

On Follow Your Leader

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In 1992 a new organisation, the ‘white separatist’ Heritage Front (founded, 1988), was making its presence known in Toronto, Canada. It ran secretive recruitment drives in local high schools and set up a ‘Heritage Front Hotline’ people could phone to make contact and learn about its values. That September, the Native Canadian Center, which assists Indigenous residents in Toronto, submitted a complaint to the Province of Ontario’s Human Rights Commission concerning the Hotline. The Heritage Front announced a march on the courthouse where the complaint was being adjudicated: 150 angry anti-racists mobilised to chase them off, and this gave birth to Anti-Racist Action (ARA) Toronto.¹

From the start, ARA-Toronto was nothing if not combative, as members disrupted Heritage Front meetings as well as concerts featuring fascist bands. Their militancy can be gauged by a ‘march on a Nazi center of operation’ announced for Friday 11 June, 1993. The poster – ‘Nazi Attacks?! Shut ‘em Down’ – gave no hint as to where the march would end up, leading Toronto police and the Heritage Front to assume the home of Ernst Zündel, co-author of *The Hitler We Loved and Why*, was the target.² Instead, protestors paid a visit to the residence of the Heritage Front Hotline’s dulcet ‘voice’, Gary Schipper.

Surprise! The next day, June 12, the Toronto Star newspaper ran a feature, ‘Anti-Racist Mob Trashes Home’:

A frenzied mob of more than 200 anti-racist demonstrators rampaged in east end Toronto last night, vandalizing the home of a well-known white supremacist as police watched. None of the screaming demonstrators was arrested after smoke bombs, rocks, paint, human excrement and even a child’s bicycle were thrown through the windows of the Bertmount Ave. home of Gary Schipper. Schipper, who operates the Heritage Front Hotline, a white supremacist telephone information line, appeared shaken when he arrived at his rented house, south of Dundas St. E., east of Carlaw Ave., only moments after the throng left.

¹ Ida Fink, ‘1.5 Anti-Racist Action in Toronto – ARA’: www.stopracism.ca (accessed 8 March 2017).

² Zündel would later be extradited from Canada to Germany, where he was tried and jailed for five years in 2007 on charges of denying the holocaust and inciting racial hatred. See ‘Holocaust Denier Jailed for Five Years’, *The Guardian*, February 27, 2007: www.theguardian.com (accessed 8 March 2017).

The demonstration was organized by Anti-Racist Action, an umbrella group of gays, lesbians, anarchists and the far left.

Demonstrators handed out leaflets, accusing Schipper of promoting racism and hatred, to startled residents along the route. Many carried photos of Schipper's face on sticks. Others stuck the photos into lawns and set them ablaze. Horrified neighbours watched as masked youths repeatedly attacked the house, then raced back into the anonymity of the mob.

A police official told *The Star* that outnumbered officers didn't intervene when the mob attacked Schipper's home because they feared arrests might lead to more violence. About a dozen police were at the house. 'At least no one was hurt', said Staff Sergeant Terry Adams. Earlier, white supremacists gathered outside the Carlton St. home of Ernst Zündel, which had been draped in plastic sheeting in anticipation of an attack that didn't come.³

Around this time Toronto artist Dave Wilcox created *Follow Your Leader* (ca. 1993). This supremely ironic statement has become ubiquitous in anti-fascist circles, but its origins have remained a mystery till now. Some stickers emblazoned with this image made their way to me in the 1990s and I've always associated it with ARA-Toronto, so I asked Rocky Dobey⁴ who created it. He put me in touch with Wilcox, who relates:

I'd been using stencils in my paintings for a few years. I was introduced to the ARA-Toronto people in the early 1990s, and they wanted some graphics for the demos, fundraisers, etc. I remembered some t-shirts that I saw in Amsterdam in some poster and records store. They were portraits of dead rock stars, like Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix or whatever and they said, cynically, 'follow your idols'. I just applied the same logic. I figured that if these neo-Nazis think that the Nazis were so great and they idolize Hitler then they should do what the Nazi leadership did and kill themselves; you know, just to show how dedicated they are, or at least to each other. So I thought, 'why don't I just do a stencil of Hitler blowing his head off and have it say Follow Your Leader?'

I got the image of Hitler from an old anti-fascist photomontage from the 1930s by John Heartfield (Hitler x-ray).⁵ I then put the image of a gun in his mouth and the back of his head spraying. I think there were three stencils used in the image. The face, gun and words on one, a background colour for the face on another and highlights on the gun for the third stencil. The spray was added freehand.

So that's the stencil I gave to the ARA-Toronto people: they used it on whatever – you know, it's got its own life now, with variations.

³ Gail Swainson and Jim Wilkes, 'Anti-racist mob trashes home', *Toronto Star*, 12 June 1993, pA3.

⁴ Dobey's 'Carnival Against Capitalism' (2001) poster appears on the cover of *Anarchist Studies* 11 (1) (2003).

⁵ John Heartfield, 'Adolph the Superman. Swallows Gold and Spouts Tin', *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (17 July 1932), cover

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This is a preface to *Anarchist Studies* Volume 25 (2017) Issue 2, giving some context to the cover image.

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