



UNION STREET NEWS

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY - SPECIAL EDITION



HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

27TH JANUARY 2011

Why it is so important we commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day

27 January 2011 marks the 66th anniversary of the liberation of the **Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in Poland**. To join in with the world wide commemoration of the terrible events of the Holocaust, and the subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and the Darfur region of Sudan, Coventry Unison has put together a special edition of our branch newsletter, *Union Street News*.

For most people, the horrors that were perpetrated against the Jewish people of continental Europe in the 1930's and 40's epitomise what the Holocaust was all about. Probably, the most famous of these Jews, who died only weeks before the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, had the greatest impact on how we remember these times. Anne Frank, a young German girl living in hiding in Amsterdam with her family kept a diary, which when published in the coming decades, revolutionised how we viewed the torment of a people at first traumatised, then systematically and brutally murdered by the henchman of Hitler's Nazi Germany.

Sadly, Anne Frank and her people were not alone in the suffering. Anyone who opposed this tyranny felt the full force of the SS. So, if you were a Homosexual, Gypsy, Pole or other Slav, Trade Unionist, Communist or other Political dissenter, dissenting Clergy, Person with a physical and mental disability or a Jehovah's witness, you were in danger of

persecution from the regime.

Today the Nazi legacy is long gone...but not forgotten. In Towns and Cities across Britain, the British National Party (BNP) and the English Defence League (EDL) have put a stain on our democratic traditions by pedalling their anti-human and racist bile as an answer to Britain's problems. To combat this we have put together a piece which counteracts their lies and their Holocaust denials.

We thank the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust for their support in producing this newsletter.



Please take the opportunity to mark the day by going to the website of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. Here you can light a 'Virtual Candle' in remembrance of those people who lost their lives in the genocides of the 20th Century.

www.hmdt.org.uk

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"The Yids, the Yids, we gotta get rid of the Yids" – British Union of Fascists chant, Bethnal Green, 1936

"Muslim Scum off our streets" – English Defence League chant, Stoke on Trent, 2010

Members of Coventry Unison may have heard about an organisation that calls itself the English Defence League (EDL). **The EDL are an organisation who recruit mainly young, white men, to attend marches against what they claim is a threat from 'militant Islam'. They are a bunch of violent racist thugs.** They are led by a rich business backer, Alan Lake, who formed the EDL in early 2009. By January 2010 the EDL mobilised football hooligans from 22 different clubs in a march in Stoke on Trent, that soon descended into an anti-Muslim riot. Subsequently they have organised 35 different protests across the UK. In Coventry, so far, they have failed to mobilise on our streets. However, we can not be complacent. Without effective and active opposition they can readily appeal to a layer of disaffected, alienated and angry people. The Coventry EDL Facebook page has over 1,000 supporters.

Many members of the EDL would not describe themselves as fascist, some claim not to be racist at all. The reality is far more sinister. The British National Party (BNP) have played a central role in the organisation of the EDL from its inception. The EDL website designer, Chris Renton, is a BNP member, as is Davy Cooling, administrator of the Luton EDL site. One of the organisers of the two EDL protests held in Birmingham was BNP member, and convicted paedophile, Richard Price. In Stoke on Trent, local BNP Councillors were seen directing the protests alongside leading members of the extreme Nazi Combat 18 organisation.

Recently, the EDL have begun to turn to new targets. Recent EDL statements have attacked the BA strikers and other trade unionists. In a speech to EDL supporters in Peterborough on 11 December, EDL leader "Tommy Robinson" – a former BNP member whose real name is Stephen Yaxley Lennan – issued a threat to student demonstrators. His speech alternated attempts to whip up anti-Muslim hatred with attacks on the thousands of school and college students who have protested against fees and education cuts over the past months. He threatened: *'The next time the students want to protest in our capital, the English Defence League will be there'*.

It is not 'militant Islam' that is threatening our jobs, services and work conditions as Council workers – it is

THE EDL – WHO THEY ARE AND HOW TO STOP THEM

cuts, privatisation and free market dogma. The vast majority of Muslims, like the vast majority of Christians, Sikhs, Jews, Hindus and followers of any religion, want to get on with their lives and worship in peace. Trade unions believe in the right to worship any religion of our choice, or none.



Photo - Martin Spooner

Members and Officers of Coventry Unison have actively participated in the mobilisations, meetings and have spoken in public, to stop the threat of the EDL. Many of these initiatives have been called by Unite against Fascism (UAF) along with local organisations such as Coventry Trade Union Council and Coventry against Racism.

Some people, many because they are extremely angry at EDL or BNP provocations, believe that the answer to stopping the EDL is for small groups of people to confront them with violence. This will not give a long term solution to the threat and will largely play in to the hands of those who seek the 'glory' of a punch up or worse inside the EDL. Unite against Fascism argue for mass mobilisations in the spirit of the historic mobilisations against the fascists at Cable Street (1936), Lewisham (1977), and Welling (1993). Here tens of thousands of people, all ages, races, gender and sexualities united together to show who owned the streets and who represented the majority of opinion in this country.

Trade Unions and the Holocaust



"When Hitler attacked the Jews, I was not a Jew, therefore I was not concerned. And when Hitler attacked the Catholics, I was not a Catholic, and therefore, I was not concerned. And when Hitler attacked the unions and the industrialists, I was not a member of the unions and I was not concerned. Then Hitler attacked me and the Protestant church - and there was nobody left to be concerned."

Pastor Martin Niemoller recalls his famous statement to the U.S. Congress in 1968.

The Nazis hated anyone they believed to be 'different' or who they felt would resist their policies of hatred. In order to create their authoritarian order, it was important for them to bring all areas of civic life under their control. This meant that the Nazis targeted the Trade Unions in Germany particularly early in their rule.

May Day was traditionally a day of great celebration in Germany. In 1933, just 5 months after Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, the Nazis proclaimed May Day as a national holiday, calling it a Day of National Labour. Trade Union leaders were surprised by this conciliatory gesture from the previously anti-trade union Nazis and co-operated with the Government to observe the new holiday.

Leaders were flown in to Berlin and the streets were decorated with banners and celebrations were held throughout the day. Before a huge rally, Hitler himself announced that the day represented a new era of co-operation between the Trade Unions and the Nazi Party.

The celebrations of 1 May 1933 were short-lived and the Nazis had no intention of allowing the power of organised labour to threaten their dictatorship. The morning after May Day on 2 May 1933, the Government ordered the dissolution of Trade Unions. The headquarters of the Unions were occupied, funds were confiscated and many of the leaders were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Goebbels wrote in his diary on the night of May Day, 'tomorrow, we will occupy the trade-union buildings. There will be little resistance'.

Gustav Schiefer, Chairman of the Munich branch of the German Trade Union Association, who was imprisoned and tortured in Dachau concentration camp, remarked in his subsequent testimony against the Nazis:

'and how decent were we once more in the year 1945. Not a hair on the head of any of these swine

was harmed on behalf of the Trade Unions. We bore witness, and still bear witness today, for human dignity and justice'.

To date, Trade Unionists have played a huge role in the campaign to remember and learn from the lessons of the past in order to create a safer and better future. Through remembering the persecution of Trade Unionists and others in the Holocaust and more recent genocides, Trade Unions continue to fight against the evils of racism and discrimination today.

As already stated, HMD also remembers those who have suffered in more recent conflicts. In the years that followed the end of WW11, conflicts in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Sudan have seen the brutal killings of millions of people including many in the Trade Union movement.

Clearly, if we have learned anything from the Holocaust, it's that we have still not learnt enough to understand how to stop the continuation of mans inhumanity to man. These genocides have continued to happen in Asia, Africa and Europe ,with the United Nations seemingly unable to stop it.

Therefore, the meaning behind Holocaust Memorial Day and why we need to learn the lessons needs to be continually re-examined. Coventry Unison believes there is a case for the 27th January to become a public holiday; to give the people of Britain, its young people, and the World as a whole, an opportunity not only to remember and commemorate, which is important, but also to think about what needs to be done to avoid future genocides. With fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors left, the Government needs to act before it's too late.

BNP STAY OUT OF COVENTRY!

The British National Party have yet to gain the foothold in Coventry that they have gained elsewhere in the Country. This is excellent for all those who believe in democracy. In part it is because Coventry is a very multi-racial city and in part it is because the BNP have been opposed at every turn by active opposition from across the local labour movement. Coventry Trade Union Council has played a lead role in this, alongside members of many union branches across the city, including Unison.

Nationally, the BNP are also on the back foot at last, after making startling gains in elections, with hundreds of local councillors and two MEPs elected. At times the media, especially the BBC, have treated Nasty Nick Griffin as a media celebrity, or a harmless eccentric right wing politician. This is a man who has convictions for race hate, a track record of holocaust denial and who used to be a leading member of the Nazi National Front.

We cannot be complacent - The British National Party (BNP) have recently leafleted homes in the Chapelfields area of Coventry. They claim to be patriotic local residents concerned about parking issues. Don't be fooled – the so-called 'local residents' have a PO Box in Bedworth!

They claim that a local Mosque proposal – a planned change of use for the existing Iqra Learning Centre, in Allesley Old Road, will create parking chaos. This is not true. The planned development includes a parking facility at the rear. The Mosque are more than happy to work with local residents to ensure that any problems are resolved. The Iqra Learning Centre has been established in the area for several years. It does not create 'problems', any more than the other shops, pubs and businesses on the same stretch of road. The BNP have a sinister agenda – the spread of racist fear against Muslim people and anyone else that doesn't fit their narrow world.

Chapelfields is a peaceful and welcoming place to live. We welcome people of many different nationalities and religions. We have three large thriving Churches. We have room for a small Mosque as well. The truth about the BNP is clear – they are a violent racist and fascist party which has no place on our streets.

There are real issues around local services, parking, potholes and security. The real problem is the lack of public funds, thanks to government cuts. Coventry residents can work together with the trade unions to lobby the Council and central Government to demand proper resources to deal with these issues. Blaming Muslims, or any other local people, is a blind alley which suits no one but the violent fascists of the BNP.

The BNP is a party of violence



Terence Gavan - A BNP 'Gold' Member from Batley, West Yorkshire. He is a hardened racist who built a stockpile of bombs and guns at his home. He was recently sentenced to 11 years in Jail.

Robert Cottage - A BNP Candidate in Council Elections. A Wannabe terrorist, Cottage was jailed for stockpiling explosive chemicals in his home in preparation for a civil war.

David Copeland - A former BNP "Steward". He planted bombs stuffed with 1,500 four inch nails in Brixton and Brick Lane. His Soho pub bombing killed three people - including a pregnant woman.



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