

A Defining Decade? Swastikas, Eichmann, and Arson in 1960s Britain

Nigel Copsey

It is easy to write off the scrawling of swastikas on synagogues as the operation of a lunatic fringe. But where does lunacy end and a dangerous minority faction begin? (*Sunday Times*, 3 January 1960).

Introduction

Late on Christmas Eve, 1959, a memorial stone to victims of National Socialism in Cologne was defaced. Black paint was smeared over the second sentence of the inscription “Here lie seven victims of the Gestapo. This memorial recalls Germany’s most shameful period 1933-1945”. Shortly after, in the early hours of Christmas Day, red and white paint was smeared on the new synagogue in Cologne’s Roonstrasse. “Out with the Jews” and “Germans say: out with the Jews!” were daubed on an outside wall; an entrance to the synagogue was defaced with swastikas; a swastika was also smeared on an inside porch. What followed and mindful that this was an age well before the global hyper-connectivity of the internet, was truly extraordinary.

During the next six weeks a “rash” of anti-Semitic incidents afflicted not only the Federal Republic of Germany but also many other West European countries too, and even stretched beyond European shores, to North America, South America, South Africa, and Australia (Hong Kong was not immune). Yet this global “swastika epidemic”,

“rash”, or “plague” as it was variously dubbed – the Institute of Jewish Affairs estimated nearly 1,000 incidents, in 243 cities and towns, across 34 countries¹ - has now almost totally disappeared from historical and popular memory. Particularly so when it comes to Britain. It might come as a surprise therefore that the British press reported more than 40 anti-Semitic incidents between 31 December 1959 and 9 January 1960.² Perhaps more surprising still, the Board of Deputies of British Jews estimated that during six weeks of the “epidemic” no fewer than 160 separate incidents occurred across some 60 different localities in this country.³ Such was its extent, one far-right publication pronounced Britain the ‘Runner up to Western Germany in the swastika painting cup’.⁴

When we come to reflect on domestic anti-Semitism in post-war Britain, the conventional wisdom is that ‘our’ anti-Semitism was highly marginal, especially during the 1960s. Britain’s Jews were, according to Robert S. Wistrich, enjoying ‘a new affluence and acceptance by the late 1950s’.⁵ A number of factors account for why domestic anti-Semitism was such a marginal issue. These included, as Colin Holmes has previously noted,

the so-called “recoil effect” of the Holocaust, the favourable image of Jews which derived from the building and defence of Israel, the presence of easier targets,

¹ Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain, *Information*, Vol. XV, No.3. March 1960, p. 2.

² American Jewish Congress, ‘Chart of Recent World-Wide Anti-Semitic Defacements’, 14 January 1960 (NY: AJC Commission on International Affairs).

³ Board of Deputies of British Jews, Annual Report 1960 (London: Woburn House, 1961) p. 29.

⁴ *Combat*, newspaper of the British National Party, No. 6, May-June 1960.

⁵ Robert S. Wistrich, *Anti-Semitism in Europe since the Holocaust*, Working Papers on Contemporary Anti-Semitism (NY: American Jewish Committee, 1993) p. 6.

such as Blacks and newcomers from the Indian sub-continent, the relative affluence of postwar Britain and the alignment of interests between successive British governments and Anglo-Jewry.⁶

Notwithstanding an obvious need to qualify Britain's 'unsurpassed tradition of tolerance'⁷ – 1960 was ushered in on a 'new wave' of anti-Semitism after all - the point of this chapter is not to inflate degrees of domestic anti-Semitism. For those seeking a more critical approach to domestic anti-Semitism and to the myths of British 'tolerance' and 'exceptionalism', historians such as Tony Kushner, David Cesarani, Bryan Cheyette, and Bill Williams are essential points of reference.⁸ Rather, my aim is to shed some new light on those we dismiss all too curtly as the "lunatic fringe".

Let us first heed George Thayer's observation, made in his study of the British political fringe published in 1965,

Perhaps the first point that should be noted is that the British political fringe, so often described as the "lunatic fringe", is by no means inhabited by madmen [...]
It would also be a distortion of the truth to conclude, as the term "lunatic fringe"

⁶ Colin Homes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration & British Society, 1871-1971* (London: Macmillan, 1988) p. 245.

⁷ As a *Times* editorial, 5 January 1960, described it.

⁸ See for example, Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Tony Kushner, *The Persistence of Prejudice: Antisemitism in British Society During the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of 'the Jew' in English Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); David Cesarani (ed.) *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1990); Bill Williams, *Jews and other Foreigners: Manchester and the Rescue of the Victims of European Fascism, 1933-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

implies, that these people are, on the whole, less intelligent and less capable than the more “normal” political moderates.⁹

Or, as a *Sunday Times* (3/1/60) editorial put it,

We should also remember that the lunatics perceive themselves, not as lunatics, but as the only sane people around. Many are zealous evangelists who seriously seek to convert enough of their fellow citizens to make their views effective. And some of them could.

This chapter will focus on the *outlier* rather than the wider public (though how a fringe behaves can also tell us much about the wider society in which it operates). And my contention here is that in the (inglorious) history of extreme-right anti-Semitic *organisation* in this country, the 1960s need to be reprised as a defining decade, as a decade that *mattered*.

The “swastika epidemic”

In the wake of media reports on events in Cologne (28 and 29 December 1959), and up to 28 January 1960, the West German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution recorded no fewer than 470 anti-Semitic incidents across the Federal Republic (including West Berlin). The peak of recorded incidents occurred on 7 January

⁹ George Thayer, *The British Political Fringe* (London: Anthony Blond, 1965) p. 238.

1960, with 58 incidents reported on that day alone. Incidents ranged from acts directed against particular objects (cemeteries, monuments, restitution agencies, churches); acts directed against individual Jews, or the property of Jews; indiscriminate smearing (buildings, phone booths, bridges, railway carriages); through to public statements of an anti-Semitic nature, and to the distribution of pro-Nazi literature. Around one-third of incidents were suspected to have been carried out by children (including drawing swastikas 'innocuously' in the snow). Most offenders were adolescents aged between 16 and 20 years, with a significant proportion also coming from the 20-30 age range. Arnold Strunk and Paul Schönen, the two offenders arrested and charged in relation to the original incidents in Cologne were both in their mid-twenties.¹⁰

On the very same day as their offences took place, an anonymous telephone call, together with information given by Ernst Custodis, the newly appointed Cologne District leader of the far-right *Deutsche Reichspartei* (DRP),¹¹ meant that Strunk and Schönen, both DRP members since mid-1958, were arrested swiftly. The two DRP comrades had informed Custodis of their plan on 19 December 1959, and had sought his participation. With their affiliations to the far right becoming widely known, so it raised the terrifying spectre of an evil Nazism reborn. In a feature on the "Swastika Menace" for Pathé News (14.1.60), screened in 400 cinemas across Britain, and

¹⁰ See 'The Anti-Semitic and Nazi Incidents', White Paper of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, Bonn, 1960.

¹¹ Originally founded in 1950, the DRP struggled to make any electoral impact. It typically polled around 1 per cent of the vote, although it did manage to capture over 5 per cent in regional elections in the Rhineland-Palatinate in 1959.

exported to no fewer than 87 different countries,¹² viewers were told in shocking terms that:

From Cologne, third largest city of Western Germany, came news that shocked the Free World. Nazism, foulest creed of the 20th Century, had shown its blood-stained hands again. The swastika, symbol of Hitlerism, had been daubed on a synagogue. It made headline news in the German Press – every Press. The Jew-baiters were on the prowl.

This in a country where a failure to weed out former Nazis from positions of authority in politics, judiciary, education, and industry had already drawn critical comment.¹³

For five days, from 25 December to 30 December 1959, anti-Semitic incidents remained contained to the Federal Republic. From the evening of 30 December 1959, the ‘contagion’ then spread to Britain, France, Austria, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Italy, Greece, South Africa, and Australia. For five consecutive nights, anti-Semitic slogans were painted on various buildings in Melbourne. Incidents were first reported in the United States from 2 January 1960 (there were an estimated 637 incidents in 236 cities in the continental United States);¹⁴ in Latin America from 6 January, and in Canada from 8 January. Communist East Germany, which defined itself as *the* “anti-fascist state”, fell

¹² See Jewish Telegraphic Agency, *Daily News Bulletin*, 14 January 1960.

¹³ The Board of Deputies of British Jews had passed a resolution in February 1959 calling on the Federal Republic to remove from positions of influence those who taken an active part in the public life of the Nazi regime.

¹⁴ See Howard J. Ehrlich, ‘The Swastika Epidemic of 1959-1960: Anti-Semitism and Community Characteristics’, *Social Problems*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1962, pp. 264-72.

victim too. On 6 January a shop window in East Berlin was defaced with a swastika and the slogan “Juden Raus”.¹⁵

In Britain, the first incident occurred over the night of 30 December 1959. Self-evidently mimicking the scrawling at the Cologne synagogue, two swastikas with the words “JUDEN RAUS” were smeared on the doors of the Kensington Park Road synagogue in London’s Notting Hill. An anonymous caller telephoned the Press Association claiming responsibility; the story was subsequently circulated to the press. Significantly, as the Jewish Board of Deputies’ Defence Committee chronicled it, the press took it up ‘with a vigour which in the opinion of many was considerably overdone’.¹⁶ Within a few days, reports of more swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans came from across London and its suburbs. The steps of the offices of the *Jewish Chronicle* were defaced and a ground floor window was broken; a swastika and the words “Juden Raus” were scrawled on the offices of the Board of Deputies, where a ground floor window was also smashed; the main entrance door and walls to the offices of the World Jewish Congress were smeared in red swastikas. Synagogues at Willesden, Kingston and Upton Park were defaced; swastikas were painted on the inside porch of Wildenstein Art Gallery; the gates at the Bushey Jewish cemetery were also defaced. As in Germany, non-Jewish buildings – an Anglican church in Battersea and a Catholic church in Dartford - were daubed with swastikas too.

¹⁵ ‘Chart of Recent World-Wide Defacements’, p.4.

¹⁶ ‘A Survey of the Situation’, paper circulated to the meeting of Jewish Defence Committee, 6 January 1960, Board of Deputies: Defence Committee Papers, Wiener Library (WL).

An indication of possible far right culpability came when the Press Association received an anonymous telephone call on 2 January 1960 claiming responsibility for the defacements of the offices of the *Jewish Chronicle* and the Board of Deputies. The caller claimed to represent the “British Nazi Movement” and warned that:

We have issued an ultimatum to the Jewish Board of Deputies warning them that unless their pressure on the German authorities to persecute German nationalists ceases forthwith we shall commence attacks on Jewish property throughout Britain. We have sent this ultimatum tonight.¹⁷

The *Jewish Chronicle* also received a call from “Mr Sanderson” (whom apparently had a ‘military, well-spoken voice’) claiming to be spokesperson for the “British Nazi Movement”. “Sanderson” warned the *Jewish Chronicle* that the movement had been collecting names of prominent Jews who would be held hostage in order to trade for the release of prisoners that were being held for the anti-Jewish incidents in Germany. “Sanderson” named three prominent Jews: Sydney Silverman (Labour MP for Nelson and Colne), Ian Mikardo (former Labour MP for Reading) and Dr Barnett Stross (Labour MP for Stoke-in-Trent).¹⁸ Threatening telephone calls were made not only to Mikardo, Stross and Silverman but also to the Chief Rabbi, Dr Israel Brodie; to Isodore Epstein, the principal of the Jews’ College in London, and to Barnett Janner, Labour MP for Leicester North-West and president of the Board of Deputies. Warnings were issued to

¹⁷ *The Times*, 4 January 1960.

¹⁸ See *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 January 1960.

them to desist immediately from criticising the activities of the swastika-daubers in Germany. The Federal Republic's embassy in London received a telegram signed by the "British Nazi Movement" warning that 'if nationalists persecuted, property of German Adenauer supporters here will be attacked'.¹⁹ Threatening letters were sent to Coventry East Labour MP, Richard Crossman (who was "an innocent lackey of the Jews"), and to Eton and Slough Labour MP, Fenner Brockway (a long-time proponent of legislation against racial discrimination).²⁰

A telephone threat from the "British Nazi Movement" was also made to the Anglo-Jewish historian Dr Cecil Roth who in his *History of the Jews in England*, published in 1941, had applauded English tolerance, and had considered anti-Semitism 'un-English'. The caller threatened to set Roth's Oxford home on fire if he did not withdraw his books from sale.²¹ In a further 'cultural' turn, a swastika would be found smeared on the Royal Festival Hall in London with the message "Less Jewish Music". Ominously, over the course of the following few days, reports came of swastika-daubing incidents from Leeds, Newcastle, Bolton (where the slogan "Juden Raus" was wrongly spelled "Jugen"), Dartford, Salford, Glasgow, Worcester, Belfast, Axminster, Bristol, Cardiff, Kingston, Manchester and York. By the weekend of 9-10 January, more swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans appeared in London, and also in Southend, Carlisle, Birmingham,

¹⁹ See *Wiener Library Bulletin*, Vol XIV, No. 1, 1960, p. 4.

²⁰ *The Times* 12 January 1960. Confusingly, these two letters purportedly came from "The People's Liberation Army". Brockway had been trying since the mid-1950s to get a bill through that would make racial discrimination in public places illegal and incitement to racial hatred illegal. See article by Brockway in *Searchlight*, No. 1, spring 1965, p. 5.

²¹ *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 January 1960.

St Anne's-on-Sea Lancashire, and at a Jewish cemetery in Brighton. A swastika flag was spotted flying from a 450ft. television mast in Bolton.²²

Responding to the incidents in Germany and Britain, trenchant condemnation followed in both the national press (e.g. *Times*; *Sunday Times*; *Sunday Express*; *Daily Telegraph*; *Guardian*; *Daily Mail*; *Daily Herald*) and provincial press (e.g. *Yorkshire Post*; *Liverpool Echo*; *Birmingham Post*; *Western Mail*; *Manchester Evening News*; *Bristol Evening Post*).²³ Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties all expressed their outright condemnation.²⁴ Tory Home Secretary, R. A. (Rab) Butler responded that he shared the concern of Britain's Jewish community but he was convinced that it was largely the work of irresponsible juvenile delinquents, and lacked any 'deeper' significance. The Board of Deputies shared this view, and whilst measures were taken to protect communal property by the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen (AJEX), there was no need for a combative response. A newly formed Jewish anti-fascist "60 Group" (precursor to the 62 Group)²⁵ agreed to stand down, with individual members encouraged to join defence activities organised by AJEX.²⁶ On 17 January there was a silent protest march from Marble Arch in central London to the Federal Republic's Embassy organised by the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen. In a show of solidarity an estimated 35,000 people (one-third non-Jews) participated. By the Friday of that week, the signs were encouraging: AJEX had withdrawn nightly patrols of United Synagogues in London.

²² See *The Times*, 11 January 1960.

²³ See *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 January 1960.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ On the 62 Group, see Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017) pp. 98-104.

²⁶ WL: Jewish Defence Committee minutes, 9 February 1960.

Nonetheless other synagogues in both London and the provinces continued to be patrolled.²⁷ It was mid-February before this swastika spree finally stopped.

A far-right, or another conspiracy?

If in the Federal Republic, a link to the far right was evident (but even here the waters became muddied, as we shall see), in Britain it did not seem so clear-cut. Threats were received from the “British Nazi Movement” but such a party/movement did not exist. There was, in fact, no evidence of any organised “Nazi” party directing the anti-Semitic night-daubers, nor was there any evidence of any kind of international neo-Nazi conspiracy either. There were rumours of such a conspiracy emanating from sources in Switzerland that alleged that it was part of a concerted campaign by former SS officers with headquarters in Malmö in Sweden, but there was little substance to them.²⁸ In fact of those arrested and convicted in Britain (numbering less than ten), most were youths aged between 18 and 21, engaging in ‘non-political’ acts of juvenile delinquency with no ostensible connections to any anti-Semitic organisations.²⁹ One perpetrator claimed that he had never heard of the concentration camps and gas chambers, and was said to have gone ‘white’ when shown pictures from Lord Russell’s 1954 book, *The Scourge of the Swastika*.³⁰

Most history teaching in Britain’s schools stopped in 1914, if not before, and a lack of knowledge about the Holocaust was commonplace, especially amongst young

²⁷ *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 January 1960.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ See Board of Deputies of British Jews, Annual Report 1960 (London: Woburn House, 1961) p. 29.

³⁰ See *The Times*, 19 January 1960.

people. One headmaster wrote to the *Guardian* (16/1/60) expressing his shock that the current editions of encyclopaedias made ‘no mention of Belsen or Buchenwald’ (note the lack of reference to Auschwitz here, since the British public’s encounter with the ‘Holocaust’ was still defined by newsreel images of the liberation of Belsen). As Andy Pearce’s study of Holocaust consciousness has suggested, for most Britons in 1960, the Holocaust was, if not meaningless, not particularly meaningful either.³¹ This was still a time when the genocide of European Jewry was lost in the broader cultural narrative of Second World War heroism, and moral superiority over the “evil Nazis” (more often than not simply conflated with all “Germans”, or the “Hun”). Tellingly, in the midst of the “swastika epidemic” there were reports of British businesses engaging in an anti-German boycott. It was rumoured that Germans were being dismissed and that firms were refusing to sell German goods. Although unfounded, such reports of British “anti-Germanism” were taken seriously in Bonn.³² Yet it would seem that for many young people, a swastika-daubing was neither anti-Semitic nor anti-German, but merely an act of youthful rebellion, a prank. There was even one incident of a group of five schoolchildren having painted a swastika on a school wall with the words “Ned Raus” (“Ned” was the school nickname for the headmaster).³³ Even so, as the *Guardian* (14.1.60) pointed out in a perceptive editorial, ‘Not all the swastika smears can be explained in this way [...] doctors too, have to distinguish between chickenpox and

³¹ See Andy Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014) p. 22

³² See *The Guardian* 15 January 1960.

³³ See *The Times* 23 January 1960.

smallpox: their efforts would be less appreciated if they got too frequently mixed up between the two’.

It was surely no coincidence that the original synagogue incident in Notting Hill was located in an area of ongoing fascist activity. The most openly anti-Semitic organisation in Britain in 1960 was the British National Party (BNP, no relation to today’s party). This had been formed in February 1960 from a merger of the National Labour Party (NLP) and the White Defence League (WDL). Both were splinter groups from A.K. Chesterton’s League of Empire Loyalists (LEL). The NLP, led by John Bean, was grouped around several former members of the South and East London LEL; the WDL led by Coventry schoolteacher and rabid anti-Semite, Colin Jordan, had a central office located at “Arnold Leese House”,³⁴ Princedale Road, in Notting Hill, a short walk away from the synagogue on Kensington Park Road. A card bearing a six-pointed star of David, which was of ‘so loathsome a description – it would have done credit to the imagination of Goebbels or Rosenberg’, was displayed in its window.³⁵

Unsurprisingly, Jordan was visited by Special Branch officials. Jordan also had form: in 1957 he had been involved in a pro-Nazi daubing incident in Brighton.³⁶ When quizzed by Special Branch, Jordan denied involvement, but according to his sympathetic biographer Stephen Frost, ‘In his later years, Colin Jordan frequently hinted

³⁴ Arnold Leese had led the vehemently anti-Semitic Imperial Fascist League during the 1930s (he had criticised Mosley as a ‘kosher fascist’). Leese died in 1956. His widow then allowed Colin Jordan use of the property in Notting Hill. This property was eventually bequeathed to Jordan when Leese’s widow died in 1974. Jordan only met Leese once in 1955, see Graham Macklin, *Failed Führers: A History of the British Extreme Right* (Abingdon: Routledge, forthcoming).

³⁵ See *The New Statesman*, 9 January 1960, pp.31-2.

³⁶ See Macklin, *Failed Führers*.

that he was one of those directly involved in this long running and much publicised campaign'. A leading figure in the soon-to-be formed British National Party would be the NLP's John Tyndall. After Tyndall's death in 2005, Jordan would suggest that Tyndall was also 'party to some of these actions around London and in the Home Counties'.³⁷ The name "Sanderson" points towards another leading activist, a young Denis Pirie, otherwise known as "Sandy".³⁸

Closer still to the Notting Hill synagogue – across the street in fact - was the headquarters of Oswald Mosley's Union Movement. By late 1950s, however, in its official policy at least, the 'Jewish problem' had been largely displaced by the 'Colour problem'. Whilst there was still residual anti-Semitism within the Union Movement, Mosley was keen to distance himself from the rabid anti-Semitism of those that even he dismissed as the "lunatic fringe".³⁹ Mosley had contested the North Kensington seat in the October 1959 general election and had been campaigning in this area for close to a year. For good reason too, since Notting Hill had been at the forefront of racial tensions in Britain following the disturbances there in 1958. Throughout his election campaign, Mosley 'took care not to mention Jews and concentrated almost entirely on local issues, coloured immigration and the housing problem, both subjects which appealed to local listeners'.⁴⁰ Although humiliated – he lost his deposit - there was little in the offing to suggest that Mosley intended a return to open anti-Semitism. He responded to the anti-

³⁷ Stephen L. Frost, *'Twaz a Good Fight!' The Life of Colin Jordan* (Heckmondwike: NS Press, 2014) pp. 47-48.

³⁸ See Terry Cooper, *Death by Dior* (London: Dynasty Press, 2013) p. 50.

³⁹ See Graham Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism after 1945* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007) p. 126.

⁴⁰ WL: Jewish Defence Committee Current Notes, September-October 1959.

Semitic incidents issuing his disclaimer on 7 January 1960. The Union Movement, Mosley said, 'was not, and never had been, an anti-Semitic organisation'.⁴¹ Mosley admitted that his movement might attack some Jews for what they do; it did not attack Jews for what they are (this was his standard rebuttal: he was not anti-Semitic, because for him, anti-Semitism 'is hatred of all Jews on account of their race').⁴² But for the likes of Colin Jordan, this missed the essential point that the 'Jewish problem' was '*fundamental because Jewish power over Britain is the greatest single explanation of Britain's plight today*' and '[...] Jews do what they do, inimical to real British interests, precisely because of what they are, namely Jews by race, and thereby members of a foreign nation seeking world supremacy'.⁴³

Jordan's views struck a responsive chord with Britain's coterie of post-war racial nationalists. Not only was Mosley 'unreliable' when it came to the 'Jewish problem', his reading of the 'Colour problem' was also insufficiently 'racial' too. To declare, as Mosley did, that 'Race is important, but is not everything'⁴⁴ was heresy to racial nationalists like the White Defence League's Colin Jordan and the National Labour Party's John Tyndall and John Bean. For these racial nationalists, all roads led back to the 'Jewish problem'. In 1959 Tyndall asked the question:

Whose is the power behind the scenes which campaigns to bring Negroes and other alien races over here – **against their interests**, and force them upon us

⁴¹ *The Guardian* 8 January 1960.

⁴² For more on Mosley's (unconvincing) rationale, see Oswald Mosley, *Mosley Right or Wrong?* (London: Lion Books, 1961) p. 131.

⁴³ Emphasis as original, *Combat*, No. 9. December 1960.

⁴⁴ *Mosley Right or Wrong?* p. 130.

white people – **against our interests**? If coloured immigration as has been shown, serves the interests of neither Black nor White – then whose interests does it serve?

The answer, according to Tyndall, was Jewry:

[...] the Jews realise that by mixing the Black and White races they will set in motion a process which will destroy the whole structure of White civilisation, and undermine White world-leadership – which will subsequently pass into their hands!

‘No one knows better’, Tyndall warned, than the Jews ‘that the mixing of the races brings about a decline in the quality of the higher race’, and so ‘Until we realise their significance we can only half-tackle the colour problem’.⁴⁵

In 2002, when interviewed about the WDL-NLP merger, John Bean styled it a ‘marriage of convenience’. For sure, the NLP had more members, between two and three hundred, but it was also in debt and had no premises. As Bean said,

The National Labour Party had three times the membership of the White Defence League but less financial backing. The NLP was particularly hamstrung by the

⁴⁵ John Tyndall, ‘Jews Back the Black Invasion’, *Combat*, no. 4, autumn 1959. Emphasis as original.

lack of a central office. Colin Jordan of the WDL had the secure ownership of a three storey building, with a shop front, in London's West Kensington.⁴⁶

In early 1960 passers-by might have noticed that the shop frontage of the premises at 74 Princedale Road had been repainted; the words "British National Party" now replaced "White Defence League". Jordan was named the new BNP National Organiser; John Bean Deputy National Organiser, with Bean retaining editorial control of the NLP (now BNP) newspaper *Combat*.

It was in *Combat* that the BNP would publish its response to the "swastika rash". Already, within the first week of January 1960 John Bean had denied his party's involvement, informing the *Daily Telegraph* (6/1/60) that he had '[...] no knowledge of who may have perpetrated these acts in Britain. We do not hold with that type of propaganda and if we put up slogans they would be in English so that people would understand them'. Predictably, when *Combat* did comment in more depth, the "swastika rash" was the fault of the Jews: 'In Britain, we have every reason to believe that the painting of the Notting Hill synagogue, which started the British outbreak, was done by the Jews themselves.'⁴⁷ The BNP's reason: to add weight to calls for the introduction of anti-discriminatory legislation, which the Jews had been trying to get passed 'on and off for twelve years' (in 1947, concerned at the revival of fascist anti-Semitism in East

⁴⁶ *Freedom Struggle, An Interview with John Bean* (Ulster: Glenwood Publications, 2002) p.11.

⁴⁷ *Combat*, No. 6, May-June 1960.

London, Labour Home Secretary Chuter Ede had considered a ban on 'fascist' organisations/meetings and 'anti-Semitism').⁴⁸

There was no law against racial or religious hatred in force in Britain in 1960 (it would be 1965 before the first Race Relations Bill was passed).⁴⁹ Prior to 1965 any person who made a speech at a public meeting that incited racial hatred could be prosecuted under Section 5 of the 1936 Public Order Act (for provoking a breach of the peace). Written incitement could be prosecuted for seditious libel (with the intention of promoting violence by stirring up hostility and ill-will between different classes of Her Majesty's subjects). However, in 1947 James Caunt, editor of the *Morecambe and Heysham Visitor* was acquitted of charges of having published seditious and libellous material against Jews (there was no offence of group or community defamation). At the peak of the anti-Semitic outbreaks, conscious of such loopholes in the law, Sir Leslie Plummer, Labour MP for Deptford⁵⁰ announced his intention to draft a bill to legislate specifically against racial and religious insult.

In late January 1960 Plummer asked the Home Secretary to request that Special Branch pay particular attention to the activities of the National Labour Party, which he described as a 'squalid movement', a 'Fascist organisation which has uttered threats against my hon. Friends and against myself, and is organising anti-Semitic outbreaks in

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ On the 1965 Race Relations Act, see Gavin Schaffer, 'Legislating against Hatred: Meaning and Motive in Section Six of the Race Relations Act of 1965', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol 25, No.2., 2014, pp. 251-75. The NSM sent letters to MPs warning them that support for the Race Relations Bill would constitute an act of treason, and 'that it will be treated as such in the National Socialist Britain of the future, and those of you primarily responsible will then be brought to trial for this crime'.

⁵⁰ The BNP was active in this multi-racial constituency, capturing around 10 per cent of the vote in the borough in the April 1961 LCC elections.

London?⁵¹ Needless to say, the NLP was not best pleased and challenged Plummer repeat this statement outside the House.⁵² Then in early February, as promised, Plummer introduced a private member's bill, the Racial and Religious Insults Bill. Plummer looked to make it an offence to insult or conspire to insult a person or persons on the grounds of race and religion. He wanted swastika-daubing to carry a maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment. Plummer, too, received threats (at least a dozen anonymous telephone messages and around two dozen letters). Police guarded his Hampstead flat for 12 days from the end of April through to the beginning of May.⁵³ Whilst the Board of Deputies supported the Bill, the reality was that Anglo-Jewry split over the issue. With support unforthcoming from either the Government or Shadow Cabinet, and opposed by a number of Conservative backbenchers, the Bill was dropped.

For the Union Movement, the swastika-daubing was also the work of nefarious conspiracy, not a specifically Jewish one as such, but a worldwide one organised by the 'communist international network'. 'We are now in possession of the following remarkable revelations. The whole thing was a communist-organised plot to separate the Germans from the rest of Europe'. According to the Union Movement, Communists 'used a violent anti-semitism manufactured in Moscow to divide the West, injure Germany, and strike a blow at all they call "fascist"'.⁵⁴ Suspiciously - it would emerge

⁵¹ *Hansard*, 616, Col. 360, 28 January 1960.

⁵² *Combat*, No. 6 May-June 1960.

⁵³ *The Times*, 6 August 1960.

⁵⁴ *Action*, no. 96, 15 July 1962. Emphasis as original. On the "swastika epidemic" as an instrument of a worldwide Communist conspiracy, see Joseph. P. Kamp, *The Bigots Behind the Swastika Spree* (New York: Headlines, 1960).

from their testimony - both Strunk and Schöner had visited the Soviet-occupied zone. Although they denied any connection between their previous visits to the GDR and anti-Semitic incidents, Schöner had 'occasionally' worn an SED (Socialist Unity Party) badge in the Federal Republic, and both Strunk and Schöner had close contact with two East German teachers (one of whom was a member of the SED) and had also visited a Russian military canteen.⁵⁵

That Communists in Cold War Europe were engaged in a propaganda campaign to discredit the Federal Republic as "fascist", "militarist" and "revanchist" is beyond doubt. The aim of such a campaign was to isolate the Federal Republic from its Western allies, and to assist in bringing about formal diplomatic recognition of the Soviet-occupied zone. From the mid-1950s, a SED-sponsored 'Committee for German Unity' published a series of English-language texts that claimed that 'reactionary, fascist theory is once more in full bloom' in the Federal Republic.⁵⁶ This line was also pedalled by the East Berlin-based *Democratic German Report*, a fortnightly English language publication, published and edited by the defector John Peet.⁵⁷ The incidents in Cologne were, according to Peet, symptomatic of a West German state where former Nazis held key posts in politics, the judiciary, education, industry and the military.⁵⁸ According to one US Senator this propaganda was being deliberately targeted at Britain where

⁵⁵ The Anti-Semitic and Nazi Incidents, White Paper, p. 36.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵⁷ For more on John Peet, see Stefan Berger and Norman LaPorte, 'John Peet: An Englishman in the German Democratic Republic', *History*, Vol. 89. No. 1, 2004, pp. 49-69.

⁵⁸ See *Democratic German Report*, Vol. IX, No. 1, 8 January 1960, p. 2.

'antinazism is frequently combined with a strong general dislike of Germans and Germany'.⁵⁹

While there was no incontrovertible evidence that the original trigger incidents were part of some deeply laid plan masterminded by Communists, what did emerge was that several members of the Free (Communist) German Youth were apprehended for swastika-daubing incidents.⁶⁰ The Federal Republic claimed that in January 1959, at a Central Committee meeting of the SED, a decision had been taken to organise a series of anti-Semitic incidents across a number of towns in the Federal Republic, to be carried out by 'action commandos'.⁶¹ Nonetheless, it was still not possible to prove categorically 'that any of the arrested offenders were carrying out orders forming part of the plans of such an "action commando"'.⁶² Over three decades later, discovered in the Stasi archives, was the evidence that Communists did infiltrate far-right organisations, and did stage anti-Semitic attacks in West Germany in the 1960s.⁶³ But as far as the incidents in Britain were concerned, there is no evidence whatsoever that they were Communist-inspired, although the Union Movement did point out that the outbreak allowed the British Communist Party's *Daily Worker*, 'to come out with big scare headlines in its usual humbugging style'.⁶⁴

Of more importance in this country was the *effect* that these events would have on domestic anti-Semitic organisations, that is to say, as a stimulus to their further

⁵⁹ See remarks prepared by Senator Dodd, *Congressional Record*, 15 March 1960, p. 5206.

⁶⁰ The Anti-Semitic and Nazi Incidents, White Paper, p. 20

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

⁶³ See *Washington Post*, 28 February 1993.

⁶⁴ *Action*, No. 96, 15 July 1962, p. 6.

radicalisation. Significantly, this hardening of Britain's anti-Semitic far right, as we shall see, would assume two key forms: the first Holocaust revisionism; the second, synagogue arson.

Eichmann

For sure, widespread international condemnation of the "swastika epidemic" - the American liberal poet Carl Sandburg even advocated the death penalty for anyone caught painting swastikas – raised hackles on Britain's far right. It all amounted to a "Love the Jew" month where,

[...] great play was made of the "six million dead" – or is it ten? In the *Daily Telegraph* of February 3, appeared a photograph of Adenauer laying a wreath by the memorial stone at the site of the Belsen concentration camp. On the memorial stone it stated that 30,000 Jews were killed there. Now the writer has always believed that Belsen was the largest camp, and that there were only five others. *Assuming* that they were as large as Belsen, this makes a total of 180,000 Jews who were killed – a far cry from six million.⁶⁵

With Jordan chief instigator, the BNP was now on the verge of going public with a campaign exposing the "myth of the six million". Once the sensational news broke in

⁶⁵ *Combat*, no.6, May-June 1960.

May 1960 that Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann had been captured and would stand trial in Jerusalem, the temptation to do so became overwhelming. Later that month, a vexed Jordan set the tone at the BNP's first national rally in Trafalgar Square with his 'vicious attacks on Jews'.⁶⁶

In January 1961, anticipating a further rash of anti-Semitic incidents arising from Eichmann's forthcoming trial, the Jewish Defence Committee discussed precautionary measures, including the guarding of synagogue properties.⁶⁷ On the night of 4 February 1961 several synagogues in London (Dollis Hill; Cricklewood; Shepherd's Bush) and the offices of the Zionist Federation had their front doors daubed with swastikas.⁶⁸ That this had been the handiwork of the British National Party is highly probable. Yet for Jordan, who would refer to the BNP's "Free Eichmann" campaign as "Operation Counterblast", daubing swastikas on synagogues was not enough. More importantly, he wanted to use the Eichmann 'show-trial' to undermine the official version of the Holocaust.⁶⁹

To that end, Jordan produced an 'atrocities supplement' to *Combat*. Party members were told to give it the widest possible circulation. Several provincial newspapers penned editorials condemning the supplement, labelling it 'nasty' and 'despicable'.⁷⁰ As historian Paul Jackson has pointed out, 'the inner two pages of the supplement set out many of the standard tropes of Holocaust denial literature'.⁷¹ One

⁶⁶ WL: Jewish Defence Committee minutes, 13 June 1960.

⁶⁷ WL: Jewish Defence Committee minutes, 4 January 1961.

⁶⁸ WL: Jewish Defence Committee minutes, 7 February 1961.

⁶⁹ Frost, *Twaz a Good Fight!* pp. 72-3.

⁷⁰ WDL: Jewish Defence Committee, Current Notes, March/April/May 1961.

⁷¹ See Paul Jackson, *Colin Jordan and Britain's Neo-Nazi Movement* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 98. My thanks go to Paul Jackson for supplying me with a copy of the supplement.

section in particular, entitled 'The Great Lie of the Six Million', challenged the numbers. Eichmann was, for the BNP, a 'fabricated monster'. How could Eichmann be responsible for the murder of six million Jews when the 'true figure' of the number of deaths in the concentration camps was closer to 300,000 Germans and Jews? And,

Even this is an estimate for all camp inmates and for deaths due to all factors, including natural ones, in a total camp population of millions during that period; and at a time when 3,000,000 German soldiers, 2,000,000 German civilians, and millions of other Europeans, including hundreds of thousands of British soldiers and civilians were being killed in the catastrophic war the Jews had worked to bring about. When the Jews, through the medium of the Eichmann Trial, scream their monstrous lie of the six million, let us remember the millions of Gentiles who died because the Jews wanted their war or revenge.⁷²

Writing in 1980, Jordan ruminated upon this supplement. It was, he said, an important milestone in the history of Holocaust revisionism in Britain. 'The first, detailed refutation of the Holocaust myth in the UK was in 1961 in the supplement I produced for the then magazine *Combat*, edited by John Bean, in answer to the Eichmann trial', Jordan maintained.⁷³

⁷² *Combat*, No. 11, March-April 1961. Emphasis as original.

⁷³ *Gothic Ripples*, No. 3, June 1980. My thanks to Graham Macklin for this reference.

Was this supplement really the ‘first, detailed refutation’? Probably, yet the birth of Holocaust revisionism in this country does have a longer history. Mosley had already cast doubt on the scale of Nazi atrocities at the very first press conference of the Union Movement on 28 November 1947.⁷⁴ As recently as November 1958, an article entitled the “The Big Belsen Mystery” appeared in the Union Movement’s *Action* paper, which questioned whether the scale of Nazi atrocities had been ‘grossly exaggerated’.⁷⁵ In February 1959, the Jewish Defence Committee reported on literature circulating in the Kensal Rise district of north-west London that claimed that the *Diary of Anne Frank* was ‘largely a falsification’.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, Jordan rightly deserves his (loathsome) place in the annals of Holocaust revisionism. For Frost, Jordan’s was a ‘radical step’ and it ‘would lead to many more revisionist writers tackling the enormous subject over the following decades [...]’⁷⁷ ‘It is probable’, remarked the Board of Deputies of British Jews in its annual report for 1961, ‘that post-war anti-semitic propaganda in Britain reached its height in this publication’.⁷⁸

There was also more to this “Operation Counterblast” than posting the ‘atrocities supplement’ through letterboxes. Anti-Semitic posters were soon found on London underground stations. On 15 April 1961 BNP members paraded through various parts of London’s West End, with placards reading “Eichmann – What About Jewish Atrocities?” and “Jews Caused World War II”. The following day, a group of BNP members

⁷⁴ Macklin, *Deeply Dyed in Black*, p. 118.

⁷⁵ See WL: Jewish Defence Committee, Current Notes, October/November 1958.

⁷⁶ WL: Jewish Defence Committee Report, 5 February 1959.

⁷⁷ Frost, *Twaz a Good Fight!*, p. 78

⁷⁸ Board of Deputies of British Jews, Annual Report 1961 (London: Woburn House, 1962) p. 32.

protested outside the Board of Deputies at Woburn House before venturing to London's East End to hold a meeting in Bethnal Green where the speakers railed against Israel for its persecution of Eichmann. Meanwhile, a Land Rover driven by John Bean, pulled up outside a Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration Meeting at the Princes Theatre in central London. The police instructed Bean to move on, he refused, and Bean along with seven other BNP members, including Colin Jordan, were subsequently arrested and charged with insulting behaviour. On 30 April 1961, at a further BNP rally at Trafalgar Square, Jordan made a point of attacking the 'injustices' of the Eichmann trial. Tellingly, Jordan promised his rain-soaked audience that the BNP 'shall hold our own Eichmann trial and standing in the dock will be the Jews'.⁷⁹ At the same time Jordan was becoming increasingly involved in Holocaust revisionist international networks.

None of this would gain any traction with the wider British public, however. For the most part, 'both the national and provincial press gave little space to the activities of the British National Party'.⁸⁰ To Jordan's chagrin, generous column space was given over to reporting the proceedings of the Eichmann trial. There were daily reports from the courtroom; the *Daily Telegraph* was devoting around three-quarters of a page every day to the trial. Television and radio coverage was also extensive.⁸¹ A fervent Jordan was undeterred. Bolstered by his developing international recognition amongst fellow neo-Nazis, by December 1961 Jordan had now turned his attention to a "Free Hess" campaign. It seems that no fewer than 10,000 "Free Hess" posters were printed in Britain in six different languages; 8,000 were distributed abroad. Posters were plastered

⁷⁹ See WL: Jewish Defence Committee, Current Notes, March/April/May 1961.

⁸⁰ Board of Deputies of British Jews, Annual Report 1961, p. 38

⁸¹ WL: Jewish Defence Committee, Current Notes, March/April/May 1961.

on walls in London, Birmingham, Glasgow, Liverpool and elsewhere. Two BNP members were arrested in Golders Green in north London - an area with a large number of Jewish residents - after police caught them illegally sticking up "Release Hess" posters.⁸²

Reflecting upon his time with Colin Jordan, John Bean would later claim that the 'principal lesson' that he soon found out was that his 'attempt to ride the neo-Nazi Tiger was doomed to failure'.⁸³ By early 1962, Bean, alongside Andrew Fountaine, the BNP's Norfolk-landowning president, had decided that Jordan's 'fuehrer obsession' was becoming too much. Fountaine remarked dryly that Jordan was 'like an ingrowing toenail'.⁸⁴ Bean told a *Daily Mail* reporter that 'All Jordan ever wanted to be was a disciple of Hitler. By aping the jackboots, uniforms, customs and ideology of Germany in the 30s he was doing us more harm than good'.⁸⁵ Bean was referencing "The Spearhead", an elite paramilitary unit that Jordan and Tyndall had formed. Jordan was the "Spearhead Commander"; Tyndall was the "Spearhead Group Leader for London". In August 1961 the "Spearhead", dressed in grey shirts, Sam Browne belts, and boots, engaged in drill training in the grounds of a derelict school in Kent (unbeknown to the group it was under surveillance from two Special Branch officers).

Now expelled from the BNP, Jordan and Tyndall (along with Denis Pirie) launched the National Socialist Movement on 20 April 1962 (Hitler's birthday). It would be wrong to see this break with the BNP as a consequence of struggle between

⁸² *Combat*, No. 15, January-February 1962.

⁸³ *Freedom Struggle*, p. 11.

⁸⁴ Quoted in *News of the World*, 9 June 1962.

⁸⁵ Quoted in *Daily Mail*, 10 August 1962.

'moderates' (Bean and Fountaine) and 'militants' (Jordan and Tyndall). For what concerned the 'moderates' was neither the rabid anti-Semitism nor the Holocaust revisionism, but the need to 'rein in' the "Spearhead" so that it did not contravene the Public Order Act.⁸⁶ Jordan had already been warned in September 1961 that the activities of the "Spearhead" might constitute offences against the Public Order Act. In mid-1962, following the Eichmann trial verdict, and *after* the expulsion of the "Spearhead", it is worth noting that Bean wrote that the Jews,

[...] had their vengeance when Eichmann was hanged and his ashes thrown into the sea, but right to the end Eichmann denied them their final victory by refusing to break down after his two years' ordeal and like those who were killed before him – on flimsier evidence and often Communist evidence at that – he went to the hangman's noose denying the greatest lie of the twentieth century; the lie of the six million dead.⁸⁷

Synagogue arson

⁸⁶ See John Bean, *Many Shades of Black: Inside Britain's Far Right* (London: New Millennium, 1999) p. 152

⁸⁷ *Combat*, no. 17, May-June 1962. On John Bean's subsequent 'whitewashing' of the BNP's anti-Semitism, see Graham Macklin, 'Modernizing the past for the future', in Nigel Copsey and Graham Macklin (eds.) *The British National Party: Contemporary Perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011) pp.19-37.

On 15 October 1962, in London's Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey, Colin Jordan was sentenced to nine months imprisonment for:

There being an association called "Spearhead", the members of which were organised and (1) trained and (2) equipped in such a manner as to arouse reasonable apprehension that they were organised and (1) trained and (2) equipped for the process of enabling them to be employed for the use or display of physical force in promoting a political object, he took part in so organising them, contrary to Section 2 (1) (b) of the Public Order Act, 1936.⁸⁸

Charges were also brought against Jordan's three co-defendants: John Tyndall, Dennis Pirie, and Roland Kerr-Ritchie. Tyndall, who was now regarded as Britain's 'No.2. Nazi' was sentenced to six months; Pirie and Kerr-Ritchie both received sentences of three months. Central to the prosecution case were the seven tins of sodium chlorate weed-killer which were allegedly found in the cellar of 74 Princedale Road. One tin had been labelled "Jew-Killer"; and on the back there was a scribbled instruction, 'Place a few crystals in a sealed room filled with Jews'.⁸⁹ That Jordan had declared in his confrontational defence that 'We are National Socialists and we are anti-Jewish and we are proud of it', was honest, if somewhat ill-advised.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ (T)he (N)ational (A)rchives, DPP2 4078-4080: Case Papers relating to trial of DUKES, Paul; CHANT, Graham; RAINBIRD, Colin; HUGHES, Hugh; SPARKS, Malcolm; and GORDON, Alex (all members of National Socialist Movement, Woodford group): arson (of synagogues in East London).

⁸⁹ Frost, *Twaz a Good Fight!* p. 138

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144

Before the “Spearhead” trial Jordan and Tyndall had already appeared in the dock. Both had been arrested after a National Socialist Movement meeting in Trafalgar Square (1.7.62) for using insulting words whereby a breach of the peace was likely to be occasioned. At this meeting, held under the provocative banner “Free Britain from Jewish Control” and ending in pandemonium, Tyndall had referred to Jews as “poisonous maggots”; Jordan had declared that “Hitler was right!” Both speeches were then used in the prosecution evidence at the later Old Bailey trial. On Jordan’s release from prison, Frost reveals that,

[...] one of his NSM activists presented Colin Jordan with a hardback copy of a new book which had recently appeared in mainstream bookshops, it was entitled, “The Destruction of Dresden”, written by a relatively new writer of the history of the Second World War, a certain David Irving. The enthusiastic NSM activist had inscribed a dedication to Colin on the inside of the fly-sheet on the book, it read “To my Leader, Colin Jordan, to mark the occasion of his return to the Fight. I offer this further ammunition.”⁹¹

Public notoriety followed the publicity that the NSM elicited (and there were more sensationalist headlines, relating to a NSM summer camp in the Cotswolds).⁹²

Significantly, news of the NSM soon crossed the Channel, where an article in *France-Soir* caught the attention of one Françoise Dior, niece of the French high-end fashion

⁹¹ Frost, pp. 125-6

⁹² On this episode, see Jackson, *Colin Jordan and Britain’s Neo-Nazi Movement*, pp. 112-14.

designer Christine Dior. She was deeply anti-Semitic and hers was a personal hatred (she apparently blamed Jews for the death of Christine Dior).⁹³ It was Françoise Dior's determination to marry one of the leaders of the 'British Nazis' that led to a schism within the NSM - she was first engaged to Tyndall but then married Jordan. In May 1964 most NSM members left the movement and followed the jilted Tyndall to form the Greater Britain Movement. But Dior would play a further key role: she would soon become the driving force behind the NSM's *radicalisation*. Dior's marriage to Jordan, which took place on 5 October 1963 at Coventry Register Office, was no marriage made in heaven (or, should that be Nazi Valhalla?). Whilst both shared a love of Adolf Hitler, Colin Jordan would spend most of his week with his widowed mother at 42 Tudor Avenue, Coventry; his estranged wife meanwhile stopped in London, at 74 Princedale Road, in the regular company of a small group of impressionable young activists. After Jordan's split with Tyndall the NSM in London had now contracted to around 20 'fully active supporters'.⁹⁴ Many of them fell under the spell of the "Queen of the Nazis".

From 13 March 1965 through to the end of July, a series of attempts were made to burn down synagogues in London and the metropolitan area: at Brondesbury, Edmonton, Tottenham, Bayswater, Boreham Wood, Palmers Green, Finchley Road, Stanmore, Lea Bridge Road in Clapton and at Beehive Lane in Ilford. There were also arson attempts at a Jewish Day Nursey in Maida Vale, a Jewish religious school in Stoke Newington, Jewish butchers' shops in Southgate and Willesden, and the home of a Jewish taxi-driver who apparently had some altercation with Françoise Jordan. A

⁹³ Cooper, *Death by Dior*, p. 69.

⁹⁴ According to report on National Socialist Movement contained in TNA DPP2 4078-4080: Case Papers.

system of guards and overnight patrols was introduced by AJEX.⁹⁵ But AJEX insisted that there was no evidence to suggest that that was this was a centrally directed or planned campaign.⁹⁶

If the numbers involved probably never exceeded more than a dozen, the arsonists were not “juvenile delinquents” or “hooligans”; it also appears to have had some central direction. In February 1966 six members of the NSM were convicted on charges of arson at the Clapton and Ilford synagogues. One of the defendants, Paul Dukes, had given a pre-trial statement to the police that revealed that ‘Colin Jordan was present at one of our meetings and said it was a good idea to set fire to Jewish synagogues, but he could not give official backing to the scheme’.⁹⁷ At a second trial in April 1966, when four other NSM members pleaded guilty to arson, they claimed that Françoise Jordan had ‘always encouraged us to do these burnings, but did not want to get the name of the movement involved’.⁹⁸ Françoise Jordan was clearly implicated as the *agent provocateur*.

The problem for the authorities was that this *agent provocateur* was outside British jurisdiction. She was now back in France (sentenced in October 1966 to four months’ imprisonment for fly-posting a pro-Nazi sticker on the British Embassy in Paris). After her release, however, she would return to Britain (she had been stripped of her French nationality). In August 1967 she was arrested and placed on remand in Holloway Prison. At her trial, in January 1968, Françoise Jordan was jailed for eighteen

⁹⁵ Board of Deputies of British Jews, Annual Report 1965 (London: Woburn House, 1966) p. 40.

⁹⁶ See ‘Racialists in Britain’, *Wiener Library Bulletin*, Vol. 19, 1965, issue 1, pp. 9-14.

⁹⁷ See *The Times*, 23 November 1965.

⁹⁸ *The Guardian*, 15 March 1966.

months for conspiring with three NSM activists, David Thorne, John Evans and Raymond Hemsworth to set fire to synagogues between 1 March and 1 August 1965. She told her investigating officer that she would like to see synagogues blown up by an Act of Parliament. Asked if she was responsible for the arsons, she replied: 'I do not start fires. If I say I want something done which should be done and it is done, I am not responsible if I am not there'.⁹⁹ On being found guilty, she turned to the jury, gave the Nazi salute and called out, "Heil Hitler!"¹⁰⁰

As for Colin Jordan, he had already been sentenced in January 1967 for offences against the new Race Relations Act. By the time he was released from prison a year later, Britain's far right had moved on. A new political party had been born – the National Front (NF) – with its sights set on breaking into the political mainstream. For the leaders of this new party, who wanted at least 'semi-respectability', their problem with Colin Jordan (he never joined the NF) was that 'any involvement of "CJ" in their political party was an election loser, the press would seize on his "Hitlerite" credentials to undermine any professed "respectability"'.¹⁰¹

Conclusion: a defining decade?

⁹⁹ See 'The copper, the neo-Nazi and the shul arson sprees', *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 August 2017 (online at <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/the-copper-bert-wickstead-the-neo-nazi-francoise-jordan-and-the-shul-arson-spree-1.442757>).

¹⁰⁰ *The Guardian* 18 January 1968.

¹⁰¹ Frost, *Twaz a Good Fight!* p. 218.

For understandable reasons, historians of British fascism, and of fascist-related anti-Semitism, get drawn to the 1930s, the decade of Mosley's Blackshirts and Cable Street.¹⁰² More recently, however, historians have extended their chronological scope to the immediate post-war period.¹⁰³ This chapter makes a case for extending it further still. The 1960s certainly did matter. And this decade mattered for the *radicalisation* of anti-Semitic organisation. As we have seen, this radicalisation manifested through both Colin Jordan's more detailed elaboration of Holocaust revisionism, and through the escalation of anti-Semitic hate. At the beginning of the decade, there were the swastika-daubers, the telephoned threats as part of the (global) "swastika epidemic". And it seems highly probable that the far right was behind at least some of these incidents, particularly those in and around London. By mid-decade this far-right anti-Semitic hate had escalated to more serious incidents of synagogue arson.

We might chose to 'end' this radical phase in January 1968 when Françoise Jordan raised the Nazi salute as she was taken from the dock. We might choose to end it earlier, when the National Front was formed for the official launch of the NF on 7 February 1967 was a *new* departure. What the Front represented was broad acceptance across the extremist fringe that the use of neo-Nazi imagery, paramilitary uniforms, and declarations that 'Hitler was right' had been a mistake.¹⁰⁴ A.K. Chesterton, the NF's first Chairman, reassured his LEL members that the merger that

¹⁰² See, in relation to this period, Daniel Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932-40* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹⁰³ See for example, Joe Mulhall, *British Fascist Tradition: Continuities in Interwar and Postwar Fascism* (Abingdon: Routledge, forthcoming).

¹⁰⁴ For a recent study of Britain's far right since the formation of the NF, see Nigel Copley and Matthew Worley (eds.) *'Tomorrow Belongs to Us' The British Far Right since 1967* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

would give rise to the NF had been negotiated in such a way as to avoid any associations with 'past swastika-daubing and similar activities'.¹⁰⁵ And when this 'non-Nazi democratic political movement' captured nearly a quarter of a million votes in local elections in 1977, beating the Liberals in the Greater London Council elections in no fewer than 33 seats, the so-called "lunatic fringe" was now being talked about as Britain's fourth political party, poised to even displace the Liberals as 'our' third political party.

Yet we need to be careful here. This 'de-radicalised' departure was more about *presentation* than forsaking anti-Semitic ideology. The National Activities Organiser of the Front, Martin Webster, had joined the NSM when he was 19 years old. When members of the NF were arrested for throwing a petrol bomb at a synagogue in Sheffield in 1969, Webster's claims that the Front was not chained to the old ideologies of the 1930s did not ring true.¹⁰⁶ Neither was it such a surprise when, in 1978, investigations offered convincing evidence that the notorious Holocaust revisionist pamphlet *Did Six Million Really Die?* was the work of the National Front. As a Granada *World in Action* TV documentary (viewed by more than 10 million) revealed, this pamphlet was written under the pseudonym Richard Harwood by the NF's Richard Verrall, editor of the party's monthly, *Spearhead*. Final proof came when experts revealed that letters of complaint written to the Independent Broadcasting Authority by

¹⁰⁵ See *Candour*, November 1966, pp. 162-64.

¹⁰⁶ For Martin Webster's response, in the form of his letter published in the *Hornsey Journal*, see *Spearhead*, No. 27, November 1969, p.5

the-then NF Chairman used the very same typewriter as the author of *Did Six Million Really Die?*¹⁰⁷

The NF Chairman at that time was none other than John Tyndall. In the August 1978 issue of *Spearhead*, Tyndall wrote of his experience of being interviewed for this documentary,

On arriving we were shown into a studio room in which the programme personnel present might have deceived us into thinking they were part of the congregation of the local synagogue [...] having strayed into an underworld inhabited by creatures of reptilian aspect, covered in a coating of green slime [...] each of us could feel only that he was facing something Satanic, the aura of dark, subversive forces being overwhelming. Here in the alien eyes surrounding us on all sides was the world revolution.

Plus ça change? The outward appearance may have changed but the fundamentals remained the same. Letting it slip that his thoughts on Jews had evidently not altered from the decade before, Tyndall then concluded:

For if such a satanic power can be used to blacken and slander our movement the mind boggles at what other purposes it can be used for. It behoves every responsible Briton, pro-National Front or otherwise, to

¹⁰⁷ See Martin Walker, 'Typewriter analysis ties Front to Jew-bait pamphlet', in *The Defender*, issue no. 1. May-June 1979 (published by Board of Deputies of British Jews).

wake up to this power before its tentacles crush what remains of the life of our nation.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ John Tyndall, 'The Zionist Lie Machine Does Its Worst', *Spearhead*, No. 120, August 1978, pp. 10-11 & p. 15.