

Workstation 2: The 43 Group

1930s BUF	1940s-50s 43 Group Era
Fascists held large marches	Fascists held smaller meetings
Jews often relied on broader anti-fascist campaigns	Jewish ex-servicemen organised their own defence groups
Newspapers openly supported Mosley	Open fascism became socially unacceptable
BUF reached tens of thousands of members	Successor groups remained relatively marginal
Antisemitism largely open	Antisemitism remained but was pushed towards the political fringes

Morris Beckman (43 Group founder)

“fascism had not disappeared and needed to be actively opposed.”

Vidal Sassoon (43 Group member, aged 17)

"I was proud to be involved. It was disgusting that having just fought a war against Nazism, home-grown fascists were allowed to start reorganising. Something had to be done."

Before the war, opposition to fascism often came from broad anti-fascist coalitions. After the war, many Jews decided they needed to defend themselves directly.

The 43 Group:

- infiltrated fascist organisations,
- monitored meetings,
- distributed intelligence,
- disrupted fascist rallies.

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Year	Membership
April 1946	43 founding members, mainly Jewish ex-servicemen who had fought in the war
1946-48	Expanded to several hundred members – not all were Jewish.
Peak	Approximately 2,000 members – the core were Jewish ex-service men and women. Members included boxers, martial artists, clerks, shopkeepers and professionals. They were Communists, Labour supporters, even people with little previous political involvement.
1950	Dissolved after fascist groups had been significantly weakened

Other Opinions

MI5's assessment of post-war anti-fascism:

British fascism caused concern largely because its importance had been "magnified out of all measure by the organised opposition of Jews and communists".

Vidal Sassoon's recollection of a non-Jewish woman who helped him escape fascists:

although she wasn't Jewish, she felt a duty of care towards him because her husband had died fighting the Nazis in the war.

Police officers:

often regarded the 43 Group as a public-order problem rather than as defenders of democracy. The police often tried to protect fascist speakers' right to hold meetings and were frustrated by the 43 Group's tactics of disrupting rallies and provoking confrontations.

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Other Opinions (cont.)

Jews and the general public:

had differences of opinion, despite being overwhelmingly anti-fascist. Most Britons rejected fascism after 1945, but many also disliked street violence and were uncomfortable with the 43 Group's confrontational methods.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews:

opposed the 43 Group's use of violence, which they thought was “counterproductive”.

The Board believed that:

- Fascists should be defeated through law and public opinion.
- Violent confrontations gave fascists publicity.
- Jewish participation in street fighting might increase antisemitism.

The 43 Group's view was that the law and police were not dealing with fascists effectively enough.