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1<sup>st</sup> Witness Statement of Joan Rudder

2<sup>nd</sup> March 2022

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I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

### **Personal Details**

**Please give your full name and date of birth.**

1. Joan Frances Kathryn Rudder, 23.9.1954.

### **Political Activism**

**Please outline your political activities which led to your membership of the Anti-Nazi League**

1. I was a member of the International Socialists / Socialist Workers Party. I joined in approximately 1974. I was a full time student and was involved in University.
2. I was very concerned about the rise of racism and fascism in Britain. I was concerned particularly in the growth and influence of the National Front, their growth generally, but particularly amongst young people. I wanted to be part of trying to prevent their spreading their racist ideas and propoganda particularly in the run up to local elections at that time. I recall that in local elections the

National Front was standing hundreds of candidates, and the thought of having them sitting as councillors on local councils was quite horrifying.

3. I graduated from University of London – Bedford College in approximately Autumn 1978 and then began working for the Anti-Nazi League. I would say that my role whilst employed by the Anti-Nazi League evolved. I started by opening the mail and keeping the day record of mail coming into the office, dealing with cheques, money orders and then dealing with banking. Mostly my work for the Anti-Nazi League was in organisational work.
4. During periods when the Anti-Nazi League was organising counter-protests the office would become very busy. So, alongside colleagues we would deal with phone calls answering questions, sending out leaflets / material and dealing with the press.

#### **What were the aims of the ANL?**

5. To stop the National Front from gaining support so that they could become a respectable political force. That was really what it was about. To that main aim, it would involve mass mobilisation of socialists, trade unionists, anti-racists and of course the local community to stop the National Front organising.
6. However, it was not just re-active. The organisation was also proactive – we would run stalls on High Streets up and down the country. We would organise

meetings in the local community to build the understanding as to what the National Front actually was – a Nazi organisation.

7. The Anti-Nazi league was all about building a broad united front against the National Front.

### **Did the ANL share any aims with the SWP?**

8. They were quite separate organisations. They were very different in approach. At their core they were both anti-racist. The Socialist Workers Party was very radical, with a broader programme covering issues such as the trade unions, wages, international issues, and socialist theory. I wouldn't have described the Anti-Nazi League like that. The main role of the Anti-Nazi League was to build a mass campaign against the National Front. We organised under the slogan 'Never Again!'

### **Did the ANL use violence to advance its aims?**

9. No. We were very clear on this issue. The Anti-Nazi League was all about building a mass campaign and a mass movement. To that end we organised on a local level street stalls, and organised meetings to campaign and educate about the dangers of fascism. On a regional and national level we organised demonstrations in the local communities. Crucially we also organised Anti-Nazi Carnivals alongside Rock Against Racism. It was about how we could spread togetherness and unity. We worked closely with Rock Against Racism because

they were involved with lots of young people, so we worked with them on events, so we might help them with stewarding and things like that at their events.

10. The Anti-Nazi League was about exposing the myths and lies of the National Front and showing that black and white communities had more in common with each other than what divided us. So, it was not about violence, no. We did build counter protests to the National Front – but this was to support the communities to oppose the National Front getting a foothold and thus causing division.

11. The idea was that they shouldn't have a platform where they could get publicity in the local press. We wanted to avoid the press reporting on a National Front event – without it being made clear that there was a counter protest and there was opposition locally to the National Front meeting / organising. As a result representatives of the Anti-Nazi League would be interviewed. In addition our counter protests would have an effect and the police would often stop the National Front meeting.

**Did the ANL foresee a time when violence would or would be, necessary to realise its aims?**

12. No. The aims of the Anti-Nazi League **were** about black and white unity. It's aims were very much about building a mass movement to ensure that people would not vote for, or support the National Front. This meant the campaign was

about turning the tide politically, violence would have actually gone against that aim and potentially alienated the people were trying to win over.

**Did the ANL advocate, provoke or approve of public disorder in order to advance its aims?**

13. Well as I have said above I don't think advocating, provoking or approving of public disorder would advance our aims. So no, the Anti-Nazi League didn't.

**Did the ANL consider it necessary to break the law to advance its aims? If so please explain.**

14. See the answer above.

**Did the ANL vet its members?**

15. No, anybody could join. We had hundreds of people joining and there was no way you could have vetted if you wanted to. I think we had 300 groups up and down the country.

**Was the use of the ANL as a means of recruiting new members to the SWP a covert or overt tactic?**

16. It wasn't the main reason why the Socialist Workers Party helped to initiate the Anti-Nazi league. If people did join the Party it wasn't because of an overt or covert recruitment policy.

**What affiliation, if any had Rock Against Racism and the Right to Work Campaign with the SWP?**

17. Nothing formal but we worked together quite a lot. They were really only ever interested in the music side. Rock Against Racism was formed to promote unity, and use music to bring young people together – black and white. The main people involved in Rock Against Racism were heavily into music, all of them; we worked together with them particularly Mike Simons, Roger Huddle and Red Saunders.

**Did you attend the demonstration in Southall on the 23 April 1979 which led to the death of Blair Peach?**

18. Yes I did attend it.

19. When I got to Southall the counter-demonstration against the National Front was already underway. There were a lot of people there from the local Asian community, the Indian Workers Association and supporters of the Anti-Nazi League. As you would expect the counter demonstration was very loud. It was very busy.

20. I don't remember a great deal of the earlier stages when I was there but it did get very violent, and people (counter-demonstrators) were getting hurt badly. I was with a group of people that tried to get the injured through to the St John's Ambulance. However, we weren't being allowed through police lines to get to the ambulances.

21. I recall that a house became a make-shift medical centre. I don't know the area, so I couldn't tell you its whereabouts. I recall going into the house and seeing several injured people there – many with head wounds. There were other people upstairs I don't know what their state of health was, but I think they had head injuries too. The general idea was that we would stay there until things calmed down, and then take the people there to hospital. As I state above we had been prevented by the police from taking the injured to the ambulances.

22. However, whilst in the house the police arrived. They demanded that we leave the house, and if **we** didn't they were going to come and get us out. So we thought the best thing was to leave. As we exited the house we went along a path to the gate, which was obviously open, the police had stationed themselves either side. I am guessing 6 or 8 officers were either side with truncheons drawn ready. As we went through the gate we were attacked and beaten. I was beaten on the crown of my head, my head split open. I have got 6 stitches and the hair has never grown back. I don't know how injured the other people were who left with me, because by that stage I was too frightened to do anything - I was really scared. I have never been in a situation like that and it was scary. I got to the other end of that line of officers beating us somewhat

dazed, I knew I was bleeding so somebody took me to an Ambulance and they patched me up.

23. When the ambulance was full we went off to hospital. When we got to the hospital it was incredibly busy, it was chaotic, there were some police officers there and a lot more counter demonstrators who were injured. I remember that the police got seen to first. Sadly, the attitude of hospital staff seemed to be that we had asked for it, which was scary again, because you think you are in a place of safety.

24. Anyway I got patched up, but whilst waiting I heard rumours about somebody dying. I didn't know Blair Peach personally – but I now know they were referring to him. To be honest, my first reaction was, "Only one? There'll be more to come." I say this because the police had been so vicious to the counter demonstrators. So while I was waiting to be patched up I found a call box and called Peter Hain, who was the press officer for the Anti-Nazi League to inform him what was going on. Obviously we didn't have any other means of communication in those days. I phoned him, briefed him, so that he was aware of the situation, before he got contacted by the mainstream media which inevitably he would have been. I was patched up and discharged. It was just pretty awful.

**Can you describe the events that you witnessed? Did you witness any violence or disorder?**

25. My long lasting memory of this event was that the Police were out of control.<sup>1</sup>

Without doubt. The people I was standing with, nobody had any weapons or anything that could be used as a weapon. On the counter demonstration we were being herded around by the police. Their whole mobilisation was to deny our right to peacefully protest, they had riot shields, they were out with the horses, they had their batons drawn and they were long batons they weren't short ones.<sup>2</sup> Someone somewhere must have authorised their use.

26. I recall that when they investigated the death of Blair Peach, they found that he was killed by a lead filled truncheon.<sup>3</sup> There was a culture of violence that manifested itself by police officers knowing it was okay to take a lead filled truncheon on a demonstration. This should inform the inquiry to understand that there was a culture of violence within the police force that says "It's okay to beat demonstrators up. It's okay to use lethal force if necessary."

**Did you or anyone you were with participate in any violence or disorder?**

27. Absolutely not.

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<sup>1</sup>In the report by the National Council for Civil Liberties - 'Southall' – it reports that three people (inc. Blair Peach) suffered fractured skulls; one of the stewards Inderjeet Singh Kohli suffered a broken pelvis and a young member of Peoples Unite suffered a severe eye injury; there were multiple head injuries (see pp163-164)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid NCCL pp162-163 at 9.53.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid NCCL – Post mortem of Professor D. Bowen of Charing Cross Hospital – p79 at 3.26 "The instrument used must have been very weighty, and yet at the same time was malleable and without a hard edge as there was no lacerations to the scalp." At point vii. "The instrument used could have been a lead weighted rubber 'cosh' or hosepipe filled with lead shot, or some like weapon."

**Diversity Information**

**What is your racial origin?**

28. White British

**What is your gender**

29. Female

**I believe that the content of this statement to be true**

**Signed: Joan Rudder**.....*Joan Rudder*.....

**Date:** 02.03.2022