



Organising against

FASCISM

in the workplace

1: INTRODUCTION

JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



This booklet has been produced to help trade union shop stewards and activists get involved in workplace and community campaigns opposing fascist politics and extreme far right political parties.

Fascist and populist extreme right-wing parties are becoming increasingly involved in mainstream politics in Europe and the UK. In Europe they have had considerable success by demonising racial and religious minorities – especially those that have come to Europe as migrant workers.

At the start of 2007 fascist and extreme right-wing parties formed part of governments in Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Italy, Portugal and Switzerland. The election of fascist MEPs in Bulgaria and Romania resulted in attempts to form a fascist group of MEPs in the European Parliament. If this had succeeded the group would have been entitled to financial support as a 'part bloc'.

In the UK the British National Party (BNP) have targeted local council seats in an attempt to build a political base that could launch them to parliamentary success. Since 2000 they have expanded rapidly – from fielding 17 candidates and receiving 3022 votes and no seats in 2000 to gaining 49 seats with votes of 238,389 in 2006.

Why is this a problem?

Fascism is a political philosophy that glorifies the nation, and often race, above the individual. It believes in a centralised autocratic government headed by a dictator and a uniform, rigid economic and social way of organising society with forcible suppression of any opposition. The philosophy is opposed to the values of democracy and solidarity that are at the heart of trade unionism.

While many fascist parties present themselves as nationalist parties, their campaigns and policies reveal that in fact they subscribe to a fascist philosophy. Increasingly the BNP and other extreme far-right parties focus their propaganda on workplace and community issues that trade unions are campaigning on. They are also stepping up their campaign against trade unions fighting for the rights of migrant workers. While many unions have anti-racist policies and campaign against fascist parties during elections, it is important that trade unionists develop an anti-fascism message that is focused on the workplace to counter fascist arguments.

Educating union members about fascism and why they need to actively oppose fascist politics and parties is essential because workers make up a significant part of the local electorate and can become activists in local community anti-fascist campaigns. The more that we can actively engage trade union members the more effective these key campaigns will be.

2: FASCIST ACTIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Fascist parties have sought to win popular support from working people as a way of obtaining power and influence at a local and national level. Building support and influence among trade unionists has always been part of their strategy.

In the late 1960s most British Nazis had realised they could win some support by adopting an ultra-patriotic and racist programme. This was the main reasoning behind the formation of the National Front (NF) in 1967. Although the Immigration Control Association (ICA) was originally set up by dissident conservatives, it quickly saw an influx of NF members eager to exploit the support that the ICA was finding in many workplaces. The most notorious was Smithfield meat market, where the porters were organised in a trade union. Danny Harmston, a prominent union member at Smithfield, was a long-time fascist and former bodyguard to the fascist leader Sir Oswald Mosley. Under Harmston's leadership the meat porters formed the core of many ICA marches. Ironically, in 1936 the meat porters were in the forefront of the huge anti-fascist protests against Mosley at Cable Street in east London.

By the mid 1970s the NF had started to establish cells in the prison service. They were particularly strong at Strangeways,

Dartmoor, Wandsworth and Pentonville prisons. Workers at the north London Royal Mail sorting offices of Mount Pleasant and Upper Street, Islington, were also well known for their support for the NF. Ninety-six NF activists were organised in cells at sorting offices in London and the Home Counties. On the railways the NF was able to set up its own Railwaymen's Association. These activities were co-ordinated by the NF's Trade Union Association.

This period saw the slow demise of the ICA and its replacement by the Trade Union Anti-Immigration Movement (TRUAIM). NF members, helped by TRUAIM, were elected to official trade union positions, such as on Luton trades council and the shop stewards' committee at Rover in Solihull.

William Roberts, an open NF member, was re-elected as a convenor for the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW).

This success in unions was one of the reasons for the split in the NF in 1976 and the launch of the National Party (NP). The NP took a big chunk of the NF's most capable and dedicated members, as well as a lot of their supporters in the unions. To begin with the NP met with some success, particularly in the declining mill towns in the North-West of England, and even had two local councillors elected in Blackburn, Lancashire. It also won support in the old racist hotbeds of east London. Fortunately for the labour movement internal problems led to the NP's rapid collapse.

MARK THOMPSON



2: FASCIST ACTIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE

The British National Party

In recent years the British National Party (BNP) made a concerted attempt to infiltrate the trade union movement. As well as trying to influence workplace attitudes BNP members have sought to confront trade unions on an individual basis by getting expelled from membership and then taking unions to tribunals for breach of the law and their own rules. This resulted in a number of high profile cases where BNP members took different unions to court.

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ASLEF, which had been found to have acted unlawfully by the British courts after expelling an active BNP member, took their case to the European Court of Human Rights. In February 2007 the European Court issued its judgement in the case of ASLEF v UK, holding that ASLEF's right to freedom of association under Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights had been violated by UK law, which prevented it from expelling one of its members on the ground of his membership of the BNP. The case, taken by ASLEF, was financially supported by 12 other TUC affiliates.

The court's decision represented a real advance in terms of the rules governing the kinds of people unions can admit or exclude from membership, including BNP members and activists. As a result the Government is changing UK legislation. Unions are also in the process of tightening their own rules to make anti-racism and anti-fascism clear as objects of the union.

Solidarity – The Union for British Workers'

As a response to the failure of their strategy to infiltrate trade unions the BNP and other extreme right-wing parties have attempted to form their own union. 'Solidarity – The Union for British Workers' was formed in late 2005 and registered with the Trade Union Certification Officer in early 2006. The union's General Secretary

is Patrick Harrington, an ex-RMT member, and Clive Potter, ex-Unison. While stating that it is open to all workers from ethnic, religious and political backgrounds, Solidarity describes itself as a nationalist union and it is, in effect, a front for the BNP. Harrington is a close friend of BNP leader Nick Griffin while Clive Potter has stood as a candidate for the BNP and is a member of a more obscure fascist organisation called Third World. Lee Barnes, another member of Solidarity's management team, is head of legal affairs at the BNP.

Solidarity's main activities so far have been to organise a recruitment campaign in Northern Ireland by distributing leaflets in loyalist areas through their links with some elements of the Belfast Orange Order. They also have links with Civil Liberty, an organisation with links to the BNP and other right-wing extremist organisations domestically and internationally,

There have been reports of Solidarity activists trying to recruit in the Stoke area and they have a website with information aimed at workers in a number of different sectors. However, they do not have recognition in any workplaces and *Personnel Today* has published articles expressing concern about Solidarity's link with the BNP.

Redwatch

Set up in 2001, the Redwatch website publishes the names and personal information of perceived anti-racist activists along with their photographs and addresses. The main purpose of the site is to encourage people to attack or harass these opponents of the BNP and other fascist groups.

The TUC and its affiliates are concerned that the Redwatch website, which has links with far right groups including the BNP, Combat 18 and Blood and Honour, is a tool to intimidate trade unionists, journalists and anti-racist/fascist campaigners.

There have been a number of incidents that have heightened concern. Examples include:

- Several NUJ-member journalists who, in the course of their work, investigated far right groups or commented against right-wing political groups, have been targeted by the site alongside messages that indicate a need to find reporters fast and scare them off.
- Members of the ATL and NATFHE have appeared on the site when challenging the views and behaviour of students with far-right sympathies. In one incident, a lecturer's name was published on the Redwatch site after she insisted that the university

disciplined a student who had ripped posters off her office wall, shouted at her and attempted to intimidate her after issues had been raised about the racist content of the student's work.

- A UNISON activist involved in anti-racist activity in the North East had paint thrown over his house after his name and address were published on the website.
- The chair of the Trades Council in Wirral was attacked in his home by a man and his face cut with a knife after being featured on the website.

The TUC, along with member trade unions, is pressuring the Government to close the website and prosecute those who run it

2: FASCIST ACTIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE

What to do if members are attacked or harassed

If a member of your trade union is harassed or attacked as a result of their photograph and details being put on the Redwatch website, they should:

- write a statement detailing what happened and why they believe the incident was linked to Redwatch
- report the incident to the police
- raise the issue with their local MP.

Any information on incidents should be collated and sent to the TUC, which is collating evidence on harassment that has taken place as a result of trade unionists' details being published on the Redwatch website. This information will be passed onto ACPO and the Home Office.

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3: CAMPAIGNING IN THE WORKPLACE

GRANT LYNCH

Have a plan and stick to it

Understanding what you are trying to achieve is key to a successful campaign. Randomly handing out union leaflets or arranging for members to receive letters from the union when you have no clear idea of what you are trying to do can be both soul destroying and a waste of time and resources, so your first step will be to consider your **objectives**.

Objectives

Spending even a short period thinking about what it is you want to achieve can make a world of difference. Your objectives may include:

- countering a BNP presence in your workplace
- countering myths about asylum seekers, migrant workers and issues about race and religion
- raising the level of awareness among members about fascist and far-right extremist parties
- encouraging trade union members to become more active in anti-fascist community campaigns.

Achieving these objectives will require a specific campaign **strategy**.

Strategy

An essential part of your strategy will be ensuring that you secure the active support of your branch committee so that you have the support of colleagues and can access resources from regional and national levels of the union.



As well as securing the support of the branch for the campaign and its objectives you should ask yourself the following questions when putting together your strategy:

- Which groups of members are you going to target?
- In which workplaces or offices are you going to target your efforts?
- Do you know the union members in your target workplaces and their attitude to fascist and extreme right-wing parties?
- What people and resources do you need to deliver your strategy?
- Can you get time off for those involved in the campaign?
- What materials do you need to produce locally and what can you get from other sources?
- What issues and messages will be most effective in influencing the views of members?
- How can you deliver these messages most effectively? (For example, through workplace meetings, leaflets, posters, etc.?)

3: CAMPAIGNING IN THE WORKPLACE

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Resources

Ensure that you have adequate resources, including both people and materials. Also make sure that the people working on the campaign talk to each other on a regular basis. You should ask the following questions:

- Do you have a campaign team and what are the individual members responsible for?
- Are the branch publicity and education officers involved?
- Where do people meet and at what time?
- Who will be responsible for convening the branch campaign group?
- What training do they need?

Thinking about even the simplest campaign in these terms will make it clear what your objectives are and will make it easier for you to judge whether the techniques you use are successful.

Countering fascism in the union and the workplace

A number of unions have expelled fascists from their membership and others have changed their rules to enable them to take action against them. If you discover that there is a member of a fascist or extreme right-wing party in your union branch it is important that they are not ignored and that the union makes a decision on how to deal with the situation.

The law on how trade unions can discipline or expel members is complicated. **It is important that you get advice from your regional or national officer before attempting to take disciplinary action against a member.**

There may be instances where members of the BNP's union Solidarity become active in your workplace. Although there is little chance that the TUC will be able to persuade the trade union certification officer to de-list Solidarity it is important that genuine trade unionists organise against them if they become active or attempt to gain recognition in a workplace.

- Report instances of where Solidarity have attempted to organise to your regional or national office.
- Explain to members what Solidarity is, what it stands for and why they should not join.
- Work to get employers to ban Solidarity activists from the premises if they seek to recruit in the workplace.
- Counter Solidarity-organised demonstrations and campaigns in workplaces.

Where Solidarity attempts to recruit in unorganised workplaces it will be important for unions to recruit and gain recognition.

Developing effective local community campaigns and strategies against the far right

The TUC believes that one of the primary means of defeating far right parties is through determined grass-roots activity that engages with people in their communities and workplaces; good will alone will not defeat the far right. It should also be recognised that if all previous tactics had worked we would not be facing a situation where the far right continue to make electoral gains.

The TUC has published the *Organising Against Racism and Fascism handbook*, a resource to help trade union activists develop effective local community campaign strategies against the far right. Copies of the handbook can be obtained from the publications department at the TUC (see page 12).

The TUC has also developed an online training course, Tackling Racism, run by unionlearn. The course for union reps has been designed to provide an opportunity for further understanding of equality and diversity issues in relation to race and to equip reps with the information to tackle myths about race, religion and migrant workers. Information on the course can be found at www.unionlearn.org.uk/education/learn-337-fo.cfm

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4: ELECTORAL LAW

GETTY IMAGES



You may choose to run your campaign during election time. If you do, you will need to be aware of electoral law.

Campaigning during general or local elections is covered by the Representation of the Peoples Act 1983 and the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Acts 2001. These laws control how political parties, organisations and groups campaign and how much money can be spent directly and indirectly by political parties and politicians during election campaigns. Under the election rules trade unions are classified as 'third parties'.

What the law says

A third party is a person or organisation which campaigns on behalf of one or more registered political parties or a particular category of candidates (for example those who advocate a particular policy or opinion).

Controls on the intervention of non-party organisations and individuals in the UK were introduced for the first time by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (PPERA) 2000. This took effect in February 2001, backing up the limits on campaign expenditure by political parties also introduced by PERA.

PPERA restricts the amount that a third party can spend on campaigning for the electoral success of registered parties or candidates. Being registered

as a third party with the Electoral Commission increases a third party's spending limits.

Spending in support of, or to disparage, an individual candidate is not covered by those provisions and continues to be subject to the controls set out in the representation of the People Act 1983.

At any election, other than a by-election, any of the following can register with the Commission as 'recognised third parties', which permits them to spend more than £10,000 in England and £5,000 in each of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland:

- an individual resident in the UK or registered in an electoral register
- a company
- a trade union
- a building society
- a limited liability partnership
- a friendly, industrial or provident society
- an unincorporated association.

PPERA introduced regulations restricting the amount of expenditure that can be incurred by a third party or third parties when producing election material that is made available to the public.

Election material is material that can reasonably be regarded as intended to promote electoral success for a party or group of candidates (including by

disparaging a different party or group of candidates). It is irrelevant whether the material expressly mentions the names of the party or candidate.

Once registered with the Electoral Commission third parties are subject to the regulations governing donations to political organisations set out in PPERA. Donations that are made in support of a third party's activities in campaigning on behalf of a party or group of candidates may only be accepted if they are from a permissible source, and donations above a certain threshold must be reported to the Electoral Commission.

Materials to union members

Where the third party is a trade union, and all expenditure incurred in preparing and distributing the material to members of the union is met from a political fund, members of the union would receive the election material as members of that union rather than as a section of the public or as individual members of the public at large.

The expenditure, therefore, would not constitute controlled expenditure by a third party for the purpose of Section 85(2) of the PPERA.

If you are unsure as to whether you are complying with the law, contact the Electoral Commission (see page 12).

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5: USEFUL CONTACTS

Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia Today (AXT)

Contains in-depth analysis and trends regarding anti-Semitism and racism across the world.

www.axt.org.uk

The Electoral Commission

T: 020 7271 0500 (switchboard)

F: 020 7271 0505

E: info@electoralcommission.org.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission

www.cre.gov.uk

Institute of Race Relations

Provides useful resources for activists, campaigners, students, researchers and teachers working against racism.

www.irr.org.uk

Kick it Out

A campaign to eliminate racism from football.

www.kickitout.org

Searchlight

www.searchlightmagazine.com

Trade Union Congress (TUC)

Represents the interests of the 7 million trade unionists and their families in England and Wales.

www.tuc.org.uk

The booklet *Organising Against Racism and Fascism handbook* can be obtained from TUC Publications, TUC, Congress House, London WC1B 3LSD,

T: 020 7467 1294

F: 020 7636 0632

www.tuc.org.uk/publications

6: TRADES UNION CONGRESS REGIONAL OFFICES

Northern Region

Regional Secretary: Kevin Rowan krowan@tuc.org.uk
Regional Policy Office Carolyn Clayton cclayton@tuc.org.uk
www.tuc.org.uk/north

Yorkshire & Humber Region

Regional Secretary Bill Adams badams@tuc.org.uk
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www.tuc.org.uk/yorkshireandthehumber

North West Region

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Midlands Region

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Southern & Eastern Region

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Wales TUC

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South West Region

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6: TRADES UNION CONGRESS REGIONAL OFFICES

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www.stuc.org.uk

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