

The Battle of Cable Street Information Sheet

Numbers involved

The numbers of people involved vary widely, partly due to biases to one side or another, and partly because estimating numbers in the narrow streets and alleys of the East End was extremely difficult. However, the numbers given below are generally accepted as being as accurate as possible.

Fascists: 2,000 – 3,000, up to 5,000 (This included 400 black-bloused women, cadets and a small group from Germany.

Anti-fascists: Estimates include 100,000, 150,000, 250,00, 300,000, 310,000, 350,000 and 500,000.

Police: 6,000 – 10,000, including the entire Metropolitan Police Mounted Division. The police used wireless vans and a spotter plane.

Medical Provision

St John Ambulance: Around 500 volunteer staff.

Medical stations set up by: Independent Labour Party, Communist Party, BUF.

Hospitals used: St Peter's Hospital (Bethnal Green), St George's Hospital (Wapping), London Hospital (Whitechapel)

The weather was good on the day.

Bill Fishman, the son of a Jewish immigrant tailor from Russia and a Ukrainian mother grew up in the East End and was involved in the Labour Youth League. At 15 he was an eyewitness to the events at the Battle of Cable Street. In later life he was one of the leading historians of London's East End.

Fishman confronted common misconceptions about Cable Street. In particular, he challenged the belief that the police were sympathetic towards the fascists and antagonistic towards anti-fascists and Jews.

Fishman agreed that sometimes the police had “to be forceful in protecting the Fascists” from aggressive opposition, and that there were some officers who admired “the BUF’s uniform, military discipline and patriotic discipline”.

But the situation was “more complex” and he showed that amongst the local police who “lived and worked among the immigrants[,] ... there is a wealth of evidence” which shows that they were “disposed to be friendly towards the law-abiding Jews.”

Daily Worker: Communist Party newspaper; far left, strongly anti-fascist, pro-working class and supportive of mass protest and direct action against fascism. It was the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Great Britain and played a major role in mobilising opposition to the BUF.

Daily Herald: Pro-Labour Party, pro-trade union, anti-fascist, left-wing newspaper, jointly owned by the Trades Union Congress and Oldhams Press.

Daily Mirror: A popular mass-market newspaper owned by Lord Rothermere (who also owned the Daily Mail).

Jewish Chronicle: Mainstream British Jewish newspaper; anti-fascist, concerned about antisemitism, but generally opposed street confrontation and favoured legal and political solutions. The paper often reflected the cautious approach of established Jewish leaders such as the Board of Deputies.