

# THE POLITICS OF DESPAIR

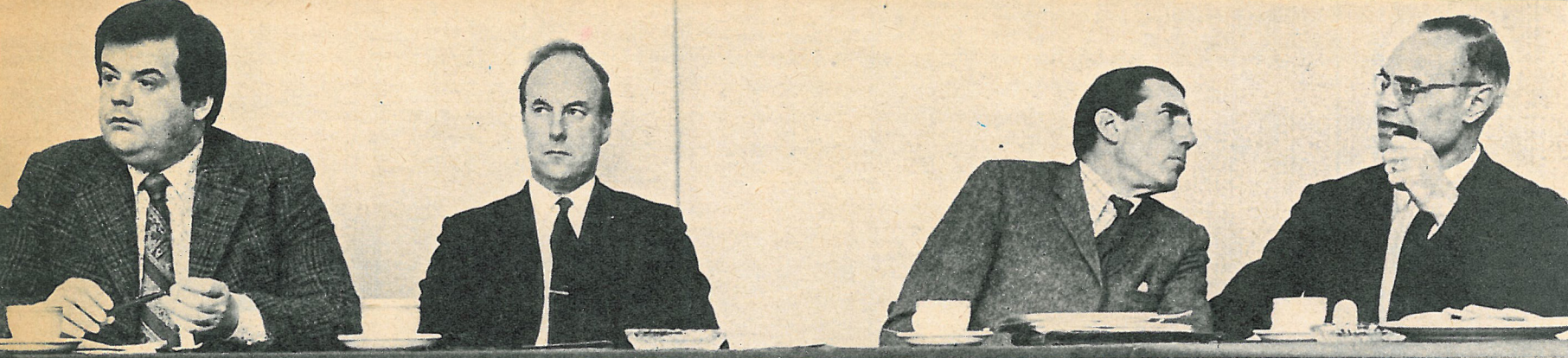
The National Front is Britain's fourth largest political party, according to a survey by the Department of Government at Essex University. It plans to field more than 300 candidates at the next General Election. What is more, it may be the only party whose support is increasing. The survey says: 'Support is disproportionately common among the working class, the poorly educated and the young.' It is also commonest in areas with a high coloured population. Overleaf, JAMES FOX investigates how the Front operates in one such area - the London borough of Hackney. Photographs by COLIN JONES.



The National Front Executive



Techniques of persuasion: above, a Front member argues with the public at Brick Lane market in London's East End. Right: the Front on the march through Hoxton and Hackney.



(left to right) Andrew Brons, lecturer from Harrogate and an NF parliamentary candidate; Martin Webster, national organiser; John Tyndall, former Tory, now the Front's chairman; Andrew Fontaine, vice-chairman; and Peter Williams, an ex-Mosley blackshirt, now South London activist. *Photo: Peter Marlow*



If you tried to arrange social chaos in an inner city borough, starting from scratch, you couldn't outdo the present arrangements in London's Hackney and Shoreditch. The heart of that borough, the area around Hoxton market, is possibly the worst place you could live in England, and the National Front know how to manipulate a demoralised population.

The people of Hoxton feel betrayed, even conspired against by the Labour Party, who have taken their votes for granted for many years. They would rather lose their right arms than vote Tory, but they will, and they do, vote for the National Front – often out of pure spite. 'The candidate doesn't matter,' said an NF election organiser. 'You could put up the devil himself in Hoxton.'

Hoxton Street itself is an ancient East End market, reduced to a long, empty strip, with a few stallholders clinging on. The uncollected garbage blows down the street and along the tin fencing that hides bombsites, 32 years old and still untouched. The corrugated iron – line upon line of it – is daubed with fascist slogans inviting Hitler to rise again. It is the nearest you can get to a National Front precinct, and you know it as soon as you get there.

Even when the community was intact, it was the breeding ground of fascism in Britain. It always had the atmosphere of a deprived community. In the thirties, Sir Oswald Mosley centred his fascist movement on Hoxton, getting at the Labour vote by whipping up anti-Jewish feeling among the demoralised working class. Now the National Front are settling there and in the rest of the East End once again, whipping up the same primitive fear of aliens, of black and Asian hordes taking from the Englishman what belongs to him; bringing the bully boys out into the street, holding meetings where East Enders stomp in unison, shouting 'scum' and 'filth'.

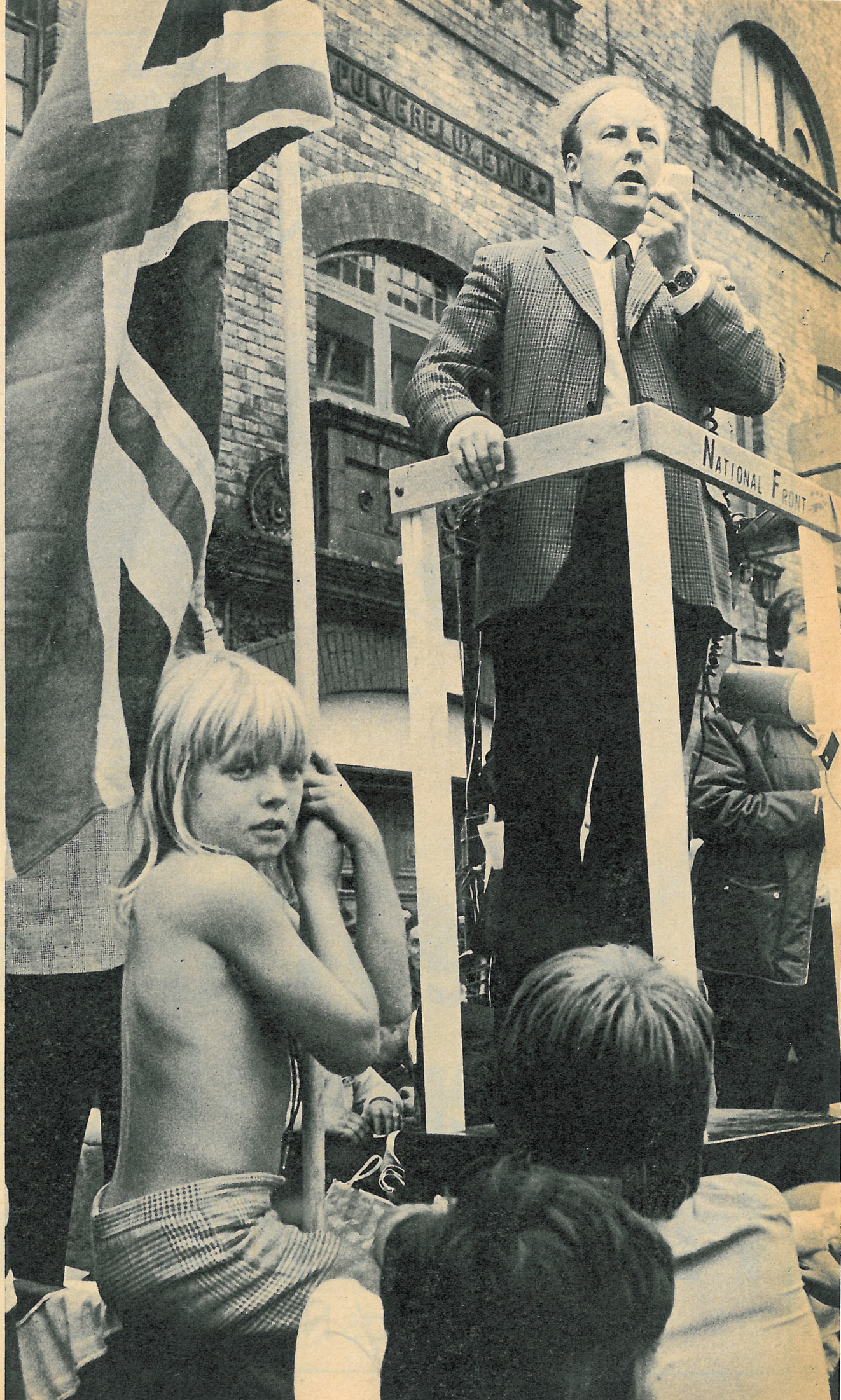
In the GLC elections in May this year, they consolidated the gains made in the October 1974 election. In Hackney they won 19 per cent of the vote. It would now surprise everybody if they failed to get some council seats in the local elections next May.

Hoxton is lorded over by a man called Derek Day, a roaring street corner politician who sees himself as the uncrowned king of his 'manor'. He is frantic with anger and offended pride at the decline of Hoxton, where his family have lived for four generations.

Day has given his services to

continued

**Chairman Tyndall speaking at an anti-mugging rally held in Hoxton Street Market.**





The home front . . . on Day's settee, Derek Day (in vest) and Ted Russell – 'Edward the Confessor slung 'em out, didn't hæ?'

Labour, Tories and Liberals over the years, and then two years ago he joined the National Front. Its techniques seemed to suit Day's style better, and he has become their most visible activist in the area. 'I am a racist,' he is now fond of saying. He has also been summonsed and charged with 17 cases relating to assault, offensive weapons and physical damage over the last two years, and he has been acquitted of every one. 'Why?' he says. 'Because they was all *trumped up charges*.'

You could choose almost any East End borough to discover the strange goings on inside the NF. But Hackney has two specialities. It was where Mosley stood, and it is where the chairman of the NF, John Tyndall, will also stand in the next General Election – when the NF propose to field 318 candidates. For the Front, Hackney South and Shoreditch got the best percentage of the vote in the October 1974 election. And Tyndall says, 'There appears to be a strong tradition of nationalism and race consciousness in that part of London. People there fear the alien presence from both points of view.' He means blacks and Jews.

Secondly, on street level Derek

Day gives the NF activities a particularly pungent flavour that is based on the reality of the street. He shows up the contrast between what might be a 'political' and a 'fighting' wing of the NF. He is unlike the *petit bourgeois* archetypes of the NF branch organisers, with their fastidious outward respectability. They never quite get it right, and they are always conspicuous. Day is the kind of man Mosley would have used – a street-fighter, politically naive. He is a loud-mouthed cockney, who boasts that his 'friend' Johnny Speight used him as the model for Alf Garnett. He hasn't worked for years. His Asian doctor has declared him sick. He is often lying on the settee of an afternoon, his bulbous, scarred belly bared to the ceiling, or scanning the horizon for the faintest sign of movement on his pitch.

He is at first irresistible because he has the timing and the touch of a first class East End comedian, and the racist remarks come out like music hall gags about Jews and Irishmen. 'Other day,' he says, arm extended over an imaginary row of stalls, 'some black geezer says he's going to take my neighbour's dog to the Race Relations

Board. He's *barkin'* at him. Protectin' the property. Right? So this black fella starts yellin' the dog's a racist and he's goin' to take him to the Race Relations Board. What's he gerna say when he gets there? Woof?'

At the Front headquarters they don't like Day; they consider him an embarrassment. Day alleges that David Bruce, the NF candidate in Hoxton for the GLC elections, told him that he was 'too common' to join the National Front. He is also given to violent outbursts and they think of him as likely to give the Front a bad name. (Indeed, many of what Tyndall calls his 'tough, able-bodied young men' are not officially registered as members. If they are caught with a brick in their hand they can easily be disowned.) Day, who was once chairman of the local NF branch, has now been suspended from the party altogether for belting Martin Webster, the national activities organiser, in the face. 'I chinned him, didn't I?' says Day. The two men loathe each other. Webster aped Day's cockney accent, depicting him as a village idiot in a caption under Day's photograph on the front page of the *National Front News*. 'I've been stabbed in

the back so many times by the National Front,' says Day, 'Watergate's got nothin' on what they done to me.'

'I'll tell you one thing,' he says. 'The National Front needs me more than I need the National Front.' There he may be right. Day was a grass roots organiser in Hoxton and on his housing estate long before the National Front, acquired his services. He doesn't like being called a Nazi. 'They call me the Führer and my wife Eva Braun, and it makes me sick.'

People like John Carr at the Community Relations Office in Hackney, whose windows have been shot through with high-powered air rifles, and who has had paraffin bombs put through his letter-box, says of Day: 'There are a lot of people in the area who look up to Derek Day. Here was a man who clearly cared about his borough and was upset about it. He knew how to do things about it and people would go to him for advice. It doesn't mean that many people aren't frightened of him.'

If you ask Day or any of the NF sympathisers in Hoxton why they fell in with the Front, they will relate some single incident, or a series of them, all connected with

## 'Our opponents in the establishment would be quite frightened if they

the Labour council which they feel has come to resemble a feudal landlord in the borough. Then there will be some incident of a relative being mugged by a black. Mugging stories dominate the front pages of the NF publications. They are beginning to show up on the front page of the *West Indian Voice* as well.

The political polarisation began with the amalgamation in 1965 of Shoreditch (which included Hoxton) and Hackney councils. 'That was the worst day's work we ever did in our lives,' says Day. And the one great bungle that has caused

the anger is housing. The post-war dream was high density housing in the area, compensated by rolling parklands. Not a blade of grass has been seen since. Shoreditch park was promised 12 years ago and it's still a bomb site.

The housing department – as even the councillors will admit despairingly – is over-bureaucratic and shows not only a lack of sympathy with its tenants, but a lack of response to their needs as well. Flats stand empty while families queue on the housing list. The heating was unrepaired on Day's

estate for 12 weeks. The place fell down around one tenant before the department took notice. And Derek Day was the man who got that family rehoused.

Deeds like this give him his uncontested power in the area. He knows the place inside out, every street, every family. He has squatted families in the empty flats. He could get others rehoused in 48 hours by using guerrilla tactics against the council. 'I've always fought for the rights of the Hoxton people. Right? When I seen 'em livin' in squalor. The

council literally cast them aside. When they went to the council for help – nothin'. So they come to me. I go down the *Hackney Gazette*. Reporters used to come down. And we used to work together. They used to give the council dirt and I used to have a go at the council in different ways, know what I mean? to get the people what's rightfully theirs. A decent place to live.'

Day was a clever organiser, and because the council owns 90 per cent of the housing in the area he became the grass roots opposition leader to the council. The council are frightened of Day. They know he can cause trouble.

But the final straw for Derek Day was the time, five or six years ago, when 'problem families' – that neat bureaucratic term which often means poor blacks or immigrants – were rehoused in Shoreditch, Day's pitch. They didn't come from Jamaica or Uganda, but from Stoke Newington – pushed out, say the National Front, by Jewish councillors. They were put in the flats that families on the housing list wouldn't touch. But to the locals it looked as if they were jumping the housing list. Myth and rumour became fact.

In the old community that Day remembers and still dreams of, an outsider was the object of suspicion and a black man was someone you touched for luck. 'No stranger came down 'ere, and if a stranger did come down here we wanna know who he is.' Day became obsessed with hate for blacks. It was they who were taking it all away from him. They were causing the violence. He was no longer in control of his manor. The government that had let him down was now *helping* the immigrants; they were getting privileged treatment, better education – even their clothes looked more expensive than his own. He was a classical National Front recruit. They fed him with the information he needed to inflame his paranoia.

And what about his borough? 'My borough,' he shouts, looking down Hoxton Street. 'Look at it. How many barrers can you count. Go on. How many? (Five) Right. Five barrers. The stallholders used to have to fight for a pitch down here.'

'It was one of the most prosperous boroughs in London. It had every commodity and luxury. All of a sudden the immigrants come and it's a ghetto. It's crawlin' with rats. How big are the rats, Lou?' The street is alerted to Day's ranting. Lou describes a gigantic rat. 'Hoxton was originally called 'Ogs Den of course. The Queen used to come through here on her way to hunt the wild boar. On her way to

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## knew how much sympathy we have in the police' – John Tyndall.

her lodge at Canonbury. It was a close-tied community. You could leave your purse on the counter and anybody what nicks it gets his hand chopped off. Bang.

'Now you can't walk in the street at night, without being mugged. If a young girl walked down here at night with a sovereign round 'er neck it's wallop.' Day makes a snatching movement. 'My borough is my God. I put my borough before my wife and children. And it's been destroyed, not only by the bombs what the Germans done, but by the councillors put in to represent the people.'

'I will say this, you got a lot more immigrants up in Hackney Central and that and Stoke Newington as what you've got down here. Right? But what I'm sayin' is, we pay the self-same rates as they do up there. So why is it that they have literally cast us aside, put us in the khazi? All they do down 'ere, the last building that they done down 'ere, was the Rose Lipton Library. Right? Right, Ted? But the thing is this, be fair about it. Go to the top of Kingsland Road there and you'll see a historical building which was Kingsland Road library, they've shut that down. See what I'm saying? They've shut down

what belongs to the Shoreditch people, such as our town hall. Right? (Day revealed that Ross McWhirter helped him in trying to reopen it.) They've built a thing there and call it the Rose Lipton library. *She* was never a councillor of Hoxton or Shoreditch.' Day's voice rises in indignation, 'She was a councillor of Hackney, so what the bloody 'ell have they got to bring *her* name down here for? So what they've actually done is – they've done their utmost to destroy the community spirit.'

Several summonses, all connected with assault, were served on Day in 1975, in a private prosecution. Day's wife had been involved in a scuffle with a black teenager in the playground outside his house. That same day a black neighbour of Day, Mrs Simms, was taken to hospital, severely beaten up, and several witnesses testified to having seen Day doing the beating. A few other black residents were hurt. But the magistrate refused the summonses.

The prosecuting solicitors, who were from the legal firm of Stanley Clinton Davis, MP for Hackney Central, took it to the Divisional Court – presided over by Lord Widgery, with two other judges,

including Mr Justice O'Connor. They found no fault with the magistrate. But there were some odd aspects to the case. The medical records detailing Mrs Simms's wounds were missing from the hospital. A doctor was called to give evidence. Day now says that the doctor could find nothing about Mrs Simms since 1972. In fact the doctor had a detailed report of the injuries, which he read out in court. Day also says that Mr Justice O'Connor said, 'This is sheer oppression brought against this man from outside.' In fact the transcript shows no such remark.

What the case showed clearly was the atmosphere on the Colville estate. The few black residents had to walk down a staircase near Day's flat every day past National Front stickers, slogans saying Keep Britain White.

Last year Day was charged by the police with possessing an offensive weapon, and with conspiracy to destroy the property of a local resident. The case was dismissed for lack of prosecution evidence. The policemen concerned were occupied in another court when the case came up. And there was a knifing incident in Hoxton, involving Day. 'When I appeared in court,' said Day, 'he

[the alleged victim] never showed up.'

When I interviewed John Tyndall, the National Front's chairman, he said, 'Our opponents in the establishment would be quite frightened if they knew how much sympathy we have in the police, up to the rank of inspector.' It is interesting that after the Battle of Brick Lane in November last year between Left-wing counter demonstrators and the Front, when the police arrested 19 demonstrators, there was only one witness on the prosecution index who was not a policeman, and that was Derek Day.

\* \* \*

The Day front room is cluttered with patriotic objects, some in glass cases, and a Coronation edition of the *Daily Mail* with the headline, 'Let us Cherish our Own Way of Life' – a quote from the new Queen.

He tells me about what he calls the 'smears' being spread about him. 'If I *had* hit someone with a pickaxe handle,' he says, 'where would they be? Come on. Where in all honesty would they be? Hospital, right? And would I be standing here talking to you? It's the smearing that gets me. They say "He lights

continued

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## 'We don't want to resort to the fist and to the cosh, but it seems the Left has

paraffin bombs and puts them through the letter-box, he brings the Alsations round, he chases kids down the street, terrorisin' 'em." If I was doin' all that, would I be standin' here a free man talking to you?"

Day is often with a member of the Front called Ted Russell, who wears gold-rimmed glasses and whose views make Day sound only like a member of the 1922 Committee. Russell cannot stand to be argued with even on his most outrageous propositions, claiming that the right of free speech bars any contradiction. Day repeatedly has to say, 'Yeah. All right Ted. I'll grant you that.' Both men agree with the Front's line that everything in world politics, especially British politics, is a Communist/Zionist/Wall Street conspiracy for world domination. Russell refuses to accept that Hitler, too, was helped by the international bankers.

Day broods over the 'deluge' of immigrants in Britain. 'All of a sudden they start coming over here. Hand over fist, hand over fist, left right and centre. In the early sixties Scotland Yard had a discreet inquiry as to how many immigrants were here illegally. Out of two million, one million were illegal. As you know, their rate of childbearing,

birth... you know... breedin', is vaster than ours. So I keep it in a minimum of three children each. That was 17 years ago, right? So the illegal immigrants are up to four million, and the legal immigrants the same, making eight, plus they get married young and they've had children. So I reckon there's 10 to 12 million immigrants in this country."

[The exact figures cannot be had, but the Community Relations Commission puts the black and Asian population at about one and three quarter millions - 3.2 per cent of the population. Births to mothers from the New Commonwealth are put at 39,900 in 1975, 6,200 less than in 1970.]

Ted Russell has an idea. 'Edward the Confessor slung 'em out of the country, didn't he? Put them on the Dogger Bank and let the tide come up.' Day's paunch is heaving with laughter. 'I mean to say, in all fairness...,' says Day, '... I hope those two monkeys fall off of that roof...,' he says - Day has spotted, at a great distance, the minute figures of two black men painting an attic window frame - 'In all fairness, the Ten Commandments say "Love thy neighbour." They don't say you *must* love your neighbour. There's a vast difference

between shalt and must.'

A hallmark of National Front thinking is the idea that it is a basic and precious freedom, a part of the British heritage, to be able to insult someone on the most obscene level.

'If you look at it in the right light I could be walkin' down the street, right? and one of them wants to start saying to me "so and so, so and so," knowahimean? "can you tell me the way to so and so." I can turn round and say, "look, go away. Don't want to talk to yer." Right? "Don't like yer." "What d'yer mean, you don't like me?" "I don't like yer. I'm a racist." And he can say "Oh" - bang and next minute you're stirring up racial hatred. You're up at the Race Relations Board.'

I question whether the National Front would be democratic when it came to power, and an argument develops between Russell and Day.

**Day:** 'You would allow the Communists freedom of speech. You've still got to have that Left-wing element, that opposition.'

**Russell:** 'Not the Communist Party, because they are alien to our way of life.'

**Day:** 'If you preach democracy...'

**Russell:** 'I'm not denying freedom of speech, but you'd ban the Communist Party.'

**Day:** 'If I went to a meeting and if a Communist wanted to ask a question, he's fully entitled to. We've got to prove that we practise what we preach.'

**Russell:** 'Any clandestine meeting. We'd stop that automatically.'

Day hates being called a Nazi, but he agreed that the leaders of the National Front had 'Nazi attachments.' They won't like him for that. The new image is the pin-striped suit, with only a pair of St George's Cross cuff links, worn like hidden jewellery. There are hearty, forced jokes about swastikas and jackboots. The trouser leg is raised for the benefit of the Press. 'Oh! forgot to put them on tonight. Ha ha ha.'

Tyndall is the guest speaker at the neighbouring constituency of Islington and Finsbury, the home pitch of the Front's election tactician, Sidney Chaney, who worked for the Tory party for 30 years, and now vows he will do everything in his power to hurt them. He sits on the table with John Cavanagh, the branch chairman, an upper middle class businessman. On the right is a prison officer, who is the branch treasurer. A Columbia Broadcasting System crew is filming and the lights are making everyone sweat, except for Tyndall, who, despite a

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## 'You realise the chaos that will be caused.'

it makes a W. That stands for white power.' Suddenly Dr Fields bellows, 'What do we want?' and the pint-drinking East Enders chant 'White Power, White Power, White Power.' It's all a little embarrassing. I don't feel they believe in it, and anyway, they've got it.

There follows the most paranoid speech on race I have ever listened to. The white race, Dr Fields says, was responsible for the creation of every race and the blacks are responsible for the destruction of civilisation. The white blood of the northern European nations, which has nourished the world, is seeping away. He descends to the most appalling banalities: if our ancestors hadn't stopped Genghis Khan at the Danube, he says, we would all be Asians now. 'We stand at the threshold of the greatest struggle for survival of the white race.'

For all their protestations that they have cast off the old Nazi trappings, the tactics of the Front haven't changed. Fascism starts on the street, and breeds on fear and hate, and the leaders know that much of their grass roots support comes from giving some quasi-official licence to violence.

In Hackney there is already

considerable violence. Mugging is frequent and there are racial attacks; one mixed married couple had their furniture smashed with such viciousness that there was no single piece of wood left larger than a pencil. The wall was daubed with NF slogans. Alec Biswas, secretary of the Hackney Asian Association, said: 'We are worried about the attacks and the unwillingness one notices on the part of the police to arrest the attackers. It gives them no alternative than to set up vigilante groups, and this is what they are doing.'

Even if you injected millions of pounds straight away, and unemployment fell to half a million overnight, the problems of Hackney and the rest of the East End would hardly be touched. So the root causes of the NF protest vote will remain. The prospects are that the NF will present a serious opposition in the local elections next May, and could easily pick up a handful of council seats. 'You realise the chaos that will be caused,' says Sidney Chaney, the Front's election man, 'The Left have said they won't allow us into the council chamber.'

Every Sunday morning, you can see the opposing forces lining up at Brick Lane market. The Left on one side of the bridge and the Front

on the other, by arrangement with the police.

The Front sell their newspapers until opening time - then they gather at The Bladebone, the old Mosleyite pub a few hundred yards from Brick Lane. On my last visit I saw Dr Fields again. He was distributing a leaflet in the shape of a dollar bill which read, 'Boat Ticket to Africa. This ticket entitles one nigger to: 1) Free trip to Africa on luxury liner with plenty of pumps. Boat is shaped like Cadillac with fins. 2) All the bananas and choice cuts of missionary desired. NAACP members may sit up front. 3) Barrel of axle grease for hair. Delicately scented with nigger sweat. Free jar of meat tenderiser.'

I am writing this down in my notebook when someone asks Dr Fields, sitting further along the bar, whether, to spare me the trouble, he could give me a leaflet. Dr Fields then discovers that I am a reporter for this magazine. He would rather keep that kind of stuff under the counter. He can't understand what I am doing there anyway, in this exclusive company. The atmosphere is deteriorating, but by this time I have had enough of the National Front and its friends as well, and I am already on my way out into Bethnal Green Road.

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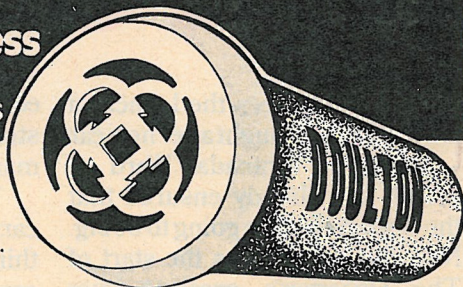


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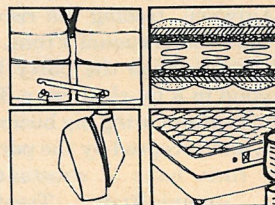
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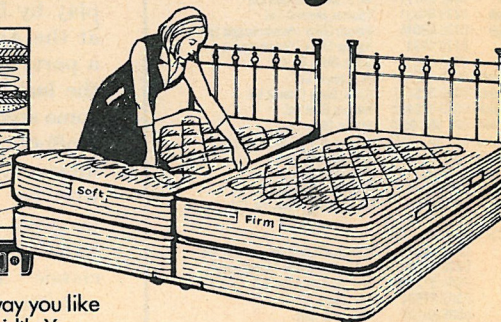
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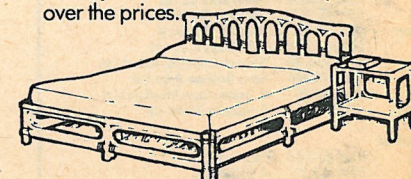


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