

Is the BNP Nazi? No, it's Worse: It isn't

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WITH THE increased vote for the British National Party in the last local elections, a chorus of “these Nazis must be stopped” has gone up, along with suggestions concerning what organising tactics might be effective against it. Unfortunately, most such tactics are presently handicapped by a misapprehension about the BNP that leads well-intentioned activists into ineffective tactics. This suspicion is bolstered by the failure of the brave and sincere efforts of Stop the BNP (publisher of *Searchlight* magazine), Unite Against Fascism, the Anti-Nazi League and others to stop the party's growth.

The problem? While it is morally satisfying to call the BNP Nazis, and while their ideology is indeed racist, xenophobic and abhorrent, it's starting to become clear that this rather slippery political beast has in fact shed its old skin, and is no longer plausibly describable as a Nazi, or fascist, party at all. Why is this “worse”? Because, although one must rejoice in the abandonment of this diabolical ideology by anyone, it also increases their chances of success.

The likelihood of real, live, goose-stepping Nazis actually winning much support in Britain is far less than that of some better-packaged and locally-palatable variety of racist extremism. Unfortunately, after 40 years (if you count its National Front predecessor) the BNP seems to have finally figured this out. So the Nazi business has been junked. This is logical: racial hatred is their only political bedrock, and the swastika is just one expendable way of expressing it.

Before I discuss the evidence they really have done this, it's important to remind ourselves that “Nazi” isn't just a word to toss around, even at people who richly deserve any insult they get. Nazism is a real, historical, political ideology, like Marxism, with a specific content and specific criteria for who is one. It is National Socialism, the philosophy of the National Socialist German Workers Party. There's some leeway to include people who don't literally fit, but not every racist demagogue is a Nazi, not even remotely. Some,

especially in foreign countries that fought Hitler in World War II, are even anti-Nazi.

Why care about being so precise? *Because attacking the BNP for being Nazis will backfire, if they're not.* It only invites them to prove to the public that they aren't, and, because this is now probably technically true, they can then just sit back, smile, and say to the public: “See. Our opponents told you we were bad because we were Nazis, and we've now proved we're not Nazis. So we must not be bad. Furthermore, our opponents are liars and you can't believe anything else they say about us.”

This is not good. When the public hears “don't vote for them, they're Nazis”, and then, partly out of sheer titillation at the naughtiness of somebody daring to be such an evil thing, goes and looks at the BNP website and starts reading their propaganda, they will discover fairly quickly a group that has gotten rid of the old swastika trappings, and adopted the image of nice British patriots. If they are taken in, they may then conclude they're a legitimate party, merely being attacked by silly and hysterical left-wing cranks who exaggerate things.

I realise some readers will believe the BNP is still Nazi, and maybe they really have taken it deep enough underground that I'm fooled. But I think not, as some signs are just tell-tales. One of them is the reported expulsion of hardcore Nazis from the party, something loudly complained about on openly-Nazi websites, accompanied with howling accusations of betraying their cause directed at BNP chairman Nick Griffin. Another is the BNP's sudden change in attitude towards Jews, after having vilified them since the earliest days of the National Front. Basically, they now seem to be openly proclaiming they don't consider them evil anymore, and have even publicly mocked Nazi and other anti-Semitic ideas about Jewish world conspiracies and the like.

Take a look at this article by their chairman, for example: “If the neo-cons didn't have the baggage-laden anti-Semites, especially in America, as

bogeymen, they'd have to invent them.... The neocons are mainly Jewish, but they are not 'the Jews'. When it comes to Middle Eastern policy, they are a particular faction, an unofficial overseas agitprop department of Israel's ruling Likud party. To oppose their war is not to oppose 'the Jews', but only one group of Jews and their Christian-Zionist and plutocrat allies...." (Nick Griffin, 'By their fruits (or lack of them) shall you know them', BNP website, 21 March 2006.)

One could read the above words in the *Guardian*! Something is definitely going on. Or look at this article by John Bean, one of the longest-lived right-wing cranks in Britain, and a major BNP ideological guru:

"... there is no factual basis for anti-Semitism, i.e. the belief that Jews are intrinsically our enemy. The worst one can truthfully say of the Jews is that they are intrinsically opportunistic. To survive in other people's countries for 2,000 years, they obviously have to be. But this doesn't make them intrinsically bad; only people who will, like anyone else, pursue their self-interest according to the circumstances of the time. We shouldn't surrender to their pursuit of self-interest. We should, naturally, pursue our own, but in a calm and rational way in the same manner as we deal with other foreign societies, without hatred, mythology, or hostile intent." (John Bean, 'Why we must reject Judeo-obsessivism', BNP website, undated.)

Unless this is *completely* invented out of whole cloth, something fundamental has changed. And I suspect it isn't a complete put-on, as at least one (extreme right-wing) Zionist magazine seems to have picked up on it, and seems to believe it, or most of it:

"... today [the BNP] is, by world standards, a fairly conventional right-wing populist ethno-nationalist party, having abandoned the fascistic trappings, tendency to violence, and weird obsessions that once characterized it. The party's transformation is not wholly complete as of this writing. Some of the rank-and-file membership is clearly not as far along as its leadership. But, after four years of reform, the BNP seems to have managed a decisive break with its past.... The BNP's new ideological complexion is generally denied by its opponents, both on the left and on the establishment 'right' ... but it seems to be real. The accusations of 'sell-out' hurled at the present BNP leadership by devotees of the old ways make this clear, if nothing else does." (Robert Locke, 'The British National Party goes straight', *Think-Israel*, September-October 2005.)

Now a change like this doesn't just happen. I think some kind of deal has been done between the BNP and some extreme-right-wing Zionists. It's a pity that a people who suffered so much from fascism should produce fascists of their own, but we have all seen enough of Israel's behaviour in

recent years to know that some Jews are not exempt from this.

It's obvious that the BNP's foaming-at-the-mouth Islamophobia must have something to do with this unexpected rapprochement. Even they are bright enough to appreciate the logic of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend". They may, in fact, be rather jealous of the treatment Israel routinely hands out to its Muslim population on the West Bank. Or perhaps the anti-Semitic mind just needs someone to hate, and they just find Muslims a juicier target these days.

The BNP still says it's not pro-Israel – they claim to be isolationists, who don't want to side with either side – but one has to wonder, if they're resolutely uninterested in the whole thing, and simply want to ignore Jews entirely, why they've gone to the trouble of making sure everyone knows. The giveaway: they've made clear statements that they're against Britain's funding the Palestinian Authority, which is a *de facto* pro-Israel position if anything is, given that we currently *do* fund it, through the EU.

Maybe they've been paid to do this, maybe it's pure ideology, I don't know. But don't be surprised if this apparent new alliance lasts. Israel and Zionists have been happy to do business with any number of extreme-right parties, from the Afrikaner Nationalists in apartheid South Africa to the Falangists in Lebanon to the Kuomintang in Taiwan. Historically, actual fascists (as opposed to Nazis) can go either way on the Jewish Question: some have been raving anti-Semites, others blasé about Jews, or sympathetic to fascistic elements in Zionism. Extremes do meet.

So should we simply substitute the word "fascist" for "Nazi" in anti-BNP campaigns? Unfortunately, I don't think the BNP is really fascist, either. Fascism means espousing a lot of things, like military glory and massive accumulation of state power, that the BNP sniffs at these days. Whether or not it is sincere, it has become so good at playing this tune that it has even managed to con a significant section of *libertarian* opinion in the UK, like Sean Gabb, into supporting it, at least tacitly. So calling it fascist suffers the same liability as calling it Nazi: it's too easy for them to convince people they're not.

In the end, I think our best bet is simply to classify the contemporary BNP as a right-wing populist racist and xenophobic party, of no stable ideological substance beyond that. Don't try to fit it into a box in which it doesn't really belong, and will wriggle out of if accused. The truth about it is bad enough, without having to dress it up in an ideological costume drama from 1936.

"Racist" is good enough for me, adding "xenophobe" when one needs to elaborate. And, of course, there's always "thuggish" and "criminal". This sheep smells bad enough without having to tell people it's really a wolf. ■