

workers power 5

For an Anti-Fascist Defence League

The English Defence League (EDL) is organising a series of marches trying to intimidate Muslim and Asian communities, under the guise of protests against "Islamic extremism".

The EDL marches mark the far right's return to the streets, on the back of the British National Party's increasing electoral success.

The BNP, presenting themselves as a "respectable party", remains fascist to the core. Their election campaigns are just a cover for winning power through a campaign of street terror, culminating in a fascist dictatorship. Undercover investigations by journalists and infiltrators inside the BNP have consistently exposed this as the basic ambition of the BNP leadership.

The EDL, if it is allowed to grow, could become the streetfighting arm of Britain's resurgent fascist movement. That is why it must be stopped – by any means necessary.

Communists see fascist organisations as instruments of civil war against the working class. Their aim is to smash the workers' movement, both trade union and political, and to divide the working class through murderous campaigns against racial, religious and sexual minorities. In this sense the fascists are not a "normal" capitalist party, and so the methods necessary to defeat them cannot be those we use against the mainstream capitalist parties. Fascism is a weapon of last resort for the capitalists against the working class movement: when capitalism faces a major social crisis, the ruling class can turn to the fascist organisations.

No platform

It is because we recognise the radically different character of fascist parties that we believe they have to be stopped from organising their forces. This is the policy of "no platform". Wherever fascists seek to grow and develop their influence and support, communists seek to organise united action of workers, youth and anti-racists to stop them. Experience shows that when, as with the National Front in the late 1970s, they are prevented from carrying out their inevitably violent street marches, their parties go into crisis, splinter and collapse.

For these reasons we do not accept the liberal argument that the fascists should be free to organise and make propaganda like any other

party, because this would be to allow them to conduct a campaign of terror against Black and Asian communities, trade unions and socialist organisations.

The fascist EDL marches pose the question of self-defence quite sharply and immediately. Allowing the EDL to march would encourage their growth and the racist attacks that always follow their appearance. The EDL was formed following white nationalist riots in Luton – where racist thugs went on a rampage.

But it doesn't have to be like this. The heroic and courageous actions of Black and Asian youth in Birmingham show the way.

Not only did the youth have to face racist abuse and attacks from EDL thugs, but they have also faced a campaign of repression by the police, including a high profile campaign in the local media with photos of the antifascist youth who broke up the EDL demonstrations.

The police have collaborated closely with the EDL and sought throughout to protect their protests and their right to march. The police can never be relied upon to defend workers' interests or fight the fascists. That is why we oppose calls on the state or the police to ban their marches. State bans will simply rebound on the antifascist forces.

That's why we need independent workers' antifascist organisation.

Antifascist movement

The most high profile antifascist campaign in Britain is Unite Against Fascism (UAF) – an alliance of MPs including Labour, Liberals and Tories, several trade unions, former London Mayor Ken Livingstone and the Socialist Workers Party.

Though UAF sees the need to protest against the BNP, it suffers from having to limit its arguments and tactics to what the capitalist politicians and figures on the right wing of the labour movement will accept.

The return of the fascists to the streets has created tensions in the alliance. In Birmingham the local UAF group, Birmingham United, refused to organise a protest against the second EDL march, fearing violence would break out between antifascist youth and the EDL.

In the run up to the march UAF had lobbied the council and police to ban the EDL march and planned to hold a rally with Asian community leaders, trade unions and councillors in the council chamber at the same time. But then the police allowed the EDL to march while the council banned the anti-racist rally from taking place.

It was a worked example of how the state will back far right groups against challenges from the workers' movement. Shamefully UAF then refused to organise a protest citing the danger of violence, leaving it to local antifascists, including to their credit the Socialist Workers Party, to organise a protest without them.

The split in UAF exposed the contradiction built into the coalition from the outset. In order to keep more right wing, pacifistic forces on board UAF has to present only a liberal opposition to the BNP, and not back physical "no platform".

But the Socialist Workers Party, which is a key component of UAF, does support physical "no platform". If the EDL continue to march while UAF refuse to organise counter-protests for fear of violence, then the contradictions within UAF between these wings can only widen further.

For an antifascist defence league

The actions of Black and Asian youth in Birmingham are an example to the whole antifascist movement. But we shouldn't simply rely on spontaneous acts of courage. We need to take steps towards organised defence squads – a national Antifascist Defence League that can rout the EDL wherever they appear. This is particularly important if we are to draw all other sections of the working class, white as well as black and Asian youth, into the struggle, and not just leave it to minority communities to defend themselves.

The Socialist Workers Party, while supporting physical "no platform" where it happens, has not been willing to develop the struggle in Birmingham to a higher level of organisation, an antifascist defence league, as it would force a rupture in UAF.

This is a mistake. We need to learn from the experience in Birmingham and generalise the policy of physically confronting the EDL elsewhere, if we are to make sure no community has to endure their campaign of racist and fascist terror.