

# THEE FACTION

Thee Faction  
Billy Brentford: Vocals  
The Hard Man: Bass  
Dai Nasty: Drums  
Nylons: Guitar  
Baby Face: Guitar

I first saw this band at an num benefit in the middle of the miners strike. This mythical band who popped up at benefits and giant squat parties, preaching revolution to the masses with such blistering contempt for anything that didn't fit their world view that a reviewer from Sounds said they looked as if they were drinking a cocktail of hate and hope and spewing it indiscriminately. They didn't release records, wouldn't accept money to play, wouldn't advertise their gigs, and yet if rumour got out that they were playing, up to 2 thousand would turn up. When I finally did see them, at the just-closed Ebbw Vale town hall which local NUM activists had 'reopened' for the evening, I was blown away. Scargill had been on the television that afternoon, talking to the TUC in Brighton, spitting blood over the lack of solidarity being shown by the rest of the movement. I thought that was the most inspiring, vitriolic attack/call to arms I would ever see. And then that night I saw Thee Faction.

Interviewed by

Sally Armie

May 1985

## Socialist R&B

I tried to see them whenever I could after that - hard work with a band whose low profile was so jealously guarded. And then, last month on the eve of their first tour of eastern Europe, I received a phone call offering the chance to interview them for Agit Pop.

I met Billy Brentford and the guitarists Nylons and Baby Face in their rehearsal space in West London.

Agit pop: you don't do many interviews, so people don't know that much about you. Can you tell us a bit about how you started, your influences and what made you the band you are?

Billy Brentford: yeah, if you want. But let's keep this bit brief, yeah? All it does is contribute to the cult of personality that surrounds "the rock band", and it's bogus. There's nothing magical about this group of people. We're any group of working people, who labour together. Take one of us out, put another in, the work gets done. Trying to claim it's some magic meeting of individuals is bullshit. Does the car factory produce

Opening with Union Man/Proletarian Man, singer Billy Brentford let forth the most extraordinary cry of "brothers and sisters" as the drums began. From anyone else it would have sounded like hollow, posturing rhetoric. But that night, in that climate, with that audience, hairs stuck up on the backs of the necks of donkey jacketed colliers and battle hardened women alike. And as Nylons' blistering guitar kicked in over The Hard Man and Dai Nasty's beat, the whole place erupted. By the time they encoored with Your Hanc Are Tied everyone in that crowd of 1200 would have gone to the barricades for that band, and the class they represented. And if Baby Face had said the word, the People's Republic of Ebbw Vale would have been established that night.





different **Cars** when one man on the production line is replaced by another? Or ten men by ten others? No fucking difference.

Nylons: but if you do want the shortened history, here you go. Four of us formed at our comp in Reigate.

Agit pop: How did **that** happen?

Nylons: Dai Nasty had moved down from Wales at 11 and had his accent kicked out of him by everyone except us. So we were his mates. The Hard Man was a loony. Angry, angry kid. But Billy and I, who were both, I guess, bookworms and music freaks, got him into Dr Feelgood, the Count Bishops, y'know, and he found a home. And then billy's brother gave us this book, the Communist Manifesto. And everything made sense. So we put the group together. But, like Billy says, it could have been anyone else. It's not some "great men" thing. Historical conditions dictated that this thing would happen. So it did. That's how history works.

Agit Pop: ok, so that's 4 of you. What about the fifth?

BillyBrentford: yeah. Baby Face is dai's cousin from back in wales Precocious kid. He'd read all of Marx by the time he was 13. Finished the last book, hitched to Reigate, turned up at our place announcing he was going to live with us. We were squatting a disused pub in town. We knew he'd be wasted at school, so we sort of adopted him. This was, what, 82? We were all 18, looking after this idiotic, over-read, over-excited teenager. Hes no different now, 3 years on.

Baby Face: yeah, they recruited me for my good looks and ideological purity. And then taught me the guitar. And I taught them about western Marxism.

Nylons: did you fuck. You just brought in the big words.

[it's worth noting at this point that Nylons and baby Face aren't smiling. Far from it]

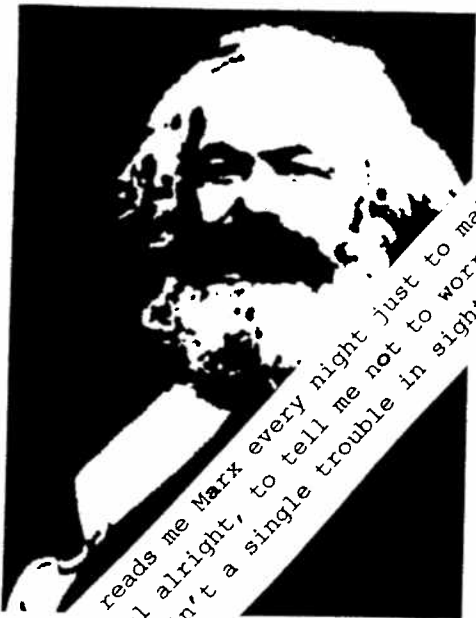
BB: anyway, that completed the band. We'd been playing for about 4 years, but most of our work went into political activity. Suddenly we were five and it made sense to combine this with our political activity. A socialist asks himself: how am I of most use to my class? The answer at that point was clear.

Agit pop: sorry to ask about influences again, but what were you listening to?

Baby face: boring. I'll tell you what we were reading though. Gramsci, GDH Cole - his stuff on guild socialism is fucking dynamite, and is the biggest influence on the structure of the band. For a while we called ourselves a guild instead of a group, but no one outside of us got it. That's happened a lot, so we

changed to communicating as clearly as possible on everything. Who else? Althusser - combined with gramsci's stuff on hegemony, his stuff on ideological state apparatuses is killer. That's how we see ourselves. Counter-hegemonic, combatting the ideological state apparatuses. So they're our influences, plus Marx, Luxemburg, Lenin - y'know, the family.





"she reads me Marx every night just to make me feel alright, to tell me not to worry and there ain't a single trouble in sight"

Agit pop: but you express yourselves through music

Billy Brentford: not solely. Maybe even not mainly. You're missing the whole point of us.

Agit pop: understood. But just as you've been influenced by writers so there must be musicians you like.

Nylons: ok. Do you know The Roosters? Japanese R&b group. They're great. We like the feelgoods, y'know, stuff like that.

Agit pop: what about bands doing a similar thing to you? Y'know, Crass, chumbawamba, mekons, redskins?

Billy Brentford: none of them are doing the same thing as us. Redskins wanna be popstars, and are happy to be puppets of the swp. Crass, chumbawamba? Hippies. Fucking anarchists peddling their daft libertarian crap to middle class idiots on their gap year before becoming accountants. Fuck 'em. Mekons? Yeah, maybe they're doing something like what we're doing. But country and folk aren't our thing. R&B is. Socialist r&b.

Agit pop: where do you fit in to the struggle?

Baby face: We struggle. That's what all working people do. How far do you want to break it down? History's driven by class struggle. In this epoch it's workers against capitalists. History's decided where we are in that.

Agit pop: ok. Within the struggle, how can you play the most useful part?

Baby face: through class consciousness. Making sure everything we do is aligned with the interests of the class. Being disciplined. Avoiding decadence. Making decisions consciously, and without influence by the powers that control us. In The German Ideology Marx told us that the ruling ideas in any epoch are those of the ruling class. All we can do is stop those ideas ruling us, and in helping others realise that consciousness. We do that in any way we can.

Agit pop: sounds pretty spiritual

Baby face: then you're not understanding what I'm saying.

Nylons: leave it out, baby face. What's the point of



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that? Sally's on-side, man.

Baby face: there's no fucking spiritual dimension to Marxism. That's the whole point of materialism, Nylons.

Nylons: it was you that was saying we needed clarity in what we say.

Baby face: (inaudible)

Agit pop: so how does this consciousness raising work? Do you encourage people to unionise? To join the labour party?

Nylons: we do, yeah.

Baby face: we don't, no.



"you think you're immune? Well I can sell you ANYTHING"





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Nylons: what's Union Man/Proletarian Man about then?

Billy Brentford: my experiences.

Nylons: but it's advice too, no?

Baby face: to join a union, yeah. We believe working people should organise. Of course. But the labour party? No. Kinnock? What's he gonna do for the struggle? Thatcher doing more for the struggle than him. At least she accepts there's a war going on and she represents her class in it. Does Kinnock? Classic example of a class led by someone who can't take the responsibility.

Nylons: but what were the swp saying at the election in 1983? Vote labour but build a socialist alternative. We believe that. We do that.

Baby face: you said that we encourage people to join Labour. That's different.

Nylons: fuck, baby face. That's stupidly pedantic.

Baby face: is it? Tell that to the Militant comrades Kinnock's weeding out. Entryism isn't something Thee Faction has suggested.

Nylons: I think there's value in it. Look what Hatten' doing in Liverpool.

Baby face: he's on a fucking power trip, Nylons. That's what motivates people to stand for election, to sign record deals, to get in the papers. It's bullshit.

Nylons: so it does nothing for the class?

Baby face: I'm not saying that.

Agit pop: ok. If we assume that it's mass movement

stuff you like, and that it's the event or the gesture that makes the difference, not the personality, where do you guys stand on situationism? I know you do Jacques du Tronc's Le Cactus live.

Billy Brentford: (laughing) you might regret asking that one....

Nylons: situationism made a lot of sense. Debord's analysis, the whole "society of the spectacle" thing, spoke to people. Who else was saying anything relevant to the world as it is, with capitalism as it's become? In 68, with the Stones, television, mass media and all that - Marx wasn't talking to those students.

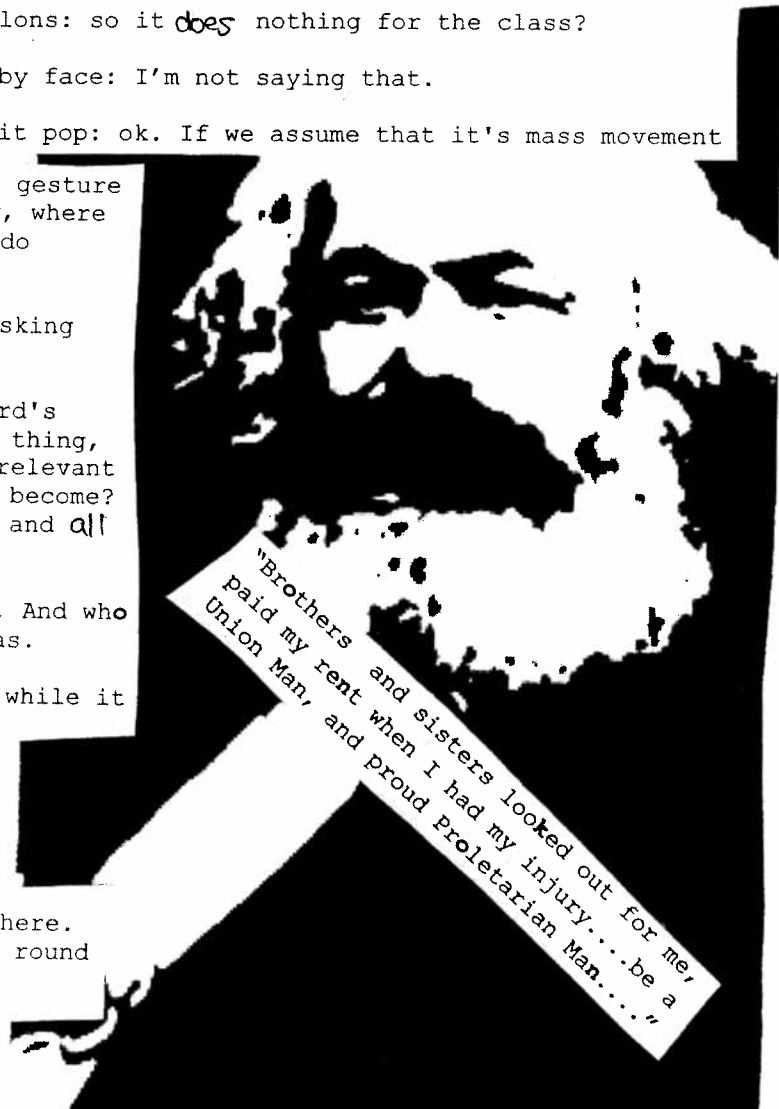
Baby face: yeah he was. They weren't listening. And who else was saying anything relevant? Althusser was.

Nylons: and he sat in his ivory tower in Paris while it all kicked off. Althusser was a PCF puppet

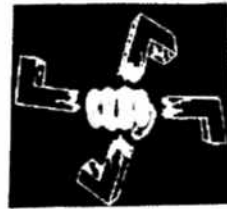
Baby face: He fucking wasn't

Nylons: fuck off baby face. He was.

[I don't know how to describe what's happening here. Baby face has swung for Nylons. They're rolling round on the floor, punching each other and shouting. Meanwhile.....]



BillyBrentford (unperturbed): ha ha. You couldn't have asked a more inflammatory pair of questions! Thee Faction is united on all but two questions: entryism and situationism. And it's always these two that cause the problems! Ha ha. Oy, nylons, come on. Give it a rest.



[nylons stops punching baby face]

Agit pop: so, you're off to eastern Europe. What's the plan? You're not going to fight capitalism out there.

Billy Brentford: That's exactly what we're going to do. You think the comrades out there have it any different to us? We buy into Tony Cliff's analysis of Stalinist economies being, basically, 'state capitalist'. And nothing's going to be any different under this new guy, Gorbachev, or now Hoxha's dead. The comrades in Poland are fighting the same struggle as we are. So are the comrades in Nicaragua and El Salvador. The landscapes look different. The struggles the same. So we're off to fight it in the East.

Agit pop: But you use the symbols of Soviet communism.

BillyBrentford: Of course. 1917 was a real revolution. The Bolshevik Party was a tremendous force for the class. We believe in the Soviets. We don't believe in the economic organisation of Stalinism.

"when the union's inspiration thru the workers' blood shall run, there can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun"

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Agit pop: So, do you think you'll get the same reaction out there? And will you be allowed to say the same stuff?

BB: We'll see.

[at this point The Hard Man and Dai Nasty walk into the rehearsal space]

The Hard Man: What's this? An interview? I thought we didn't give interviews.

BB: It's alright, this is Sally. Agit Pop 'zine.

Dai Nasty: Yeah, I know it. Anarchists, yeah?

Agit pop: Broadly, yes. But...

The Hard Man: We're done here I think, comrade. Nice to meet you Sally. We've got stuff to do.

Thee Faction then walk off together. Baby Face and Nylons appear to be best of friends again. Dai Nasty and The Hard Man seem to be questioning Billy Brentford over why they were talking to me. And I'm left amongst instruments, books, newspapers, and what seems to be a pile of correspondence between the government and Thee Faction about the Eastern European tour. Curious.

Good luck to them. An incredible band, though truly strange people. It'll be interesting to see happens out there. They're leaving Britain at a moment when the country most needs them. Let's hope the comrades in the East appreciate what they're getting.

## AGIT POP 'ZINE

May 85