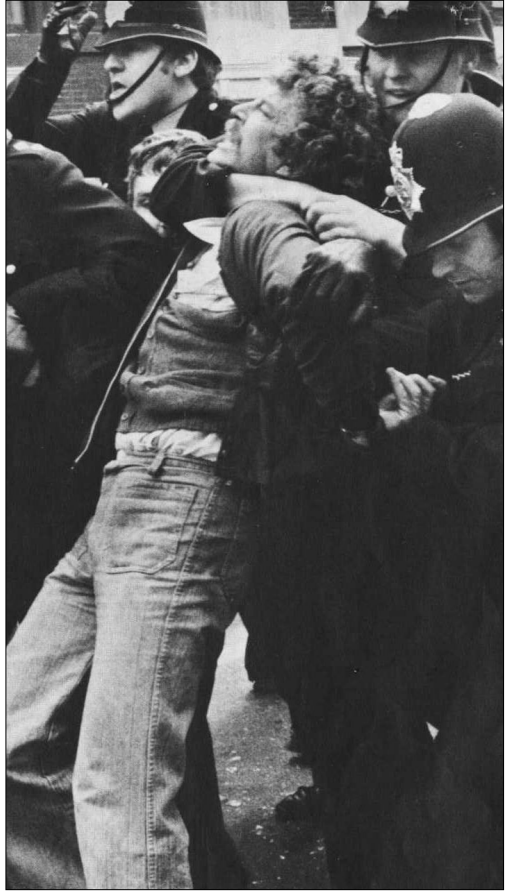


Lewisham, 1977



Clockwise from top left: National Front supporters attack anti-racist demonstrator; Four police arrest anti-fascist protestor; anti-fascists capture an NF flag; anti-racist defends himself from NF

protected by the police, began to assemble in Achilles Street, New Cross. According to the *Times* 4,000 anti-fascists were there to meet them.

The police moved in to clear a path for the fascists and “two orange smoke bombs were thrown, and a tin of red paint”. Clifton Rise and New Cross Road “became a seething mass of demonstrators and police. Police helmets were knocked off as arrests were made.” (*Kent Mercury*).

All hell broke loose as anti-fascists and local black youth fought the police and the fascists under a shower of bricks, bottles, wood and smoke bombs. Participants included local house-holders throwing missiles from their windows.

Two mounted police were dragged from their horses and anti-fascists threw dustbins and fence posts at the NF ranks. “Half the [NF] marchers remained in Pagnell Street, afraid to walk into the hail of missiles.” (*Kent Mercury*)

As the fighting raged in New Cross, the Bishop of Southwark led a church service against racism and for peace at St Stephen’s Church, central Lewisham. The banner outside read, “Justice, love and peace.”

Lessons for us

If on 13 August 1977 we had only had was a peaceful march that dispersed quietly at the police’s request, then the NF would have been allowed to parade and grow, and we would remember the day as a setback.

The great victory at Lewisham was won by the

thousands of anti-racists who understood the need to physically confront fascism.

Against a serious threat of fascism, church services are worse than useless. And so are appeals to the police and state to help us. In Lewisham 1977 the police acted as racist provocateurs and protectors of the Front.

Of course there was a backlash in the press, which denounced the anti-fascists as violent “red fascists”. But the Front were stopped, battered and defeated.

Against the threat of fascism we are entitled to defend our communities and ourselves. The only force that can stop fascism is the left and the labour movement.

To mark the 30th anniversary of the Battle of Lewisham a series of commemorations are planned in the area where it took place, including:

- a walk along the route of the march/counter-protest, including people involved at the time. This will start from Clifton Rise, New Cross at 3 pm on Saturday 15th September 2007.

- a Love Music Hate Racism gig at Goldsmiths Student Union on Saturday 27th October 2007.

- a half day event in New Cross on Saturday 10th November with speakers, films and a social event in the evening (2 pm start at Goldsmiths College, New Cross).

For more info see lewisham77.blogspot.com

Participants remember

“In the event, it was the anti-racists, involving for the first time large numbers of the local black youth, who came out on top in a day of bitter street fighting. The NF march was partially blocked at New Cross when it set off in the early afternoon, only getting through after repeated police charges against the anti-racist demonstrators. The battered remnants of the NF were then shepherded by the police towards Deptford, then led towards Lewisham town centre, only to find it completely blocked by thousands of anti-racists, many of whom had moved rapidly from New Cross to Lewisham, sweeping aside the occasional police cordon as they did so.”

“The police diverted the NF towards an isolated section of Blackheath Common to which the NF coaches had been redirected prior to a speedy and ignominious departure. Sometime later in the afternoon the police used riot shields for the first time in mainland Britain to disperse the anti-

racists from Lewisham High Street and then to press them back into a network of sidestreets.”

(*Ted Parker*)

“At one point the march was smashed completely in half as hundreds of anti-nazis broke through the ranks of police and engaged the Front in vicious hand-to-hand fighting. On Lewisham Way, anti-racists and local people attacked the front of the march... Frontiers were running around in a blind panic, and the march just seemed to disintegrate as wave after wave of attacks hit them from all sides. Shortly afterwards the police put them on coaches and trains in a bid to stop all the violence. However, small-scale skirmishing continued. NF coaches were bricked as they left the area and the police again attacked the counter-demonstrators.”

(*Steve Tilzey*)