



unite against fascism

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Why it is right to peacefully oppose the EDL in Bradford

The prospect of the English Defence League [EDL] coming to Bradford on Saturday 28 August demands a sober and effective response from the anti fascist movement as whole. We wish to explain why we believe it is vital that there is a [peaceful multicultural celebration](#) in Bradford city centre on the day of the EDL action.

This is in contrast to the view expressed in the August edition of Searchlight magazine and in the Morning Star newspaper, by Hope Not Hate organiser Nick Lowles, where he argues that banning the EDL march "...is our only option and sole focus."

UAF supports the call made by Bradford trade unions, local community and faith groups for a ban of the proposed EDL demonstration in Bradford on Saturday 28. But we do not agree that this is the 'only option', nor that if "thousands of EDL supporters manage to get into Bradford then we have already lost", as Lowles's argument continues. On the contrary, the experience of Stoke and Luton tells us that the EDL are more likely to go on the rampage when there is no public opposition to them on the day of their actions.

Firstly, on the call for a ban. In the view of UAF and many others, section 12 and section 13 of the Public Order Act, allow the police to ban both marches and static demonstrations. However to date, apart from one in Luton, the authorities have refused to ban EDL demonstrations. Therefore, in our view, the response to the EDL planned mobilisation in Bradford has to be to campaign for a ban, and at the same time take the necessary steps to put in place a peaceful celebration of multicultural Bradford in the event that the EDL are allowed to assemble there.

UAF has been engaged in serious discussion over many months, with the communities targeted by the EDL, other faith communities, local and national trade unions and many others, to consider the most effective way to respond to these EDL actions where they are allowed to go ahead. From these discussions, clear support has been expressed for ensuring that the EDL are not allowed to go

unopposed, and that there should be events held that assert the positive local support for their multicultural, diverse and united communities.

Accordingly, Bradford Unite Against Fascism is organising with trade unionists, faith groups, community groups and others a "We are Bradford" peaceful, multicultural celebration of unity to show that the overwhelming majority of the people of the city reject the EDL's poisonous message. The event being organised is not a "counter demonstration".

It will be held in the city centre, and there will be transparent arrangements made with the police, with whom the 'We Are Bradford' event is co-operating fully to ensure that there is no confrontation with the EDL. This will demonstrate that Bradford does not welcome the attempts by the EDL to whip up hostility between communities, strengthen the solidarity of all Bradford's communities against racism, and will also provide the media with a focal point to profile the breadth of support for multicultural Bradford, rather than allowing the agenda to be dominated by the EDL.

In the framework of both mobilizing support for a ban and preparing for the eventuality that this call is ignored, Unite Against Fascism invites Hope not Hate to jointly organise with us a peaceful multicultural celebration on Saturday 28 August in the city centre.

Unite Against Fascism is acutely aware of the huge responsibilities facing the anti fascist movement in Bradford given the experience of the 2001 riots and the electoral breakthrough by the BNP in 2004 in the wake of the racist myth about so called 'Asian grooming' of young white girls for sex.

But we believe that a disorganised and chaotic response to the EDL coming to Bradford is more likely if the anti fascist movement does not fulfill its duty on the 28 August to organise a safe place for all those people who will undoubtedly wish to make their voices heard against the threat of the EDL and in support of our multicultural society. The issue is whether the response to the EDL's presence is properly stewarded and channeled to a peaceful, positive event - not whether there will be a response. Failure to organise such a response would also send a signal to the EDL that they are free to escalate their actions against the Muslim and other communities without any expression of the breadth of opposition to their message of hate.

We are also concerned at the possible implication of Nick Lowles' comment that "The EDL is coming to Bradford to provoke another riot. Let's not give them one." [Searchlight August 2010] We must be very clear that experience tells us that the EDL does not need an excuse to start a racist riot.

In Dudley the EDL attacked a Mosque, and Hindu & Sikh temples. We also have to emphasise that the responsibility for violence in the town rests with the EDL and not the peaceful gathering organised by the local Interfaith Forum, Unite Against Fascism and others.

We should not give any ground to the myth that the EDL is a legitimate, peaceful movement which is 'provoked' into violence. Nor is it acceptable for anyone to imply that people supporting a peaceful celebration of our multicultural society on the same day as an EDL action are in any way responsible for provoking the EDL.

If the anti-fascist movement is to deal effectively with the threat posed by the EDL it is necessary for it to understand the causes of its growth and its relationship to the British National Party.

In the context of a rise of Islamophobia across society the EDL has been allowed to make gross attacks on the freedom of conscience, thought, religion and cultural expression of Muslims including actions outside mosques. If there were demonstrations against Christian churches or Jewish people and synagogues there would quite rightly be widespread outrage and condemnation.

Unite Against Fascism consistently argued, both before and after the 2009 European election, that the election of even one BNP MEP would represent an historic breakthrough for British fascism with serious negative consequences. We now see in Britain an embryonic pogrom movement in the form of the EDL which is a direct product of that BNP breakthrough. There is a de facto far right division of labour: the BNP does the electoral politics whilst the EDL intimidates on the streets.

The UAF has been clear that both these threats must be countered, and was central to the local campaigns against the BNP in Barking, Stoke-on-Trent and other areas of the country where the BNP were successfully driven back electorally.

But, in developing our strategy and tactics we must never forget that the fascists are not primarily a parliamentary party. They seek to impose their views by force – intimidating communities and if they ever come to power eradicating their opponents. Therefore, alongside the campaign of mass action to oppose them electorally, it is also vital to develop a movement that comes to the defence of communities under attack, demonstrating to the fascists that these communities are not isolated and will not be left to stand alone.

We have to reply to the EDL by demonstrating that the labour movement, other faiths, those of goodwill, will celebrate our multicultural society in the face of the fascists' attempts to whip up hatred, prejudice and fear. We only need to look at other European countries to see what happens when movements akin to the EDL are allowed to grow without this type of broad response. It leads to an increase in racist violence directed against whole communities, including arson and murder.

The EDL is a racist organisation that concentrates on anti-Muslim prejudice as a focal point for racism. It will seek to organise any anti-Muslim current but starts with those, such as football 'casuals' most prepared to 'take to the streets'. Contrary to the media's portrayal of the EDL as being opposed to 'extreme Islam',

in reality it seeks to create a street force capable of intimidating and attacking the Muslim communities, and further down the line to pose a physical threat to other black and Asian communities and to the labour movement.

Over the last year the anti-fascist movement has learned many lessons about how we can successfully celebrate and defend our multicultural society against the attacks of the EDL. In Dudley, UAF worked closely with local communities to peacefully celebrate 'one society, many cultures'. This was such a broad and united response that dismay at its success has been publicly voiced by leaders of the EDL. The effectiveness of this campaign, and the support it won locally, was also reflected in a dramatic decline in the BNP vote in the General election in the town and the warm support it received from the local media.

More recently, the march celebrating Tower Hamlets, on the day of the planned EDL demonstration, brought together the breadth of the anti-fascist movement, including local elected politicians, faith communities, trade unionists, lesbian and gay activists and all those who oppose fascism. It was the largest anti-fascist mobilisation for a decade. It was a peaceful, focused and vibrant expression of unity.

We believe that the anti-fascist movement has a duty to stand in unity with all those in Bradford and beyond who wish to publicly show their support for our multicultural society and their opposition to Islamophobia in the face of a national mobilisation of the EDL. The anti-fascist movement will not be forgiven if it abandons those people to their fate on 28 August.

For more information see our website, uaf.org.uk