

Why take direct action against fascism?

What is fascism?

Fascism is an extreme form of nationalism founded by Benito Mussolini in the early 20th century, who described it as "the merger of corporate and state power". It places everything and everyone in the service of the state, under a dictatorship, for this reason it is sometimes called 'national socialism' (Nazism). Fascism promotes racism, strengthens hierarchy and relies heavily on the military and police; dissent is not tolerated, the media are controlled, the opposition imprisoned or killed, and minorities persecuted. Fascist parties took power in Italy, Portugal, Spain, Germany, and Japan, where their imperialist ambitions led ultimately to the Second World War and the deaths of at least 60 million people.

As times get harder, many people are desperate for someone to blame, or to look down on; fascists offer them scapegoats, diverting attention from the bosses who are the cause of their problems. Fascists hold provocative marches and rallies in diverse or migrant communities, adopting 'patriotic' symbols and claiming to be defending cultural traditions. These events are calculated to stir up ethnic conflict and incite violence against minorities and political opponents.

Fascist parties seek respectability by standing for election, feeding off people's anger by pandering to local prejudices and reactionary ideas. Fascism preys on fear; poor people's fear of losing their jobs and benefits to outsiders, while others fear losing the value of their homes and pensions; fear of foreigners, terrorists, paedophiles, communists, imaginary secret societies, name it. Candidates may promise national regeneration, offering simple but impractical solutions to problems such as housing, crime, unemployment etc; these promises are false.

At any one time there may be dozens of fascist groups operating in the UK, apart from the well-known ones such as EDL and BNP. The changing names and shifting alliances are hard to keep up with; some are tiny, some who claim not to be 'racist or violent' consist of the very same people in other groups that boast about being racist and violent.

Why not leave it to the professionals - police and courts? That's what we pay them for.

This is the usual position of the leaders of communities who find themselves under threat; the bad news is that the state is not neutral in this, as the Spanish Anti-fascist Buenaventura Durruti observed "No government fights fascism to destroy it". When capitalism is in crisis, fascism is its last resort, to scare people into voting for mainstream parties, to keep workers divided and stop them organising to take control of their own lives. By shifting the political debate to the right, fascists prepare the ground for state repression.

Martin Luther King pointed out that "Everything Hitler did was legal", both the apartheid system of South Africa and racial segregation in the southern USA were enforced within strict legal frameworks, which nevertheless turned a blind eye to acts of terrorism from the far-right. In parts of Greece and Eastern Europe, fascists now have the support of police and local government; so it's up to the working class to clean up its own mess.

Surely, no one takes fascists seriously anymore?

Well the fascists do, and so do their wealthy backers and friends in the establishment; their crude racist paranoia is echoed in the tabloid press and other corporate media; then thoughtlessly repeated by the politically naive. Whilst it's easy to ridicule them, 300 drunks staggering down the street can be quite intimidating if you're on your own, or you've just had your shop windows fixed after the last time. Far less so if you're behind a barricade with 1000 other people.

A recent march by the fascist Golden Dawn in Greece attracted thousands; the Greek economy has been wrecked by global capitalism, but since ordinary Greeks can't do anything about global capitalism, many of them are looking around for someone else to take it out on.

I'm not political; what's it got to do with me?

We're going to be a little harsh now; the concentration camps were full of people who weren't political.

What about democracy and freedom of speech?

At first sight this is a tricky one, but if you think about it, does anyone have the right to stand on a platform that would abolish free speech and deny rights to some kinds of people, or incite violence against them? As for democracy, no fascist government ever stands for re-election.

Fascism is a violent ideology, from its very beginnings it meant to take power and impose its regime by force; it glorifies violence and seeks to intimidate its opponents into standing aside, until it's in a position to do away with them altogether.

Wherever fascism has taken hold it has ended in violent conflict, history shows that the more people are involved in resisting it, and the earlier they take action, the less violent that conflict will be. Denying a platform to fascists is just common sense, to do nothing is to invite catastrophe.

I'm not physically strong; I could lose my job/benefits/get deported if I'm arrested; I'm too old to go running around the streets.

There's still plenty you can do: man a telephone line or monitor social media, distribute leaflets, put up posters, talk to your neighbours and gather intelligence about fascist activity in your area; keep in touch with your local anti-fascist group.

For mass mobilisations we need spotters, photographers, legal observers, first-aiders, prisoner support. There's also usually a 'family friendly' counter protest organised by unions and community associations; it may well get kettled by police, but if it's large enough, even that can prevent the fascists following their intended route.

Stay free, stay safe, stick together!

<http://antifascistnetwork.wordpress.com>

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