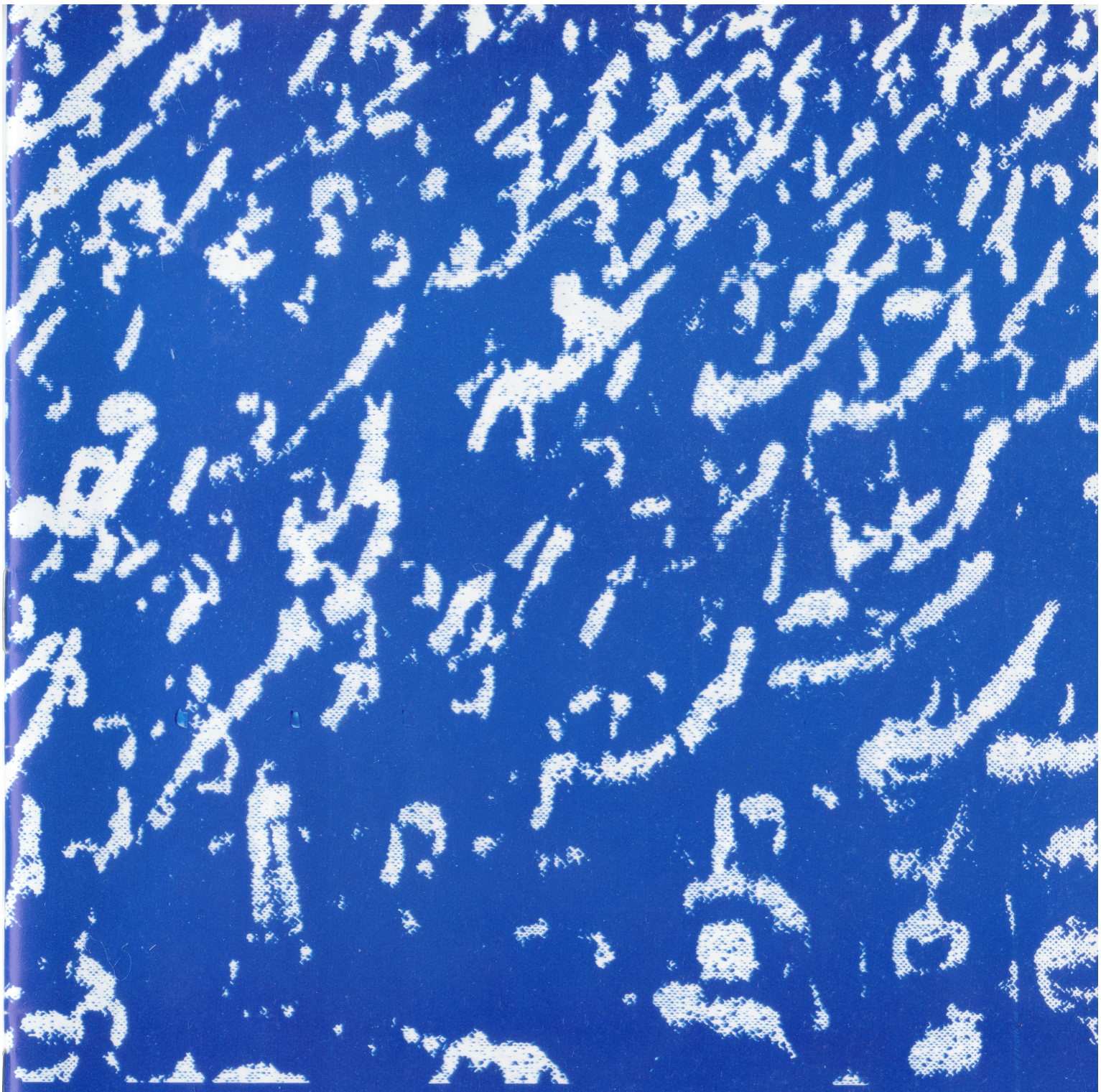

FACING THE CHALLENGE

INTERNATIONAL MILITANT ANTI-FASCIST RALLY1997

ANTI FASCIST ACTION

BANNED

ANTI-FASCIST ACTION PRESS RELEASE - 26.9.97

CAMDEN IRISH CENTRE BANS INTERNATIONAL ANTI-FASCIST RALLY

An international anti-fascist rally has been banned from using the Camden Irish Centre, London, because it is "political". This is the first time ever that anti-fascists have been banned from holding a public event.

The rally on Sunday 5 October to commemorate the Battle of Cable Street is organised by Anti-Fascist Action (recently the target of a C18 letter-bomb campaign which also targeted black celebrities) and involves anti-fascist organisations from all over the world, many of whom have been victims of fascist violence.

Representatives of the Irish Centre insist they would lose their charitable status if they were seen to support an organisation with a history of physical confrontation with fascist groups and said: "Our funding would be in jeopardy."

In fact, the Irish Centre regularly hosts political events including those associated with the Republican movement in Ireland and attended by individuals like Gerry Adams. In reply to this, Veronica (co-ordinator of the Irish Centre) said: "Gerry Adams is an author." On Monday 6 October a public meeting is being held at the Irish Centre by Republican Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Socialist Party, both on record as opposed to the peace process and whose armed wings are currently engaged in operations against British forces in Ireland.

Last year, AFA held a similar rally in the Irish Centre to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street. Messages of support were read out from former members of the International Brigade. The rally and gig (on the next day) attended by up to 500 people, were trouble free and regarded as a huge success. The event was covered by the Camden Journal.

Representatives of the Irish Centre cited the publication of an AFA press release in the Daily Mail on 18 September which had put them "under pressure". The Daily Mail carried no such story on 18 September or any day since. Indeed, the press release, although dated 18 September, was not posted until 20 September.

It transpires that the assistant manager, Ian Wakefield, with whom AFA has been in regular contact since making the initial booking at the Irish Centre in April, was previously the landlord of a pub used by the British National Party. Mr Wakefield was the landlord of The Sun in Bethnal Green Road in 1991 when the pub was notorious as an "operations centre" for violent fascists, some of whom went on to form C18. Having failed to persuade the brewery and Mr Wakefield that they should refuse the custom of fascists, AFA held a 300-strong picket on the premises to force the management to evict the fascists. The tactic proved successful.

Anti-Fascist Action is alarmed at the political consequences posed within this ban and intends to fight it. It will be contacting all Irish organisations with whom it has worked in the past to register their outrage at this turn of events.

The rally will go ahead as planned but at another venue. A picket will be held outside the Irish Centre on Oct 5 at 4pm to protest at this unprecedented ban.

BANNED

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THE CHOICE IS OURS...

In 1994 the BNP announced that there would be "no more marches, meetings, punch-ups." Mainstream anti-racist opinion was quick to reassure us that this was merely a ploy by the BNP to court respectability for the duration of the election campaign. Thereafter the fascists would revert to basics. Some in AFA were not convinced and began to speculate on the consequences for militant anti-fascism of the Far-Right permanently abandoning the 'march and grow' tactic in vogue since the '70's. What, we asked ourselves, would be the consequences if instead they adopted the Euro-nationalist strategy being implemented with spectacular success by their compatriots on the continent. It now appears after a 3 year debate inside the BNP that support for the change of strategy is unanimous. In the pages of Spearhead leading articles have explained the current BNP mindset:

"Twenty years ago or so, we could make our point to the public with large scale marches, meetings in public halls, and similar activities. More recently though, bans by the authorities, police pressure and surveillance, and violence from the State's licensed boot-boys have all combined to make such tactics largely ineffective. Since the opposition actively seeks confrontation, it follows that we must continue with the policy of avoiding it wherever possible, putting our efforts into grassroots campaigning rather than high-profile public activities announced long enough in advance to allow our opponents to mobilise against them." If AFA can be 'persuaded' "to leave our candidates, canvassers, and leafletters in peace - this is all we need to win." So though they are loath to admit it militant anti-fascism has proved a major factor in the change in the tactics of the Far-Right. When Martin Webster predicted that the NF would kick their way into the headlines he didn't fully anticipate that the opposition would be doing the most of the kicking. Predictably they got tired of it before we did. While celebrations might be in order the harsh reality is that we too must change. It is that or become a footnote in history. Essentially the BNP's new Euro Nationalist strategy means putting votes before principles in order to attain the power needed to put principles into practice.

In the General Election in May the BNP put the new strategy into effect and received over 8,000 votes in adjacent wards in East London. To fail to turn that vote into one or more council seats next May would certainly be careless. And of course when that happens the political landscape which we now occupy will be altered in a major way. The evidence shows that following their last election success on the Isle of Dogs their vote trebled and quadrupled in every successive local election in surrounding areas. It is obvious that if we cannot get to them we cannot stop them.

So what do we do? Well, let's first outline what we must not do. For the last seventeen years the cry of the conservative Left has been "get the Tories Out!". Now that Labour are elected the same unity of purpose will be demanded to 'keep the Tories Out!' and so on ad infinitum. As the situation on the continent has shown that strategy is a proven disaster. Primarily, because it forces the very people who want change, the bottom 40 %, the natural constituency of the Left, directly into the arms of the radical Right. In Europe it is predominantly under nominally socialist regimes that the Far-Right has made most ground. It is also worth remembering that it was under the last Labour government that the NF briefly threatened to become the third party ahead of the Liberals. Today it is this very constituency, so badly mauled under the Tories, that Labour is in the business of cutting politically adrift. And while the call for cross class unity has an attractive simplicity it is really a siren call on to the rocks. Across Europe this policy, sometimes referred to as the strategy of the 'lesser evil' has been foisted on anti-fascism by an alliance of the liberal establishment and the conservative Left. The idea is to demonise the Far-Right; isolate them by offering support to whatever candidate is best placed to beat them: Anyone But Fascism. In France this strategy - always deeply flawed - has proved to be utterly counter-productive. For once fascism achieves a certain momentum the precise opposite happens. The logic of the strategy demands cross class unity, involving the whole of society against the evil of fascism. However, anti-fascism's collaboration with politicians and parties, often nominally socialist, often the very people responsible for creating the social conditions which because of the 'anyone but fascism' approach, only the Far-Right are comfortable in addressing, has the opposite effect to the one expected. Instead of ostracising the fascists in working class communities it just as often provides them with a radical and robust political complexion. While in contrast, the prostituting of anti-fascism by corrupt politicians fatally tarnishes a noble tradition in the eyes of the working class public. Those who believe that in opposing fascism it is sufficient to scream "Never Again!" without addressing precisely why there is a resonance for their arguments, draw ridicule on themselves, caricature the anti-fascist struggle and diminish us all.

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Invariably over a period of time the outcome of this kind of anti-fascist agitation is to forcibly drive those who want political change into the opponent's camp out of sheer desperation. Today in France we can see the consequence of a ten year strategy of collaboration sponsored by Mitterand and championed by the Left to isolate Le Pen. The options within this criteria are all now exhausted and there is no Plan B - no cunning plan that does not involve capitulation. They began with that old favourite 'Ignore them and they will go away'. When the Front was ignored in the past 15 years its influence, unopposed, grew. When the centre Right co-operated with them, hoping to draw their sting, the opposite has happened. "People" as Le Pen remarked "tend to prefer the original to the copy." When the Front was denounced by both Left and Right, its preoccupations with race and national identity and Socialist Party corruption were placed centre stage, and its influence continued to grow. Now the FN is the biggest working class party in France and a Far-Right agenda is being implemented, without the embarrassment or inconvenience of fascism actually taking power. Strident demands for legislative and vigorous police action to curb the right wing extremists sanctioned be the conservative Left for exclusive use against Far-Right are employed as well, and then, instead, by the security services against its 'subversive' opponents at the other end of the spectrum.

Genuine anti-fascists are subject to all types of surveillance, dirty tricks, infringement of civil liberties, telephone taps, agent provocateurs, punitive sentences, alleged terrorist links and so on without criticism. A free hand for the police in dealing with 'extremism' is the price extracted from the supporters of the strategy of the lesser evil in return for its co-operation in 'the fight against fascism'.

Following clashes between Right and Left in August 1997, the editorial in the Danish paper Politiken had this to say: "Even though Nazism is extremely violent at its ideological core, the Danish Nazi leader, Jonni Hansen, and his ridiculous and at the same time repulsive marching companions are not expected to start smashing shop windows. That the anti-Nazis oppose a violent ideology with real violence is the political problem." (Politiken editorial published in the Guardian 20/9/1997).

That mindset is a direct echo of the Times editorial following the police riot during the march on the BNP bookshop in Welling in October 1994. Without need of an inquiry the editorial insisted "firm pre-emptive action is clearly needed to stop militant troublemakers...who seek to subvert capitalism and the established order ... hijacking future protests, even if this means

restricting right of free assembly in a handful of cases." (Times 18/10/1994)

Similarly following a spectacular rout of fascists by working class anti-fascists in the Altona district of Hamburg, the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung demanded "action ruthless and immediate", against the victors. The specific proposals proposed by the paper were draconian in the extreme - 'the setting up of summary courts' empowered to pronounce sentence 'after a very simplified procedure. Sentences of death were to be imposed on those guilty of 'unlawful possession of weapons' and so on. Even in the summer of 1931, for these democrats of the press it was still anti-fascism rather than fascism that was regarded as - 'the real political problem'.

Those who only equate fascism with the Holocaust are right in their moral condemnation but mistaken in their sense of sequence. Fascism is not an 'either or' condition. The danger in France and elsewhere lies not in right wing terrorism, or the cataclysm of the putsch, but in the insidious political drift.

Today in Britain as in France in the early 1980's, we have just elected a nominally - or formerly - social democratic party . For those that support Labour this means a shift to the Left but for the rest of us it is either a continuing drift to the Right or merely a new administration replacing an old administration. In any case the agenda remains much the same. One way of looking at it is that we are now governed by a single party, with two Right-wings: one ideological and one pragmatic. The latter is now in government. If we have learned the lessons from France, it is the duty of militant anti-fascists to confront fascism not by lining up with the pragmatic wing of the Establishment, but by lining up against it.

And our responsibility does not end there. It will profit it us nothing in the long run merely to take up the correct and principled position to Labour, a) if this strategy is not implemented in working class areas and b) if mainstream anti-fascism continues to be identified in the public mind with the antics and stance of the ANL, Searchlight and the Board of Deputies of British Jews. It is expected that Peter Hain, the honorary president of the ANL, will soon be in the Cabinet. It is not right that anti-fascism is so closely identified with the ruling party. It is not right that in the name of anti-fascism people collaborate with the security forces. It is not right that anti-fascism is seen as an apologist and cheer leader for the status quo. It is not for anti-fascism to argue that independent working class candidates might split the Labour vote. It is not for anti-fascism to argue that progressive change is not necessary.

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If through the propaganda of the ANL a centre right party, like Labour is allowed or encouraged to hitch anti-fascism to its own anti-working class agenda then despite all AFA's efforts the working class we be alienated from us. The only way to prevent this happening is for our version of anti-fascism, real anti-fascism to become the dominant political brand. Being politically and operationally independent, being in touch with working class concerns and remaining loyal to the working class interests are the fundamental lessons that are there to be learned from the situation in France.

The electoral and political threat from an organised Far-Right must not be our only concern. In May the New York based Human Rights Watch produced a report that revealed Britain has one of the highest rates of racially motivated crime in Western Europe - a situation as desperate as that experienced by minorities in Germany. The conclusions of this extensive report which took three years to compile is that race attacks have a political element to them...a quality of ethnic cleansing." In the late 80's the government sponsored Runnymeade Trust estimated that there were about 70,000 race attacks annually. Recently the same organisation put the figure at almost double. Roughly 350 a day. This is a legitimate area for anti-fascist attention, or at least, it should be. Humanitarian concerns apart there is also a vital tactical consideration. This is the sea in which the organised fascists swim. A failure on our part to address this issue now will see pockets of organised fascists emerge from within these communities sooner or later. Following an electoral breakthrough anywhere in the country the natural progression from violent racist to organised fascist is for this strata both natural and inevitable. And as we have seen that breakthrough could be as early as next May. The lesson is: disregard Labour, get a fascist for a neighbour.

Despite efforts by AFA to highlight the race attacks issue in the late 80's and early 90's it has remained a hidden epidemic. Now the government proposes new legislation that it says will make those sentenced for attacks motivated by racial hatred serve an additional term of imprisonment. Whether this is yet another pious platitude from New Labour, or simply well intentioned idiocy it is almost certainly a serious blunder. Race attacks are a symptom of a wider problem that cannot be dealt with in isolation, and certainly cannot be solved by legislation. Particularly when the proposed remedy will be in the hands of a police force rightly condemned in the same report as "vicious and racist". Hand wringing liberals fully aware of the contradiction, suggest that this inherent and vicious racism can be eradicated by better training. Better training? What are they saying? That the police are not already aware that killing black working class people is against the

law ? Even worse, as these mini-pogroms are politically motivated - the objective to make an area white or keep it white - legalisation designed to criminalise already criminal behaviour will at best prove ineffective and at worst offer a huge propaganda gift to the Far-Right. This is an issue that needs to be tackled head on and is certainly within the militant anti-fascist remit. Indeed it should be made a priority. Race attackers are a legitimate target, but the idea must be to quarantine them, stamp them out, not make as Labour propose, political martyrs of them.

Proud of his grip of the problem Home Office minister Mike O'Brien boasts "that the new legalisation will send an unequivocal message to racist groups such as Combat 18". It certainly will. And the message seems to be 'Stick around and we'll make you world famous!'

Even if they were as fearsome as advertised C18 would still not be the cause of the problem, more a reflection of its depth. Notwithstanding the fact that C18 came into existence in the early 90's as a direct response to the havoc wreaked by AFA across the Far-Right, they are in reality a propaganda group who have done little. Instead they rely for their notoriety on sexy media stories, and gullible politicians like O'Brien who in turn are spoon fed by the same organisations, who on the back of the hysteria generated hope to goad or manipulate the authorities in to proscribing the group. You don't have be a genius to detect an M15 agenda in there some where. Nor who, in the interest of balance, would be next.

Meanwhile if the Home Office wants to get tc the source of the problem they might look a little closer to home. The responsibility for two of the more infamous race murders in the 1990's can be laid at the feet of a political organisation, but it is not C18 or the BNP - but the Labour Party. In Camden in the late 80's Labour in their wisdom decided to close a youth club used predominantly by white kids, at the same time as opening a youth club intended for the exclusive use of Asian youngsters. Had the motives been impeccable the application was still cretinous and the racial tension generated cost Richard Everett his life. In Thamesmead in south east London a couple of years earlier they did exactly the same thing. Again only a half wit would have been blind to the backlash. This time a black youngster Rolan Adams was the victim.

There is an evangelical zeal behind some Labour anti-racist initiatives that clearly see working class communities as territory to be pacified. This colonial trait is something we must guard against and actively combat, and as militant anti fascists must be

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seen to do so. It cannot be left to the Far-Right to organise the resistance to Labour in working class communities. To allow the likes of the BNP the opportunity to graft racist solutions on to legitimate working class grievances would be fatal. Consequently we must lend support to any genuine independent working class initative, but ultimately we must be prepared to fill the vacuum in our own communities ourselves. As a counter point to the Far-Right winning council seats in their strongholds as early as May, we need to begin the work of politically developing our own strongholds. To paraphrase Blair: Tough on fascism! Tough on the causes of fascism!

Since AFA was relaunched in September 1989 we have successfully thwarted the Far-Right in its ambition to fill the political vacuum in working class areas. Time and time again, at critical moments we have gone through the fascist ranks like a rat through cheese. Sometimes even we have underestimated the havoc wreaked. But now we are in a new era and we must adapt.

Labour are in government locally and nationally. For Labour, middle England is the undisguised source of all political wisdom. The political displacement of the working class, if not already complete, will soon become apparent. With the Tories in government Labour locally could blame them for everything. Now that alibi has been removed. Yet the government is committed to working to the Tory agenda. So for the first time in 18 years Labour councils will be faced with the consequences of their own actions. What is equally certain is that the political beneficiaries will not be the previous government. The millions of disenchanted people will have to find another political home. The implications for us could not be more clear-cut.

That said, here in Britain the playing field is more or less level. Circumstances are presenting Right and Left with the same opportunity: to organise in working class communities without much interference from the major parties.

This is a battle for working class hearts and minds that cannot be ducked. To lose this battle is to lose the war. Alternatively, if we ignore the gauntlet and shrink from the responsibility we are finished anyway.

Across Europe the clear ambition of the fascists is not to protest but to govern. Likewise for us. There are no half measures. It is all or nothing. Either working class rule or working class subordination. And, as things stand, we can still be the difference. Our destiny is in our own hands. The choice is ours.

WORLD CUP TOURNAMENT 1998

Bristol AFA in association with the Easton Cowboys F.C. are organising an International 11-a-side Football Tournament to be held near Bristol, England, during July 1998. Teams from Europe, Africa and the USA have been invited to play in the 5 day event (3 days of football), which includes beer, bands, DJs and more.

If you are interested in taking part or know of a team that may be interested (particularly if you are from outside England), then contact Bristol AFA at PO Box 1076, Bristol, BS99 1WF, England.

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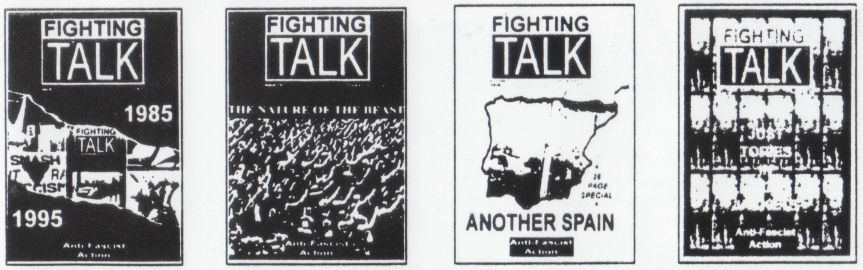

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