

## Out of Their League

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#### IS THE EDL WAVE BREAKING AS THE 'BIG ONE' FLOPS?

It was supposed to be 'The Big One' — that's how the EDL were billing their Bradford rally — a climactic moment in their campaign against 'radical Islam'. According to puff pieces released on Youtube before the event, there were supposed to be 5,000 leaguers descending on the Yorkshire town on Saturday 28

August. The EDL had warned women and children not to be present and one flyer bore the slogan 'Burn, baby, burn'. A much smaller rally by the National Front in 2001 had sparked three days of rioting (see SchNEWS 313) in Oldham which saw over 200 men incarcerated for periods of up to five years. Bradford braced itself. In the end a mere 700-800 EDLers were on display. Two days later, a march by the English Nationalist Alliance in Brighton saw no more than fifty fascists show up and their march was only forced through the city's streets by Sussex Police with batons and dogs.

Is this the beginning of the end for the EDL? Before Bradford the EDL looked to be on a roll. Nothing succeeds like success and for a while the League looked unopposed by anybody except the state. Rallies in Bolton and Dudley had attracted possibly up to two thousand. They had held rallies in Manchester, Aylesbury, Nottingham, Newcastle, Stoke and elsewhere.

Attempts to spread to Wales and Scotland were met with disinterest but in northern England at least they appeared to be getting stronger. Organised opposition from the left had largely come from the ineffectual Socialist Worker's Party (SWP) front Unite Against Fascism (UAF). A few anarchos and direct action types were making regular pilgrimages to the EDL demos but not in the numbers required to make any difference. Often the Muslim community, under pressure from the police, were able to keep their young men off the streets. In Bolton police action was directed at anti-fascists, within even the UAFs Weyman Bennett getting lifted for 'conspiracy to commit violent disorder'.

Apart from the set-piece demos, followers began branching out under the EDL flag, placing pigs' heads on mosques and beginning to turn up to small meetings of Indymedia, the Anarchist Federation and the UAF.

#### NORTHERN LIGHTS OUT

Bradford was different — from early in the day a mixed group of travelling anti-fascists and local Muslim youth began congregating in the area where the EDL were to be confined (their march had been banned on request of the local authority but a static demonstration was permitted). In the event the EDL were bussed into a waste-ground, mostly surrounded by plywood hoarding (the intended site of a new shopping centre). Bradford is shaped like a bowl with the centre at the bottom and the town and its estates looking down on all sides. The EDL were, fittingly,

at the lowest point in town. Anyone outside the perimeter had a birds-eye view of proceedings.

At midday there were already 150 EDL inside the cordon, leading to fears that the apocalyptic scenarios promised were about to unfold. Two EDLers even felt confident enough to give a press conference outside their pen. The fact that one of them was the EDL's only Asian member confused issues for a few minutes but they were soon chased back with shouts of "Nazi Scum — off our streets".

By 2pm however, the advertised start time for their demo, it became clear that they had achieved a very low turn out — estimates vary from six to eight hundred. Meanwhile the UAF confined themselves to a cordon five hundred yards away in Exchange Square. Cops established a double ring around the EDL rally facing inwards and outwards. The EDL rushed towards a gap in the hoardings screened only by a couple of police vans and began hurling their racist abuse. "Muhammed is a paedo", "Who the fuck is Allah?". Soon stones, smoke flares and half empty cans of lager were being hurled at the more thinly spread anti-fascist crowd. The smoke flares were hurled back. Police baton charges drove anti-fascists back and it was clear that the EDL were getting the same rough treatment.

The afternoon continued in a three-way struggle with the police until, as the main body of anti-fascists were being pushed up the street by mounted police, the less lardy members of the EDL finally hit on the idea of scaling the fence. The rear of the EDL's pen was totally unguarded and around 150 of them escaped over the hoarding — intent on heading into Bradford and making good on their threats.

On the other side hundreds of anti-fascists broke away from the confrontation with the police and headed around the block towards the Forster Square retail park. Shouts of 'Allahu Akbar' mixed with cries of 'Antifascista'. There was some hesitation when the EDL were first encountered but they soon broke and ran, some of their more hapless members taking a pasting before police with dogs intervened and rescued them. Chased back into their pen the EDL tamely got back onto their coaches and were driven along the motorway under police escort. By this time the Muslim youth from the surrounding estates were in town in large numbers looking for any stray leaguers.

#### SOON TO BE RELEGATED?

So where next for the EDL? It is true that they have bounced back from worse defeats than this; their first two outings in Birmingham, for example, mainly involved a bit of sieg-heiling and a lot of kissing the pavement. But they were able to turn these into a call-out by painting the conflict as a race war — beleaguered Englishmen surrounded by radical jihadists. They may yet turn it around, after all the mainstream press provides ample fodder for the belief that the UK is under siege by Islamic hordes. The EDL feed off of the kind of patriotism needed to ensure that the domestic population backs Our Boys.

The EDL is not a monolithic body, it is a loose coalition operating

on the basis of a lowest common denominator, a belief in the need to prevent the victory of Sharia law in the UK- a goal so easily achievable it's a wonder they don't all stay at home. Some of them are die-hard white supremacists, some are football hooligans just up for a ruck, others are disenchanted BNP activists and there's even an increasingly diminishing number of law-abiding flag wavers. With their taste for bespoke merchandise the EDL are obviously a cash-cow for someone. The 'leadership' may want to pretend that they have a very narrow focus on 'militant Islam' but the rank and file are simply there for the 'muzzie-bashing' and racist taunts are a regular feature of their mobilisations. The contradictions in a movement always show up the moment that a coalition hits a stumbling block and for now at least the EDL seem to be indulging in a fair amount of finger pointing and mutual recrimination. hilariously, on the front page of their website they're trying to blame the anti-police violence on infiltrators from Combat 18.

The waving of Israeli flags may have started as simple device for winding up the opposition, but now Zionist organisations have become increasingly involved with the EDL, linked by a hatred of Islam. EDL types have showed up to support Zionists outside Ahava (see SchNEWS 704), target of the Israeli boycott campaign. Once again in their analysis of what went wrong in Bradford they accuse their opponents of being anti-Israel. Which is probably true but begs the question of why the EDL care so much about the affairs of a nation in the Middle East.

At the moment, apart from rumour-mongering on their forums, the EDL do not have any more set-pieces on their calendar. They might go for Leicester next or maybe even back to Luton where it all began. They are failing to grow and anti-fascists, who were mostly stunned by the rapid growth of the far-right movement have shown that together with locals it is possible to counter-act the EDL even on their days of action. At the moment the league are down but not out... time perhaps to finish the job.

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## Brighton Defence League

### **BRIGHTON DEFENCE LEAGUE**

The English Nationalist Alliance, a much smaller group have taken things a step further, moving on from targeting 'radical Islam' to taking a stand against 'extremist students' and their 'anti-English' activities (see SchNEWS 736). Very much a poor cousin to the EDL, the ENA is essentially a response to the mobilisation against the March for England earlier this year (see SchNEWS 720).

There were fears that a success for the EDL in Bradford would have a knock-on effect in Brighton. However, only thirty idiots assembled at the train station with a few allies scattered around in local pubs. Those there soon dropped the ENA banner and openly paraded EDL flags and shirts.

The UAF for once did the right thing by arriving at the station en masse and together with other anti-fascists they succeeded in preventing the fash from marching for over an hour, before caving in to police requests to turn tail and march towards a pre-prepared cordon in Victoria gardens.

This left it up to the few non-aligned Brighton anti-fascists to try and stop the march. Sussex Police had clearly made a political

decision to allow the march to go ahead, and with batons, dogs, and horses they proceeded to do exactly that. Even so they were forced to change the route of the march. Instead of parading through the town's main roads, the ENA/EDL were forced on a detour of Brighton's boutique-ridden North Laines, where they entertained locals with a healthy mixture of moronic racism and homophobia.

The small group of anarchos battled on for the next hour dragging wheelie bins into the road and resisting police charges by hand. They were joined by groups splintering away from the UAF demo and passers-by. Eventually however the fash were escorted back to the station, followed closely by a growing crowd of nosiy anti-fascists, who were clapped through the streets by passers-by. Small bands of racists continued to roam loose and on a couple of occasions breakaway groups were cornered in local pubs and had to be escorted away by police. The day ended with fourteen arrests, nine of ours and five of theirs.

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## Grounded At Heathrow

### **GROUNDING AT HEATHROW**

The action group Transition Heathrow have been granted a month extension in their fight against the eviction of a squatted garden. The guerilla gardeners had set roots at an abandoned market garden on 1<sup>st</sup> of March (see SchNEWS 736). The locality at the time was under threat by plans for a third Heathrow runway but fortunately, as March drew to an end so did BAA's runaway plans.

This Thursday (2<sup>nd</sup>) the green fingered activists were due at Uxbridge court after being served eviction papers. Over 50 people showed up to support the gardeners' fight against eviction. The high flyers have got at least a 28-day long hiatus as the court awaits the return of the land owner, who is rumoured to be away in India.

The 'Grow Heathrow' project has encouraged and supported locally grown produce in an area that was once one of the most productive in Britain but has since been laid to waste. Since the garden was established, residents and activists have joined forces to change a derelict area into a flourishing market garden, a community hub and a model of sustainable living and self-sufficiency. 30 tonnes of rubbish have been cleared away and two greenhouses built. There have also been activities such as permaculture courses, growing workshops, bike workshops, clothes making, solidarity support for local workers and direct action workshops.

The case has been adjourned to the Central London County Court after the Deputy District Judge ruled that higher authority was needed to rule on the case. So, for now, the community can continue to enjoy its harvest even if the future remains uncertain.

\* See [www.transitionheathrow.com](http://www.transitionheathrow.com)

# Marx And Sparks

## **MARX AND SPARKS**

Anti-sweatshop campaigners have called for a demonstration outside London Marks & Spencers this Saturday following an attack on workers and the kidnapping of a union leader at an M&S supplier factory in India.

Last Wednesday (25<sup>th</sup>), 60 workers were attacked by armed thugs as they arrived for work at the Viva Global factory in Gurgaon. Sixteen women were severely beaten and union leader Anwar Ansari was dragged away. After being beaten and told he would be killed if he returned to the factory he was dumped near his home. He has since rejoined the picket lines.

The attack came after months of campaigning against low wages and the excessive, forced, appalling working conditions by the Garment and Allied Workers Union. One of the attackers has been identified as a labour contractor used by the company to provide workers to the factory.

With the situation still tense, campaign group Labour Behind the Label are now calling for middle class institution M&S to take responsibility for the safety and well-being of the workers that stitch all those sensible blouses and understated jumpers. The demo will be outside M&S at 173 Oxford Street at 11am.

\* See [www.labourbehindthelabel.org](http://www.labourbehindthelabel.org)

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