

STREET FIGHTING MAN

Action!

Race War to Door Wars

Joe Owens

Lulu, 2007

Reviewed by Andrew Redmond

Joe Owens was “on the door,” working as a bouncer at a popular Liverpool nightspot called The Garage when three fun-seekers came in: a blind man and his two companions. Sitting the blind man down, one of his friends went to the bar, the other to the men’s room. As Owens writes:

It didn’t take too long before the white trash noticed this, as well as the fact that he was blind. One scumbag went over to the blind guy and sat next to him, while removing his own shoe. He then waved this obviously smelly shoe under the nose of the blind guy and held it there. This was to the great merriment of his friends . . . (p. 193)

The bullying continued, and at last Owens was made aware of the situation:

Never have I witnessed such a despicable spectacle. Running over as fast as my legs could carry me, I kicked this low life in the face and put him to sleep. I have seldom, if ever enjoyed dishing out the ultra-violence as much as I did to this dog. (p. 193)

Joe Owens is known up and down the United Kingdom as a veteran nationalist street-fighter, a genuinely “hard man” feared and loathed by the far left, who called him the “Nazi Assassin” for the vicious, almost clinical punishment he meted out to communist and anarchist thugs who preyed on politically incorrect activists, often with the connivance of the police and special interests.

Owens' new tell-all book *Action! Race War to Door Wars*, is an absorbing, fascinating glimpse inside the mind of a segment of nationalist politics many would prefer to ignore or pretend doesn't exist: young working-class men animated not by theory and books but by tribal instinct and first-hand experience of the effects of nonwhite immigration and a changing world that leaves their kind behind.

Action! takes the reader through Joe Owens' political awakening in the 1970s; the violence, jail time, and eventual disillusionment that followed; his career at some of the best-known night clubs of the English rave scene; and his re-engagement with politics, rising to become the bodyguard of Nick Griffin, present leader of the British National Party.

The incident with the blind man and the bully, which Owens calls "a depressing story," is perhaps the best example of what draws many of the men of Owens' class to nationalism. They hate bullies, despise unfairness and hypocrisy, and see nationalism less as politics than as a survival strategy. Poorer whites are the first to feel the effects of nonwhite immigration, with the crime and competition for scarce social resources that come along with it. Their response is often explosive.

Certainly the violence Joe Owens confesses to is extreme, but it didn't come out of thin air. Owens was at the height of his game at a very important point in the racial history of the UK, the 1970s and 1980s, as the effects of the government's open door immigration policy, never consented to by the electorate, was becoming evident to a growing number of people.

The result: a resistance movement that sank roots deep into the public housing council estates of white Britain. This pro-white group was the National Front (NF), an organization that mixed an uncompromising call for ending immigration and beginning repatriation with a defense of the welfare state and working class social gains, from the eight-hour day to the National Health Service. The NF program had the potential, largely realized, of drawing off hundreds of thousands of blue collar whites from support of the Labour Party, which had long taken them for granted. The sight of thousands of white working people marching in England's streets to international attention terrified the Establishment, from the Tories' corporate owners craving cheap non-white workers to the Labour Party and special interest groups who supported Third World immigration on ideological grounds.

In the 1977 London election, the NF scored an astounding 119,000 votes, with even the Labour Party admitting that the NF had put out "the most dynamic, exciting, and hard-hitting leaflet of the campaign." The tally was a shock to the system, which felt that something clearly had to be done: calling the NF "Nazis" and "racists" hadn't worked.

The UK's equivalent of the Anti-Defamation League is the Board of Deputies of British Jews, which met in 1977 with Labour Party officials to devise a strategy. A small Trotskyite sect called the Socialist Workers' Party was approached with a view to a plan to destroy the National Front.

Like all Trotskyite groupuscles the SWP was (and still is) marginal at best, but their leader "Tony Cliff" had a nose for business. Born Yigael Gluckstein in 1917 in what would soon (in 1920) be British Mandate Palestine, Cliff had earlier on made an ideological concession to "imperialism" over the Korean War and had no problem with concocting an ideologically correct formula to benefit the corporate immigration agenda by agreeing to help form the Anti-Nazi League, the ANL, which with swift inevitability was called ANAL by its detractors.

(American readers will recall the outcry in 2006 over "Nuestro Himno," the version of "Star-Spangled Banner" sung *en Español* by famous Hispanic artists as part of the run-up to the illegal alien amnesty campaign. The man behind the record was Adam Kidron, none other than the nephew of Tony Cliff/Yigael Gluckstein.)

Among the ANL's initiatives was Rock Against Racism, which enlisted popular bands for well-financed carnivals and concerts to draw large numbers of kids in the hope of overshadowing the NF's self-financed events.

These machinations were high level, but the effects were soon felt on the streets of the United Kingdom by the likes of Joe Owens, who discusses a nationalist Liverpool sidewalk paper sale when he saw a group of "Reds" coming. "The leaflet they were distributing was advertising a Rock Against Racism Carnival. . . . I had not even had time to read it when all hell broke loose. . . . Immediately dropping my papers I ran to the aid of my comrades" (p. 16). What followed was merely one of many brutal physical confrontations with communists who, empowered by the connection their leadership had to power and finance, were in fact the paramilitary arm of corporate/state policy

enabling Third World immigration.

The people involved in attacking nationalism were not only weedy lefty students, but hardened criminals and killers, drawn from the *demimonde* of drugs and organized crime. One who actually pulled a gun on a local BNP organizer was Dessie Noonan, head of a Manchester crime family and responsible, police say, for numerous murders. Noonan himself was eventually to die on a sidewalk, stabbed to death by his black crack dealer.

Members of the ANL, and spin-offs like Red Action (some of whom were Irish Republican Army terrorists) had no compunction about attempting to kill dissidents, emboldened as they were by the official protection they enjoyed. The most famous nationalist victim was probably Albert Marriner, an old-age pensioner, Second World War veteran, and NF member who was hit on the head with a brick and killed in 1983.

The aim of the orchestrated violence was to send a message to white Britons that they could engage nationalist politics only at their own physical peril. As a result, nationalism became isolated and attracted a number of people who thrived on the atmosphere of intimidation.

What is interesting in Owens' account of his early political career is how small a role ideology played in the "action" the book is named for. He confesses that he was ignorant of the ideological identity of the political thugs he punished so mercilessly. "I knew what Communist meant and associated it with Russia. I could not understand why they were concerned" (p. 15). Three decades after one beating he says that "I am now aware that they were the Socialist Workers Party. This was a violent Trotskyite grouping, whose aim was revolution and the smashing of the UK state. We commonly knew them as Reds." Indeed, Owens' disgust for the "Reds" often seems more elemental than ideological: "Like some scripted scene from a TV show they moved in in unison in our direction shrieking, 'NAZI! NAZI! NAZI!' . . . What a bunch of sad bastards and total misfits they were" (p. 27).

Ideological considerations were also only secondary in the curious life-or-death lash-ups that occurred among the street-level nationalists Owens talks about. The National Front had a number of "more hard-line" grouplets on its coattails, each claiming to be more extreme than the next. One such organization was the British Movement, founded in 1968 by Colin Jordan, uniforms and Hitler worship included.

Another group was the National Socialist Party of the UK (NSPUK), run by an elderly lady in Eire, where speech laws were liberal by UK standards, and where US-derived National Socialist propaganda was run off with abandon.

The NF was a fanatically "loyalist" group, totally opposed to the Irish Republican Army and what it stood for. It openly renounced Nazism, pointing to its numerous war hero members, but despite the BM's Nazism and the NSPUK's support for the IRA (which goes unmentioned by Owens), none of these details of history and politics stopped cooperation in Liverpool against the common "Red enemy." After one punch-up, Owens had to explain his alliances to a larger NF meeting. "I . . . explained what had happened on Church Street. I gave a very detailed account of the British Movement lads being arrested . . . that without the British Movement guys we would surely have taken a very bad beating" (p. 18). It is unknown how much further the violence of the controlled left played a role in determining nationalist policy like this, but still, straight up neo-Nazis, in the Hollywood sense, were able to work side-by-side with working class white patriots like Joe Owens, driven together by common need.

One explanation for such cooperation is that the fetishism of Third Reich symbols and slogans among some white blue collar youth does not necessarily indicate a commitment to, or even real understanding of National Socialism. Instead, swastikas and lightning bolts are often seen as the most powerful sigils available to evoke a sense of militancy in the face of often-immediate physical danger. To youth raised on media portrayals of "Nazism" as ominous and evil, these symbols become the ultimate expression of brawn and rebellion.

It is often ineffective to point out that their use defeats the overall purpose, because for many of these kids the purpose is to intimidate, and even offend, not to transform society. Many older activists have responded either by catering to this short-sightedness or by rejecting this class of young people out of hand. A more sensible course, followed by many European groups, has been to wean young people from Third Reich fetishism by giving them a substantive ideological education.

Similar ideological looseness can be seen in the schizophrenic response of Owens' circle when it came to political action. Owens understood that the racial crisis in the UK was the result of official, government policy, enforced at all bureaucratic levels, right down to

the police, who protected the Reds and arrested nationalists. Yet when the black Liverpool slum of Toxteth exploded in riots against the police, Owens found himself fighting on the side of the cops and their chief, a politically correct creature named Chief Constable Ken Oxford. "Now don't get me wrong, I was no Oxford fan. I looked upon him and the rest of his kind as sellouts to the mob and the Reds. Shouting 'Oxford in' was just to wind the Reds up and get a bit of publicity" (p. 41). Provoking reactions from political enemies had the expected result for Owens' new political group, John Tyndall's New National Front (NNF), which even planned a pro-police march. "The NNF gained a lot of local publicity from all this, but sadly failed to make real political headway . . . In hindsight, it is a shame that confrontation was our only approach to politics" (p. 43).

In those days before the internet, the NF had to make news to be seen, and marches were key to raising their profile. In the end, by being physical deterrents to leftist/state violence, men like Joe Owens prevented the NF from being wiped out. That task, once again, fell to better-schooled people at much higher echelons. Owens touches on one aspect, the self-destruction the NF underwent, "with infighting in every quarter" (p. 23).

Efforts with names like the "British Campaign Against the Boat People" seemed to calculate an accommodation to the leftist image of nationalists as heartless people bullying the weak. "In retrospect I wonder what those Vietnamese must have made of it all. A small army of assorted skinheads who screamed abuse at them, attacked them. Did anyone explain to them who we were? Why we were there?" (p. 21). While the system that allowed the immigration crisis to deepen was at fault, people widely viewed as clearly helpless were, if anything, easily manipulated into being made into the victims of a carefully controlled image of intolerance.

Eventually, the all-around pressure on the National Front, among which was a lack of strategic focus, led to dissolution from within. Joe Owens touches on the numerous splits and purges and how he stayed with the "hard-line," ideologically committed to John Tyndall.

While the Board of Deputies of British Jews sank undoubted millions into defeating the National Front, and internal mayhem weakened it, Margaret Thatcher's 1978 nod to the concerns the NF had aroused is widely assumed to have gelded the NF and won Thatcher the 1979 election. "People are really rather afraid that this

country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture," she said, receiving thousands of supporting letters and gaining an immediate 5 percent jump in opinion polls. The NF, "associated with violence" that had been manufactured, and incapable of constructing a coherent profile, never recovered. Nationalism sank into sectarianism, extremism, and irrelevancy, consumed by the confrontationalist politics that had been so skillfully imposed on it.

While Owens had never been a physical slouch, and the National Front was physically fearless, Owens was eventually overtaken by the actions and thinking of his extreme associates. In 1983, "a silly thing to do," as he admits, was sending "envelopes lined with razor blades to prominent members of Liverpool's Jewish community." Despite the fact that he was motivated by the Israeli slaughter of Palestinians at Sabra and Chatilla in Lebanon, he admits that "they were just the straws that broke the camel's back as far as I was concerned" (pp. 52, 53). He was jailed for a year.

Back on the street, Joe Owens' political commitments weakened. In the early 1970s he had been influenced by the Bruce Lee juggernaut, a fad that also fascinated another hard man of Owens' generation, Andy McNab, whose book *Bravo Two Zero* on his SAS Special Forces experiences has a lot in common with Owens' own account of another kind of active life.¹ Owens parlayed his interest into competition fighting, where he excelled, and then into a lucrative career as a bouncer.

The long, fascinating section of his book detailing his nightclub life has little if any political interest for readers, but does say a lot about Owens' character as a genuinely tough man. He doesn't brag or gloat, but gives worthy opponents respect, part of the honor ethos he says he learned in martial arts. A stoic approach was certainly called for. In those days, Liverpool's nightlife was plagued by organized crime, and the feuds and violence saw the police attempt to frame him for various crimes, most seriously murder. People like Owens see a side to policing most of us don't: the corruption and brutality that pervades the operations of many police forces.

Owens' sense of personal honor shines throughout his book. The mix of objective political events and the hard work of a new generation of serious nationalist leaders had made the British National Party into a viable political force, the first such nationalist group in the UK since

¹ Andy McNab, *Bravo Two Zero* (New York, New York: Island Books, 1993).

those heady days of Joe Owens' youth in the 1970s. With the advent of the internet, marches became unimportant, and with them went the organized opposition nationalism had faced in the 70s. But that didn't mean people weren't still gunning for the BNP. Nick Griffin, the new BNP chief, needed protecting, and Joe Owens offered himself, an absorbing tale he tells in the final chapters of the book. Among his adventures is a tale of how he bravely helped fend off a Red mob anxious to tear Griffin and French leader Jean-Marie Le Pen limb from limb.

Owens' personal code made his engagement with the politics of the possible difficult. Far from the hard streets of his political youth, Owens faced the disillusionment many feel among professional politicians. And while his problems with the new BNP seem personal, he definitely shows a high degree of insight into modern nationalist thinking. With biting candor he points out that we "only have to look at the white power movement in the USA, to see how far off track our cause has gone . . . If our race has to rely on swastika tattooed skinheads to survive then we are finished." But Owens' main insight has to do with those who should know better and yet haven't broken out of the old fashioned thinking that has held the cause back.

He is also honest: "I have led a very mixed-up life, without any real sense of purpose. . . . My life has been both exciting and dangerous but sadly, I have nothing to show other than plenty of odd and amusing memories" (p. 291). But Owens, despite his disillusionment, remains unrepentant, something that was in question when news that he planned to release a book came out, especially since he had had a public falling out with the BNP. There was some concern that his memoirs would be a "prodigal son" recantation in the style of *Führer Ex* and the tattooed convicts paraded regularly on daytime television to bemoan their past lives of "hatred."² *Searchlight* even greeted the news of Owens' pending book with a headline, "Nazi Godfather Spills

² Ingo Hasselbach, with Tom Reiss, *Führer Ex* (New York: Random House, 1996). Among similar "confessional" snitchographies are Thomas Martinez with John Guinther, *Brotherhood Of Murder* (New York: Pocket Books, 1990) and Ray Hill and Andrew Bell, *The Other Face of Terror* (London: Collins, 1988). In all three books, the protagonists claimed to have experienced epiphanies about the odious nature of their "hatred" when faced with serious criminal charges. Needless to say, their accounts are deemed highly suspect by some readers, and their denunciations of their former "comrades" often revolve around illegal behavior they themselves instigated or otherwise enabled.

the Beans."

The mainstream author Owens initially worked with had something like that in mind. Since the late 1990s the UK has seen a renewed and lucrative interest in "lad" programs, books, and films, a reaction to the engineered emasculation of white males over the course of the previous three decades. Tell-alls from former gangsters, soccer hooligans, and Special Forces veterans fly off the shelves. Author Graham Johnson saw a chance to benefit from this market, and he and Owens began work on the project. But there was a catch:

Graham explained to me that the book would have to show that I had now changed my views, and looked back on my life with disdain. I compromised saying I wouldn't change a thing in my life but would admit the path I'd taken hadn't really changed anything. (p. 272)

Owens' well-honed sense of suspicion—the hotel room meetings Owens suspected may have been bugged and the leading questions about Owens' alleged crimes—finally led Owens to drop out of the project, returning a cash advance in the process, something he didn't have to do but which was demanded by his personal code. Owens struck out on his own, penning a highly readable, politically uncompromising memoir as a result.

It is a testament to the rise of the new media—the same media that ended the old nationalist confrontational politics—that *Action! Race Wars to Door Wars* even appeared. Instead of hoping to find a mainstream publisher, Owens turned to Lulu, an on-demand internet publishing service.³ *Action!* suffers from a clumsy title and the lack of a seasoned editor. It also could use an index. But as an absorbing read, *Action!* is difficult to put down.

Andrew Redmond is an associate editor with Western Voices World News (<http://www.wvwnews.net/>).

³ Available in three formats, download, paperback, and hardcover, from the Lulu website: <http://www.lulu.com/content/985684>.