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# FASCISM

AND HOW TO FIGHT IT

PHILIP KANE

## AIMS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT

- (1) The Direct Action Movement is a working-class organisation.
- (2) Our aim is the creation of a free and classless society.
- (3) We are fighting to abolish the state, capitalism and wage slavery in all their forms and replace them by self-managed production for need not profit.
- (4) In order to bring about the new social order, the workers must take over the means of production and distribution. We are the sworn enemies of those who would take over on behalf of the workers.
- (5) We believe that the only way for the working class to achieve this is for independent organisation in the workplace and community and federation with others in the same industry and locality, independent of, and opposed to all political parties and trade union bureaucracies. All such workers' organisations must be controlled by the workers themselves and must unite rather than divide the workers' movement. Any and all delegates and representatives of such workers' organisations must be subject to immediate recall by the workers.
- (6) We are opposed to all states and state institutions. The working class has no country. The class struggle is world-wide and recognises no artificial boundaries. The armies and police of all states do not exist to protect the workers of those states; they exist only as the repressive arm of the ruling class.
- (7) We oppose racism, sexism, militarism and all attitudes and institutions that stand in the way of equality and the right of all people everywhere to control their own lives and the environment.

Direct Action Movement/International Workers' Association  
223 Greenwood Road, Benchill, Wythenshawe, Manchester 22

Medway DAM/IWA  
107 King Street, Gillingham, Kent



MEDWAY DAM-IWA



## FASCISM: THE SECOND WAVE

Mention fascism to most people and they will think of the ideas espoused by Hitler and Mussolini, of a political philosophy that is closely associated with the concentration camps and the Second World War. Fascism is popularly connected with major historical events, with the march of armies and the wielding of State power.

With such a concept of fascism it is very easy to disregard those extreme right-wing organisations that are either tiny sects or that aim at achieving a degree of respectability through electoral politics. After all, fascism in the 1980s hardly matches up to this image. Even in Britain, Oswald Mosley and his British Union of Fascists at their height were able to command massive support and were backed by much of the "popular" press. The modern Nazis who claim to have assumed Mosley's mantle quite obviously are not as powerful as their predecessors of fifty years ago.

Yet the mass fascist organisations began life as tiny sects and propaganda groups on the political fringe. So the Tyndalls, Jordans and Le Pens of today cannot be ignored in the naive hope that they will go away. Unless they are fought now they could well become the successors to the fascist leaders of an earlier generation.

We are, in fact, facing a second wave of fascist activity. Now, as in the '20s and '30s, the extreme right can feed on both a deep crisis of capitalism and the failure of the "traditional" authoritarian Left to find a way out of that crisis for working-class people.



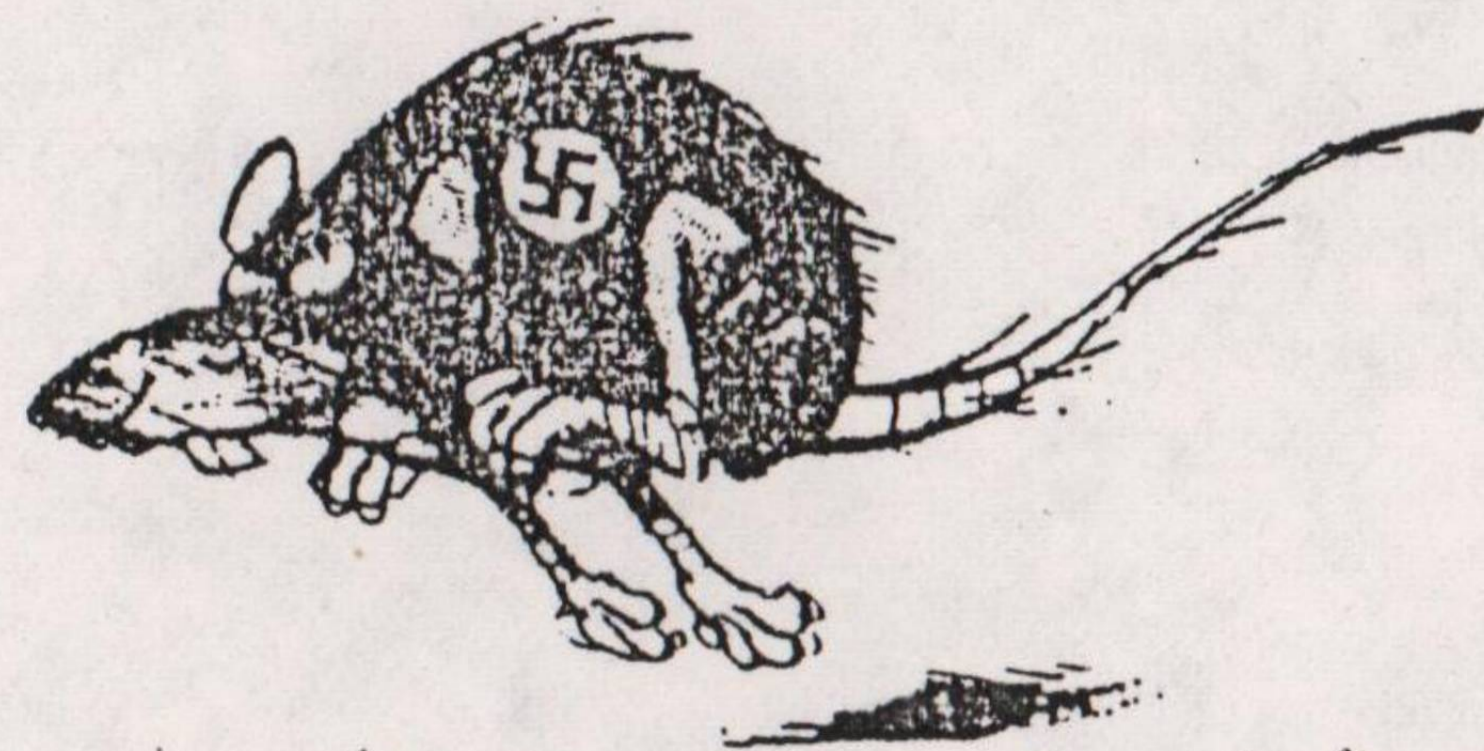
Fascism points to solutions. False ones, certainly, but faced with the deterioration of their conditions of life and in the absence of realistic alternatives, vast numbers of sane, rational people can turn towards the most impractical of political ideologies. Desperation can prove to be a powerful motivation.

#### CLASSICAL FASCISM

The First World War was brought to an end by a revolutionary wave that swept around the world from 1917 onwards. Exhausted and angered by the demands made on them by the major capitalist powers to sustain the carnage in Europe, working people rose in revolt. Revolutions, mass strikes and mutinies broke out everywhere, from Western Europe to Hong Kong.

In Russia, Germany, Italy and Spain, the conflict reached its greatest proportions and the workers came closest to achieving their own liberation. Yet in all these struggles the authoritarian socialists retained their influence.

In Russia, the Bolsheviks destroyed the energy and independence of working people in their determination to cling to power; in Germany and Italy the socialist parties led workers into reformism and defeat at the hands of the old capitalist establishment; and in Spain a revolution led by the most independent workers' movement in Europe was eventually destroyed from within by the machinations of Stalinists and reformists alike.



Although the struggle for socialism was soundly defeated - largely by the "socialist" parties themselves - masses of workers still sought to improve their lives. It was in these circumstances that fascism was able to win mass appeal. The fascist leaders benefitted from the disillusionment of a badly mauled working class.

Their proclaimed ideology, to smash both capitalism and communism, had originated among the lower middle classes and the better-off peasants. These groups resented the power of the big capitalists and at the same time felt threatened by a class-conscious workers' movement. Now it drew in great numbers working-class people who had been betrayed by their self-appointed socialist leaders yet whose hatred of the capitalist system was largely intact.

However, the final rise of the fascists to control of the State machine was due to the patronage of the very capitalists they claimed to oppose. The major traditional parties of big business - similar to Britain's Conservative Party - had been discredited by their inability to break working-class power once and for all. Fascism offered a new way to achieve this. Where the conservative parties used the law to curtail workers' activities, the fascists used physical force. Meetings were broken up, activists were beaten and even murdered. In return for these services, the capitalists filled the coffers of the fascist parties and encouraged support for fascist ideas among their employees.

The development of fascist organisations was a pattern repeated throughout Europe in the '20s and '30s. Very few of them were successful, although some gained governmental status as puppets of German and Italian regimes. Where they were successful the features of their growth were markedly similar.



The rise of the major fascist parties was characterised by the exploitation of working-class demoralisation and ruling-class fear. Fascism can be truly described as the politics of despair.

#### WHAT IS FASCISM?

State power has only been seized by fascist movements on the back of a defeated movement for social transformation in the interests of the great majority. Yet no ideology can win huge numbers of adherents as a merely negative response to the ills of society. It must also be able to present a positive aspect, an answer (however illusory) to people's problems. Fascism is no exception.

The central aspect of fascist ideology is extreme (often called "revolutionary") nationalism. This is a very different concept to simple patriotism, which is so easily swept aside as class interest takes a hand. The fascist belief was well summarised by an old Nazi slogan: "Eind Volk, Eind Reich, Eind Führer" ("One people, one nation, one leader"). In other words, the nation is seen as a single entity. On one occasion Mosley described the fascist ideal as "... a society working with the precision and harmony of a human body. Every interest and every individual is subordinate to the overriding purpose of the nation". The State and all who live within its boundaries are regarded as having a united purpose and common will. The national leader then comes to embody that popular purpose and will in his own person.

Such a theory has no place for class or sexual struggles. Rather there are struggles between national and all else must be subordinated to the "national interest" - as interpreted, of course, by the omnipotent fascist leadership.

Hand in hand with the fascists' "revolutionary nationalism" go a number of other ideas equally adapted from values dear to the middle classes and so equally indicative of their class origins. Belief in the absolute necessity of hierarchical organisation, the superiority of their own "race" over others, the strong family as the keystone of society, the subjugation of women and the repression of "degenerate" minorities (eg Jews and homosexuals) are features common to all fascist movements, however they may differ in other details.

#### FASCISM TODAY

The fascist organisations at present active in Britain share the ideology of their forerunners but cannot claim to be necessary to big business. On the contrary, the employers' more traditional methods of waging class war are proving most effective. Neither have the defeats inflicted on the workers' movement in recent years been so severe as to drive the working class wholesale into the arms of the extreme right; the problem is rather that the domination of reformism and the left parties persists. Yet if the fascists are to reproduce the successes they had in the '30s they also need the conditions in which the triumph of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco was possible.

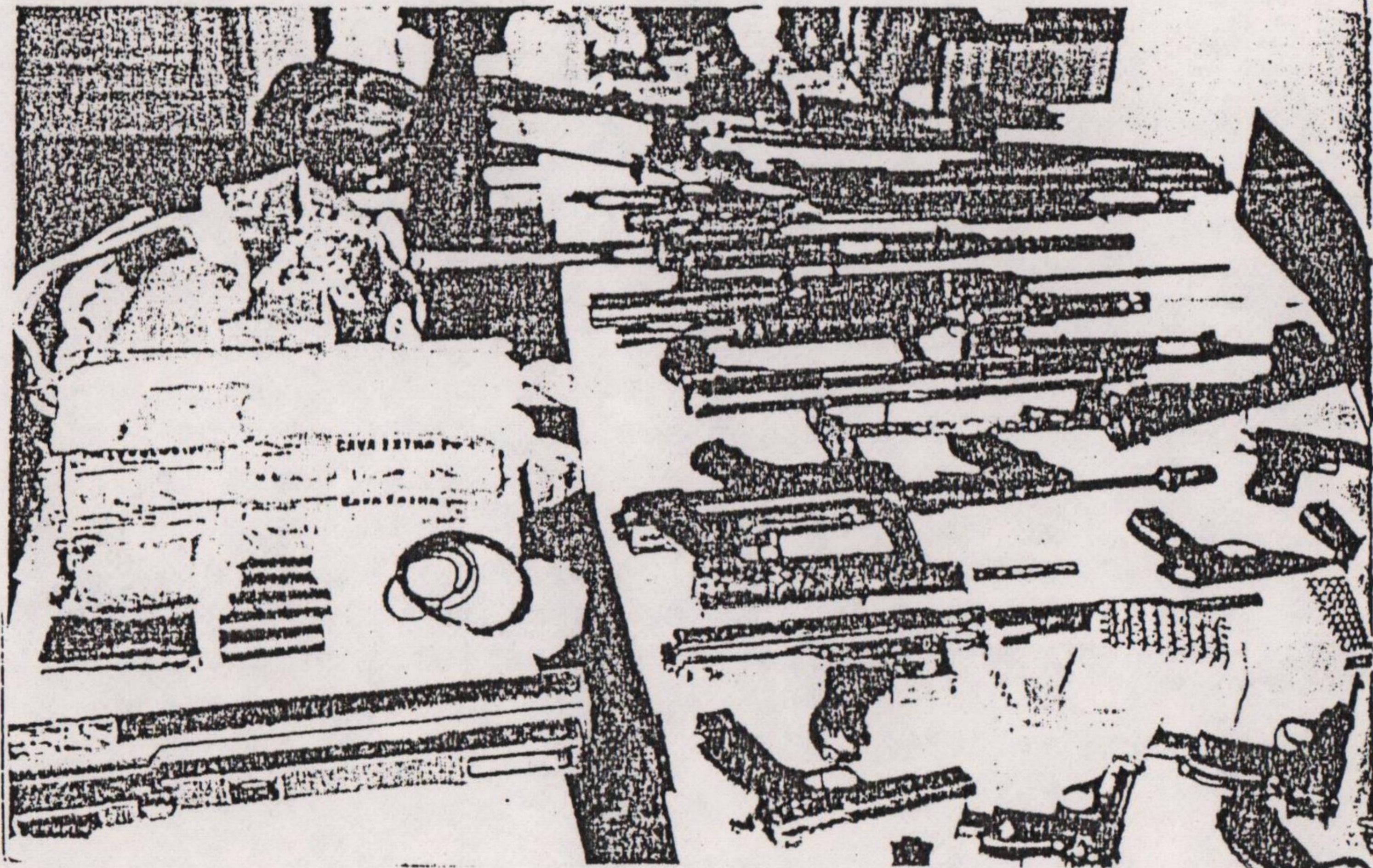
Faced with this problem, the extreme right have looked for a means of moving towards the objective of a fascist state from their present position of political isolation. The result is the "Strategy of Tension". The aim is essentially to raise the level of conflict within society to the point where the fascists will be able to present themselves as the saviours of civilisation and take the reins of the State apparatus, whether through an election or a coup d'etat.





A bomb planted by right-wing extremists exploded in Bologna Station on 2 August 1980. This was Europe's worst ever terrorist outrage, killing 84 people and injuring over 250

Weapons, including bomb-making materials, found by police in a Rome garage after a police crackdown on right-wing terrorists in April 1981



However unrealistic it may sound the "Strategy of Tension" lies at the heart of international fascist activity, from demonstrations to bombings, from involvement in elections to the formation of terrorist cells.

The tendency of modern fascists to turn towards terrorism and the tactics of psychological warfare has once again made them useful to the ruling class. The State now makes use of the fascists, both as individuals and as organisations, in subverting opposition to the establishment. Because of their politics the fascists can always be disowned by their puppet-masters, while a steady flow of money ensures that they remain available to do the dirty work of governments and business cabals alike. International fascism has become a "plausibly deniable" instrument of capital and the State.

At the same time the fascist organisations have been able to gain some fairly significant support amongst that section of the working class that is most isolated from the traditions of workplace organisation and unionism - unemployed youth. Feeling outcast and powerless they are turning increasingly to fascism because it promises action and a sense of purpose. This reflects the inability of state-socialism to embrace new ideas as society evolves. Union organisation in the community as well as in the workplace and alternative forms of direct action to the traditional "strike or nothing" concept - both essential to revolutionary unionism - are alien to theories such as Marxism.



The state-socialists seek to change society in an authoritarian manner. So they emphasise centralisation and an imposed discipline in opposition to the autonomy and initiative that are the very heart and essence of socialism. They do not provide a real alternative to the oppression and alienation inherent in capitalist society, only a mirror image dressed up as socialism.

Yet again the fascists are free to exploit the bankruptcy of the authoritarian Left, offering hope and power to those who feel themselves to be powerless.

### FIGHTING FASCISM

The National Front marched through Lewisham, a predominantly black area in South London, on 13 August 1977. Their march attracted counter-demonstrations from local youths and the Anti-Nazi League



The high-point of British fascism in recent years was without doubt the electoral successes of the National Front in the late '70s. Their advance was halted by the Anti-Nazi League, which organised a massive campaign and made certain of the fascists' defeat at the polls. However, that victory did not mean the destruction of the British fascist movement; the energies of the extreme right were simply channelled into other, less visible areas of activity.

The Anti-Nazi League was built around propaganda that was intended to turn passive "public opinion" against the Right, the National Front in particular. As the fascist organisations have now more or less abandoned "respectable" electoral politics, the same strategy cannot be repeated with any real chance of curtailing their influence.



'Only one thing could have stopped our movement—if our adversaries had understood its principle and from the first day had smashed with the utmost brutality, the nucleus of our new movement.' *Hitler, 1933*



Rather than trying to win support from liberal bishops and exposing the links between modern fascism and the Nazi terror of the '30s and '40s, opposition to the fascists needs to be built on a class basis. It is necessary to emphasise the role of the fascists in disrupting the workers' movement, posing the alternative of a working class united against capitalism and the State.

Yet an anti-fascist movement can only grow if it breaks from the failed methods of the state-socialists, reformist and Trotskyist alike. In practice this means that the movement must develop along libertarian lines, organising on the principles of federalism and active struggle.

The battle has to be carried to the enemy whenever they raise their heads. When the fascists take to the streets they must be driven off again. The famous struggles at Cable Street in 1936 and Lewisham in 1977 stand as magnificent examples of such action. Individual fascists must be argued against and politically isolated wherever they appear before their propaganda can take root. But none of this is enough in itself.

If today's fascists are to be defeated, the fight against them sooner or later has to be linked with the fight to improve society as a whole. That means encouraging the development of independent working-class organisation and unity within every workplace and every part of the community, opposed to bureaucracies and hierarchies of all kinds, while promoting forms of direct action that complement the strike as a means of struggle. Only in this way can the fascist influence among unemployed youth be smashed and the effectiveness of their "psychological warfare" tactics be dissipated.

There is a further element to the struggle against fascism that we cannot afford to disregard. The fascists are like the rats emerging from a sewer; they can be driven back again and again but will keep returning unless the sewer is finally destroyed. That sewer is the capitalist system and the State that is created by it and serves to preserve it.

The only way that the fascist movement can be swept away once and for all is through the building of a living alternative to capitalism, state-socialism and the State through which both seek to uphold their subjugation of the working class.

All these requirements can only be met by anarcho-syndicalism, with its combination of militant organisation in the present and the objective of a free world in the foreseeable future.

#### DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT

The Direct Action Movement is an anarcho-syndicalist federation of workers. We are the British section of the International Workers' Association, the anarcho-syndicalist International, founded in Berlin in 1922.

Anarchism is a political belief that all forms of government are wrong. We believe that as long as the State exists, exploitation, wage slavery, war and oppression will also exist. Syndicalism is the belief that the workers should take control of society and reorganise it on the basis of their class organisations.

Anarcho-syndicalism combines the two. We believe that the social general strike is the means by which the working class can overthrow capitalism and the State and begin to create an anarchist system of self-management and freedom.



The DAM has branches in most parts of Britain and publishes a national newspaper, Direct Action. We are involved in all areas of the social struggle: in the trade unions, the peace movement, the women's movement etc. Will you help us to grow?



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