

Socialist Challenge

BUILD A SOCIALIST OPPOSITION FOR A UNIFIED REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION

5p.

SPECIAL ISSUE



LEWISHAM

Labour leaders
said ignore
them ...

... but their
victims can't
afford to

So in Lewisham
and Ladywood
they said:

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT
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WE'RE FIGHTING BACK!



Photo: G. M. COOKSON (Socialist Challenge)



Photo: G. M. COOKSON (Socialist Challenge)



Photo: G. M. COOKSON (Socialist Challenge)

12.00am: The main demonstration heads off only to be told to disperse by the police, and the march leaders, a mile from New Cross.

1.30pm: Over 3,000 activists defied the police ban, and occupied New Cross, determined to stop the fascist march.

2.30pm: The police attack the occupation to clear a way for the fascists, only to be repelled.

What really happened at Lewisham ...

Many people have been led to think that the violence in Lewisham and in Birmingham was 'the work of extremists'. This is not true. What happened in both cases was more significant than that, something no left-wing group in Britain could organise: a justified explosion of anger and frustration by the black communities in this country.

To the anti-fascists who gathered at New Cross to stop the NF marching in a black area, to those who assembled at Ladywood to stop the NF holding a meeting in a black area, the police tactics were familiar. The police have attacked us with horses and snatch squads before. Generally, the cops have been met with linked arms, maybe a few fists, even the odd missile. But when thousands of people meet the cops with bricks, bottles, paving stones - in short with anything and everything that comes to hand - and when thousands lay siege to police stations, then it must be obvious that something quite different is happening.

For this is the response, not of individuals, but of a whole community, a community that feels itself under attack, a community driven to exasperation by years of oppression. Similarly, when the cops get out the riot shields or charge their horses into the crowd at full gallop, then this is the response of police trying to crush, not a few 'extremists', but mass resistance and opposition - exactly the same as the British Army trying to put down the Catholic communities in Northern Ireland.

What an incredible sight the police made at Lewisham! For years, every bourgeois and labour politician has been telling black people there is a law making race hate illegal. Trust in law and order, they said. Yet, here in Lewisham, were the very instruments of law and order, merrily escorting a band of racist thugs, crying 'wogs out', 'niggers go home' and worse, into the heart of a black area, battering aside all opposition!

Is the response so surprising? Time and again in recent years the NF have been allowed to march or meet in the black areas. Time and again the police have defended their 'democratic right' to shout their filthy insults and mouth barbaric demands for the deportation of millions of people for no reason other than the colour of their skin. There are limits to what black people can bear.

MESSAGE

That's the message that comes out of Lewisham and Ladywood. Black people are saying they're tired of these fascist marches, tired of the police frame-ups as with the Lewisham 21, tired of discrimination in jobs, schools and homes. They're saying: We're tired of taking the shit for the problems of this society. Get the hell off our backs!

The press campaign against 'left extremists' serves to cover up these,

the real issues. All the screams about left wing extremism, all the drooling about 'democracy', serves one purpose: to cover up the real culprits.

Like the culprits in the police. In taking the Front into the black areas, and in being willing and prepared in advance to 'Ulsterise' the district, the Commander of the Metropolitan Police must be either a complete incompetent or else sympathetic to the National Front. Either he is a blockhead, a risk to the public and to his own men, or he shares the racial prejudices to which the NF give virulent expression. What other conclusion will people draw?

It must also be added here that if McNee doesn't keep his men off the streets of Notting Hill this weekend, if he doesn't withdraw and let the blacks look after their own organisation and discipline, then either he is completely blind or deliberately out to provoke a riot.

Or take the culprits in the Labour Government. For years now, these people have done nothing to support black people against racism. Their economic policies have created the conditions for the current wave of racialism. While denouncing the left as 'enemies of democracy', it is they who have made, in fact, the most vicious attacks on the democratic rights of black people - splitting up families at the immigration points and countenancing the midnight knock of the deportation officer. Merlyn Rees is the real threat to democratic rights.

The themes of the capitalist press have been echoed by *Morning Star*, *Tribune*, and *Labour Weekly*. These papers have attacked the 'violent element', and tell black people to trust in peace, persuasion and the law to sort out their problems.

What a disgusting spectacle! These people imagine that the rest of the world is just like them. When you are threatened with disaster, with phy-

sical violence, with deportation, with police frame-up, you should steadfastly refuse to be provoked, turn the other cheek, and write wordy petitions to prove you're a good democrat. And when people are forced by harsh reality to reject in practice the line of the reformists, these bureaucrats resort to the explanation that everything's the fault of a few 'ultra-left' demons!

But passive bleating never won victories. It never stopped racism or fascism. We say to the reformists: if you are genuinely concerned about attacks on black peoples, then do us a favour: join us on the anti-fascist picket line. If you had mobilised your forces, in their many thousands, to stop the Front, then there would truly have been no violence in Lewisham. There would have been peace in South London and in Birmingham. It is only your chicken heartedness, your blind faith in the law and order of the bourgeoisie, that ensured the anti-fascists and blacks would be attacked by the police.

Yet these reformists are doubly pathetic. *Tribune* and the *Morning Star* mourn what happened in Lewisham. To them it was all a great tragedy. A step back. For these people, the task is now to 'pick up the pieces'.

SELF-CONFIDENCE

Judging by the buckets of tears, some enormous defeat must have taken place. But where is this defeat? The demoralised anti-fascists? The thousands of black people cowering in a new wave of fear? They can't be found - because they don't exist.

Far from discouraging the black community, the events of last week did the exact opposite. The victims of racialism discovered a new self-confidence, a new unity in struggle, one that no amount of petitions can give. New links in struggle between black and white were forged which are a hope for the future.

The events of last week also made it clear to the police and the NF that they had better stay out of the black areas. It will not be so easy to intimidate black people in future. The mobilisation in Lewisham was a defeat for the NF - to the fury of the cops. Even now, there is talk of a ban on the next NF march in Manchester.

There has even been a change in the assumptions of the capitalist press. Increasingly fewer people now try to deny that the NF are fascists.

Thousands of people don't throw bricks just because of their opponents' ideas.

The press campaign may serve to cover up for the police. However, the political and physical defeat of the cops is the subject of profound anxiety in the councils of the bourgeoisie. That's why there is now a lot of talk about bans. They don't want a repeat of Lewisham or Ladywood.

BANS

Let's be clear about bans. If a ban is made against the next NF march, and it is a big if, it will be the product of the struggle of the anti-fascists and blacks at Lewisham and Ladywood. But the main point is this. Who is going to enforce the ban? The police? What a joke! So what happens when the NF march illegally, or find some way of invalidating the ban? Are the police going to do battle with the NF? And if a ban stops one march, how long will it be kept up? No - we must keep up the mass mobilisation. All out on October 8th in Manchester!

Nor will a ban on fascist marches stop their physical assaults on black people, their homes, families and social centres. The only real guarantee is black self-defence. Recent experience shows clearly that we cannot rely on the law and the police in Britain.

Naturally, the bourgeoisie will manoeuvre to defeat these big steps forward in the anti-racist, anti-fascist struggle. Some sections of bourgeois opinion, such as Whitelaw and Griffiths want to go on a big campaign of repression against the left - creating new penalties such as a minimum term of two years' imprisonment for assaulting a police officer on duty. Others want to use the occasion to hit the left as well as the right by giving new powers to the police to ban rallies, a move which will undoubtedly be used by police against the left. Coupled with these potential threats to the whole labour movement there is of course the disturbing militarisation of the police already seen last week in London and Birmingham.

But neither the labour movement nor the black communities must be deterred by these new developments. Lewisham and Ladywood, the self-defence at the Grunwick picket line - all these experiences vindicate the message we heard chanted on the streets of Lewisham and Ladywood: *The Workers UNITED will never be Defeated!*

Behind the

The use of riot shields on the streets for many. But as ANN BOURNE writes, the control of police and Government of the working class.

In fact, their attempts to accustom people to the sight of riot shields on the streets, begun in Lewisham, was well-orchestrated - in the best tradition of the methods used to repress the political force of the working class.

It started when they refused to ban the fascist march on the grounds that, firstly, the police were not a political force and so could not take such decisions, and that it would be a breach of 'democracy' for the Labour Government to take such action.

However, their intentions had been clearly worked out in advance, and their tactics were simple and classic. They intended to demonstrate that the police and only the police have the right to control the streets. Any assertion to the contrary by the demonstrators had to be smashed. And so, the police cavalry charge which created was not primarily aimed at the fascists being allowed to march - it was as much to quell any illusions that the left controlled the streets.

Once having provoked the crowd, it was an easy next step to break out the Derry-style riot shields, and use them with impunity.

In addition to these methods, however, the police also showed themselves adept at the back-up methods of political control. A few hours previous to the demonstration, the Right to Work centre was raided - allowing the police access to information about the intentions of the forces they had to oppose. The behaviour of the crowd was observed by helicopters which, as demonstrators in Ireland and the US have found to their cost, are highly efficient in centralising information to be used in the police counter-attack.

The police used riot shields again in Birmingham two days afterwards, and will no doubt do so again in Notting Hill. The emotive linking of the use of these shields in Britain to the use of them in Northern Ireland by the bourgeois press is to be expected. It is simple for them to equate the 'terrorism' in Ireland with the so-called 'buggery' of the left in Britain. But socialists should make a different equation.

For many years now the British Army has co-operated, mainly through Government research establishments, with riot squad



Photo: G. M. COOKSON (Socialist Challenge)



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3.00pm: The fascists assemble in Clifton Rise, under massive police protection. The police attempt to take the fascists by a different route — and the occupation moves as one to confront the fascists.

4.00pm: The anti-fascists are re-assembling at Lewisham clock tower when the police decide on a show of force to demonstrate that they control the streets.

riot shields

streets is a new phenomenon. D explains, this is part and strategy of the political

and armies in Europe and the United States. There has been a great deal of communication of methods of riot control, and control of 'subversive' elements. Most of these methods — the use of CS gas, rubber bullets, water cannon and the like — have been used extensively in Northern Ireland. In their turn, the police have liaised with the army, themselves experimenting with interrogation methods etc. Some of the hardware used in riot control has also been passed on to the police force. For example, the police have been equipped for quite a long time with CS gas — whose long-term effects are still unknown. The events leading up to Lewisham, where the police used cameras and audio equipment for the surveillance of the black community, are yet another example of the way in which the police are being encouraged to use more sophisticated methods in their attempt to control an ever more restless working class.

Without wishing to be alarmist, it is likely that the police, given the success at Lewisham, will be encouraged by the Government to expand their overt methods of control. With the likelihood of stronger and stronger expressions of working class dissatisfaction — not just in the fight against fascism — the police will escalate their attempts to restore 'law and order' by more and more efficient methods and more and more violence.

They will be backed up in this campaign by the other wings of the state's 'law and order' brigade. The courts will no doubt be seeking to impose heavy penalties on those facing charges after Lewisham, Birmingham and Nottingham Hill.

Socialists should be well aware of the dangers which these methods of political control pose. And, within that we should be aware of the need to defend ourselves as completely as possible — both in terms of our own self-defence and security and by mounting a strong defence campaign for those comrades facing the retaliation of the courts.

We must remember that our strength lies in our unity with those from the workers movement, the women's movement and black organisations who are prepared to assert our right to political dissent through mass action.

...and those who choose to ignore it

'Ignore them in the streets and vote against them at the ballot box.'

This is the advice of Merlin Rees, Labour Home Secretary, on how to respond to the fascists of the National Front. Unfortunately, if you are black, or a labour movement activist, it is getting more than a little difficult to ignore the fascists on the

The violence they 'forgot'

In the midst of all the outcries of 'extremists', 'thugs', and 'hoodlums' directed against the anti-fascists, a revealing story came to light.

On Monday, 15 August, someone fire-bombed and almost destroyed the bookshop of Centreprise in Hackney. Centreprise is a local community centre heavily used by black youth in the area. It turned out that this was the fourth attack of this sort on Centreprise this year. Moreover, three other bookshops in North and West London were subject to racist attacks in the course of the preceding month, including one fire-bombed. All specialised in books for the black community. In February an Asian owned bookshop in Southall had been similarly attacked.

Why is it that this obviously concerted effort at intimidation of the London black community only seeps into the light of day after Lewisham? Could it be that the capitalist press is trying to teach London's blacks the lesson that has been so often drummed into the heads of the oppressed elsewhere: that it's only when you get up in your thousands and create bloody murder, that anyone is prepared to listen to the injustices that you have laboured under since birth?

streets.

Just take the Lewisham area as an example.

Deptford: Bola Femi, a young Nigerian, was attacked outside a pub by racists. His head was smashed, both his arms broken. A busman who went to his aid had to have 12 stitches in his head.

Lambeth: A disco run by Lambeth Council for black and white youth was smashed by a gang of white youth armed with knives and a sawn-off shotgun. Five youth were badly injured and taken to hospital.

Lewisham: A public meeting held by the Lewisham 24 Defence Committee formed to help a group of mainly black defendants who face charges of 'conspiracy to rob' was broken up by the National Front. One woman was beaten unconscious.

New Cross: A few weeks later members of the NF launched a savage attack on a demonstration in support of the Lewisham 24.

This is the real face of the National Front and other fascists. Like Kingsley Read, who declared after the murder of an Asian youth in Southall, 'One down - one million to go'. If black people will not leave Britain of their own accord, then they must be beaten, attacked and intimidated until they change their mind — that is their policy.

Nor will the fascist attacks stop at black people. White labour movement activists are already coming under attack. Like the Communist Party day school attacked in Leeds, or the Trades Council member in Tower Hamlets marked down by the NF to have his kneecaps smashed.

Yet Rees tells us to ignore the fascists on the streets and confine ourselves to a vote against them at the ballot box. The labour movement will heed such advice at its peril.

NO PLATFORM

The National Front are no ordinary political party — they are fascists, intent on making black people the scapegoats for the economic crisis and destroying the organisations of the working class — its trade unions, its political parties. The labour movement must be prepared to organise, along with the black community, to defend itself against the fascist attacks.

Part and parcel of that is denying the fascists a platform to spread their racist filth and provoke attacks on the left and blacks. The demonstration in Lewisham called by the NF, for example, was openly aimed at intimi-

dating the black community and encouraging racist attacks in the area.

Those people who are attracted to the apparently tough solutions to the crisis offered by the fascists must be shown that the labour movement means business too — that it can and will defend itself and defeat the Front not just in the ballot box, but on the streets and wherever fascism tries to strike out.

Those like Labour Party General Secretary Ron Hayward, or Labour's Ladywood candidate, John Sever, who join with Tory Michael Heseltine MP to denounce the 'lunatic elements of left and right', offer no defence for the labour movement against the fascists.

Michael Foot spends all his time attacking 'so-called socialists' — those who resort to violence — who are not socialists at all, thus claiming that the anti-fascists who meet fascist violence with organised self-defence are as bad as the fascists. This is the old trick of trying to lump together the attacker and the victim, if the latter dares to fight back. It glosses over the real difference between the violence of the fascists and the anti-fascists — that the fascists are out, through their meetings and demonstrations, to incite violent attacks by bands of thugs upon black and labour movement activists; the anti-fascists are fighting for organised mass action by the labour movement as a whole, to defend the labour movement and the black community.

Far from offering any defence for the labour movement, Rees and Foot supported McNeer in using 4000 police in an attempt to allow the fascists to go ahead with their march.

The paper of the left MPs in the Labour Party, *Tribune*, offers equally dismal gems of wisdom. First, a propaganda campaign against the fascists by the Government and Labour Party. Excellent. But why does *Tribune* not call for the Labour Government to repeal the racist immigration laws, as is the policy of the last Labour Party conference? This would show a real willingness to campaign against the ideas of the National Front. Condemning the Front whilst pursuing racist policies is pure hypocrisy.

Tribune's real position can be seen from their refusal to support the counter-mobilisation against the fascists: 'If there had not been a confrontation would the NF have got the amount of publicity it did?', *Tribune* asks. Well, perhaps it would

not. But we would ask — is it not only because of consistent mobilisations to deny a platform to the National Front that the press finally — now almost unanimously — admits that they are fascists? Was not the effect of Lewisham — the outrage displayed, not just by members of the far left, but by the whole labour movement, and local black people — to finally pin the fascist label on the Front and tear away their veil of respectability. And did it now show to fascist sympathisers nationally that the Front offers no easy way out, because it will be met with the most determined response from the labour movement to defend itself?

COMMUNIST PARTY

The Communist Party on the other hand do claim to offer a means of defence — 'Never again must the NF be allowed to parade its racist poison through the streets. Its marches must be stopped by the police.' However, until the police do that the Communist Party are content to retreat indoors and leave the fascists to route their hate marches through black communities as they sought to do at Lewisham.

Instead of denying the fascists a platform, the Communist Party call for a 'broad democratic alliance', like that with church figures in Lewisham, saying that it is by the development of this 'political, mass action' that the NF will be defeated. We have seen only too well what this meant in Lewisham — limiting action against the Front to that which is acceptable to the church figures, and dispersing the anti-racist forces as soon as the police step in to defend the fascists.

We too are in favour of political mass action to stop the front. We too are in favour of imposing a ban on the fascist marches. But we start from mobilising the labour movement to impose that ban. The CP's tailing behind local church figures leads them to ignore this task.

There is an easy way for all these leaders of the labour movement to implement their calls to defeat the fascists with the minimum of violence — by mobilising the labour movement to make sure that tens of thousands of workers turn up next time, in Tameside in October, to stop the announced National Front march. We can be sure then that the fascists won't dare show their faces, and the police won't waste time trying to clear a way for them.

Will we see you there, gentlemen?

Socialist Challenge

Make Tameside another link in the anti-fascist chain Build for October 8th

No sooner was the Lewisham demonstration over than Fuhrer Webster was announcing the intention of the National Front to hold a further march. This is to be on 8 October in Tameside near Manchester, and will be preceded by a meeting at Hyde Town Hall. Already the Tameside anti-fascist committee, set up by Tameside Trades Council, has called for a counter-mobilisation to deny the Front a platform for their racist views.

Webster has announced that the theme of the march will be 'law and order'. What he means by law and order can be seen from his reason for marching in Lewisham: 'The aim [of the Lewisham march] was simply to give heart to white people in Deptford who had voted for us and show they had not been forgotten as they had by all the trendies who run the country and do nothing but pander to black muggers.' For black and Asian people in Tameside the law and order of the Front means more vicious police harassment of black people, the fascist thugs being left alone to attack black people, and tear gas and rubber bullets for the police to attack any opposition to the fascists. The law and order of the Front means terror for the black communities.

The Front must be refused a further platform to spread their policies of violence against black people - the labour movement must ensure that they do not march. Only a mass counter-demonstration, involving thousands of socialists, trade unionists and black people, which denies the fascists access to the streets can effectively do this. In every locality, the priority must be united action by the whole labour movement in support of the call by Tameside Anti-Fascist Committee.



The battle of Cable Street, 4 October 1936.

Defend the Lewisham 24

The Front's march through Lewisham was called on the pretext of protesting against 'black muggers'. One group of supposed 'black muggers' are the Lewisham 24 — charged by police with 'conspiring with each other and persons unknown to rob persons unknown' after early morning raids on 60 homes in Lewisham on 30 May. No specific charges were brought. It seems that all the police are certain about is that they did it, or rather, intended to do it, — but just what, when, and how, they are not so sure.

Since then the NF have been determined to give the police support in any way they can. On 17 June they broke up an open meeting called by the Lewisham 24 Defence Committee, beating one woman unconscious. Then on July 2nd, they attacked a demonstration in support of the 24. On the first occasion no fascists were arrested, despite dramatic photographs of the incident. The second incident resulted in the police arresting 50 people — 23 of whom were anti-fascists.

One law for the white and one for the black?

Ladywood result boosts anti-fascists

JOHN SEVER [Lab]	8,227 [53pc]
QUENTIN DAVIES [Con]	4,402 [23pc]
ANTHONY REED-HERBERT [NF]	888 [6pc]
KENNETH HARDEMAN [Liberal]	765 [5pc]
RAGHIB AHSAN [Soc. Unity]	534 [3.4pc]
JAMES HUNTE [Ind.]	336 [2.2pc]
KIM GORDON [SWP]	152 [1pc]
GEORGE MATTHEWS [Ind. Con]	71 [5pc]
PETER COURTNEY [Reform]	63 [0.4pc]
WILLIAM BOAKES [Air, Transport, White resident]	46 [0.3pc]
Labour majority	3,825

The results of the Ladywood by-election — given above — are further encouragement to the far-left and anti-fascist forces.

The figure of under 900 votes for the NF was far less than they were expecting. Given the massive desertion of voters from the Liberals (who received more than 3000 votes and 13% of the poll in the general election), from which the NF has gained most of its recent electoral support, this was a really poor showing.

Moreover, almost 100 votes were cast for explicitly revolutionary candidates — 3.4% for Raghieb Ahsan of Socialist Unity and 1% for Kim Gordon of the Socialist Workers

Party — an excellent showing in a country where for so long socialism and the working class have been identified exclusively with Labour.

If one adds to these figures the 336 votes cast for James Hunt, a black candidate who stood on a reformist, but nonetheless anti-racist platform, the tremendous potential of the Ladywood campaign becomes clear.

SWP

If the Socialist Workers Party had not insisted upon its sectarian course of a separate candidate, and revolutionaries and anti-fascists had entered the Ladywood

campaign as a solid bloc, there is no doubt that the far left could have gathered an even greater proportion of this anti-racist sentiment, and, more importantly, gathered support from a considerable number who were disillusioned by the divisions in the left, and either abstained or voted Labour.

Unity

Imagine the effect of a thousand votes cast for a revolutionary, leaving the NF vote well behind and coming third after the two 'great parties', right in the face of the press hysteria over Lewisham and Ladywood! This would have knocked a really big dent in the ruling class's propaganda manoeuvres. We would be having, even in the columns of the capitalist press, a very different debate about the 'lessons of Ladywood' that could make tens of thousands of working class militants think about the need for a socialist alternative.

Let us hope that the SWP finally learns the lessons of this experience, and responds to the crying need for maximum unity that the current upsurge in the anti-fascist struggle demands ever more urgently from day to day.

Lewisham defence committee formed

«Only one thing could have stopped our movement — if our adversaries had understood its principles and from the first day had smashed with the utmost brutality the nucleus of our movement» Adolf Hitler, 1933.

In Lewisham on 13 August, 5000 trade unionists, socialists, and black youth, forced the Nazi National Front to abandon their march.

The police were determined to let the Nazis march. They arrested over 200 anti-fascists on charges ranging from breach of the peace to grievous bodily harm. But it is not the anti-fascists who should be in the dock — it is Home Secretary Merlin Rees and Police Commissioner McNee. They sought to allow the front to march through a strong black community spouting racist filth, unleashing 4000 police in baton and horse charges, and making mass indiscriminate arrests.

That is why a Defence Committee was set up last week to campaign for the dropping of all charges against the anti-fascists.

The defence committee needs the help of all those who want to stop the fascists.

It needs: Money! Collection sheets have now been produced.

Resolutions of support for those arrested from your trade union or Labour Party branch. Witnesses' to arrests to come forward. Meetings in each town to be addressed by the defence committee speakers, organised through anti-fascist committees.

The Defence Committee can be contacted at this address: Treasurer, Lewisham De-

fence Campaign, 6 Bowden St., London SE11.

Similar moves are under way in Birmingham to organise defence for the 12 anti-fascists arrested by police rallying to the aid of the beleaguered NF during the Ladywood by-election. Donations, inquiries or offers of support can, for the time being, be sent to: Ladywood Defence, c/o 76B, Digbeth, Birmingham, B5 6DY.

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MAKING A SOCIALIST OPPOSITION FOR A THIRD REVOLUTIONARY DECADE

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