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Ploughing the Same Furrow? Continuity and Change on Britain's Extreme-Right Fringe

John E. Richardson

In this chapter, I discuss two British political organizations and their relationships to British fascism. The first of these is the British National Party (BNP) – which is, at the time of writing, the largest extreme right-wing party in Britain. In contrast to certain published academic work (e.g. Mudde 2007, Fella 2008, Mastropaolo 2008), this chapter will argue that the BNP should not be categorized as a ‘populist radical right-wing’ party. Operating at the highest levels of the BNP, a coterie of hardcore (ex-)National Socialists can be identified who, across the decades, have acted like a ‘container group’, ensuring the continuation of their political ideology. The origins of this coterie date from the re-establishment of the British tradition of National Socialism in the late 1950s, since which time it has acted to protect and maintain the flame of British fascist ideology. Accordingly, categorizing the party as ideologically ‘populist’ ‘may serve as an unintended form of democratic legitimization of modern xenophobia and neo-fascism’ (Mammone 2009: 174). The second organization discussed in this chapter is the street-fighting movement the English Defence League (EDL), whose nascent ideology contains populist and radical elements. However, the EDL is not a political party and, as such, it lacks a mandated leadership, a stable ideological position and a widely agreed upon programme of political action. These facts create difficulties for both the classification and policing of the EDL, as I discuss below.

Working from the arguments of previous analysts of British fascist ideology – primarily those of Billig (1978) and Copsey (2007, 2008) – I argue that an understanding of extremist parties requires comparative analysis of texts produced at different times and for different audiences (insider and outsider; potential voter and party initiates) (see, for example, Richardson & Wodak 2009a, 2009b, Richardson 2011). This analysis needs to be contextualized through examining the histories and activities of the party, ‘their history, cultures and heritage, on forms of party socialization and membership, and ideology and internal discourse’ (Mammone 2009: 176). The remainder of this chapter briefly discusses the surface and depths of BNP ideology, the political records of certain party members, the associations between the BNP and other European fascist parties and organizations and the party’s continued anti-Semitism. Following

this, I will briefly discuss the EDL and the ways that the ideology of this fractious movement could develop in the future.

BNP ideology: Surface and depth

As the BNP Leader Nick Griffin has himself noted, the BNP has its ideological roots 'in the sub-Mosleyite whackiness of Arnold Leese's Imperial Fascist League' (Griffin 2003, cited in Copsey 2007: 70). Arnold Leese has been described as the 'high priest' of British Nazism (Thayer 1965) and, until very recently, there were core members of the BNP who had been his contemporaries in the 1950s – John Bean, for example, the last editor of the BNP's magazine *Identity*. In essence, the BNP's political ideology still draws strength from Leese's antisemitic racial fascism and remains committed to the racial purification of the national space by anti-democratic paramilitary means.

This is not to claim that the BNP core ideology is a simple mimetic reproduction of the concerns that dominated the fascist parties of the inter-war period. Nor do I regard the ideological commitments of the Imperial Fascist League (IFL), the British Union of Fascists (BUF) or any other fascist party of that period as a touchstone against which contemporary movements can be measured. As Paxton (2005: 14–15) has argued, such an emphasis on historic definitions provides 'a static picture of something that is better perceived in movement . . . It is like observing . . . birds mounted in a glass case instead of alive in their habitat'. Other political ideologies have mutated and transformed relative to changing social and political circumstances, so it would be odd to believe that fascism has not also.¹ Fascism is, as Weber (1964) put it, a dynamic but vague ideology, with few specific predetermined objectives, and is inherently prone to opportunist shifts. However, this much I believe we can argue – this much *does* remain a constant: when analysing the discourses of fascist parties and movements, 'more than in most others, it is essential to separate the propaganda from the real attitude in order to gain an understanding of its essential character' (Mannheim 1960: 120). The history and core ideology of the BNP are concealed from the wider public through the adoption of a 'dual style' of political communication: 'esoteric appeals' are used to communicate to 'intellectual' insiders and grossly simplified 'exoteric appeals' to address both the mass membership and the electorate (see Taylor 1979: 127). The current leader of the BNP, Nick Griffin, is on record as arguing explicitly for this Janus-faced communications policy. In an article published in the magazine *Patriot* shortly after his first trial for incitement to racial hatred, Griffin outlined to BNP activists his plans for 'modernization' of the party:

¹ Following Billig (1978) I argue that fascism is characterized by a shifting constellation of: (1) strong-to-extreme nationalism; (2) support for a capitalist political economy (given the nationalism, this is usually of an autarkic nature); (3) and opposition to communism (and any mobilization of the working class as a class for itself); (4) these are 'advocated in such a way that fascism will pose a direct threat to democracy and personal freedom' (p. 7). More specifically, fascism is a reactionary, nationalist and largely petty-bourgeois mass movement, which advocates, employs and/or tolerates violence against political opponents to further its goals. Fascism can rise to power as the 'party of counter-revolutionary despair' (Trotsky) during periods of hegemonic crisis and working class defeat.

As long as our own cadres understand the full implications of our struggle, then there is no need for us to do anything to give the public cause for concern . . . we must at all times present them with an image of moderate reasonableness . . . Of course, we must teach the truth to the hardcore, for, like you, I do not intend this movement to lose its way. But when it comes to influencing the public, forget about racial differences, genetics, Zionism, historical revisionism and so on – all ordinary people want to know is what we can do for them that the other parties can't or won't. (*Patriot*, No. 4, 1999)

The importance of this extract – acknowledging that the BNP adopts a 'moderate' public face to hide an ideological core – cannot be over-emphasized. Here, Griffin explicitly makes a distinction between exoteric and esoteric appeal, arguing that it is both possible and desirable to appeal to 'ordinary people' while teaching 'the truth to the hardcore' by more covert means. Further, the article indexes this strategy of exoteric/esoteric appeal in a more fundamental way. Even here, writing for party members on the subject of strategically moderating the BNP's 'careless extremism', Griffin partially conceals 'the truth' to which he and his party remain wedded: in British fascist discourse, 'racial differences' is a code for racial hierarchies; 'genetics' is a code for scientific racism, and theories of genetic racial superiority/inferiority more specifically; 'Zionism' is a code word for Jews, the 'Jewish Question' and the myth of a Jewish world conspiracy in particular (Billig 1978); and 'historical revisionism' refers to Holocaust denial. In their place, Griffin argues that the party needs to concentrate its propaganda on 'idealistic, unobjectionable, motherhood and apple pie concepts' (ibid.): freedom, democracy, security and identity (see Copsey 2007, 2008).

British National Party members

The actions of party leaders, members and supporters reveal an enduring commitment to fascist politics. To take an anecdotal example first, I personally took the photographs below (Figures 7.1a and 7.1b), at the BNP's *Red, White and Blue* Festival, in August 2009. The man, saluting the crowd I was part of, was later arrested by the attending police.

The man pictured below is by no means an aberrant case among BNP members. And, in case readers may feel I am selecting only the most extreme outlying members of the party, fascist tendencies can also be identified in the party's senior members. On the eve of the 2010 UK General Election, *Searchlight* published brief biographies of 19 BNP election candidates showing their commitment to racism and political extremism. Two of the more straightforwardly fascist of these included:

Barry Bennett (Parliamentary candidate for Gosport) who wrote the following on the Stormfront website: 'I believe in National Socialism, WW2 style, it was best, no other power had anything like it. The ideology was fantastic. The culture, nothing like it. If it was here now, I'd defect to Germany.'

Jeffrey Marshall (Eastbury ward, Barking and Dagenham Council), the Central London BNP organizer, who in response to the death of David Cameron's six-year-old

Figure 7.1a Fascist salutes at the BNP 'Red, White and Blue' festival, August 2009.
© John E. Richardson.

son, wrote in an internet politics group: 'We live in a country today which is unhealthily dominated by an excess of sentimentality towards the weak and unproductive. No good will come of it . . . There is actually not a great deal of point in keeping these sort of people alive, after all' (see Williams and Cressy 2010: 12–13, Richardson 2011).

Given that the people above were selected to stand as parliamentary candidates, it should come as no surprise that the leadership of the party also has similar political inclinations. Nick Griffin has been a leading member of fascist parties since the 1970s – initially the National Front (NF), and later the International Third Position (ITP). He has also edited, written and published various fascist publications, including the pamphlet *Who are the MIND-BENDERS?* (Anon 1997), which drew on the antisemitic fraud the *Protocols* and adopted the structure of *Who Rules America?* written by an American neo-Nazi, William Pierce. In more detail, *Who are the MIND-BENDERS?* (ibid.) detailed the 'Jewish conspiracy' to brainwash the British (white) people in their own country. In this pamphlet, Griffin claimed: 'The mass media in Britain today have managed to implant into many people's minds the idea that it is "anti-Semitic" even to acknowledge that members of the Jewish community play a large part in controlling our news.' Jews are also accused of 'providing us with an endless diet of pro-multiracial, pro-homosexual, anti-British trash'.

Griffin has been prosecuted for incitement to racial hatred on two occasions – successfully in 1998 for Holocaust denial material published in his magazine *The Rune*, for which he received a nine-month suspended sentence. When interviewed by the police during this investigation, Griffin argued:

Figure 7.1b Fascist salutes at the BNP ‘Red, White and Blue’ festival, August 2009. © John E. Richardson.

[Griffin] I cannot see how any Jew should be upset, erm, if they find out that such large numbers of their people weren’t horribly killed. It’s good news! I can’t see it’s insulting to anybody. . . .

[Police questioner] By promoting the fact that they believe, as history bears out, that the Holocaust occurred-

[Griffin] History does not bear that out.

[Police questioner] Well, the recognized history, for the majority of people then, the-

[Griffin] The orthodox history accepts it in the same way that people once thought that, erm, that the sun goes round the earth, yes.

He has never distanced himself from these statements. Indeed footage filmed by journalist Dominic Carman (Griffin’s unofficial biographer), in 2004 using a concealed camera, shows he still believes ‘The Jews’ have ‘simply bought the West, in terms of press and so on, for their own political ends’, and ‘If Hitler hadn’t been so daft, they’d have exterminated the German Jews.’² I see little evidence in this of the claimed ‘modernization’ and rejection of fascist ideology in the BNP.

Griffin currently represents North England in the European Parliament, but until 2012 the BNP also had a second MEP, Andrew Brons, who represented Yorkshire and the Humber. Brons’s links to British and European fascist movements go back

² <www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LR8-uXEHAM> [accessed 12 May 2010].

almost 50 years. A briefing document, produced by the campaigning website *Nothing British* on his election as an MEP, describes him as follows: 'Brons is a true ideologue from the National Socialist wing of the British politics. He is a strong believer in the pseudo-science of racial hygiene'.³ In 1964, aged 17, he joined the National Socialist Movement, an organization deliberately founded on 20 April 1962 (Adolf Hitler's birthday) and led by Colin Jordan, the leading figure of post-war British Nazism. Throughout the 1960s, NSM members were responsible for an arson campaign against Jewish property and synagogues. In a letter to Jordan's wife, Françoise Dior – who was herself charged with arson attacks against London synagogues in 1965 – Brons said: 'I feel that our public image may suffer considerable damage as a result of these activities. I am however open to correction on this point.' Towards the end of the 1960s, with Jordan serving another jail term under the Public Order Act for a highly racist pamphlet *The Coloured Invasion*, Brons joined John Tyndall's Greater Britain Movement (GBM). This party was founded on what Tyndall termed 'British National Socialism', though its constitution looked as Nazi influenced as the NSM, arguing 'Only those of British or kindred Aryan blood should be members of the nation' and that 'The removal of the Jews from Britain must be a cardinal aim of the new order'. Brons then joined the NF, was voted onto its National Directorate in 1974, and became party Chairman in 1980, when Tyndall left to form his *New National Front*. His leadership of the NF did not lessen his contribution to street politics however, and in June 1984 Brons was convicted by Leeds magistrates of using insulting words and behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace. The court heard how Brons and another NF member were heard shouting slogans such as 'Death to Jews', 'White Power' and 'National Front'.⁴

In a speech at the 2009 *Red, White and Blue* festival, Griffin acknowledged the ideological debt that the party owed to Brons, identifying him as the person who introduced distributism to party policy. Distributism (also known as distributionism, distributivism) is a political-economic theory developed chiefly by G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc in which the means of production (but *not* wealth) are spread as widely as possible, rather than concentrated in either the hands of the state or with a small number of monopolistic (*international*) corporations. It accepts the capitalist mode of production but seeks to restrict capitalist ownership within national boundaries and share the alleged benefits of the accumulation of surplus value among as many as possible. It is these commitments that made it attractive to fascists – an economic system that posits a spurious equality between the propertied classes and workers and which aims to insulate the Nation from the influence of 'International Finance'. As the organization Church in History Information Centre has argued, in a pamphlet written in *support* of Belloc:

Belloc detested both international finance, which exploited and manipulated the ordinary working people, and Marxist socialism which, by making the state the owner of all productive wealth, would be destructive of freedom of the spirit. It was widely believed at the time that the leaders of both these forces were small

³ <www.nothingbritish.com/research/> [accessed 30 January 2012].

⁴ <www.nothingbritish.com/research/> [accessed 30 January 2012].

groups of Jews. Because of this, a negative feeling developed towards them . . . In this way, Belloc's campaigning against corruption in high places became entwined with opposition to certain rich and potentially influential Jews.

Distributism is not, in and of itself, antisemitic. However, it does provide another opportunity for British fascists to position finance capitalism and communism as tools of a single enemy: the 'International Jew'. Such a 'reconciliation of contradictions' (Billig 1978: 162) also brings a rhetorical benefit for fascist political campaigning:

If both communism and capitalism are seen as common enemies in the same evil conspiracy then working-class support can be solicited with an anti-capitalist rhetoric and middle-class support can be solicited with an anti-communist rhetoric. The language of revolution can be used simultaneously with the language of tradition. (ibid.)

Distributism was also the basis of NF economic policy in the 1980s – as indicated by numerous articles that Brons wrote on the subject when he was a member – as well as other smaller British parties including International Third Position, The Voice of St George and Third Way. Griffin's spontaneous advocacy of Brons in this speech therefore indexes yet another ideological continuity with fascist parties of the recent past and signals, to those who understand the code, the continued commitment of the BNP leadership to antisemitic conspiracy theories.

BNP: Political associates

The BNP has links with parties and organizations, across Europe, which belong directly and clearly within the fascist political tradition. For example, Nick Griffin has long-standing personal associations with Roberto Fiore, the leader of Forza Nuova (FN). As Mammone (2009: 173) points out, 'the label neo-fascist is not usually disputed' by members of FN, 'indeed it would be difficult to deny this because they regularly organize pilgrimages to the tomb of Benito Mussolini in order to commemorate certain fascist anniversaries'. The friendship between Fiore and Griffin stretches back to the start of the 1980s, when Griffin was the leader of Young National Front. Wanted by Italian police in connection with his role in the Bologna station bombing on 1 August 1980 – which killed 86 people and injured 260 others – Fiore was provided with a safe house in London, and eventually made a small fortune from employment and housing agencies for Italian and Spanish migrants he ran with the help of Griffin. Fiore also had a significant political influence on Griffin, leading him to introduce Evola-inspired 'Third Positionist' politics into the NF, and to develop the political soldier philosophy that would lead the NF down a pseudo-revolutionary cul-de-sac for the remainder of the decade. Fiore and Griffin remain close, with Fiore giving the keynote address at the BNP's 2009 *Red, White and Blue* festival. As part of his introduction to Fiore's speech, Griffin described him in glowing terms and acknowledged his influence on the British extreme right:

... this group of young Italians, basically the same age as us, but coming from a place where they had been engaged in a physical and also an intellectual struggle with the far left and with liberalism, which is far more honed than the nationalist movement in Britain had yet come to. But although they were the same age, they brought a huge amount in fact of experience and a new way of looking at things [. . . One of these Italians] who is now here with us, Roberto Fiore, who to my mind was really always the leader of that operation, and a tremendous influence for good on this party and our nationalist cause in Britain . . . a man who has had a great influence on nationalism all over Europe, Roberto Fiore.⁵

Members of the BNP are regularly welcomed at fascist meetings on mainland Europe. Among many activities recorded by Searchlight Magazine, four BNP activists attended the Nazi music and politics festival, Fest der Völker, in East Germany on 12 September 2009. Nina Brown, a BNP councillor in Brinsley (Nottingham) and her husband Dave Brown, also a Brinsley councillor and the BNP candidate for Broxtowe District Council, were photographed in front of 'a banner depicting two steel-helmeted soldiers of the German army and bearing the clapped-out fascist slogan Europe Awake!'.⁶ Nina Brown spoke to the festival crowd, sharing the stage with leading European fascists in attendance, including Sweden's Dan Eriksson, a representative of the violent antisemitic Info14 network. Similarly, on 5 April 2009, the BNP Deputy Leader, Simon Darby, spoke at an international fascist conference in Milan, entitled 'Our Europe: Peoples and Traditions Against Banks and Big Powers'. Originally, the title of the conference was to be 'Our Europe: Peoples and Traditions Against Banks and Usury', but perhaps this reference to usury was thought to index the fascist pedigree of the conference to an unacceptable degree, given its historic importance in fascist discourse as ambivalent coded reference to Jews and to the mythic 'International Conspiracy' in particular.⁷

BNP: Ambivalent and open anti-Semitism

BNP literature is replete with references to vague or unidentified people who are working against the interests of Britons (i.e. white Britons). These people are a crucial link in the BNP's ideological chain – an explanation for why, in the words of the 'racial scientist' Philippe Rushton, whites have adopted ideologies that 'discourage nationalist and religious beliefs' (cited in Mehler 1989: 20). The explanation is 'the Jews'. For British fascists, 'it has long been axiomatic that multiculturalism is a Jewish conspiracy' (Copsey 2007: 74). It is the Jew ('*Der Jude*' in Nazi argumentation), the arch-internationalist architect of both communism and capitalism, who is the real enemy of the nationalist; it is the Jew that is responsible for mass immigration, in a bid to weaken the white race; it is the Jew that has pulled the wool over the eyes of

⁵ <<http://bnptv.org.uk/2009/08/italian-roberto-fiore-of-the-forza-nuova-party/>> [accessed 30 January 2012].

⁶ hopenothate.org.uk/news/article/1356/midlands-bnp-officers-speak-at-german-neo-naz

⁷ <www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2009/04/426708.html> or <www.hopenothate.org.uk/news/article/1145/bnp-deputy-leader-addresses-international-fas> [both accessed 30 January 2012].

white people, through their control of the mass media (see Billig 1978 for an extensive discussion, Nugent & King 1979). Significant portions of the BNP remain wedded to such antisemitic conspiracy theories and to Holocaust denial. For example, just before the 2010 General Election, Alby Walker, the Stoke BNP council group leader and local branch organizer, left the party and announced on a regional BBC programme that 'there's a vein of Holocaust denying within the BNP that I cannot identify myself with. They've still got senior members of the BNP who will be candidates in the general election that have Nazi, Nazi-esque sympathies.'⁸

At points in the history of British fascism, this *Judenhass* has been open and unambiguous. However, given the overwhelming distaste for political anti-Semitism, and its association with Nazism and the Holocaust, references in modern fascist literature to this conspiracy are almost always coded, even in esoteric arguments. There are, instead, frequent ambivalent references to the men in 'International Finance', unnamed-but-financially-powerful-string-pullers, 'big business', money power, the backers of international political or economic institutions (e.g. the EU, the IMF, the UN) and, increasingly, globalists.

A casual intertextual reference is also another principal way in which an adept writer can index the antisemitic conspiracy theory. As Copey points out:

The January 2005 issue of *Identity* featured an article entitled 'The Hidden Hand' that argued that, as the work of the likes of the British conspiracy theorist A. K. Chesterton had shown, the Bilderberg Group was taking all the major decisions affecting the world and that its final goal was one of world dictatorship. (2007: 77)

Fascist initiates would not have missed the significance of an article on global conspiracy, with such a headline, that also referred to the work of A. K. Chesterton. Chesterton was a key figure in the development of British fascism, being a leading member of the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, the leader of the League of Empire Loyalists in the 1950–60s and the first Chairman of the NF from 1967. As late as 1996, the catalogue for the BNP Book Service still sold Chesterton's conspiracy text *The New Unhappy Lords*. This book asks the question 'Are these master manipulators and master-conspirators Jewish?'; and takes over 200 pages to answer:

... almost certainly 'yes'. Whether or not One World is the secret final objective of Zionism, World Jewry is the most powerful single force on earth and it follows that all major policies which have been ruthlessly pursued through the last several decades must have had the stamp of Jewish approval. (Chesterton 1965: 204)

The Hidden Hand was an alternative title for the viciously antisemitic magazine *Jewry über alles*, published in the 1920s by The Britons and still advertised for sale in British publications, such as *Spearhead*, throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Referring to Chesterton's work and invoking *The Hidden Hand* – in this 2005 article in the BNP's

⁸ David Walker (2010) Dissident derails Stoke BNP election campaign, *Searchlight Online*. <www.searchlightmagazine.com/index.php?link=template&story=320> [accessed 3 November 2011].

leading magazine – demonstrates an unbroken link back through the ‘populist’ fascism of the 1970s, British National Socialism in the 1960s as far as the British Union of Fascists and National Socialists in the 1930s. The intertextual reference is a favourite method of the modern-day fascist, in which they hide their devotion to antisemitic conspiracy theories in clear view.

The English Defence League

At the time of writing, the EDL is not, and does not consider itself to be, a political party, ‘but a grass-roots single-issue movement. The EDL is best understood as a right-wing social movement, that deploys mass mobilization, or the threat of mass mobilization, as its prime source of influence’ (Copsey 2010: 11, see also Jackson 2011b). The lack of centralized management makes the politics and discourse of the EDL less controlled, and hence more heterogeneous, than with most political parties. The EDL were formed on, or immediately before, 27 June 2009 at an anti-Muslim demonstration at a mosque in the East End of London. The formation of the EDL occurred, at least initially, outside the influence of traditional fascist, far- and extreme-right parties, such as the NF and the BNP. A variety of small ‘ultra-patriotic’ groups developed to fight the (perceived) greater influence of Islam in the British public sphere, and specifically in response to the hostile reception several small Islamist groups gave to some British soldiers returning from service in Afghanistan (Copsey 2010, Bartlett & Littler 2011). These groups banded together, initially under the name of the English and Welsh Defence League. They were later joined by the members of Casuals United – a football ‘hooligan’ organization, aimed at putting aside the differences between fans of rival football teams in order to fight ‘the enemies of our nation, those who wish to enslave and or murder us.’⁹

The size of the EDL is difficult to measure accurately, due to the nature of the movement itself: there is no official membership nor any formal joining procedure; most of the recorded discourse of the EDL takes place on social forums, such as Facebook, between individuals who voluntarily ‘like’ the movement. However, using such groups as a means of recruiting a sample of respondents, one recent study has estimated the ‘membership’ of the EDL to be between 25,000–35,000 people (Bartlett & Littler 2011). Of these, ‘around half have been involved in demonstrations and/or marches’ (ibid.: 4) while the remainder could perhaps be better categorized as sympathizers. The number of activists is therefore roughly comparable to the BNP membership at the height of the party’s popularity.

The success of the EDL – which within six months was able to organize demonstrations of 1,500 people (Copsey 2010) – took many people by surprise. Indeed the achievements of EDL led rivals from Britain’s fascist fringe to cast doubts on the origins and motivations of the movement’s organizers. Predictably, the leadership of the BNP alleged that the movement was evidence of a ‘Zionist’ conspiracy, based upon

⁹ See Casual United blog. <<http://casualsunitd.wordpress.com/photos/>> [accessed 3 November 2011].

the support that the tabloid newspaper the *Daily Star* gave to them. In a recorded conversation broadcast on a BNP multimedia website, Nick Griffin and Simon Darby discussed the EDL in some depth. Darby opens the subject, introducing the conspiracy:

Darby: It's been set up by a powerful organisation. People with the power to manipulate, who are used to manipulating and have the organisational structure, the facility and the financial clout to promote it.

Griffin: Let's spell it out shall we? . . . Spelling it out in simple terms, you look at the owners of the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Star* and their interests. This is a neo-con operation. This is a Zionist false flag operation, designed to create a real clash of civilisations right here on our streets between Islam and the rest of us.¹⁰

In interviews, the leadership of the EDL has always strenuously denied that it is a far-right or even a racist movement, pointing to their Sikh and Jewish Divisions and their few Black members as evidence.¹¹ However, it is clear that the movement has attracted far-right activists since its very earliest days, and now counts neo-Nazi factions within its ranks. Copsey (2010) details the role that BNP activists such as Chris Renton, Peter Fehr, Laurence Jones and Chris Mitchell have played in the development of the movement, and points out that members of the BNP and the NF, including the leader Tom Holmes, have been present at their demonstrations. The influence of such people, in the run-up to the breakthrough demonstration in Birmingham (8 August 2009), led EDL organizer Paul Ray to claim that neo-Nazis had 'hijacked the movement' (quoted in Copsey 2010: 13). 'Anyone with the slightest bit of knowledge about neo-Nazis', he argued, 'knows the meaning of 8/8 [the date the demonstration was planned] which is why I pulled out of any active participation' (ibid.) – 88 standing for the eighth letter of the alphabet, giving HH or Heil Hitler.

However, for the most part, EDL supporters and EDL ideology accord with the 'new wave of populist, nativist far-right politics sweeping Europe' (Jackson 2011a: 7). The key themes of their still developing ideology – communicated via Facebook, Youtube and blogs of members and affiliated groups – appear to draw most strongly on 'ethno-nationalism based on "cultural racism" . . . [and] anti-political establishment rhetoric' (Rydgren 2005: 416). Their arguments are populist, aimed at demonstrating that the needs and sensitivities of the common (working-class) Englishman are being ignored, and that their grievances are caused by a Muslim folk devil who political élites pander to in order to serve their own interests. The ideology is therefore specific enough that it provides 'followers [with] a clear sense of how to frame and interpret their grievances with the wider world' and yet flexible enough that it allows for 'a wide range of seemingly unrelated social issues to be refracted through the unifying lens

¹⁰ <www.hopenothate.org.uk/blog/article/520/bnp-blame-zionists-for-edl> [accessed 30 January 2012].

¹¹ For example, Tommy Robinson (real name Stephen Yaxley-Lennon) was interviewed on the flagship BBC news programme *Newsnight* on 1 February 2011 and again on 25 July 2011. For footage of this second interview, see <www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RdJ4dpRQeE>. He was interviewed on the ITV morning show *Daybreak* two days later <www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZpdhdUOoJ4> [both links accessed 30 January 2012].

of perceived injustices' (Jackson 2011a: 9). It is recognizably far right due to the way it links steep national decline to a (racialized) scapegoat figure, and populist in the ways this decline is blamed on 'the neglect of the political elite . . . It is a tenor that can connect individual instances of alleged corruption and decay to an overarching narrative of future crisis and decline' (ibid.).

Jackson (2011a) details the ways in which the ideology of the EDL has developed since the formation of the movement, and its relations with fellow travellers of the extreme right. What is key here, at least in my view, is the potential for their populist ethno-nationalism to develop into a more fully fledged conspiracy theory. It is only a small inductive leap from claiming that a political élite panders to immigrant communities, to their own advantage and against the interests of the (white) majority, to asking who these political élites are, and perhaps pointing an accusing finger. Indeed, recently, the leader of the radical splinter group within the EDL, The Infidels – a group mainly based in the north of England – has discovered the infamous antisemitic tract *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Writing on his Facebook page, John 'Snowy' Shaw declared that the book has already begun to make things 'click' in his head, and suggests that 'all true British patriots take the time to read this'.¹²

In keeping with such ideological developments, the actions of EDL activists have recently taken on a more threatening air. For instance, elsewhere on the Facebook walls of members of the EDL, 'we can find references to neo-Nazi rallying cries such as David Lane's 14 Words slogan' (Jackson 2011a: 18). Anders Behring Breivik, the far-right terrorist convicted of murdering 77 people on 22 July 2011, was in contact with the EDL through Facebook groups and may have met leaders of the EDL during a visit to London in March 2010.¹³ The willingness of the EDL to use violence against political enemies is reflected in the data collected by Bartlett and Littler (2011: 23): they show that 37 per cent of their respondents (n = 1,295) 'agree entirely' or 'agree a little' with the statement that in certain circumstances it can be acceptable to use violence to achieve political goals. And when asked what they rated as their most important personal value, bottom of their respondents' lists were tolerance (9%) and respect for other cultures (3%) (ibid.: 24). Indeed, EDL rallies and demonstrations have always been marked by violence, harassment and arrests (Copsey 2010, Jackson 2011b).¹⁴ The violent activities of the EDL and their various splinter groups are likely to continue in the near future, just as their ideological arguments and explanations are likely to continue to develop.

Conclusion

There remains a constituency of the British population which remains attracted to anti-egalitarian politics *in extremis*, whose views fascist political parties accommodate in

¹² <www.hopenothate.org.uk/blog/article/1287/infidel-leader-praises-the-protocols> [accessed 30 January 2012].

¹³ <www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/norway/8661139/Norway-killer-Anders-Behring-Breivik-had-extensive-links-to-English-Defence-League.html> and <www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jul/23/norway-attacks-utoya-gunman> [both accessed 30 January 2012].

¹⁴ <www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2011/10/487677.html?c=on#c274923> and <<http://blog.fredrikwalloe.com/2011/10/edl-supporters-attack-occupy-newcastle.html>> [both accessed 30 January 2012].

order to attract and retain them as activists. However, while they need to communicate to such people, they cannot alienate the more sizable rump of the country who ‘simply’ oppose immigration, or think that there are too many jobs/homes/opportunities going to ‘non-British’ people. This, and the obvious legal restrictions on open hate speech, has meant that extreme-right wing parties have developed ambiguous and coded ways of constructing arguments, of referring to social problems and proposing (final) solutions. Ironically, it seems that many people attracted to parties like the BNP do not understand this rich tradition of double-talk. Periodically, factions break off to form more openly extreme organizations that speak more directly about conspiracies etc., before eventually attenuating their position to gain support, and so setting up another cycle of splits. Currently, we are witnessing such a period within the BNP – which may not exist by the time this chapter is published, or at least will be a party greatly changed by internal feuding and legal investigations for breaches of electoral law. But whatever the future for the BNP, the mixed constituency to which it speaks – from the unrepentant National Socialist to the conservative rural shopkeeper concerned to ‘keep out’ asylum seekers – will still exist, and so will continue to act as a driver for political agitation.

In some ways the EDL appears to be something new in Britain. Their fusion of ultra-patriotism, ‘traditional English values’, cyber-activism and street violence has acted like a lightning rod for a wide assortment of activists, from far- and extreme-right racists to anti-Muslim defenders of ‘liberal values’. The EDL, like other ‘new far-right’ groups across Europe, ‘lay claim to the mantle of the enlightenment, espousing support for fundamental liberal values of free speech, democracy and equality’ (Bartlett & Littler 2011: 7) while simultaneously aiming to deny these same rights to those whose ‘culture’ – acting as a homologue for race – they deem to be threateningly different. A binary is constructed in EDL ideological discourse wherein Western culture is deemed tolerant and progressive and Islam is deemed intolerant and backward (Jackson 2011b). Accordingly, the EDL must protect Western tolerance by not tolerating intolerant Muslims; their stated objectives, to protect liberality and the Rule of Law, act as little more than a pretext for xenophobia, bigotry and violent criminality; and this mismatch between words and deed allows a space wherein supporters are able to associate themselves with either (both?) their tolerant/law-abiding aims and/or their intolerant/law-breaking activities. Though clearly riven with contradictions, this strategy appears to have gained ground, as evidenced by the large numbers of demonstrators and supporters the EDL has attracted in a short period of time. Despite, or perhaps because of, this success, the future of the movement currently looks uncertain, due to a variety of intense rivalries – both political and between opposing football hooligan ‘firms’ – that continue to surface in their ranks.

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