

sistently to deny and downplay the Holocaust. They're fools but (alas) not idiots – they know they'll get nowhere if they admit their ideological link to the Nazi regime. But their Holocaust denial gives the game away.

Behind the shiny suits lurks the same hatred,

the same rotten ideology. We must expose them for who they are, and stand together to stop them. Never forget, never again.

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Why the BNP is Still Fascist

Geoffrey Brown

THE GAINS made by the BNP in local elections in recent years – it now has almost fifty councillors, an achievement unprecedented in the history of the far right in Britain – have been assisted by a systematic revamping of the party's image. The public expressions of Nazi sympathies and Holocaust denial for which the BNP had become notorious have been junked and it now presents itself as a respectable, mainstream political party. The question arises – does this amount to a fundamental change in the BNP's political character, or is it a cosmetic exercise designed to fool voters into backing an organisation that has in reality failed to break with its fascist past?

Origins of the BNP

That the British National Party has fascist origins is of course indisputable. The party was founded in 1982 under the leadership of John Tyndall, a longtime Nazi sympathiser whose involvement with the far right dated back to the 1950s. A former chairman of the National Front and editor of the fascist magazine *Spearhead*, Tyndall was on record as stating that "*Mein Kampf* is my bible".

Having resigned from the NF in 1980 after losing a factional struggle against his rival and former close collaborator Martin Webster, Tyndall formed his own group called the New National Front. He established the BNP on the basis of a fusion between the NNF and two smaller fascist groups, the British Movement and the British Democratic Party. Tyndall remained at the head of the BNP until 1999, when he was successfully challenged for the position of chairman by the present incumbent, Nick Griffin. After his death in July 2005 a *Guardian* obituary rightly described Tyndall as "a racist, violent neo-Nazi to the end".

Enter Nick Griffin

For all the carefully cultivated "reasonableness" of his public persona today, Griffin has a similar far-right background to Tyndall. He was a national organiser for the NF in the 1970s, and in the 1980s was heavily influenced by Roberto Fiore, a leader of the Italian fascist organisation the Armed Revolutionary Nuclei (NAR), who fled to Britain to avoid prosecution over the 1980 bombing of Bologna railway station in which 85 people died. Throughout the 1980s Griffin was a leading figure in what remained of the NF, promoting a NAR-inspired "Third Positionist" ideology that claimed to offer an alternative to both capitalism and communism. Griffin and the Third Positionists advocated a "political soldier" strategy which rejected the 1970s NF's objectives of mass membership and electoral success in favour of building an elite corps of professional fascist "revolutionaries".

However, as the NF fragmented in an outbreak of political infighting, the Third Positionists broke away in 1989 to form a separate grouping, and by 1991 Griffin had abandoned organised fascist politics altogether. After a brief period in the political wilderness he joined the BNP in 1995 and became editor of Tyndall's magazine *Spearhead*. Ironically, in view of subsequent developments, Tyndall brought Griffin into the BNP to act as a counterweight to an opposition headed by Tony Lecomber and others who favoured playing down the fascist character of the party in order to establish a wider popular appeal.

Griffin used *Spearhead* to denounce the "spiral of sickly moderation" and scorned the idea of the BNP projecting an image of restraint and respectability. Commenting on the party's earlier success in a council by-election in Millwall in 1993, Griffin

wrote that the voters had not backed “a Post-Modernist Rightist Party, but what they perceived to be a strong, disciplined organisation with the ability to back up its slogan ‘Defend Rights for Whites’ with well-directed boots and fists. When the crunch comes, power is the product of force and will, not of rational debate.”

In the course 1998, however, Griffin executed a dramatic U-turn and placed himself at the head of the Lecomber faction, arguing that the Tyndall-led BNP’s overt identification with fascism was a political liability. (As he and Lecomber later informed Tyndall: “The many photographs of you in neo-Nazi uniform have always been a public relations handicap for the party.”) When Griffin stood against Tyndall for the party leadership in 1999 he did so on a programme of “modernising” the organisation in order to make it more electable.

Griffin was inspired by the example of Jean-Marie le Pen’s Front National, which has won significant electoral support in France by distancing itself from its fascist origins and taking on the character of a more mainstream right-wing party. (Griffin modelled the BNP’s “Red, White and Blue” festival on the FN’s “Fête Bleu, Blanc, Rouge” and the BNP’s magazine *Identity* borrowed its title from the FN’s *Identité*.) Having ousted Tyndall, Griffin set out to persuade the BNP membership to abandon their skinhead haircuts and swastika badges, wear smart clothes and in general project a more acceptable image, a tactic encapsulated in the slogan “suits not boots”.

Griffin has a history of making sharp ideological turns in which he has embraced political views that he earlier repudiated and has condemned positions that he once enthusiastically supported. As some of his former comrades observed after he took over the leadership of the BNP: “He has been a conservative, a revolutionary nationalist, a radical National Socialist, a Third Positionist, a friend of the ‘boot boys’ and the skinhead scene, a man committed to respectable politics and electioneering, a ‘moderniser’. Which is he in reality?”

Griffin himself would claim that over the years he has undergone a genuine ideological evolution in which he learned from his mistakes and adapted his views to a changing political reality. A more convincing explanation is that he is an unprincipled opportunist who is prepared to adopt or reject any variant of far-right ideology in order to further his own personal ambitions.

Griffin explains ‘modernisation’

At the same time as he proposed to moderate the BNP’s image, Griffin made it clear that the party’s fundamental politics had not changed, and that its core membership should remain committed to fascism. In a 1999 article for Lecomber’s magazine *Patriot*, published some months before he deposed Tyndall as chairman, Griffin outlined to BNP

activists his plans for the “modernisation” of the party. He wrote:

“Why do nationalists [i.e. fascists], and nationalists alone, insist on spelling out in words of one syllable where they come from and where they want to go? Is it really honesty, or is it just plain stupidity? This is a life and death struggle for white survival, not a fancy dress party. A little less banner waving and a little more guile wouldn’t go amiss....

“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 [i.e. Holocaust denial] 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.”

Griffin emphasised that this did not mean the BNP had abandoned its long-term political objectives. He argued that it was all a matter of tactics and expediency:

“Politics is always the art of the possible, so we must judge every policy by one simple criterion: Is it realistically possible that a decisive proportion of the British people will support it? If not, then to scale down our *short-term* ambitions to a point at which the answer becomes ‘yes’ is not a sell-out, *but the only possible step closer to our eventual goal.*”

Fascist sympathies

Out of the public eye, the BNP’s “cadres” make no secret of their fascist sympathies. In a 2002 Channel 4 documentary entitled *Young, Nazi, and Proud* Mark Collett, the then head of the BNP’s youth organisation and a protégé of Griffin, was secretly filmed declaring that “Hitler will live on forever”. Collett endorsed Griffin’s view that an openly Nazi movement was inappropriate to Britain in the early 21st century. But he insisted:

“National Socialism was the best solution for German people in the 1930s.... When people say ‘Do you take any inspiration from that?’, I mean, I honestly can’t understand how a man who’s seen the inner city hell of Britain today can’t look back on that era with a certain nostalgia and think, yeah, those people marching through the streets and all those happy people out in the streets, you know, saluting and everything, was a bad thing ... would you prefer your kid growing up in Oldham and Burnley or 1930s Germany?”

In October 2004, when the BNP contested a council by-election in Dagenham, an *Evening Standard* reporter infiltrated their campaign. He quoted Tony Lecomber, who as we have noted was

one of the earliest proponents of the current “modernising” project, expressing similar pro-Nazi sentiments to Collett’s. Lecomber asked: “Do you remember *Cabaret* with Liza Minnelli, the part where, one by one, the Hitler Youth, our fellas, stand up and start saluting and singing? That is right stirring that is, gets the blood up every time.”

On the eve of the 2005 general election the *Yorkshire Evening Post* reported details of a video made at a BNP social event “in which its members and supporters sing neo-Nazi songs, praise the leadership of Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich, and give Sieg Heil salutes accompanied by shouts of ‘Auschwitz!’.” One of the songs sung in the video is “a re-write of the Kenny Rogers 1969 chart hit ‘Ruby, don’t take your love to town’, except that the words have been changed to ‘Nigger, get the **** out of my town’.”

A recent study published by the University of Essex, *The BNP: The Roots of its Appeal*, has commented that such reports “reveal a British National Party that is far from throwing off the violence, racism and fascist sympathies that Griffin seeks to disown”.

BNP and anti-semitism

As a convinced Nazi, Griffin was until his latest political turn an unabashed anti-semitite. In 1997 he co-authored a pamphlet entitled *Who are the Mindbenders?* which asserted that the British people had been brainwashed by Jewish-controlled media. It was a typical paranoid fascist fantasy about a world dominated by cabals of scheming Jews.

In May 1998 Griffin was found guilty of inciting racial hatred and received a two-year suspended jail sentence. The charge arose from his writings in the BNP publication, *The Rune*, in which he referred to the Holocaust as the “Holo-hoax”. Attacking far-right “historian” David Irving for admitting in an interview that up to four million Jews were killed by the Nazis, Griffin wrote: “True revisionists will not be fooled by this new twist to the sorry tale of the Hoax of the Twentieth Century.” The prosecution was the result a complaint to the police by the Liberal Democrat MP Alex Carlile, who was attacked by Griffin as “this bloody Jew ... whose only claim is that his grandparents died in the Holocaust”.

In his defence Griffin reasserted his stand on Holocaust denial in unequivocal terms: “I am well aware that the orthodox opinion is that 6 million Jews were gassed and cremated or turned into lampshades. Orthodox opinion also once held that the earth is flat.... I have reached the conclusion that the ‘extermination’ tale is a mixture of Allied wartime propaganda, extremely profitable lie, and latter [day] witch-hysteria.”

However, one of the notable features of the BNP’s makeover under Griffin’s leadership has been his efforts to avoid public displays of anti-semitism. Bizarrely, the party even has a councillor

of Jewish origin – Patricia Richardson (*née* Feldman) who won a seat in Epping Forest in 2004. Richardson justifies her membership of the BNP on the grounds that the “present party is different to the old party”, which is of course precisely the message that Griffin wants to convey to the electorate, though the issue has provoked angry criticism from within the BNP’s ranks.

Last year Griffin told an interviewer that the BNP now rejects “old fantasies about Learned Elders of Zion controlling the world, and the rabid anti-semitism that they reflect and incite”. He explained:

“Look – we have very serious enemies in this country, both at home and abroad. If you’re going to go with that old nonsense of Jews under every bed and responsible for all the ills of the world, then you’re going to have a crazy strategic vision of who you’re fighting and what to do about it. The idea that ‘the Jew is the enemy’ is simply over for us now, and not a moment too soon, because now we can get on with the real struggles.”

Who are these “real struggles” to be fought against, then? Griffin told the same interviewer:

“We are deeply concerned about the mainly – though not exclusively – French elite project to morph the EU, Turkey and the Maghreb into ‘Eurabia’. Bat Ye’or is 100% right about this. If this now far-advanced scheme comes to fruition then it would in turn lead to the Islamification of the whole European continent. A generation ago the revival of the historic Islamic threat to Europe would have been unthinkable; now it is clearly destined to be the great issue and decision of our time. For us, the closely linked threats of mass Third World immigration and Islamification outweigh all other considerations.”

More recently, Griffin has repeated this point in an article on the BNP website, condemning “people whose one-track concern about ‘the Jews’ is blinding them to the clear and present danger of resurgent Islam”. As usual, Griffin argued this on purely pragmatic grounds. He stressed: “We should be positioning ourselves to take advantage for our own political ends of the growing wave of public hostility to Islam currently being whipped up by the mass media.” In short, joining in the incitement of Islamophobia would produce better results than promoting anti-semitism.

Thus the May 2006 local election campaign was fought by the BNP as a “referendum on Islam”. Their election leaflet stated:

“Terrorist atrocities in London, militant marches on our streets and ‘preachers’ calling for the deaths of normal British people simply because they don’t follow Islam. This is not some nightmare vision – but the reality of Islamic extremism in Britain today, yet our government do nothing but pander to these people. The BNP say enough is enough! We are the only people speaking out against the dangers of the Islamification of Britain.

If you want to make Blair and Co hear your voice, vote BNP, and use this election as a referendum on Islam.”

However, this shift in political tactics does not mean the BNP membership have abandoned their anti-semitic views. In the documentary *Young, Nazi, and Proud* Mark Collett, unaware that he was being recorded, opined: “I’d never say this on camera, the Jews have been thrown out of every country, including England. There’s not a single European country the Jews have not been thrown out of... When it happens that many times it’s not just persecution. There’s no smoke without fire.”

In 2003 Steve Batkin, who has stood as the BNP’s candidate for mayor of Stoke, caused Griffin severe embarrassment during the local elections by asserting that Jews had made money out of the Holocaust and had lied about the death toll. Griffin publicly reprimanded Batkin, who was instructed not to confuse “personal hobbyhorses with the party line” or else the BNP’s backing for his candidacy would be withdrawn. A chastened Batkin was forced to inform the press: “I stated my personal view on this occasion and not the view of the Party. It was a mistake.”

The mask slipped again in June 2006 when Liam Birch, the BNP’s candidate in a Plymouth council by-election, was exposed as having posted racist comments on his weblog in which he referred to the “alleged” gassing of Jews by the Nazis and asserted that the chimney of a concentration camp crematorium was “a Soviet dummy”. Birch also wrote: “The Jews declared war on the Nazis, not the other way round.”

It is quite clear that the public downplaying of anti-semitism by the BNP under Griffin’s leadership is just another tactical manoeuvre that does not affect the party’s basic ideology. In any case, a shift in emphasis from anti-Jewish to anti-Muslim racism is hardly evidence of a renunciation of fascism. In October 2005 a contributor to *Combat 18’s Blood and Honour* discussion forum argued, along similar lines to Griffin, though in more forthright terms, that the traditional fascist concentration on Jewish conspiracy theories is now outmoded:

“... the world is facing a bigger threat. Right now our whole way of life is under a threat of the magnitude that no Jew has ever presented us: Sharia Law. Little by little, piece by piece Blair is facilitating the Muslim take over of our society. Burger King remove icecreams because a squiggle on the packaging looks like ‘Allah’. A council removes pictures of pigs during Ramadan. They are pushing and pushing – seeing what they can get away with. If they are refused it’s ‘Islamophobia’. How long before all pork is banned because of ‘Islamophobia’. How long before we are told what to wear, what to drink, what to say?

“At the moment our society is the best in the

world (even if it is run by some secret group of Jews!!). Compare our way of life to the real enemy: People who’ll flog your feet for listening to music or being clean shaven. People who’ll behead you for drinking a lager... Groups like Hisb ut Tarir [sic] want an Islamic world, with white people as subservients – paying tax to their caliph king. Despite the noise made by Blair, they are still all around us and still getting stronger.

“Obsession with ZOG [Zionist Occupation Government, a popular white supremacist myth] is a distraction. Fuck it – forget about the Jews. Focus on the real enemy. Defending the Jews isn’t something I make a habit of, but at least they are more or less like us... The Jews don’t eat pork, but they don’t shove their religion down our throats, but there are people out there who will – if we lose sight of who the real enemies are.”

Conclusion

In summary, I would endorse the assessment of the BNP made by Nigel Copsey, in his book *Contemporary British Fascism: The British National Party and the Quest for Legitimacy* (2004), where he writes that “even if the image and tactics have changed under Griffin there has been little modification of the party’s core ideology”.

The fact that the Griffin-led BNP has publicly dispensed with the Nazi trappings of the past does not mean that it has evolved into some sort of post-fascist right-wing populist party, as has arguably been the case with Le Pen’s Front National. This is not to say that such an evolution is theoretically impossible, but the BNP’s organisational and ideological roots in the British Nazi movement are so deep that any such development must be seen as a very long-term prospect.

If we are to argue over definitions, I would concede that the BNP might more accurately be termed “neo-fascist”, in the sense that it draws its inspiration from fascist movements of the past while adapting its ideology and forms of organisation to the political situation in Britain today. But this is no invention of Nick Griffin, even if he has taken the process further than others. Back in 1992, under Tyndall’s leadership, the BNP’s election manifesto stated: “Fascism was Italian; Nazism was German. We are British. We will do things in our own way...”

A discussion of the political strategy necessary to defeat the BNP is outside the scope of this article. But the exposure of the fascist character of the party is an essential part of the struggle against it. The BNP may have attracted wider electoral support over the past few years by prettifying its image, but its main cadre remains a bunch of unreconstructed Hitler admirers and Holocaust deniers. Those who accept Griffin’s fraudulent claim that he has effected a fundamental transformation of the party’s character will only play into the BNP’s hands. ■