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RE-SOUNDING (ANTI)RACISM, OR CONCORDANT POLITICS? REVOLUTIONARY ANTECEDENTS

Virinder S. Kalra, John Hutnyk and Sanjay Sharma

The scene: a decaying Raj era hall on Lenin Sarini in Calcutta. The hall is supported by imitation Greek columns and other Victorian architectural curios, but also festooned with the red flag, hammer and sickle. Portraits of Mao comfortably fit amongst banners announcing a meeting of the Bengali section of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).[1] Five women cadres take their place on the stage equipped with tabla and harmonium and perform a rendition of the workers' anthem the Internationale.

> Then comrades come rally
> And the last fight let us face
> The Internationale
> Unites the human race[2]

The image: five thousand miles away, but simultaneously everywhere via satellite, an MTV showing of Fun^Da^Mental's video 'Dog-Tribe' ends with the trashing of a British fascist office to the insistent refrains and Hip-Hop bass-quake frequencies of the new Asian dance music.

> What's the thing that makes a Black man insane?
> Deranged and wanna give a man pain?
> Practicalities, similarities, immoralities of what you call a racist dream.
> Skin-headed warrior fightin' for the country, killing black
> children, burning Bengalis. Enough is enough.
> Ah... people say I've gone and lost my mind 'cause I'm not
> afraid to die 'Ji'
>
> (Fun^Da^Mental, 'Dog-Tribe', Nation Records, 1994. Words by Mushtaq Uddin and Dave Watts. Published by QFM/Warner Chappell Music.)

Between these two moments we seek the possibility of a reconfigured politics. An explicit recognition of the historical antecedants of contemporary anti-racist movements in Britain necessitates an enlarged view, a linkage with imperialism and an understanding of the entwining of racism and imperialism. This is not a one-way story and this chapter valorizes and criticizes the efforts of anti-racist movements in Britain over the last thirty years. Failure to recognize the connection between the above two moments is in part responsible for their failure to achieve otherwise admirable anti-racist aims.

Addressing musical production in the context of organizational debates in radical anti-racist politics in Britain is difficult because much of the material for such a discussion is found only in obscure pamphlets, the Left press and in forgotten histories. The role of musical production as an organizing and historical tool in political struggle is a crucially important issue at this time, given the resurgence of racism across Europe and the difficulties that mainstream party-organized Left groupings are having in mobilizing against racism. The key to engendering new mobilizations is to combine organizational lessons learnt from Asian self-defence movements with lessons from a critique of the white anti-racist movement. The manoeuvres and critiques needed to come to this conclusion are split into three sections in this chapter. The first section attempts to reclaim the history of music and performance within organized Left Asian groupings and the Asian self-defence movements since the 1950s. A detailed history of some of the key events in the development of grassroots defence movements is explored. Music and poetry are embedded within the organizational set-up of the groups we describe. In contrast, in the second section the role of music in the anti-racist movements of the mid to late 1970s is explored in terms of debates about the significance of music to political mobilizing and, critically, the relationship between white organizers and Black musicians. This relationship parallels the organizational debates that took place between grassroots organizers and the white Left. Particularly pertinent to this is the issue of 'parachuting in' on self-defence campaigns and the use of anti-racism as a tool for recruiting to white Left organizations. 1990s Britain forms the setting for the last section where bands such as Fun^Da^Mental attempt, often with conflictual results, to bridge the gap between the anti-racist formations of the white Left and grassroots organizing by Asian defence groups. There is a lot of useful detail to be picked up in these histories, but any writing of a Black politics in the UK cannot be neatly contained, be this either in an anti-racist narrative or one about cultural production.

REVOLUTIONARY FORMATIONS: INDIAN WORKERS AND ASIAN YOUTH

We first attempt to reclaim the lost history of music and performance within the Asian self-defence movement – beginning with the Indian Workers Association (IWA). We begin with translation of some of the songs of Asian activists in Britain that provide material to chart this history. Radical Asian politics in Britain has always used cultural performance as an organizing and mobilizing tool. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s political meetings in Birmingham and Bradford included songs and poetry which articulated the political aims, of, for example, the IWA, its anti-imperialist concerns, its anti-racist work, and its position vis-à-vis capitalist Britain.[3] The development of the Asian Youth Movements and their relationship with the white Left and the Indian Workers Association form the second part of this section. Beginning with the murder of Blair Peach and continuing through a series of public and court campaigns involving Asian youth such as the Bradford 12 and the Newham 7, the scene is set for a broader understanding of the way in which the white Left marginalized Black musicians and activists in the 1970s.

When the Kid
Cries in terror
Then the leader
On a horse
Challenges him in the triumph of
Supremacy
The history of the minority
is repeated
again and again.
The police reveals itself
Pretending to be saviour of law & order
Obeying the blind law of its ruler
The police
burns fires, throws bombs, destroys houses
Showing off its power as it likes.
Torture is everywhere
All the time
not knowing
time
country
borders.
The conscience of human beings is crying
under the oppression of life

whether it is
Handsworth, Brixton, Liverpool
Delhi, Kanpur, Lebanon
You,
the cursed comrades of the minority
first identify the greater cruelty
to recognize the face of the cruel
then defend the rights of the minority
Long Live the Public!!

(Surjit Hans)

Songs and poetry are key formats for oppositional groupings. The above verses were written and performed by a member of the Indian Workers Association (GB). The IWA was one of the most active South Asian political organizations to emerge out of the presence of South Asian economic migrant labour in Britain. Its role in organizing social and cultural activities in 1950s Southall and Birmingham, working on the shop floor with Asian labourers, organizing with unions, and meeting in the back rooms of local pubs and homes, is something still obscured in the mist of languages not yet 'anthropologically' translated. Much of the history of Asian experience in Britain has been charted in Punjabi, Bengali and Urdu folk songs, and in emergent forms such as British Bhangra and today in post-Bhangra (as discussed elsewhere in this book). This musical history reflected the movement of political groupings, with the Indian Workers Association as a cultural formation with links to Indian political assemblages. The IWA was connected to the politics of the subcontinent and particularly to that of the Communist Party of India (CPI). When the CPI split in 1964, an event that saw the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), a parallel occurrence took place in Britain. When the Naxalbari movement in India further split the Communist Party of India (M) and led to the formation of a Maoist party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), the Marxist-Leninist branch of the Indian Workers Association came into place. The cultural activities and anti-imperialist stance of the IWA reflected the mobilizing for mass support that took place in India. Every political rally would have a poetry, folk song and drama section. The songs reflected the schisms in the Indian party as well as addressing local British conditions.

I go from East Hounslow to Feltham
From my room to my work, and from my work back
to my room
This is life's journey, this life's destination.

(Ishwar Chitrakar)

Or this folk song:

What of it if both my hands are black with grime?
What of it if my eyes are still full of sleep?
What of it if my hands are cracked?
Pain has no voice.
I eat sand and dust
And drink the flying sparks
And push a trolley too heavy for my strength
We are a strange kind of tireless worker
Who have clothed ourselves in pound notes.
What are you saying about us?
We work from seven to seven, seven nights of the week.
The cold air, wrapped in snow, blows against us as we
go on with lowered heads.

(Avtar Sadique)[4]

The IWA at its peak in the mid-1970s, along with the Pakistani Workers and Kashmiri Workers Associations, could boast a following of up to 50,000 people and on many issues matched the white Left in mobilizing ability. The associations were organized along party lines with branches in most of the major cities of England, Wales and Scotland. The plight of the male industrial worker and the emergence of a radical Asian shopfloor movement is documented in such songs. Only the beginnings of a written history is available (Duffield 1987), which must be supplemented with the sort of aural story we wish to explore here. These organizations were part of an increasingly militant shopfloor movement based in factories, sustained by cultural ties through performance and aiming to combat racist and exploitative conditions common to all. These conditions, in Labour Party capitalist Britain in the mid-seventies, were sufficient to awaken attention from the organized white Left.

However the role of these Workers Associations in regard to anti-Nazi, anti-fascist movements is one marked by tension and by an autonomy which often led to conflict. The Anti-Nazi League (ANL), whose history we follow in the second part of this chapter, was largely unaware and uninterested in the forms of organization central to the Indian Workers Association and other Asian assemblages. The cultural work that brought Asians together under the IWA banner, as exemplified in the shared experiences documented in song at every IWA meeting, was beyond the comprehension of Anti-Nazi League activists, both by language and by inclination. (Translation of some of these songs begins a recovery operation and reiteration which we further identify in the work of contemporary Asian cultural activists.)

There should be no surprise that Asian musical expression addressed the difficult times of Britain in the 1970s. Enoch Powell's 1968 'rivers of blood' speech fostered the climate of race hatred in Britain, characterized by an intense hostility to the presence of Black immigrants. Immigrants were indeed seen as 'a strange kind of tireless worker' – one that Powell and racists like him targeted as to blame for Britain's economic woes. The fact that it was these workers who had the lousiest jobs and did the 'shit work' was ironic to the point of ridicule (Sivanandan 1982). Black workers became the targets of increasingly hostile police, an unsympathetic government and ever more organized fascist groupings. Facing the vicious end of this atmosphere were youth in the education system and those just entering the labour market. The policy of bussing Black children to schools far away from their homes was only one in a series of measures designed to deal with the 'problem' of too many immigrants. The more extreme version of this policy initiative was deportation. The 1974 general election saw members of the fascist party, the National Front (NF), fielding ninety candidates. Their explicit agenda of racial hatred and violent action against immigrants ensured the group the position of fourth largest national political party.

The response of the white Left to this climate is considered in the next section. Of more concern here are the grassroots responses to racial violence. The racist murders of Gurdip Chaggar in Southall in 1976 and of two Bangladeshi students in the East End of London in 1978 saw the formation of Asian Youth Movements (AYM) up and down the country. There was an explicit recognition that if racists could come and murder people with such impunity in areas of high Asian population such as Southall and the East End, then it was time to act. The impact of the deaths was described by a member of the Bradford Asian Youth Movement:

> What I do know is that in 'seventy-six in Southall there'd been an incident where an Asian youth had been murdered, Gurdip Chaggar. And that had a big impact on us and we decided that we had to do something now ... not hang on the coat tails of, you know, the white left any more and organize our own community (quoted in Perks 1987: 67–74).

While white activists organized rock concerts to gain publicity for anti-racism, and increasingly with the Anti-Nazi League for anti-fascism, in the East End of London Asians had moved to more practical and immediate activity. An organization was formed called the Anti-Racist Committee for the Defence of Asians in East London. Its purpose was

to set up self-defence patrols and gather information on racial attacks. The Bangladeshi Youth Movement formed out of this organization but failed to build on the politics of the previous committee. In 1978 the murders of Altab Ali and Ishaque Ali led to the setting up of the Action Committee against Racial Attack. The Southall Youth Movement was formed because Chaggar's death 'crystallized the political schism to responses of racism from a strategy of negotiation to one of open revolt' (Mukherjee 1988). The central task of the various youth movements emergent in England, from Southall, the East End, Bradford and Birmingham, was self-defence, but they operated on a local level with little national co-ordination. This was to change with the death of Blair Peach in Southall in 1979 and the case of the Bradford 12 in 1981. It was with these events and the organized campaigns attached to them, in different cities but united in community defence, that the assertiveness of Asian youth against the state and against reactionary tendencies within their own communities became apparent.

The setting up of the Southall Youth Movement, though predominantly male in membership, fulfilled the need for an organization that took an uncompromising position on the defence of Southall's communities against racist attack. As part of the 1979 general election campaign, the National Front stood a candidate in Southall and organized an election meeting in Southall Town Hall. The events of 23 April are well documented in *Southall 23 April 1979*,[5] but the organization of the protest against the National Front illustrates the then marginal position of the Southall Youth Movement and the Indian Workers Association with respect to each other and to the wider anti-fascist movement. Only a few months before, the Rock Against Racism (RAR) organization had pulled out of organizing an anti-racist music concert with Asian acts in Southall, so there were already underlying difficulties. When the meeting to organize the protest against the National Front in April was called by the Indian Workers Association branch in Southall, the local branches of the Anti-Nazi League and Socialist Workers Party (SWP) attended with other local community/voluntary associations. The IWA called for a closing down of shops and offices in the Southall area, as a protest against the National Front meeting. This was opposed by the other groups present who demanded a march and sit-in, which was ultimately the plan decided upon. The notable absence of the Southall Youth Movement from this meeting was due to their independent decision to have a picket on the day of the meeting outside the town hall. The intent behind this decision was that the fascist event should not be allowed to take place and to confront

the racists directly. While the view that the meeting should not be allowed to take place was shared by the ANL and the SWP, there was no co-ordination between the groups. The tragic death of Blair Peach, on the day of the protest, at the hands of the police was wholly a consequence of state over-reaction to the protest and state defence of fascists. Yet, questions continue to be raised about the possibility that had there been better co-ordination between groups or had the Anti-Nazi League leadership acceded to local Indian Workers Association organizers, things might have gone differently.[6]

The events of Southall were described in the media as an attempt by strident left-wing trouble makers to cause trouble. The majority of interviews in the newspapers were with members of the Anti-Nazi League or Socialist Workers Party, giving the impression that the event had been stage-managed and inspired by these organizations. This even though the majority of those arrested were members of the Southall Youth Movement or other local organizations. Futhermore, the fact that the community had been mobilized and showed its anger was ignored by the media. Their emphasis on outside organizations parachuting in on Southall ignored the main issue that 'the real outsiders were the National Front, who had no local branch, and the Special Police Group stationed elsewhere' (*Southall 23 April 1979*). This marginalizing of the Asian groups was not something confined to the media but was a consistent refrain in relations between organized Black groups and the white Left. A significant example is the presence of an Indian Workers Association speaker at a Rock Against Racism/Anti-Nazi League carnival a year before. When on stage the IWA representative was greeted by incomprehension when he chose to discuss imperialism and workers' issues rather than the 'suffering' of Asians and support of anti-Nazism. The single-issue politics of groups like the Anti-Nazi League were always poor for mobilizing in communities where racism is not the only factor that binds and causes oppression. The intricate links between capitalist exploitation, racist exclusion and gendered seclusion were more fully recognized at the grassroots level than by the organized white Left. The criticism put to the ANL was that it acted as a front to attract the most advanced cadre to the Socialist Workers Party – a case supported by its disappearance with the relative decline of the National Front in the early 1980s. Racist Britain remained much the same and only a small section of the white Left continued to see anti-racism as a priority. The case of the Bradford 12, two years after Southall, illustrates the tension between those defending their own communities and both the organized white Left and the state.

Described as the 'Trial of the Decade'[7], the case of the Bradford 12 involved the arrest of twelve Asian young men who were all active members of the United Black Youth League (UBYL), an organization that had splintered from the Asian Youth Movement and took a radical approach to issues of racial attack and deportation. The police discovery of two milk crates full of petrol bombs in an area of Bradford was used to justify the arrests. But the climate in Bradford was such that racists had broadcast the fact that they were on the way to attack the Asian community. For Asian youth the petrol bombs were a justifiable means of self-defence (English common law states that self-defence is a right if the force used in defence is not in excess of what is reasonable to repel an attack). The defendants maintained that possession of the bombs was a legal act and necessary to defend the community against racist attack. As in Southall in 1979 the British state drew the line and decided to teach these 'Northern Pakis' a lesson. The Director of Public Prosecutions could have chosen to prosecute the group using the straightforward charge of 'manufacturing of explosives'. Instead the more politically divisive route of charging the twelve with conspiracy was chosen. The implication was that the Bradford 12's purpose was to undermine and destabilize the British state.

Only weeks before, Asians in Southall had burned down a pub in which skinhead fascists had organized a pop concert with the racist band Screwdriver. Three busloads of skinheads came into Southall, smashed shop windows and harassed residents. The youth of Southall, despite police protection of the fascists, organized and burnt the tavern down. The case of the Bradford 12 thus took place in the context of a widespread feeling of rage against the treatment of Black people. This song by Surjit Hans aptly describes the situation:

> Black brothers of the world
> One day you must die, so unite
> Tonight you must fight such a fight
> That tomorrow a different sun will rise
> Break the chain of slavery
> Forget the ways of non-violence
> This age of kal-yug is the black peoples' age
> Make it the age of Black power.

One year later, in June 1982, a multiracial jury acquitted all twelve accused. The exoneration of the twelve had required courts to accept that Asian communities have the right of self-defence. Wider recognition of systematic institutional racism in Britain was a direct result of the struggle for the twelve's release by the AYMs.

The importance of the events in Southall and Bradford was the approach that groups took to organizing. The AYMs built their politics on the anti-imperialist perspective of the Workers Associations. The performances of workers' poet Faiz and the singing of Ranjeeta Rani were as much part of the youth's organizing experience as they had been for the Indian Workers Associations (IWAs). But this did not mean that the youth organizations were a carbon copy of the IWAs. Tensions and areas of contest with the older guard were to bring about a radicalization of the old party structures and make the focus Britain rather than subcontinental. The primary differences were, however, tactical. Consider, by way of illustration, this tract from an IWA conference held in 1982:

> What should cultural workers do against racism?
> 1. Use all the means necessary, stories, poems, novels, folk songs, to expose the poisonous culture of racism and to document the struggles of the younger generation....
> 3. Organize all of the various organizations into a unified front: such as the Indian Youth Association (GB), trades councils. Council for Civil Liberties, some churches, IWAs (GB) and all anti-racist organizations.
>
> (Noor 1983, our translation)

One AYM member summed up what they were doing in contrast to this:

> Two things made us different; first we're proud of being Asian ... secondly was to try and oppose racism militantly, and ... if the National Front were there, to go down and make sure they don't distribute their literature. If there are cases going, ... to fight those as militantly as possible and actually do things. The main difference is we would actually do things, while they would pass policy (in Perks 1987).

This should not give the impression that these organizations did not work together or have any form of communication. Many of those in the youth movements came out of the Workers Associations, realizing that their particular need would only be met in organizations led by British Asians. The relationship was also marked by attitudes to the white Left, as one Bradford Asian Youth member said: 'Our white proletariat brothers were more likely to be attacking us and racially abusing us, we needed to organize separately from the white Left.'[8] The IWAs were also more open to forming alliances with the Anti-Nazi League and Socialist Workers Party, while the Asian Youth Movements reflected a deeper understanding of these groups vis-à-vis their approach

to Black struggles and the relationships between racism and fascism. Ultimately the cultural politics embedded in the organizing of the white Left and the Black Left was such that, for the Anti-Nazi League and other anti-racist groups, the struggle against racism was the beginning of greater involvement with Black activism. The limiting factor for these white organizations was that the concerns of the shopfloor movements – strikes by Asian workers, and the constant threat of deportation – were not issues that the ANL prioritized. For Black groups these were integral to their immediate struggles.

ANTI-NAZI/ANTI-RACIST: ROCKING RACISM OR DANCING AGAINST FASCISM?

In the late 1970s Rock Against Racism (RAR) 'carnivals' were the organizational form in which the British Left, especially the Socialist Workers Party and the Anti-Nazi League, mobilized against racism. Our take on this history focuses upon the relations between organizers of RAR, who were mostly white, and Black musicians, who were often ignored. These musicians, and their politics, were subsumed within the 'anti-Nazi' focus of the ANL/SWP, or used in 'token' ways to provide credibility to the white Left. In terms of active audience, Rock Against Racism was a largely white mobilization which did not often intersect with the sorts of Asian organizations described in the previous section. Despite the musical and political possibilities that might have made such an alliance fruitful, RAR carnivalism did not result in any significant change in racist Britain. Many suggest this was a feel-good exercise for the white Left. Critiques of Rock Against Racism called for alliances between Asian defence groups and the RAR/ANL formations – these came from both the white far Left such as the Spartacist League, and from Black commentators who were suspicious of the white Left practice of parachuting in on local self-defence and anti-racist campaigns to do publicity for their rock carnivals.

Rock Against Racism was formed in September 1976. Not long before, on stage in Birmingham, befuddled rockstar Eric Clapton had announced he supported Enoch Powell and thought Britain was 'overcrowded' (*Fighting the Nazi Threat*, Anti-Nazi League educational pamphlet). In south London, punky anarcho-poseur Johnny Rotten snarled at such dinosaur rocksters to 'fuck off' and said he 'despised' the National Front, that 'no-one should have the right to tell anyone they can't live here because of the colour of their skin' (*Zigzag* 1977,

no. 77: 4) and that 'England was never free. It was always a load of bullshit ... Punks and Niggers are the same thing' (quoted in Gilroy 1987: 124).

Rock Against Racism was formed as a response by concerned activists to the outrageous comments of Clapton and other musicians, and to the perception of an increasing turn towards racism and fascism within some sections of British society. Tony Parsons, writing in the music zine *Zigzag*, reported that the National Front 'intended to ban all music with black origins from the airwaves and replace the "jungle music", as they put it, with some Great British marching music' (*Zigzag* 1977 no.76: 4).[9] However absurd and lacking in even the rudiments of basic human integrity, such right-wing threats identified an enemy, for a newly politicized constituency, at the conjunction of music and politics. Two trends within popular music history are often associated at the birth of RAR in the available histories: the anti-everything anarchism of Punk and the prominence of Reggae with its anti-Babylon, anti-capitalist slacker messages. It is always difficult to assess political content and context for popular cultural forms, and never more so than for those formations that attracted the moral panic that Punk and Rastafari generated. None the less, with many Punk and Reggae bands on the bills, Rock Against Racism managed to organize almost 800 events in Britain between 1976 and 1979. The largest of these 'carnivals' in collaboration with the Anti-Nazi League attracted 80,000 people in May 1978 (Gilroy 1987: 132) and 100,000 in September 1978 (Anti-Nazi League education pack).[10]

Had it not been for Paul Gilroy we would have forgotten Rock Against Racism. David Widgery's 1986 study *Beating Time: Riot 'n Race 'n Rock 'n Roll* has been out of print for several years, histories of Punk only offer brief reminiscences, and histories of Reggae and 'Two-Tone' remain either unwritten or focus solely on the Reggae of Anglo-British bands like the Police and associated personalities. Widgery was a co-founder of Rock Against Racism and a member of the Socialist Workers Party, and though his book was described by Jon Savage in *England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* as 'full of insults for the groups who supported RAR' (Savage 1991: 484), it was the best of a small lot.

Gilroy argues that the formation of a mass anti-racist movement in Britain 'has passed largely unacknowledged' (1987: 134). It would be inappropriate to place too much emphasis on the lack of readily available histories of Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League, but the proliferation and significance of histories of the Poll Tax campaigns and

of the miners' strikes (from both anarchist and socialist presses) as documentations of counter-hegemonic struggle remind us it is important to recuperate multiple versions of what goes on in anti-racism in Britain. There are various interpretations of why the Rock Against Racism/Anti-Nazi League assemblage is important. One suggests that RAR and the ANL 'gave expression to the feelings of young people who had seen the inadequacy of racist explanation [and] revealed for all to see the implicit politics of youth cultures which were defined by and often copied from Black forms and traditions' (Gilroy and Lawrence 1988: 146). The Socialist Workers Party orthodoxy is that 'Rock Against Racism aimed at promoting racial harmony through music, and was one of the first organizations to mix black and white bands at gigs' (Anti-Nazi League educational pack), and with the ANL showed the way to fight fascism. More extravagant and optimistic assessments can be arrayed alongside these orthodoxies – most famous amongst them Tariq Ali's proclamation at an early RAR event that 'Lots of people will come for Rock Against Racism today and will see that it should be Rock Against the Stock Exchange tomorrow' (*New Musical Express*, 6 May 1978[11]).

Although conjunctions of Punk and Reggae music inspired activists, it was the case that RAR remained mostly white boys' adventure rock for both organizers and performers – Buzzcocks, the Clash, Tom Robinson. With the exception of lesser known and often obscure local Reggae outfits, and perhaps Marion Elliot, aka Poly Styrene, of X-Ray Specs (Marcus 1989: 77), RAR was into a more mainstream form of crossover like UB40 and 'stars' like Elvis Costello, rather than a forum for local Black cultural productions. It is worth noting that the early British Bhangra scene was running parallel to these developments, but there was no involvement of Asian bands in RAR. Bhangra bands were playing the circuits of weddings and community events in a context largely neglected by the organizers of RAR. Politically oriented Asian musicians, for example from the Indian Workers Association, might have been invited to events, but as the imagined Other were inaccessibly beyond translation. On one occasion the RAR organizers abandoned plans to stage an event in Southall with Asian bands on the bill (Street 1986: 78–9). The potentially huge Asian audiences that might have been reached were all but ignored[12]. The diversity of the RAR crowds was often declared: 'Punks with green and pink hair mingled with skins, hippies, students, and the occasional lonely representative of the middle-aged middle classes. A lot of black kids too, though fewer Asians' (*New Musical Express*, 30 September 1978).

A key issue of interpretation in the available histories rests on the relation between the Anti-Nazi League, as organized mainly by Socialist Workers Party cadres, and the Rock Against Racism collectives working throughout the country. Though RAR was formed some time before the ANL, and organized many successful local gigs, it was when the two organizations joined forces to promote the large London marches and carnivals and a three-day 'festival' in Manchester that the movement gained widest public prominence.

A liberal view of the activities of the Socialist Workers Party in the late 1970s seems to have been quite extensive and is illustrated by Knowles in her book on the Labour Party: 'There was the carnival approach of the Anti-Nazi League, formed in 1977 to mobilize the young and unorganized in the cause of anti-racism, and providing anti-racism with an upbeat image' (Knowles 1992: 139). This 'carnival' and 'upbeat' approach characterized the ANL and SWP activity as a hip extension of real politics, and there is no doubt that many were attracted because the presentation of the ANL was more interesting than the dullard monotony of so many other political formations. Knowles continues:

> As the title of this organization conveys, though, it favoured the old official Labour Party analysis that fascism was the main problem. The Anti-Nazi League was a force for extra-parliamentary action and rapidly developed a large organizational structure capable of mobilizing thousands.... Mass action and counter-demonstration did not isolate the Anti-Nazi League from the Labour Party, though it was not officially endorsed (Knowles 1992: 131).

This parallel development with the Labour Party is very significant, suggesting a movement tailing parliamentary politics and tending towards organizational forms that were not far behind the party itself. Following Messina, Knowles reports that 'four MPs joined the steering committee' of the ANL, and 'Benn, from the cabinet, addressed Anti-Nazi League rallies' (Knowles 1992: 181; Messina 1989).

The relation between the ANL/SWP and the Labour Party is notable because it illustrates a difference of political practice that is common to the relations between the liberal Left and Black political activity. It is not without recognizing this tension that Gilroy points out that RAR had an element of anti-capitalist critique which was effectively curtailed by the anti-Nazi focus of the ANL – Gilroy writes that 'Rocking Against Racism had allowed space for youth to rant against the perceived iniquities of "Labour Party Capitalist Britain". The popular front tactics introduced by the ANL closed it down' (Gilroy 1987: 133). In

contrast the SWP claims that the ANL support of Rock Against Racism was 'important in building support for anti-racism in schools, workplaces and the community, as well as exposing the Nazis of the National Front', and 'Of course this did not mean that institutionalized racism ... or racial harassment was stopped' (Anti-Nazi League educational kit). In reply to Gilroy's criticisms, Alex Callinicos says, 'It is in the nature of a united front that it brings together divergent political forces which are prepared to work together around a single issue, in this case combating the Nazis', and shows that he is aware of the need to shore up criticism of this single-issue focus when he adds that 'Focusing in this way on the fascists wasn't a retreat from the more general struggle against racism' (Callinicos 1993: 64). Yet the flimsy thread running from this single-issue united front to anti-racism and then to a broader, anti-capitalist politics could be more easily tied with the sort of anti-imperialist politics of the Indian Workers Asssociations. In any case, allegations of ANL links with the Labour Party drew strength from obvious electoral opportunism within the ANL/RAR organizing committee. A stark example of this was the staging of the Manchester festival to coincide with a local by-election, in which Labour was struggling. In the context of the Manchester festival, Paul Morley in the *NME* asked: 'Has the ANL been transformed into a pure political machine?', and continued, 'Whatever, rock music is being used through the ANL, not as peoples' music, but as the supreme vehicle to reach youth. A growing deception' (*NME*, 22 July 1978).

Was the music peoples' music? Gilroy claims that the anti-capitalist orientation of RAR came mostly from Reggae and some aspects of Punk rebellion, although this latter with ambiguities since some punks flirted with the iconography of the National Front. A June 1977 editorial in the Punk fanzine *Sniffin' Glue* had characterized the National Front as 'crud', but also linked them with the 'commies, the Socialist fuckin' Workers, the head-in-the-sand brigade and the poxy Evening News' (*Sniffin' Glue*, 10 June 1977). Whatever the status of the Nazi symbols, it is acknowledged that Punk brought an anti-authoritarian and anti-state orientation that complemented Reggae's evocation of a Black urban militancy – Gilroy points out that the Notting Hill Carnival uprising coincided with the emergence of Punk (Gilroy 1987: 125) – and so RAR came together in a way that broke from what was considered a 'dour and self-defeating' approach, 'devoid of fun' (Gilroy 1987: 127). An organizer of RAR commented in the *NME* that 'for some reason or other the British left have always thought that anything electric couldn't possess any true political awareness and

that acoustic folk was the only possible music they could ally themselves with' (*NME*, 6 May 1978). There was no doubt that the ANL and RAR were part of a moment in the political history of Britain that, alongside tumultuous musical developments, heralded a comprehensive change of tempo.

In defence of fun, Gilroy suggests that the difficult crossover of Punk and Reggae, manifest as a broad anti-capitalist anti-racism, dissolved in the face of the organizational bureaucracy of the Anti-Nazi League. He offers two explanations for this, both of which seem to have resonance with general Black organization complaints about the white Left. First of all, 'an emphasis on neo-fascism as the most dangerous embodiment of contemporary racism inevitably pulls discussion of "race" away from the centre of political culture and relocates it on the margins where these groups are doomed to remain' (Gilroy 1987: 148). Second, the neo-fascist use of the British flag and patriotism spawned an equally suspect nationalism on the part of the ANL. 'The idea that the British Nazis were merely sham patriots who soiled the British flag by their use of it was a strong feature of ANL leaflets' (Gilroy 1987: 131). With the ANL's appeal to older voters with the slogan 'Never Again', an appeal to put Britain first and above the interests of 'foreigners' was not far behind.

The first of Gilroy's criticisms might be questioned on the grounds that the intention of the ANL/SWP was indeed to bring a version of RAR anti-racism to a wider constituency, although it is conceded that their methods and tactics were insufficient as they clumsily grasped the symbolism of Nazism, and therefore an anti-Nazi politics, and made it stand for anti-racism. The second criticism, of a nationalist undercurrent within the ANL itself, is difficult to refute since in the second manifestation of the ANL in the 1990s this tendency can again be found. The way in which the SWP's Chris Bambury claims the ANL organization and the lessons of the 1970s are 'the model of how to organize against the Nazis' (Bambury 1992: 34) might be questioned when he even goes so far as to recommend an ANL structure to French anti-fascists, along with a large dose of anti-Communist sectarianism. This might raise suspicions that there is more hype in the SWP/ANL front than content – and especially so for those exposed to increasing racist attack on UK streets. Support for Gilroy's analysis could be found in the work of Bonnett who summed up: 'Unlike anti-Nazi anti-racism, the radical anti-racist perspective is firmly committed to some form of anti-capitalist critique' (Bonnett 1993: 120).

A common Black criticism of organized left groups like the SWP

and ANL was that they arrived with leaflets and resources to impose a different agenda upon local struggles which then developed in ways sometimes at odds with the broad aims of Black groups. Writing of Black mobilizations against racism in the aftermath of the Notting Hill 'riots', Farrukh Dhondy warned that 'there are well enough anti-Nazi fronts in existence with well organized badges, posters and marching orders' (Dhondy 1978: 85). These fronts were otherwise characterized as 'a rag bag of local letterhead processors ... and project hatchers' (Bengali Housing Action Group 1978: 109). Although the sincerity of many of those SWP members who did get involved in local manifestations of anti-Nazi anti-racism could not be faulted, it is clear that often the limits of this perspective caused resentment and disruption to other anti-racist concerns. Describing such worries as 'hysterical', Graham Lock summarized: 'the argument goes that the ANL is *merely* a front for the Socialist Workers Party' (*NME*, 30 September 1978, italics in original). According to *Sounds*, the 'smiling, laughing, dancing, happy' carnivalists gave 'the lie to all those cynics who try to paint the ANL as some sinister Socialist Workers Party plot' (*Sounds*, 30 September 1978). Less credibly, the ANL/RAR was also described in *Sounds* as 'a wide-ranging celebration of solidarity for freedom and against uniformity and bigotry, fired by the same spirit that fires dissidents in Russia and trade unionists in Chile' (*Sounds* 30 September 1978).

The Spartacist League's pamphlet *Militant Labour's Touching Faith in the Capitalist State*, slated 'the tradition of the ANL' popular-frontist practice of linking up with 'Anglican vicars and Labourite politicians' to confront fascism with dances. The Spartacist assessment of the ANL in the late 1970s deserves consideration: 'When the fascist National Front marched through the East End in 1978, the ANL organized an 'anti-racist' carnival *ten miles across town* [SL italics], deliberately preventing thousands of anti-fascist militants from confronting and defeating the National Front' (Spartacist League 1994: 4). Lock, in the *NME*, reported that repeated calls at the carnival for 'volunteers to defend Brick Lane elicited little response. People preferred to lie in the sun and enjoy the music.' The same writer speculated that perhaps the absence of an Asian contingent at the carnival was thus explained: 'maybe they were in Brick Lane, or maybe it is their culture tends to get overlooked on occasions like this. Where are you now Ravi Shankar?' (Lock, *NME*, 30 September 1978). Other reports suggest that the SWP leadership intentionally ignored the Asian activists (and some SWP cadre) who had assembled to confront the fascists in Brick Lane. In this scenario the SWP central committee actively worked to

close out those SWP local branches with tendencies towards 'squadism' (organized militant anti-fascist squads). Subsequently many of these cadre broke with the SWP into other formations and micro-sects.[13] The Spartacist League's pamphlet pointed out that ANL equivocation was not confined to the 1970s and had continued into the 1990s – going on to record that although the large October 1993 anti-fascist rally was a significant event (known as the Welling Riot by readers of the *Guardian*), the follow-up ANL carnival at Brockwell Park was nothing more than a rehearsal of this avoidance of popular militancy (more on this later).

Gilroy, writing with Errol Lawrence, characterized as ultraleftist those criticisms of the RAR/ANL that argued it was mere 'fun music with no political connections beyond the private affiliations of the musicians'. A 'chorus of professional revolutionaries' (Gilroy and Lawrence 1988: 147) insisted that RAR had to be structured with delegates, conferences and cadre. That this 'ultraleftism' did not organize RAR and instead the SWP/ANL moved in with a popular-front anti-Nazism does not seem an important distinction at this distance. Nevertheless, the calls of the Spartacist League for 'Workers' Defence' squads as a response to the Nazis, and the calls of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency and other revolutionary communist groups, and the editorial collective of *Race Today*, for 'community defence' groups to combat racist attack, are considerably different from what the ANL offered.

In 1991 the SWP moved to re-establish the ANL in the face of renewed awareness of increasing racism in Britain and escalating racial terror in Europe. Fascists were again standing for political positions and the British National Party (BNP) was successful in gaining a council seat in one London borough. In the face of this resurgent threat, the SWP declared that Nazism was again an issue – the 'lessons of the 70s' (Bambury 1992) were to be rehearsed once again. Yet old problems remained, and the ANL was on this occasion without a national network of grassroots activists, previously provided by RAR, able to give organized Left politics a hip edge. Where previously ANL/RAR rallies had been flamboyant affairs, the 1990s versions were dominated by the mass-printed bright yellow lollipops. Seriously uncool. Nevertheless, the popular support for anti-racist expression did draw considerable numbers to ANL rallies, and the Welling demonstration in October 1993 was a success in terms of numbers mobilized, although police confrontational tactics and protection of fascists led to some disarray as we shall see.

LISTEN CONNIVING HARAMZADA: ASIAN DANCE MUSIC IN THE 1990S

Today's new Asian dance music demands to be understood in this historical context. The reformation of the Anti-Nazi League in the 1990s amounts to a rerun of the anti-racist mobilizations of the 1970s, including carnivals, except this time we note a change in the nature of the alliances formed. Astute Asian cultural workers – and we single out for attention the new visibility of bands Fun^Da^Mental, the Kaliphz and Hustlers HC – have made attempts to bridge the gap between locally organized self-defence/Asian political groupings and the popular-front mobilizations of the white Left. Asian musicians claim a central place on the 1990s carnival platform, address their concerns to both Asian and white audiences, take speaking places at rallies organized by the white Left on other issues (especially anti-imperialist ones), and are generally more successful in countering the self-serving agendas of the Left.[14]

In the 1990s Asian musicians have drawn from the organizational practice of the Indian Workers Association and Asian Youth Movements – where politics and music were meshed in a deliberate political-cultural programme – to bring immediate self-defence concerns into a wider public sphere. In a challenge to the opportunistic approach of white Left mobilizations more interested in recruiting cadre and promoting themselves than in building broad anti-racist anti-capitalist organization, bands like Fun^Da^Mental, Kaliphz, Hustlers HC, Det-Ri-Mental and Asian Dub Foundation determined that Asian groups could not and would not continue to be ignored.

The context in which Asian musicians have brought this organizational practice to the wider anti-fascist movement has been one of general disarray. There continues to be no effective large-scale anti-racist movement in Britain. The Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA), before it collapsed in 1995, attempted to become the national umbrella organization for Black-led anti-racist groupings, and received widespread institutional support from the Left, within the Labour Party and within trade unions and trades councils. Tensions between the organized white Left (mostly Anti-Nazi League) and Black-led anti-racist organizations continued, however, and the ARA did not escape criticism from several sides. The pro-Labour stance of the ARA was a major source of contention, although this was also a charge laid before the ANL/SWP front as critics noted participation of some members of the Labour Party in the 1990s version of the ANL. This was described as opportunism as it

Photo: Mick Hutson

FUN^DA^MENTAL

appeared to some that the ANL was re-formed to capture a sudden resurgence of popular anti-racist sentiment. Both the ANL and the ARA were severely condemned for using the campaign over the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence to gain political credibility, and to claim a pseudo authenticity in their connections with the grassroots struggles of Black communities. At the hard edge of confrontational anti-racism remained those Black organizations working in the housing estate areas (rather than Westminster and the broadsheet press).

The anti-fascist Welling demonstration in 1993, led by Youth Against Racism in Europe, Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) and the ANL, gained considerable participation from semi-autonomous and grassroots-oriented Black anti-racist groups and organizations such as Newham Monitoring Project, Unity, Southall Black Sisters and Youth Connection. The demonstration took place in southeast London, an area known for its high levels of racial attacks, and it attempted to march past a building in south London known to be the organizing office of the British National Party. What marked the rally and led to arrests and the failure of the march to achieve its goal of destroying the fascist offices in Bexley was the large and aggressive police presence. Fully kitted out in

riot gear, the police blocked the rally and provoked violent clashes between police and demonstrators.[15]

The Anti-Racist Alliance purposely mounted a counter-demonstration on the same day through central London. In comparison, it attracted fewer participants, and symbolized a rather outdated ARA strategy of mainstream political intervention and a belief in the parliamentary process. While the Black-led ARA marched in small numbers, many more Black activists, by far, joined the Welling demonstration. The participation of the semi-autonomous Black anti-racist groups at Welling alongside AFA and the ANL may have suggested a desire to move beyond the paralysis engendered by the warring between the ARA and the ANL. Yet even though the limitations of the institutionalized politics of the ARA were exposed, the strategic prioritising of the ANL rally by Black activists does not signify a resolution of tensions between these anti-racist groupings and the organized anti-fascist Left. One of the most immediate concerns for the grassroots anti-racist groups remains community self-defence and the countering of everyday racial violence and attacks. On the other hand it was through the tactics of forging (symbolic?) strategic alliances across the anti-racist/anti-fascist divide that the interventionism of Asian bands such as Fun^Da^Mental, Hustlers HC and Kaliphz was located.

Six months after Welling, the Anti-Racist Alliance was disintegrating and the Anti-Nazi League moved to occupy the void by organizing a music carnival reminiscent of the populist Rock Against Racism events of the 1970s. The carnival, which took place in May 1994, was huge. Yet there was little media attention. Only one television music show, the youth culture programme *Naked City*, saw fit to cover a public function that drew some 150,000 people. Few other media even picked up the story. The *Guardian* published a cynical dismissal, alleging people were only there for the free music, and then contradicted itself by pointing to politics: '...the Anti-Nazi League claim it was the biggest anti-fascist gathering ever staged ... but this crowd was never that specific. Judging from the banners along the march it was just anti. Anti-racism, anti-John Major, anti-unemployment, anti-student loans, anti-homelessness, anti-council tax.... Today's politics of protest have evolved into a kind of catch-all anti-establishmentism' (*Guardian*, 30 May 1994). It would, of course, be possible to read and publish against this conservative tone and valorize the anti-establishment spirit.

However, in an interview on *Naked City*, Asian musicians Aki Nawaz (Fun^Da^Mental) and Sonya Aurora-Madan (lead singer of Echobelly) were critical of the event on several counts. There are grounds to believe

that, to an extent, the carnival had been a feel-good publicity exercise for the ANL/SWP, diverting attention away from more difficult complexities surrounding racial violence and the need to mobilize against its everyday occurrence. That the fascist BNP had not regained its London council seat in the recent election was considered grounds for celebration, despite the fact that the most prominent BNP candidate's personal vote had gone up from 1,400 to 2,000. Further, the BNP vote nationwide had increased, to some 16,000 votes, including 34 per cent of the vote in Newham, with one other BNP candidate missing election by just 60 votes (*Revolutionary Fighter*, 3). Mention might also be made of the way anti-BNP sentiment was used by reformist Left groups such as Militant to campaign in favour of the Labour Party candidate. Nawaz complained that Fun^Da^Mental had been ignored by organizers of the carnival and 'should have been on the bill'. At Brockwell Park there was only one scheduled Asian band (Achanak) and they were on before the bulk of the march even reached the park. This is not the only reported instance of the 1990s ANL pissing off Asian musicians (the Kaliphz have similarly had cause for dispute with the organizers of an ANL carnival in Manchester). As it was, Fun^Da^Mental were subsequently reconciled to their omission from the carnival with an acclaimed (by Socialist Workers Party members) appearance at the SWP's annual conference, Marxism 94. By July 1994, Nawaz had already been describing the Brockwell Park carnival within the context of the wider campaign: 'I think if 150,000 people go to a gig like that, then that's a petition. If 150,000 people are dissatisfied but can't change anything then something's wrong in our democracy. But are the Government listening? Are they f***! [*Melody Maker*'s asterisks]. 150,000 people and there wasn't even one report in a daily newspaper' (*Melody Maker*, 16 July 1994).

This movement from critique to the desire to be involved actively in organized white politics is a strategic interventionism common to other politically motivated Asian musicians. The Kaliphz, rappers from Rochdale,[16] most readily work in support of groups such as Anti-Fascist Action, Red Action and the Revolutionary Communist Party to raise political awareness amongst the community and the audiences they attract. Their political activity extends from involvement in the Campaign Against Militarism/No More Hiroshimas publicity, to organizing community opposition to Combat 18 in Rochdale. (Combat 18 are the declared armed wing of the British fascist movement.) The Kaliphz have gone on record in support of the AFA's campaign to make life hard for the Nazis wherever they appear. 'We're not scared of Combat 18. We come from a town where Combat 18 are big and they

don't f*** with us. Yeah, Asians have a bad time here, but the way to stop that is by organizing themselves and to stop looking for sympathy' (*NME*, 10 September 1994). In the Kaliphz' own newsletter the band explain that they are not Gandhian pacifists and believe in an 'eye for an eye' (*Slingshot*), but for the *NME* journalist they explain that the 'problem with retaliation is that it has to be organized', and in response to questions about the threat to innocent civilians they say 'you have to do what AFA do: find the Nazis and sort them out. We're not talking about looking for any white person in the street' (*NME*, 10 September 1994).

The calls for direct action against racist violence are echoed in the music of many Asian bands. These musicians are doing cultural and political work drawn from Asian political formations like the Indian Workers Associations and Asian Youth Movements and putting these concerns into wider circulation through popular musical forms now accessible to more diverse audiences.

CARF, the respected journal of the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism has often been oblivious to popular cultural forms (like Rap) as a site for anti-racist struggle. In particular it has been critical of the RAR movement both for failing to mobilize people politically, and for too easy incorporation into the music industry. Nevertheless, in a recent issue, *CARF* attempted to engage with Black politicized music. It correctly noted that anti-racism in popular musical culture is increasingly being defined more by Black groups.

> The aggressive and passionate style of such music and the immediacy of its contents are things that the establishment finds problematic ... [S]uch black bands do not have a sleek, pre-packaged anti-racist politics, but speak to the immediate concerns of the community, they automatically become part of a subversive, anti-establishment counter-culture. And herein is the lesson for us anti-racists (Editorial, *CARF*, No. 22, September 1994).

CARF recognizes that the musical output of groups such as Hustlers HC, Kaliphz, Asian Dub Foundation and Fun^Da^Mental has the potential to disrupt the racial status quo.[17]

Community self-defence has a long history in Britain, and the celebrated cases of the Bradford 12 and Newham 7, and the more recent cases of the Duffield Street 4 and the Tower Hamlets 9 (*CARF*, No.17, 1993) are indicative of a continuing active resistance against racial attacks. In the light of an increased intensity of racial violence over the last few years, through their music Asian groups are urging a more widespread proactive, vigilante-style defence activism.

The articulation of the position is beyond a crude call to hunt down racist/Nazi assailants, as exemplified in the lyrics of Hustlers HC track 'Vigilante':

As the night falls it's getting scary thinking about
racist thugs that be moving about
anger in their eyes and hate in their feet
as they charge for the Paki or the Blackie in the street
I live in fear, I wanna see the next day
but on the other side of London an Asian gets beat
by a racist jerk, cos he wanted to hurt
he's a nazi skinhead treating the brown like dirt
how many more things have to wait to happen
Don't think of the Police being your protective weapon
I used to thank god for giving me a life
now I'm praying for forgiveness for carrying a knife
My mom she's worried I'm going out she's got the blues
She doesn't want to see my name headlined in the news
I'm so vexed why does it have to be
everywhere I show my head race hate is reality
we're dodging and diving to avoid the bastards
but no matter how we run they still come after us
It's like world war three or the killing season
Stephen Lawrence he died for no damn reason
Quddus Ali, he survived, but that doesn't mean nothin
he and his family went through months of sufferin
so what do I do, do I run from the country
or wait for racist Britain to scan me and hunt me down
Vigilante the peace, the silence the yin, the yang is the anger and violence
Vigilante, You live in fear of me, product of a wall of silence
conspiracy, they call me an evil thug, indiscriminate
I've seen the violence, the silence the race-hate
the beast don't care, they just do the minimal
comin after me like I'm some kinda criminal
they'll never understand what kind of man I am
I've seen mothers cry and I cry while little brothers die
but no more twenty on one, let's turn the numbers around
no more pretence, defence is from the underground
no more trying implying that I'm weak
I'm the Hindu, the Muslim, and the Sikh
The Asian youth at the end of your street.
Got to get the jackboots stomp from my hood
choose to live in peace if I could
There's a hustler in Chinatown, a 22 goes for fifty pounds
but I wonder when the time will come
when I switch from the knife and go for the gun

I'm not evil, schizo, paranoiac, but I've seen big trouble, now my anger's overflowing
don't stereotype me, my tactics might be,
defensive not offensive, thoughtful and pensive
patrolling the streets, I'm keeping the peace
tell me what's the point of calling the police
tell me who's going to look after the schoolkids
They are the future they need protection
My direction is anti my target is the racist coward child killer
I am the Vigilante.
Vigilante the peace, the silence the yin, the yang is the anger and violence
Vigilante the peace, the silence the yin, the yang is the anger and violence
Now I the accused won't be misused
Stand hard my brother don't take the abuse
crave to live the life of peaceful remedy
But if you mess with me I'll take the role of the Vigilante
Racists be aware I come passing through
but I ain't a thug who takes a human's life
who says a vigilante must carry a knife
it could be enough just for me to be there
the racist is a coward, easy to scare
the attacker automatically gets state defence
video cameras make prosecution sense
so playing the rule doesn't have to mean violence
huh, vigilantes move in silence
but if my cover's blown I could get beat
but it's worth it for the kids on my street
and the moms, the pops, the sisters, the brotherman,
need a barrier from the hatred of the other man
so playing this role is a must for me
so you see why we all must be – Vigilante
Vigilante – the peace, the silence the ying, the yang is the anger of violence
Vigilante – the peace, the silence the ying, the yang is the anger of violence.

(Hustlers HC, 'Vigilante', Nation Records, 1994. Words by Paul Arora and Mandeep Walia, Published by QFM/Warner Chappell Music.)

Hustlers HC recognize the urgency of the situation right now. There are race attacks going on; people must defend themselves; how to do this is the question. Hustlers HC mount a scathing criticism of the police in failing to prevent racial attacks, and, more important, of the criminalization of Asian youth who choose to protect themselves. Hustlers HC remain purposely ambiguous in their advocation of the form of self-defence: 'I wonder when the time will come when I switch

from the knife and go for the gun ... don't stereotype me'. The music press – which has at least provided some sort of forum for this discussion – raised questions about the militancy of this stance which Hustlers HC were keen to clarify: 'Some reviewers have said "Hustlers have put up a good defence for violence", and we haven't. We've said vigilantism doesn't necessarily mean violence. There are various options to monitoring and controlling racial attacks. You can drive around with a video camera, you can be ready for a Rodney King' (*NME*, 15 October 1994).

Groups such as Fun^Da^Mental, Kaliphz and Hustlers HC, whilst lending their active support to the anti-fascist Left, are not easily contained by projects of anti-racism whose tendency has been to reduce Black people to the status of victims. White anti-racism has continually worked with the stereotype of the passive beaten-up Asian (youth) who must be protected, rather than the active agents of Hustlers' 'Vigilante'. The motivation behind the anti-fascist Left's limited recognition of these Asian bands has no doubt been to attempt to strengthen and authenticate the white Left's connections with Black community struggles. Nevertheless, the tensions between the white Left and the autonomous Black anti-racist groups in Britain remain apparent in the anti-fascist Left's relationship to and restricted appropriation of the cultural politics of Asian musical activism which operates beyond an anti-racist victimology.

Tracks by Hustlers HC, Kaliphz and Fun^Da^Mental challenge dominant representations of Asians (particularly males) in the media as passive racial victims – beaten bloodied faces and battered bodies is how they are come to be known. By exploiting this common-sense knowledge of racial victimology, rappers as cultural workers are able to transform it into something believed to be more progressive – organized vigilante self-defence in this case. There is no espousal of an elitist or institutionalized politics, rather, a direct attempt to express and connect with the grassroots struggles of Black communities.

These positions are at times very distant from, and in direct conflict with, the utopian 'Black and White Unite and Fight' popular anti-racist/fascist politics of Left groups in Britain such as the SWP/ANL. The identification of Fun^Da^Mental and Hustlers HC with an Asian strategic identity politics[18] is at times likely to be antithetical to the anti-racist projects of the Left, as indeed it always has been since the IWA. These bands' articulation of a de-centred 'Asianness' or an anti-imperialist Black militancy resists the containment and reappropriation of their cultural politics by the white Left.

RE-SOUNDINGS

In a decaying east London, the Hackney Empire plays host to a benefit for Quddus Ali, brutally attacked by racists and left permanently injured. On the list of performers are the Voodoo Queens, Hustlers HC, Achanak and the comedienne Meera Syal, to name only a few. The event is organized by Black-led anti-racist groups such as Newham Monitoring Project, with support from the white Left...

Making music as a means of articulating a radical politics within organized struggle against resurgent racism in Britain, and across Europe and the USA, could not be more important. This is especially so where it has become difficult for popular, or populist, party-organized Left groupings to act against racism in any meaningful way. The histories we have alluded to bear witness to a shift in radical Left anti-racist politics over the last three decades. The Indian Workers Associations and the Asian Youth Movements during the seventies were party-based organizations with anti-imperialist/anti-racist programmes. Music and other expressive cultural forms were central to their activities for mobilization, commemoration and celebration. Nevertheless, the Anti-Nazi League and Rock Against Racism were unable to foster a productive relationship with these Asian organizations. This was a result not only of the marginalization of 'race' politics by the ANL, but also of a pervasive xenophobia and nationalism in much of the white British Left during this period. In the nineties this reappeared more diffusely in the machinations of a revived ANL. A more disparate and fragmented Black anti-racist movement further problematizes the possibilities of realizing a unified anti-racist struggle in Britain.

Our contention has been that contemporary Asian-based bands such as Fun^Da^Mental, Hustlers HC and Kaliphz are doing cultural and political work drawn in part from earlier Asian political formations like the IWA and AYMs of the 1970s. Furthermore, this work is informed by experience within (and against) white anti-racist movements like the ANL and RAR, so that we see these bands putting Black concerns into wider circulation through popular musical forms, now accessible to more diverse audiences. Most significant, these bands are not connected to a specific party organization or anti-racist group, which explains their wide appeal and ability to work with the warring factions of the anti-racist Left.

It is imperative to extend the internationalist orientation of the cultural politics presented by these musicians. The first task of such an extension would be to develop a greater understanding amongst

campaigners, cultural workers and subsequently their target audiences of the complex determinations of racism not only as a component of local–global capitalism, but played out in conjunction with patriarchy, the formations of nationhood and the preservation of a white European hegemony. This extension of understanding through popular cultural forms needs to occur alongside further participation in combating the immediate practical problems of contemporary racism in a way that stretches beyond the self-serving agendas of the white Left (where there are those who still behave as if anti-racism were a recruitment tool rather than part and parcel of an anti-capitalist politics). Whilst the politics forwarded by Asian-based bands resists any easy appropriation by the white Left, simply dancing to Fun^Da^Mental does not constitute a serious engagement with these bands' anti-racist/imperialist political stances, which are central to their musical productions. It remains crucial for a broad-based anti-racist coalition to emerge in Britain which recognizes the history of organizing and autonomy amongst the Black Left as well as the crucial role of cultural activism.

Our recovery of forgotten politico-musical histories is by no means the only narrative that can be told. Equally, we do not want to say that the cultural activism of Asian musicians comes without its own contradictions – particularly with regard to the politics of male-centred self-defence activism – but the point is to put these matters up for discussion. In airing these difficulties we cannot romanticize; nor do we think valorization of Asian interventions in mainstream popular or political culture is sufficient without addressing the concomitant disarticulation of such activists from their community base – but these are problems demanding several rethinks at the junction of music and politics, and they are going on. In deploying some of these problems we attempt to reconfigure and reinforce the growing alliances we identify in the resurgent Left in Britain today.

NOTES

1. A glossary of the alphabet soup of organizations we mention is included in the References section at the end of this book.

2. Our translation from the Bangla version (!).

3. In the 'texts' we use here there is a problem of distinguishing poetry and song: all poems are songs waiting to be sung and this why there is an interchange between the two. The poems and song lyrics presented in this section are translations from the original Punjabi and Urdu.

4. These three poems are presented in R. Russel and J. Shamsher, 'Punjabi Poetry in Britan', *New Community* 7(3), pp. 291–305.

5. See *Southall 23 April 1979: The Report of the Unofficial Committee of Enquiry*, National Council for Civil Liberties, 1980; also *Southall: The Birth of Black Community*, Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, Institute of Race Relations, 1981.

6. Whatever the case, it seemed that the ANL was dissolved soon after this event, leaving Asians to fight continued racist attack in isolation. It can be noted that the Revolutionary Communist Tendency (now Revolutionary Communist Party) made many statements critical of the SWP/ANL and in support of self-defence, as did the Spartacist League, and there was also an attempt in 1981 to reform the ANL, but this fizzled. Not that these points really matter for the crux of our argument.

7. Much of the account presented is given in greater detail in Race Today Collective, *The Struggle of Asian Workers in Britain*, 1983.

8. Tariq Mehdood, in private conversation.

9. On a very different sense of 'Jungle music' in the 1990s in Britain, see Chapter 8.

10. An SWP pamphlet claims each event attracted 100,000 (Bambury 1992: 33), *Sounds* reported an estimate by Lambeth Council of 150,000, ITV news said 60,000. Who knows?

11. We refer to music magazines of numerous stripes within the text. The *New Musical Express* is more commonly referred to as the *NME*. The *NME*'s immediate rival is *Melody Maker* (*MM*). Both these papers are weekly 'inkies', tabloid-format news and reviews papers. More glossy versions include *Spin*, *Select*, *HHC*, *Sounds*, while newsletter/fanzine-style publications include *Sniffin' Glue*, and the Kaliphz's *Sling-Shot*.

12. Doubtless this occlusion should not be overvalued since part of the explanation for the distance between Bhangra and 'mainstream' English music culture was an intentional and organizational separation. It is worth mentioning that this continues today in Bhangra, despite occasional major label signings.

13. The more interesting of these are Anti-Fascist Action, Red Action and the Colin Roach Centre (see the pamphlet *ANL – Critical Examination*, Colin Roach Centre 1995).

14. Much of the white Left still persists in seeing anti-racism through Trotsky's eyes as a recruitment tool rather than as part and parcel of an anti-capitalist politics.

15. There were numerous arrests which, as a consequence of the organizational confusion of the event, were not campaigned over. The subsequent jail terms for several 'rioters' picked out by the cops were passed two years later, in September 1995, with little notice.

16. Rochdale, a post-industrial mill town in the northwest of England, is a centre of BNP activity.

17. This is explicit in Fun^Da^Mental's 'Dog-Tribe' video discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

18. See Chapter 2.