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## A People's History of London

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communities through whose areas the NF often deliberately chose to march.

The confrontations multiplied across London. In 1974 a twenty-year-old Warwick University student, Kevin Gately, was killed, probably by a blow from a police truncheon, in Red Lion Square at a protest against an NF meeting taking place in the Conway Hall. An important turning point came in Lewisham, South London, in the summer of 1977. Most of the left, local trade union organizations and the Communist Party held a rally in opposition to an NF march; the majority planned to march at some distance from the NF's proposed route. But those who thought the NF should be physically confronted – mainly the Socialist Workers Party and black youth from the local community – went on to gather at a point on the NF's route where they thought the march could be blocked. Despite a heavy police presence the anti-fascists did indeed break through the police cordon and disrupt the NF march. Mounted police charged the protestors, and riot shields were used for the first time in mainland Britain. Fighting with the police lasted long after the NF had gone home. The establishment's disapproval was shrill, and even the left-wing Labour leader, Michael Foot, described those who had broken up the NF march as 'red fascists'. It was a watershed which led to the formation of the Anti-Nazi League (ANL).

The ANL was an attempt to build a broad and active anti-fascist movement to undercut white levels of support for racism. East London was a particular challenge, as the NF and other fascist groupings were very popular in areas such as South Hackney, Hoxton, Shoreditch and parts of Tower Hamlets. In the late 1970s, these remained largely white areas where blacks and Asians (and anti-fascist whites) often came under attack. In April 1978 the ANL organized a march from Trafalgar Square to the 100,000 strong Rock Against Racism Carnival in Victoria Park, where the Clash topped a memorable bill. It marked a turning point in the area, as thousands of local people of all races turned out to show their opposition to fascism.

The racist atmosphere in London remained dangerous, however. As in the 1950s, and as we would see again in the 1990s, a string of mostly young black and Asian people were murdered because of the colour of their skin. Whether or not the crimes could be directly attributed to fascists, they were certainly encouraged by such ideology. In June 1976, Gurdip Singh Chaggar was killed in Southall: the fascist Kingsley Read said of it a week later, 'One down, one million to go.' Although charged with incitement to racial hatred he was never convicted. But it was becoming clear, at least to the younger members of the black and Asian communities, that they would have to fight back.