

# **We Shut ‘em Down**

**Nazis Routed in St. Paul**

joel

1995

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A neo-nazi skinhead concert scheduled to take place on May 20 in St. Paul was cancelled after the combined efforts of Anti-Racist Action (ARA), various independent activists, and community members of West St. Paul forced the police to cancel the show.

## **Take me out to the ballgame**

Members of ARA were tipped off about the show in mid-March and began organizing against it immediately. Because nazis know the public will shut their shows down if they know about them, they have to keep the address of the gig a secret until the day of the show.

They discreetly distributed fliers telling fellow white supremacists to meet at Mounds Park in St. Paul between noon and 6:00 P.M. to pick up tickets and a map to the hall where the gig would take place.

Anti-racist activists got a hold of the flier, obtained a permit to use the park, and held an anti-racist picnic all day in order to occupy the place where the gig organizers wanted to hand out their maps. When carloads of nazis showed up from all over the Midwest, thinking they would get a map and tickets to their rally, they were met by a crowd of 100 anti-racists led by a “baseball team” who quickly disinvited from the park any nazis who showed up. Not one nazi got out of their car the whole day. There were no fights, and despite hoards of cops, no arrests, either.

## **A beautiful day in the neighborhood**

But the fun had just begun. Three days before the gig, members of Anti-Racist Action got a tip that the show was going to happen at Smith Avenue Hall in West St. Paul. Members immediately met with the owner and confirmed that the nazis had indeed booked the hall (they lied and told the owner they were having a birthday party). We urged the owner to cancel the gig. Although somewhat sympathetic, he refused to cancel the show, citing legal and financial obligations.

So we hit the streets the next day. Members of ARA went to the community surrounding the hall, fliering homes and cars and knocking on doors, talking to anyone who was home. We let people know that a violent Nazi skinhead gang was planning on having a concert to recruit youth into their movement in their neighborhood. Naturally, the vast majority of people were very upset. We asked them to call the club owner and their city councilmen to ask them to cancel the show. Both numbers were flooded with hundreds of calls the next day. It was also obvious that many people wanted to take the streets and actively demonstrate against the nazis, so we called for a demonstration on the night of the concert.

We arrived at the hall at 7:00 to find over 200 angry community members already there. By the time 30 meek nazi skinheads entered the club to set up their equipment, almost 400 activists and neighbors were jeering them, yelling “no room for nazis in our neighborhood!” After a couple hours, the mayor of St. Paul came (along with about 75 riot cops) and told the police to shut the show down. The nazis were hustled into a police paddy wagon and escaped through a back alley (but not before neighborhood folks chased the wagon and threw rocks at it!).

## **We shut ‘em down!**

But it wasn't the cops who shut the show down, it was the demonstrators—community members, ARA, punks, anarchists, socialists, anti-racist skinheads, youth, whites, people of color, queers, etc.—who shut the show down. The mayor realized he'd have to do something or else he'd have one very angry constituency to face. People were already up in arms that the police were escorting nazis into the club and keeping community members away from it, and at the amount of money wasted to pay for police overtime to protect a violent gang of white supremacists.

Although there were a few tensions between activists from Minneapolis and community residents, overall we worked together well. Many people thanked ARA for coming, saying that if it weren't for us they never would have known about the concert and the threat to their community.

## **Who were those nazis?**

The show was organized by St. Paul's own Bound for Glory, one of the biggest nazi bands in the country. Also scheduled to play were two white power bands from Wisconsin and one from Germany. Last month, Bound for Glory played at a celebration for Adolph Hitler's birthday in Idaho, where militia members, Klansmen, and nazi skinheads mingled. It is the politics of bands like Bound for Glory that led to the Oklahoma City bombing, and we were having none of that in our city.

## **This is not about free speech**

Contrary to what some people think, nazi gigs are not simply expressions of unpopular ideas and opinions that people are obligated to respect, if not agree with. White supremacists use these gigs as a place to recruit alienated white youth into their movement of racist violence and hatred.

This is a fact; white supremacists use the veil of free speech to conceal it. But we aren't fooled. We believe it is the responsibility of all those who care about peace and justice to exercise THEIR right to speak out against nazi organizing, and to act to stop it when possible.

Apparently, the neighborhood agreed with us. All in all, the day was a complete success. Many nazis from around the country couldn't get maps to the show, and only the bands and their roadies managed to enter the hall before the gig got cancelled. There was no violence and only two minor arrests (both released that evening).

This was a total victory for anti-racist forces in the Twin Cities.

**THERE'S NO ROOM FOR NAZIS IN ANY NEIGHBORHOOD! FIGHT RACISM!**

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