

THE EDL

BRITAIN'S 'NEW FAR RIGHT' SOCIAL MOVEMENT



The University of Northampton's
Radicalism and New Media Research Group

Dr Paul Jackson, lead author

Foreword by Michael Ellis, MP

About The Radicalism and New Media Research Group

Harnessing expertise in the University of Northampton's School of Social Sciences, the Radicalism and New Media Research Group is an initiative that generates practitioner-focused research projects. Linking academia with the wider world, these partnership activities coalesce around the understudied connection between radical and extremist political movements and their use of new media technologies.

From the English Defence League's use of Facebook for directing activities to Islamist jihadi beheadings filmed for the purposes propaganda and global dissemination, this connection is both striking and increasingly relevant.

There has been, as yet, no coordinated network to systematically undertake research in the crucial connection between new media and new forms of radicalism. In taking on this role, the Radicalism and New Media Research Group invites academic researchers, practitioners and civil servants (particularly the police and others concerned with community cohesion) to compare experiences and develop collaborative enterprises in the analysis of this wide-ranging phenomenon, particularly as it relates to the contemporary UK.

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Front cover image by David Hoffman, taken at the English Defence League's Tower Hamlets demonstration, 3 September 2011

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Foreword

Rt. Hon Michael Ellis, MP

The University of Northampton is at the forefront of the important academic research into the far-right, an area of increasing importance nationally and internationally. As Member of Parliament for Northampton North, I am very pleased to have been asked to write this Foreword because I applaud the fact that the University in the town where I have lived and worked my whole life, and which I now have the honour to represent in the House of Commons, is leading the way in this key area.

The view of the 'new far right' is that we should cut ourselves off from Islam and other religions and cultures. They believe we should do this, as the Prime Minister David Cameron put it earlier this year, 'through forced repatriation, favoured by some fascists, or the banning of new mosques, as is suggested in some parts of Europe.' This ideology, or for example the practice of burning the Koran – as promoted by Pastor Terry Jones, who has been excluded from the UK – is utterly abhorrent and must be robustly rejected.

Extremism of any kind is a threat to our country and to our way of life. In the Prime Minister's speech to the Munich Security Conference on how best to tackle this threat David Cameron made the point that groups on the far-right, such as the English Defence League, fuel Islamophobia with their poisonous and deeply erroneous stance that Islam and the West do not mix.

No one can doubt the importance and relevance of the subject at hand. One must only look at the terrible atrocity this summer in Norway at the hands of a murderous terrorist – in the name of a crazed war against Islam – to see the relevance and currency of the subject matter in this report.

The potential for this kind of extremism to lead directly to 'lone-wolf' terrorism is also dealt with in this report. These developments show the danger of allowing extremist views on any side to fester.

What began in reaction to the deeply offensive abuse of returning British soldiers – our courageous servicemen and women that have made such sacrifices over the years to fight extremism in other parts of the world – has manifested itself, through the development of the EDL, into violence on our streets and a terrifying

subculture of casual racism. This report presents a very useful documentation of the EDL's development, their use of online and social media, their links to football hooliganism, as well as the development of splinter groups.

The advance of copy-cat organisations like the Norwegian Defence League and others, as documented by the authors, shows not only the urgency for action as a society but also shows the potency of the repugnant values represented by the EDL.

The British National Party, and other far-right parties, may try to attract voters with talk of local politics, of bin collections and council housing shortages to win them votes. But as a fascist organisation that does little to couch its views, it is my opinion that it will always struggle to garner the support of the vast majority of the British public who rejected fascism in the 1930's, and who continue to do so today.

The EDL, however, by not asking for votes and by arguing that they do really only oppose violent Islamism – though the hypocrisies pointed out by this report are worthy of note – could potentially spearhead a movement that would have damaging consequences and divide communities.

At the same time as we confront this new far-right politics, we must also do the same for other forms of extremism – for too long, Government policy has encouraged communities to merely co-exist rather than co-operate with each other. As a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee of the House of Commons, I am particularly conscious of this issue and very supportive of the Government's response to extremism, namely the *Prevent* strategy, which for the first time explicitly tackles far-right extremism. In addition to the recent *Prevent* policy, this Government is keenly aware of the importance of fostering a stronger sense of belonging and citizenship, co-ordinated by the Department for Communities and Local Government. By empowering communities and integrating them into society, those communities become much more resilient to terrorist ideology and propaganda.

The *Prevent* strategy of the previous Government failed to confront extremist ideology and therefore failed to adequately tackle the threat we face. If we wish to combat the rise of the 'new far-right' and the potential for 'lone-wolf' terrorism inspired by such thinking, we must vigorously pursue all forms of radicalisation. I have every confidence that, through *Prevent*, the current Government will do this.

This Government is committed to do more than any previous administration has to promote integration. The Prime Minister's speech in Munich made it clear that the new *Prevent* strategy will be an unyielding fight against extremism.

This report is an important contribution to the study of the threats that this country and Europe are embroiled in today. Rooting out extremism from all quarters must be, and is, a real priority for the Coalition Government. Twenty-First Century Britain is about integration and cohesion between all of our different communities. That both Islamist extremists and the 'new far-right' extremists reject this belief is telling.

As Baroness Sayeeda Warsi has said, 'any phobia is by definition the opposite of a philosophy. A phobia is an irrational fear. It takes on a life of its own and no longer needs to be justified.' It is this that makes the development of the EDL and their ilk of concern. I hope this report plays a part in our greater understanding of this problem, and in developing societal solutions to it.

Michael Ellis, MP
Member of Parliament for Northampton North,
Member of the Home Affairs Select Committee
September 2011

Introduction

Dr Matthew Feldman

For some thirty months, the English Defence League has brought disorder, violence and racism in its wake. It has stretched police budgets and strained cohesion amongst, and between, British communities. Despite claiming that it opposes jihadi Islamism – like, of course, all right thinking people – the EDL's rhetoric quickly turns into anti-Muslim prejudice, whether at demonstrations, online or, increasingly, in court.

The EDL and other Defence Leagues in Wales, Scotland and even abroad – the accused terrorist from Norway, Anders Behring Breivik, was associated with the Norwegian Defence League – also represent a new form of far-right politics. As described by this report, this 'new far-right' does not contest elections like yesterday's National Front, or today's British National Party. Instead, this is direct action politics, disseminated and coordinated via the new media – ranging from Facebook to mobile phones, and digital film to Youtube.

Yet for all the novelty, the EDL represents at the same time an age-old phenomenon: the politics of hate. This hatred is directed overwhelmingly at Asian Muslims in Britain – although such discrimination is often absent, with Sikhs and secular Asians also facing abuse by EDL supporters – who are subjected to a collective prejudice that is wholly alien to British values of tolerance and individual responsibility. For all its rhetoric, the EDL promotes exclusion, division, and a casual racism at street level. It is a key driver in the 'tit-for-tat' radicalisation which, in turn, has been a central area of research by the Radicalism and New Media Research Group.

Established in 2009 by an interdisciplinary team at the University of Northampton's School of Social Sciences, the RNM Group (www.radicalism-new-media.org) has been principally researching the rise of the 'new far right' in Britain and Europe this century. A host of publications, media interviews and publicly disseminated research has analysed the various 'faces' of the 'new far-right' over the last two years, with subjects ranging from populist far-right political parties in Europe to tiny racist networks, called 'groupuscules', existing largely online. Of these public-facing academic investigations, however, this report on the English Defence League is doubtless of greatest interest to policy-

makers and the wider public alike. There are several reasons for this.

Following Nigel Copesey's impressive report on behalf of Faith Matters from this time last year, *The English Defence League: Challenging our country and our values of Social Inclusion, Fairness and Equality*, the present analysis, *The EDL: Britain's New Far-Right Social Movement*, considers the English Defence League from a variety of perspectives. In doing so, the report represents the most extensive discussion available to date. In the chapters to ensue, the English Defence League is approached as a social movement, one driven by a unique alliance of football hooliganism, xenophobic nationalism and street politics – collectively organised and disseminated from the leadership to grass-roots supporters via the new media. Ample evidence is adduced, troublingly, to suggest that the EDL's signature anti-Muslim politics – if not its thuggish and violent means of expression – has a much wider purchase in British society than even the tens of thousands of 'followers' registered on Facebook.

If the demonisation of Muslims is the tide upon which the EDL is carried, then its reputation for violence remains the movement's undertow. As made clear in latter chapters detailing the leadership, chronology and trajectory of the EDL, this is a social movement that thrives upon confrontation and community tensions. An outpouring of mostly angry – and often drunk – young men on British streets has led, in turn, to arrests, prosecutions and even banning orders for EDL supporters engaged in racial hatred and violence. As police, policy-makers and civil society struggle to better understand the characteristics of the English Defence League the movement itself, despite in-fighting amongst leaders and splits amongst divisions, shows little sign of drowning.

In response, the RNM Group believes that a better understanding of the English Defence League – both at popular and policy level – can help in addressing, and in some cases curtailing, the challenges posed by this 'new far-right' social movement. It is for this reason, above all, that this report has been compiled and made freely available online: knowledge is the handmaiden of problem-solving. It does no good to just label the EDL as 'Nazis' or fascists; this social movement is not simply a reprise of interwar history but is instead something new, dynamic and dangerous. As a leading scholar of the new-far right, Pierre Andre Taguieff, has put this point: 'if vigilance was only a game of recognizing something already well-known, then it would only be a question of remembering.' In light of 'new far-right' groups

like the EDL, finally, vigilance and support for genuinely liberal values are not an exercise in recalling the dangers of the past. It is just as much, if not more so, a question of applying the lessons learned to the circumstances of twenty-first century. In doing so, the RNM Group greatly hopes that a deeper public understanding of the way in which the EDL operates today will lead to more informed and effective engagement in future.

Dr Matthew Feldman, Director of the University of Northampton's Radicalism and New Media Research Group.

Executive summary

This report examines the development of the English Defence League (EDL). It argues that the EDL is best viewed as a movement gravitating around what this report calls 'new far right' ideology. This is a very loose set of views, yet one that presents a clearly politicised approach to social issues by combining ultra-patriotism, a critique of mainstream politics, and an aggressive, anti-Muslim agenda. Addressing these points, the following are the report's key findings:

First: The English Defence League is most usefully understood as a social movement. It has a limited central organisational structure (a Social Movement Organisation, or SMO), which offers a level of coherent organisation, and a broad party line, to a wider set of networked followers. However, it is also heavily reliant upon grass-roots networks, such as the Casuals United organisation, and the initiative of local and regional leaders, to develop its division-based activism.

Second: The EDL has updated and modernised an older far right strategy called 'march and grow'. Marches and protests offer EDL supporters a series of high profile, rousing demonstrations that garner media coverage, allowing the movement to gain more support. Attendance at such protests can also boost morale through shows of unity. Arguably, the EDL's most important innovation is the introduction of new media such as Facebook in order to articulate a 'new far right' ideology. As such, limiting the movement's ability to march would likely impact negatively on its fortunes.

Third: The English Defence League's 'new far right' activism is largely driven by a single issue, namely a potent anti-Muslim agenda. In the wake of 9/11 and 7/7, this prejudice has been strong within British culture, and resonates troublingly amongst elements within the wider public today. To a significant degree, this anti-Muslim attitude is dependent upon negative media representations. The presence of a wider culture of anti-Muslim prejudice is crucial to the EDL's on-going viability. Should anti-Muslim sentiment significantly decline in the UK, it is likely that any wider support for the EDL, in its current form, would also decline.

Fourth: Although anti-Muslim sentiment is commonplace within the EDL, emergent psychological research into the movement stresses that such views are often expressions of more

general frustration with society amongst angry young men. The EDL's anti-Muslim rhetoric centres upon a scapegoat figure, a target to air a more generalised disconnection from modern Britain. Responding to a sense of powerlessness by 'performing' an empowered, male identity through street protests and violence, however, is an ultimately unfulfilling channel for such frustrations. For some followers, this has the potential to develop into a cycle of criminality and violence. Given the wider social movement's ability to give licence, either actively or tacitly, to various forms of extremism, tackling the EDL and other 'new far right' groups needs to become a core component of the *Prevent Strategy*.

Fifth: Britain's economic circumstances broadly impact upon the fortunes of domestic far right movements. Yet this needs to be understood in relation to specific localities, not only nationally. Without addressing underlying economic and social tensions within areas identified with EDL and 'new far right' support, it is likely that the movement will continue to find fertile conditions in more deprived pockets across the country. This has been the tendency with the history of the BNP, for example, which is now failing largely because of internal issues. To combat this, a relevant and empowering local politics is crucial to tackling support for extreme forms of ultra-patriotism and ultra-nationalism.

Sixth: The English Defence League is able to appeal to people wishing to register more general discontent with mainstream politics. As the other major vehicle for this type of protest politics, the BNP, continues to decline, some of its supporters may look to the EDL as an outlet. Potentially, this pressure could even lead to the EDL becoming a political party, although the leadership continues to deny any such ambitions. As a vehicle for populist, direct-action protest, the energies of the EDL may also be superseded by a more respectable 'new far right' party, such as the English Democrats (which is also currently accommodating former BNP supporters). Such a party could offer a clearly non-violent voice to those who feel disenfranchised by mainstream politicians. Many latent 'new far right' supporters are ultimately seeking just such a non-violent form of 'new far-right' politics.

Seventh: There are a number of other potential outcomes at this juncture for the future of the English Defence League. The leadership could continue to maintain its control over a large part of the movement, as it has done to date. This

suggests that the EDL could well continue in its current form for some time. Contrastingly, an unpredictable leadership crisis could easily lead to further fragmentation of the EDL. One risk here is that such fragmentation will also lead to further radicalisation among some of its more hardened followers, as is already evident in the case of the 'Infidel' splinter groups.

Chapter 1: The English Defence League and the 'New Far Fight'

Dr Paul Jackson, University of Northampton

The English Defence League (EDL) is often dubbed a 'far right' movement in press reports covering the organisation's activities. Yet the EDL itself denies this characterisation. For example, its Mission Statement states that it is a 'human rights' movement defending Britain from the incursion of an extreme form of Islam which is attempting to erode English culture.¹ The EDL takes a strong line on the alleged failings of British Muslims as well as 'jihadi Islamism', and so, unsurprisingly, it has also been described by many of its critics as 'Islamophobic'. The movement is keen to deny this latter characterisation too.

Yet what has become clear among analysts of fascist and far right movements is that the EDL is predicated on both a new type of far right politics and a potent anti-Muslim sentiment. Indeed, we can summarise this refashioned far right agenda as the 'new far right'. Before examining the EDL's discourses and activities in close detail, it is important to begin our enquiry into this complex movement by visiting some of the current thinking on these two key themes.

A politicised movement

To date, the EDL has not fielded candidates for any political position in Britain. Nevertheless, it is a politically motivated organisation, as so we can identify within it an underpinning ideology. The June 2011 *Prevent Strategy* stresses that understanding ideology is crucial when examining prejudicial groups.² Essentially a direct action protest movement, not a political party, the EDL is

concerned with developing a highly charged, politicised environment to engage its supporters. As later chapters will show, this culture is largely cultivated through the linking of new media campaigns and offline actions, while grass-roots activists energise each other, to give the movement an overarching sense of momentum. Only to a limited extent is the social movement led by a centralised figure. Its diverse following expresses a sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream politics via a 'cause' that its followers believe to have been neglected by the mainstream political establishment.

Moreover, despite its claims to the contrary, there is much *prima facie* evidence to place the EDL on the more radical fringes of the political right. This ranges from its populist, nationalist agenda; to its condemnation of left-wing figures on its various blogs and websites; to its strong associations with the US Tea Party movement; to its support for international far right figures, such as Geert Wilders. Moreover, as is discussed elsewhere in this report, key EDL figures, such as Steven Yaxley-Lennon and Kevin Carroll, have historic links with the British National Party (BNP). Finally, we will see in later chapters that extreme right-wing movements, such as the Aryan Strike Force, have found the EDL a useful host organisation.

What is the 'new far right'?

There has been much academic discussion in recent years over what constitutes the 'far right'.³ In particular, there has been interest in understanding the dynamics of a new wave of non-mainstream, nationalist politics, often called the 'populist' 'radical', 'extreme', or 'far' right, which has emerged since the 1980s. Across Europe, discrete parties here include: the Dutch Freedom Party, the Belgian Flemish Interest, the Italian Northern League, and perhaps most significantly, the French National Front. These newer organisations are often contrasted with older far right movements whose ideologies much more clearly stem from the legacy of interwar fascism, postwar forms of neo-Nazism and racial anti-Semitism, such as the German National Democratic Party and the British National

¹ <http://englishdefenceleague.org/about-us/mission-statement/>.

² <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/counter-terrorism/prevent/prevent-strategy/prevent-strategy-review?view=Binary>.

³ Aside from texts cited elsewhere in this report, this literature includes: Paul Hainsworth, *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (London: Pinter, 2000); Elizabeth Carter, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success of Failure?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Antonis A. Ellinas, *The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe: Playing the Nationalist Card* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Party. Boundaries here are fuzzy, yet broadly speaking we have seen a resurgence of the far right in recent years across the continent. Although there is still much debate, comparative analysis has led to a good deal of consensus among academics. This centres upon a rough distinction between an openly fascist 'extreme right-wing', which admits it is inspired by neo-Nazi and similarly revolutionary themes,⁴ and a more publicity savvy, though still extremist, 'new far right', which veils such connections in its public discourses. We can consider this as a spectrum of extremisms, and so figures that may start out as less extreme, drawn to the common sense appeals of the 'new far right', can gravitate to more extremist perspectives over time.

In Britain, movements such as Combat-18 and the terrorist group the Aryan Strike Force can be clearly placed at the most extreme point of the far right spectrum, as can influential figures such as the promoter of neo-Nazi terrorism, Colin Jordan.⁵ Relatively less extreme figures include John Tyndall, founder of the British National Party, who still represents continuity with anti-Semitism and neo-Nazism.⁶ So too does current BNP leader Nick Griffin, despite his attempts to develop a more presentable public image since his election in 1999. Indeed, Griffin's attempt to mask his earlier interest in more extreme far right themes, such as Holocaust denial, through a more family orientated language, is typical of what we can call the publicity savvy 'new far right'. Griffin has also strongly targeted Muslims in his reinvention of the BNP.

When turning to the EDL, we see that the neo-Nazi and openly fascist 'extreme right-wing' is regularly condemned by the leadership of the movement. This is important to recognise. As with other 'new far right' movements, the EDL's leadership actively wants to disassociate itself from overt 'extreme right-wing' activity. As such, commentators should be wary of claiming the EDL is simply another traditional fascist or even neo-Nazi group, as is often the case with anti-fascist protestors. Instead, the evidence currently available suggests that fringe elements of the most 'extreme right wing' political persuasion are contained within the EDL, yet formally it aspires to be a populist, 'new far right' movement that genuinely wants to distance itself from a legacy of neo-Nazi style extremism.

In other words, the academic literature here argues there is such a thing as an openly anti neo-Nazi 'new far right', which, whatever its position on the history of interwar fascism, nevertheless remains in conflict with liberal democratic principles. This 'new far right' is the force that has been relatively successful in recent years.

One leading theorist on fascist and far right ideologies, Roger Griffin, has usefully characterised the value of the term 'far' in such contexts as simply signifying an ideology that radically places itself outside the formal political establishment, and ultimately manifests anti-liberal values. 'By definition', argues Griffin, 'no-one on the Far-Right would use the phrase to define themselves. For them it is the status quo that is "extreme" in its decadence and failure to safeguard essential values'.⁷ Thus the term 'far' in a far right context is essentially a marker of ideologies that view the political establishment as becoming dysfunctional and dangerous, a theme that, as the following chapters will show, can be found within the EDL worldview.

So on this understanding, a 'new far right' movement is not necessarily defined by being engaged in illegal activity, as one promoting anti-Semitism, or developing neo-Nazi themes. Rather, it can be seen as one that combines an extremist ultra-patriotism with a tendency to present mainstream politics as in a critical state of decay and disorder – themes commonly found in the EDL's materials. Moreover, unlike, say, the United Kingdom Independence Party, the 'new far right' promotes a coded, ethnic sense of nationalism that is fundamentally at odds with liberal democratic values, as highlighted by Nigel Copsey in Chapter 6 of this report.

The growth of the 'new far right' across Europe

According to another leading expert here, Jens Rydgren, the origins of this new wave of far right populism emerged with Jean Marie Le Pen's National Front in France in the 1980s.⁸ For Rydgren, Le Pen's politics combined an ideology marked by *ethnonationalist xenophobia* (i.e. racism based on cultural markers of identity rather than biology); the doctrine of *ethnopluralism* (i.e. a limited engagement with multicultural ideas to frame what is ultimately a 'culturally racist' set of ideas); and *anti-political-*

⁴ Current threats from the extreme right wing have been assessed in the report I recently co-authored with Gerry Gable, *Lone Wolves: Myth or Reality?* (London: Searchlight, 2011).

⁵ See my discussion on Colin Jordan, Paul Jackson, 'Colin Jordan's "Merrie England" and "Universal Nazism"', <http://www.radicalism-new-media.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/RNMWP002.pdf>.

⁶ For analysis of the ideology of the BNP as retaining a fascist core, see Nigel Copsey, *Contemporary British Fascism: The British National Party and the Quest for Legitimacy* 2nd Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008)

⁷ Roger Griffin, 'The Origins of the Far Right' in Peter Davies and Paul Jackson (eds.) *The Far Right in Europe: An Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Greenwood, 2008) p.40.

⁸ Jens Rydgren, 'Is Extreme Right-wing Populism Contagious? Explaining the Emergence of a New Party Family.' *European Journal of Political Research* 44 (2005) pp. 1 – 25.

establishment-populism (i.e. strong evocations of the theme that the political elite have failed to defend the nation from attack by outsider figures, to the detriment of the nation). Rydgren called this combination a new 'master frame', one that has subsequently been taken up by a wide range of 'new far right' parties and networks across the continent. These qualities can be found in many political organisations which comprise the 'new far right', an innovation that could only gain credibility by significantly distancing itself from the destruction caused by interwar fascism and forms of neo-Nazism, as well as limiting its anti-liberal agenda. The recently-elected leader of the French National Front, Marine Le Pen, typifies this new, photogenic yet xenophobic far right politics. Meanwhile, Anders Behring Breivik has shown the extremes this new type of anti-Muslim ultra-nationalism can develop.

In one of the most comprehensive international surveys of far-right politics in contemporary Europe, Pierro Ignazi stresses that 'new far right' parties exhibit diverse characteristics, dependent on the national traditions and local political cultures.⁹ As such, the 'new far right' does not necessarily act in harmony, nor are their aims necessarily identical. Moreover, Hans Georg-Betz stresses that this 'new far right' can appeal to both the 'winners' and 'losers' of social and economic modernisation following the emergence of post-industrial societies, especially since the 1980s.¹⁰ The development of newer neo-Liberal ideas in post-industrial Europe has also been inspirational. The 'new far right' couches its politics in the language of radical defence of freedoms and identity. As such, a characteristic feature is the adoption of the language of liberalism for inherently anti-liberal agendas. Finally, though it will deny any links with the older far right in its public discourse, behind the scenes the 'new far right' is often intimately connected with older viewpoints, such as neo-Nazism, too. So analysts need to be aware of a more moderate 'front stage' and a more extreme 'back stage' as a core feature of 'new far right' movements.

The 'new far right' and cultural racism

In one of his more recent discussions on this topic, Betz also highlights how the 'new far right' has been keen to develop anti-Muslim rhetoric as a core strategy. Betz uses the term 'nativism', or cultural

racism, to identify the cultural, yet ultimately racist, prejudices expressed towards Muslims by the 'new far right'.¹¹ Indeed, Muslims have become the most predominant scapegoats for the far right today, as anti-Semitic and anti-Afro Caribbean prejudices have become more unacceptable. Contrastingly, nativist forms of 'cultural racism' can appear more tolerant, and therefore command greater public legitimacy. They function by systematically and radically stereotyping core *cultural* features of a target group. By targeting cultural markers of identity (such as religious faith), rather than physical appearances as found in the 'biological racism' of older far right movements, such sustained, negative stereotyping creates a xenophobic discourse of exclusion. In particular, it is recognisable by its presentation of the scapegoat community as having a culturally 'fixed' set of values. These values are held to be diametrically opposed to those of the national community, as well as being inferior and dangerous. In the case of 'nativist' Islamophobia, the Koran is a key propaganda tool. One of the key recurring themes within the 'new far right' is the argument that Muslim adherence to the Koran is deemed essential to the Islamic faith, yet the text is also presented as the antithesis to European values. In sum, according to the stark 'new far right' ideology either one rejects the west, or one rejects the Koran.

Following this 'nativist', or culturally racist turn, Europe's 'new far right' calls for the removal of such feared influences. This is to be achieved via compulsory assimilation to a pre-defined national identity, while rejecting any values deemed 'alien'. In the main, such ideas have displaced those of compulsory deportation found in the far right of a generation ago. Removing a culture deemed alien, rather than a body of people, is often now the core goal. Through a discourse setting a constructed, ultra-patriotic national identity against an alien 'other', the 'new far right' both defines a clear, patriotic sense of 'our way of life' and evokes a sense of a safe 'us' and a dangerous 'them'. This new binary between western culture as one of tolerance and enlightenment, and Islam as one of backwardness, terrorism and 'fascism', has been found in many of the 'new far right' parties. In doing so, it advances the core building block of any form of racism or prejudice.

One of the pioneers of this slick form of prejudice was the Dutch politician Pym Fortuyn. His 1997 pamphlet, *Against the Islamisation of our Culture – Dutch identity as a foundation*, developed

⁹ Pierro Ignazi, *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Hans Georg-Betz, 'The New Politics of Resentment: Radical Right Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe', *Comparative Politics* 25, 4 (1993) pp. 413 – 27.

¹¹ Hans Georg-Betz, 'Islam and the Far Right', in Peter Davies and Paul Jackson (eds.) *The Far Right in Europe: An Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Greenwood, 2008).

the now classic line that Islam is a religion inherently incompatible with western culture. Fortuyn highlights that arguments promoting gender tolerance can be compatible with the 'new far right' in a way that would be unimaginable for neo-Nazism. Being an openly gay politician helped Fortuyn frame all Muslims as opposed to homosexuality, and against western freedoms more generally. In his wake, the 'new far right' has become increasingly open to the idea of defending a plurality of gender and racial identities as a means to demonise Muslims. In a similar way, the 'new far right' can decry anti-Afro Caribbean racism, and develop pro-Israeli and/or Jewish stances, and even embrace same sex marriage. This selective tolerance, however, systematically excludes the Muslim 'other' while only selectively embracing such difference. In the context of the 'new far right', these views are also regularly combined with ultra-patriotism.



Rabbi Nachum Shifren addressing the English Defence League at the Israeli Embassy, October 24 2010. (Image courtesy of David Hoffman)

In the past decade, there has been a growth in demand for this political agenda across Europe. As well as the major organisations already mentioned, we can include movements such as: the True Finns, the Norwegian Progress Party, the Danish People's Party, the Swedish Democrats, Austria's Freedom Party and the Alliance for the Future of Austria, Germany's Republikaner Party, Greece's Hellenic Front, Luxemburg's Alternative Democratic Reform Party, the Swiss People's Party and France's Bloc Identitaire. We can also locate pan European movements such as The Gates of Vienna, Stop the Islamisation of Europe, and Alan Lake's 4Freedom's network within this dynamic. Meanwhile, many of the former Soviet Bloc countries have also developed significant far-right movements, though these can be animated by significantly different core issues, and these also augment this type of extreme-nationalist politics across the continent. Though these do not easily fit into the 'new far right' typology, these include Hungary's Jobbik, the Greater Romania Party,

the Serbian Radical Party, and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. Collectively, this heterogeneous mix of parties, protest movements and online networks helps to create a pan-European subculture of Islamophobia and hatred.

Problematising 'Islamophobia'

In an excellent summary of how such anti-Muslim sentiments have come to dominate the prejudices developed by the 'new far right' across Europe, José Pedro Zúquete stresses that the term 'Islamophobia was not until recently seen as a *basic* feature of the extreme right's ideological and value system'.¹² It has now become a *basic* feature of the grievances forwarded by the 'new far right'. Indeed, the growth of the 'new far right' is strongly connected to the rise of 'Islamophobia' more generally.

The issue of 'Islamophobia' is thus crucial to understanding the 'new far right'. However, before proceeding, it is important to reflect on some of the problems raised by the term 'Islamophobia'. It was given some original parameters by a pioneering report published by the Runnymede Trust in 1997,¹³ which highlighted a checklist of eight core aspects:

Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change.

Islam is seen as separate and 'other'. It does not have values in common with other cultures, is not affected by them and does not influence them.

Islam is seen as inferior to the West. It is seen as barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist.

Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism and engaged in a 'clash of civilisations'.

Islam is seen as a political ideology and is used for political or military advantage.

Criticisms made of the West by Islam are rejected out of hand.

Hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.

Anti-Muslim hostility is seen as natural or normal.

This checklist still offers a useful 'rough guide' to the forms that anti-Muslim sentiments often take.

¹² Jose Pedro P Zuquete, 'The European extreme-right and Islam: New directions?', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13, 3 (2008) pp. 321 - 344.

¹³ *Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All* (Runnymede Trust, 1997), ch. 2.

However there has been some valid criticism of this perspective as being at times too monolithic, and lacking in subtlety. In particular, critics highlight that it can allow for any criticism of Muslim societies to be dismissed as mere 'Islamophobia'.

This can become a significant problem for engagement with extremist perspectives. The Quilliam Foundation's report, *Islamism and Language*, highlights how the term 'Islamophobia' can itself easily feed into a language of polarised polemics. For example, it can be used by jihadi Islamists to close down discussion on genuine areas of criticism regarding threats or actual acts of violence that jihadi ideologies promote. Significantly for the purposes of this study, Quilliam's report also highlights that, in turn, 'far-right groups have used Islamists' spurious allegations of "Islamophobia" to argue that all accusations of "Islamophobia" levelled against them are similarly spurious'.¹⁴ In other words, 'Islamophobia' has become a key, emotive term in the 'tit-for-tat' radicalisation that characterises both the rise of the EDL, and the rise of organisations such as Muslims Against Crusades (previously Al-Mujiharoun). As a consequence, the term Islamophobia is at risk of losing much analytical value.

This Quilliam report usefully identifies other key terms found within both overt and more veiled anti-Muslim views. For example, terms such as the 'Muslim world' and 'Muslim countries' imply an international unity of opinion that simply does not exist; while 'the Muslim community' again falsely implies a single, common identity among British Muslims. Such generalisations miss the need to stress plurality and cultural difference, and to resist collapsing all Muslims into one, essentialist category. Finally, a key term found in EDL discourses, 'Islamic law', implies that Shari'ah law is an uncontested system, and a unitary body of thought that could somehow literally 'replace' British law. In fact, its authors stress Shari'ah law consists of 'a diverse and often contradictory set of religious guidance',¹⁵ and such assumptions are radically misguided. Yet such generalisations can easily be deployed to caricature Muslim communities as aggressive and alien, and so the theme is often employed in EDL rhetoric.

In sum, then, the wider academic literature stresses that Muslim communities should be understood in a more nuanced way than the reductive distinction between 'moderate' and 'extremist'. Chris Allen in particular highlights that, if

followed literally, the Runnymede definition can imply the existence of an equally simplistic, idealised Muslim community, one lacking in any social or political problems, let alone genuine issues of violent extremism.¹⁶ When engaging with the prejudiced advanced by the 'new far right', it is therefore important to be aware not merely of a genuine threat posed by jihadi Islamism, but also being sensitive of the complexity of a faith shared by one billion people and, closer to home, of the many Muslim *communities* found in Britain.

The English Defence League's Mission Statement as a 'new far right' text

Finally, when examining any far right movement, it is important to be aware of the organisation's 'front stage' messages, as well as its more aggressive 'back stage' dynamic, which is hidden from public view. Indeed, one leading expert, Cas Mudde, stresses that it would be naive to accept at face value the messages put out by a far right movement, though these considered, 'front stage' messages do reveal much about an organisation.¹⁷ We will examine the EDL's variegated 'back stage' later in this report. However, to conclude this chapter by showing the relevance of the 'new far right' ideology to the EDL's identity, we can turn to one of the movement's most prominent 'front stage' documents, its Mission Statement. This text provides a self-penned description of the movement that places it squarely within this 'new far right' populist politics.¹⁸

To begin the statement opens with a quote from Albert Einstein, stressing he was 'a refugee from Nazi Germany'. The quote itself calls for people to confront evil to prevent it from dominating society. This is an emotive rhetorical device, a move that immediately attempts to distance the EDL from a pro-Nazi or fascist identity, while aligning the movement with a Jewish figure vilified by the Nazi regime in calling for a defence against a tyrannous ideology. The wider allusion, moreover, is that Islam represents a new totalitarian ideology that must be confronted. Already, core 'new far right' tendencies of distancing the movement from Nazism and identifying Muslims as a threat are being revealed.

Drawing on the language of liberalism and freedom, the first point made in the Mission Statement proper argues that the EDL is a 'human

¹⁴ George Readings, James Brandon and Richard Phelps, *Islamism and Language: How Using the Wrong Words Reinforces Islamist Narratives* (London: Quilliam, 2007).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ 'Keeping it simple and stupid: theoretical considerations on the concept of Islamophobia' in Sayyid, S. & Vakil, A. (eds.) *Thinking through Islamophobia* (London: Hurst, 2010).

¹⁷ Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) p. 168.

¹⁸ <http://englishdefenceleague.org/about-us/mission-statement/>.

rights organisation', founded in response to Islamist extremism. This rests upon claims that the EDL essentially protects the public's right to protest against 'radical Islam's encroachment into the lives of non-Muslims.' The EDL also maintains that it is protecting British Muslims against examples of Islam's excesses, while stressing that: 'the onus should be on British Muslims to overcome the problems that blight their religion and achieve nothing short of an Islamic reformation'. The underlying implication is that the whole of Islam is in a state of crisis, and so all Muslims pose a more general threat to wider society. An *enforced* 'Islamic reformation' is therefore deemed necessary by the EDL (both here and elsewhere), due to the alleged threat posed by 'those who believe Islam should be taken in its "original", 7th century form [...] the antithesis of Western democracy'. This view reiterates the simplistic 'new far right' view that Islam is essentially anti-modern and barbaric, with the EDL contrasted as a defender of modern values. Moreover, violent extremism is presented as the predominant face of Islam in Britain today, as the Mission Statement claims that 'radical Islam' has a 'stranglehold on British Muslims'. By selectively evoking liberal ideals in this way, the EDL's Mission Statement calls on the British government to repeal elements of free speech supposedly allowing the anti-democratic views of Muslim extremists to be expressed. In sum, it presents extremism as the dominant characteristic within Muslim communities, a major distortion of reality.

The Mission Statement also presents Shari'ah law as a single body of ideas to be imposed on Western society. This idea, actually one shared by only a handful of Islamists in Britain, is vehemently opposed by the EDL. The stress on confronting the growth of Shari'ah law evokes the theme of a creeping encroachment of alien, Muslim ideas into British society. Sinister plots and conspiracy theories can easily be given licence by such a tenor. In typically emotive terms, the Mission Statement claims this is separating society into 'Muslims and non-Muslims, and the EDL will never allow this sort of iniquitous apartheid to take root in our country.' Through recourse to such loaded language intended to style the movement as anti-racist, a core divide is presented here between Muslims and the rest of Britain. This assumption again helps to frame and legitimise the confrontational 'us' and 'them' politics of the EDL.

The third point of the Mission Statement states that the EDL is dedicated to informing the public about the threats posed by Islam. This is because mainstream politicians deny the public

information. This theme is representative of the anti-establishment politics of the 'new far right', which tries to develop populist, 'common sense' solutions to the problems created by out-of-touch political elites. The Mission Statement again develops some typical, anti-Muslim themes to present Islam as a growing threat to British society. For example, it argues that Islam is a totalitarian-style ideology that needs to be combated as it is opposed to Western traditions of democracy:

Islam is not just a religious system, but a political and social ideology that seeks to dominate all non-believers and impose a harsh legal system that rejects democratic accountability and human rights. It runs counter to all that we hold dear within our British liberal democracy.

Though the language is one of defending liberalism, this is only achieved by collapsing the diverse Muslim communities in Britain into a monolithic Islamist threat. This 'slippage' between challenging Islamic extremism to a more general negative portrayal of Muslim communities is a key characteristic of the 'new far right' in Europe today.

Having now powerfully evoked a worrying Muslim 'other', the fourth point in the Mission Statement discusses the positive sense of national community the EDL claims to defend. As is typical of the 'new far right', here the divisive theme of 'us' and 'them' is raised entirely in cultural terms. The discourse connects inclusivity and exclusion in an almost seamless fashion, for example stressing the EDL draws on 'people of all races, all faiths, all political persuasions, and all lifestyles'. In the next breath, however, this unified body of 'all people in England, whatever their background, or origin, can stand united in a desire to stop the imposition of the rules of Islam on non-believers'. In keeping with the rhetoric of the 'new far right', the statement again identifies a 'creeping Islamisation of our country' designed to 'implement an undemocratic alternative to our cherished way of life: the sharia.'

So, to summarise, the discourse is continually slipping into such statements presenting all Muslims as incompatible with a true, English identity, though with regular caveats suggesting a more sympathetic attitude towards some Muslims. The EDL's Mission Statement puts the movement into some genuinely fertile political territory surrounding anti-Muslim politics, one that currently resonates across Europe. In doing so, it reveals the striking characteristics of populist, ultra-patriotic and anti-Muslim ideology that characterises the 'new far right'. It is this ideology, its development, expression, impact and on-going threat that subsequent chapters of this report will analyse.

Chapter 2: The Rise of the English Defence League as a Social Movement

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It has become commonplace to classify the English Defence League as a social movement. More precisely, the EDL is best seen as what the academic literature sometimes calls a 'new social movement', namely a social movement unconcerned with addressing issues of social class and mobility – as found in the labour or the feminist social movements – but instead develops a politics driven by the desire to defend and promote a shared identity. Newer social movements like the EDL develop these non-materialistic issues as central grievances in which to air wider concerns.¹ Of course, the clear identity that the EDL's 'new far right' ideology draws upon is a powerfully patriotic sense of English nationalism, while its views are largely held together by denigrating Islamism, and often the Muslim faith too. This type of ethnic nationalism can be called ultra-patriotism, as it actively excludes some British nationals (Muslims) from the patriotic community, cutting against historic democratic principles. This chapter will explore how the EDL has grown into a social movement, and how it subsequently developed a formalised structure (called a Social Movement Organisation in the specialist literature) to promote this cause.

The distinction between the formal Social Movement Organisation (or SMO) and the wider grass-root support for a social movement is a useful one to make. Moreover, it is possible to identify a number of stages in the life of a social movement: initial emergence; coalescence and stabilisation; formalisation; and eventual decline.² The English Defence League has not only stabilised, but has started to formalise its operations of late. This has been achieved through

the emergence of a centralised SMO, alongside an ability to bring a range of diverse groups into the wider social movement. When examining the origins, current make-up, and future trajectory of the EDL, however, it is important to be acutely aware that this is a conglomeration of organisations, which have coalesced around core ideological themes powerful enough to give the movement a common cause. To date, coordination from the central SMO has been a key factor in the movement's growth, currently led by Steven Yaxley-Lennon and Kevin Carroll. Yet there are also several grass-roots initiatives that, to a greater or lesser extent, move beyond the core agenda promoted by the central SMO. In practical terms, this means that the EDL's success lies not merely in the quality of leadership found in the SMO, but also in the continued innovations within the powerful and diverse grass-roots support, united through shared anti-Muslim prejudice.

Origins of the English Defence League

In approaching the English Defence League as a nexus of organisations clustered around a central Social Movement Organisation, it is useful to begin by examining at the origins of the movement in the spring of 2009. As has been amply documented, one of the key catalysts for the emergence of the EDL was the high-profile reaction to a homecoming parade staged by the Royal Anglian Regiment in Luton on 10 March 2009.³ The event was targeted by the publicity-seeking organisation Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah – an offshoot of al-Muhajiroun, a since-banned Islamist organisation with close links to Luton – who accused the soldiers of being 'child killers' and 'butchers'. Already disowned by Luton's local Muslim communities, this small Islamist protest was specifically designed to be both offensive and provocative. Although numbering no more than 20 protagonists, it offered the perfect opportunity for an instance of 'tit for tat radicalisation' to develop in the town.⁴ Locals including the EDL's future joint leader, Kevin Carroll, responded violently to the protest. Helping to disseminate a wider awareness of the EDL's foundation, the Islamist demonstration was widely publicised in the

¹ This more general clustering of core themes is sometimes called an 'issue frame' in specialist analysis of social movements, yet the term 'ideology' will be preferred here to refer to a general sense of shared socio-political values that unites EDL supporters.

² For a wider discussion on social movements, see: Donatella Dela Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

³ For a fuller discussion on the origins of the English Defence League, see Nigel Copsey, *The English Defence League: A Challenge to our Country and our Values of Social Inclusion, Fairness and Equality* (London: Faith Matters, 2010).

⁴ 'Tit for tat' radicalisation emerges when two radicalised perspectives discover antagonistic features within each other's ideology and actions, leading to an escalation of radicalisation within two or more groups. For more on this theme, see Roger Eatwell, 'Community Cohesion and Cumulative Extremism in Contemporary Britain', *The Political Quarterly*, 77, 2, (2006) pp. 204 – 216.

national media, and was near-universally condemned as an affront to patriotic values.

In response, local activists, including Carroll, began to develop a more sustained response. A protest march was organised for 28 March 2009 in Luton. In these initial months, part of the momentum was provided by a figure later to be side-lined by the movement; namely, Paul Ray. (It has recently become apparent that Ray also had links with Norway's Anders Behring Breivik.⁵) Under the pseudonym Lionheart, Ray had already developed a profile as an anti-Muslim blogger, and his concerns typified local, ultra-patriotic activists who sought to develop a clear rejoinder to the demonstration by Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah. Although this initial counter-demonstration was called off, on the 13 April 2009 an illegal protest comprising 150 activists was held under the banner of the United People of Luton. This organisation was a direct precursor to the EDL, even if the movement's more nuanced 'new far right' ideology was yet to be properly formed.⁶

Tellingly, at this point, the demonstration included figures previously linked to the extreme right-wing group Combat-18, symptomatic of the wider far right's early interest in the Luton area at this time. The next demonstration in Luton came on the 24 May. This protest developed when another nationalist protesting organisation, March for England (MFE), began to organise a protest directed primarily against one of the local Islamists present at the 10 March demonstration, Sayful Islam. In the lead-up to the event, a mosque linked to Sayful Islam was the target of an arson attack, which is revealing of the growing anti-Muslim tensions within the town during the EDL's initial year of formalisation. After securing permission to hold this event, MFE formally withdrew, although the march still went ahead with a smaller, unofficial MFE presence. The event resulted in more violent confrontations: a breakaway group targeted Muslim areas of Luton, which itself inspired a counter-response by around 150 young Muslims.⁷ The process of 'tit for tat' radicalisation is clear here: one local community develops a pugnacious stance, which inflames the other, leading to an increase in violence and disorder, in this case, in Luton in the spring of 2009.

Resulting from this process of escalation, the English Defence League was formed in the early summer of 2009. The initial process of

creating a Social Movement Organisation was nebulous, yet the movement was by this time also generating a wider profile. With the emergence of a level of centralised organisation, the movement has, to date, guided the more general social movement to relative success and longevity.

In June and July 2009, there was a further escalation in anti-Muslim protests linked to the EDL that, by this point, were branching out beyond Luton into the wider country. On 27 June 2009, a demonstration was planned for a mosque in Whitechapel, London, clearly attempting to develop the reach of the fledgling movement. This demonstration ultimately proved a nonviolent event, as a relatively small number of protestors were greeted by a significant police presence. Then, 4 July 2009 saw two demonstrations develop: one in Birmingham to protest against Muslim extremism; and another in Wood Green, North London, focusing upon an event organised by the publicity-seeking Islamist Anjem Choudary.⁸ For many in these initial months, the demonstrations by the fledgling EDL were clearly linked to a far right agenda, though its precise identity was – like the identity of its elusive masked leader, 'Tommy Robinson' – difficult to discern at first.

Telling of this early confusion over the EDL's aspirations, in August 2009 Paul Ray recorded an interview with TalkSport where he described the movement as protesting against a militant Islam which he felt the government did little to discourage.⁹ As this suggests, the aspiration to develop a discrete political identity around the anti-Muslim theme was being developed by this point, and was one that wanted to distance the movement from any traditional far right movements, such as those with a neo-Nazi identity. The demonstration in Birmingham on the 8 August 2009 was a moment when the identity of the emergent EDL was also being tested. The symbolism here is important to stress. The demonstration was held on the eighth day of the eighth month, referring numerically to 8 - 8, so thus designed in part to appeal to the extreme right wing. In far right circles, 88 is code for HH: Heil Hitler. The tension between a social movement fuelled by anti-Muslim sentiments and the infusion of more traditional far right themes, like references to Hitler, were clearly emerging within the movement. Early activist Paul Ray, for example, distanced himself from the Birmingham demonstration because of this neo-Nazi coding, saying 'Anyone with the slightest bit of knowledge

⁵<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/norway/8669670/Oslo-attacks-EDL-member-Paul-Ray-admits-he-may-have-been-Anders-Breiviks-inspiration.html>

⁶ Copsey, *The English Defence League*.

⁷ Gerry Gable, Simon Cressy and Tom Woodson, 'A Hot August?', *Searchlight*, 410 (August 2009) pp. 8 - 9.

⁸ Gable et al. 'A Hot August'.

⁹ <http://lionheartuk.blogspot.com/2009/07/talksport-radio-interview.html>

about neo-Nazism knows the meaning of 8/8, which is why I pulled out of any active participation.'¹⁰

At about this time, a then-masked figure, 'Tommy Robinson', emerged as the leader of the new movement. Meanwhile, figures from the extreme right-wing, such as Mike Heaton of the British Freedom Fighters, began taking an interest in the early EDL, as did the National Front and other extreme right-wing groups. Moreover, BNP figures, such as Chris Renton, were also attracted to the new, street-protesting movement, along with other BNP related figures like Davy Cooling and Alan Spense. So by the summer of 2009, the emergent EDL was turning heads within the wider far right communities in Britain, though not all agreed with the anti-Muslim focus. As the National Front put it at the time:

They are obviously groups who need to be educated correctly on the political implications of their actions. The National Front has long predicted that spontaneous groups such as the EDL and the Casuals would emerge ... The NF says to these groups. Get yourself POLITICALLY organised behind the NF rather than these random anti-Muslim protests.¹¹

Later in the year, the EDL made more strenuous efforts to distance themselves from older far right organisations. For example, in October, masked EDL leaders burned a Nazi flag on BBC's *Newsnight* to symbolise their rejection of neo-Nazism.¹²

Luton as an ideal base for such developments

The EDL's emergence and initial consolidation suggest that the movement grew because a local situation developed in Luton that chimed with a wider national sentiment. It also highlights the existing networks that the emergent EDL was able to cultivate. Before turning to these networks, it is first important to briefly examine Luton itself as an arena that could cultivate this mix of anti-Muslim sentiment and 'tit-for-tat' radicalisation.

Luton is a town that, in many ways, has been hit by the wider social forces that animate the views of many EDL supporters. In particular, it has seen: declining manufacturing industry; depressing the local economy while other parts of Britain thrive; postwar immigration changing the demographic of the town; low levels of affordable social housing, creating tensions among different communities; and, importantly, a localised culture

where Muslims have been seen to be standoffish and 'closer' to terrorism.

Here, key social factors are important to identify. Changing job structures are central to understanding the social forces found in Luton around the time of the EDL's emergence. Historically, the town had prospered primarily because of the domination of the local economy by the Vauxhall car factory. This was established in Luton at the turn of the century, and following the Second World War became increasingly central to the town's prosperity. Mass slum clearances resulted in council estates being built, in the main for car factory workers; and so the town expanded. In these postwar years, immigration began to alter the demographic too, with Afro-Caribbean migrants moving to Luton in the 1950s, followed by Pakistani workers in the 1960s. Reaching its height as a local employer in the late 1960s, by the 1980s the car plant was drastically cutting back on jobs. The factory finally closed in 2002, at a time when Luton had radically diminished from its heyday as a postwar manufacturing town. Such a narrative of relative economic decline, growing competition for limited state resources, combined with growing ethnic diversity, has traditionally offered fertile conditions for far right movements to grow.

In examining the town's demographics at the time of the 2001 census, the ethnic makeup of Luton stood at around three in five identified as white, two in five as Asian and one-in-five as Afro-Caribbean. Fifteen percent of Luton's residents identified themselves as Muslim. Many of the latter have been concentrated into several urban parts of Luton. Moreover, the formation of localised communities has become a central problem, structuring the geography of Luton's recent history of ethnic tensions. Economically, Muslim areas such as Biscot and Dallow have fared very poorly, placing significant barriers to social mobility among Muslims born into such areas of acute deprivation. Meanwhile, anti-Muslim sentiment among the wider community has evolved too, as the state is seen by the wider community to disproportionately allocate resources to Muslim areas.¹³

Perhaps resulting from this problematic record of managing economic and social change, Luton has had a recent history marked by violence – even before the formation of the EDL over Spring 2009. For example, 1981 saw significant rioting in the town following a series of high-profile racist attacks. More recently, the football firm Men-In-Gear, which is based in Luton and has drawn upon

¹⁰ Paul Ray quoted in Copsey, *The English Defence League*, p. 13.

¹¹ <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t621875-10/>.

¹² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gysMBg5G02Q>.

¹³ Nick Lowles, 'A Town Divided?', *Searchlight* 427 (January 2011) pp. 8 – 11.

both black and white activists, has developed a pointed antagonism towards the town's Muslim residents.¹⁴ This history of anti-Muslim tension has been augmented in the past ten years by the presence of Choudary's al-Muhajiroun, an Islamist organisation strongly associated with Luton. Moreover, high profile, British-based Islamists such as Abu Hamza (a former resident of Luton), Omar Bakri Mohammed (founder of al-Muhajiroun, and a regular visitor to Luton before being banned from the country); as well as the 'fertiliser bomber', Salahuddin Amin, have created a potent link between localised Islamists and the perception of wider terrorist threats against Britain.¹⁵ This final perception helps clarify why a movement marked by the EDL's strong anti-Islamist agenda would find a particular resonance in Luton.

Drawing on existing organisations and networks

The emergence of the EDL also reveals that the organisation did not emerge in a vacuum. The cultivation of a centralised Social Movement Organisation, ultimately to be led by Yaxley-Lennon, developed from the activities of a range of existing organisations. These collectively came together to spawn a new, discrete social movement in the spring and summer of 2009. As such, it is important to consider these movements as well. As noted above, one of the first of these groups was March for England (MFE).¹⁶ The key conduit between this network and the early Luton protests was the anti-Muslim blogger and activist Paul Ray. Ray tried to bring MFE directly into the emergent English Defence League's network, although the two organisations soon parted company. March for England wanted to retain its own, clear identity, and to cultivate what it calls a more 'family friendly' image. Reporters at the time also highlight a personal falling out between Ray and MFE leader Dave Smeeton.¹⁷

Unlike the EDL, March for England was already an established movement by 2009, and had a history of protesting against jihadi Islamism. For example, alongside a similar group, the United British Alliance, MFE held regular demonstrations against the Friday prayers sessions outside the Finsbury Park mosque, led by Abu Hamza before his imprisonment in May 2004. These MFE

protests were not violent, and even distanced themselves from the occasional interest of the extreme right-wing movement, the National Front, which tried to associate with these protests.¹⁸ March for England was originally made up of former soldiers and former football hooligans, a somewhat distinct grouping from traditional far right supports. Although not now directly associated with the EDL, March for England still hold events. 2010 demonstrations in Brighton, for example, sought to ban EDL members.¹⁹ Despite not being a formal part of the EDL, March for England has continued to protest along broadly cognate, ultra-patriotic and anti-Muslim lines, a fact that again points to the complexity of a social movement wider than just the EDL. Such smaller organisations, similar in nature to the EDL, also operate – often with links blurred at the grass-roots level. Closer examination highlights that the EDL is not a single, clear organisation, but rather a complex patchwork of networks held together by a centralised Social Movement Organisation. To a greater or lesser extent affiliated with the EDL, these wider groupings also gravitate around the core themes of street protests, anti-Muslim sentiment, and populist ultra-patriotism.



Joint English Defence League, March for England and English Nationalist Alliance protest against an Al-Quds Day march, September 2010. (Image courtesy of David Hoffman.)

Meanwhile, another key network, again bringing former football hooligans flooding into the EDL, was itself in development during the spring of 2009: Casuals United. This movement was fuelled by the same ideological concerns as MFE and the emergent EDL, and unlike MFE

¹⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1361445/Luton-a-town-pulled-apart-by-extremism.html>.

¹⁵ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/not-just-a-white-christmas-in-luton-2168414.html>.

¹⁶ <http://marchforengland.weebly.com/>.

¹⁷ Gable et al. 'A Hot August'.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ <http://newsfrombrighton.co.uk/brighton-and-hove-news/march-for-england-insist-edl-will-not-hijack-event/>.

remains very much associated with the central EDL Social Movement Organisation. Casuals United was set up by convicted football hooligan Jeff 'Marshy' Marsh; a career he has glamorised in memoirs like *Soul Crew Seasideers*.²⁰ After his conviction and imprisonment for stabbing two Manchester United fans, Marsh has been able to develop networking skills that proved to be crucial to the emergence of the Casuals United organisation in spring 2009. Marsh naturally shares the anti-Muslim agenda that has become increasingly prevalent among many football hooligan networks in recent years. He recognised that this issue could help to unify rival gangs in a common, ultra-patriotic cause. As he told WalesOnline.co.uk, 'Hooligans from rivals clubs are uniting on this and it is like a ready-made army.'²¹ To no small degree the emergence of the EDL was based on the coming together of networks such as Casuals United and March For England.

The development of this relationship between an anti-Muslim far right and an anti-Muslim tendency among football hooligans should come as no surprise. Since the 1980s, the racist dynamics of football hooliganism has been changing. While the white supremacist ideology of the National Front carried some clear influence on organised football violence in the 1970s – with later far right movements such as Combat-18 remained heavily associated with the Chelsea Headhunters group well into the 1990s – the growth of black players in British football has helped to undermine such previous racist dynamics among football hooligans. Moreover, black hooligans are now an accepted part of the violent counter-culture,²² a pattern we can see developing abroad too.

The new turn in racist sentiment towards scapegoating Muslims among football firms is likely to be in part a result of the Muslim community being under-represented among both football players and its supports. Moreover, in recent years, one of the most striking examples of anti-Muslim sentiment being generated, in part, by organised football hooliganism was witnessed in the Oldham riots of 2001. Here, hooligans associated with Stoke City, Oldham, Stockport, Shrewsbury and Huddersfield clearly influenced the tensions that ultimately led to major public disorder in Oldham in May 2001.²³ By the 2000s,

football hooliganism was fertile territory for the growth of anti-Muslim sentiment that, as noted earlier, had become a growing force more generally in Britain during this period.

In fact, the EDL openly celebrates its 'heritage' in football hooliganism. The clearest example of this glorification of football violence is the pseudonym 'Tommy Robinson' itself, used by Steven Yaxley-Lennon to disguise his previous history of violent behaviour and BNP support. Indeed, until 2010 Yaxley-Lennon's identity was successfully kept out of the public domain until being revealed by *Searchlight*.²⁴ The name 'Tommy Robinson' is also the pseudonym of the leader of Luton's notorious football firm Men-In-Gear (MIG). This firm, in turn, has been directly associated with anti-Muslim violence in Luton in the 2000s, long before the formation of the EDL. (Tellingly, earlier this year, Yaxley-Lennon was convicted of leading football fans in violence during an event in Luton in August 2010.²⁵) Once again, these and many other such connections demonstrate a clear connection between football violence and the politics of the EDL. The culture of football hooliganism within the early EDL is quite blatant, and has remained a constant presence.

The growth of the English Defence League

Before the turn to a more mainstream, respectable political style, the common approach to developing a profile in far right politics in Britain was, traditionally, marching. The British National Party, and earlier far right organisations such as the National Front, often used coordinated marches to successfully develop a wider profile, allowing such movements to expand their presence. The core far right strategy of 'march and grow' was deemed ultimately incompatible with electoral politics under the leadership of Nick Griffin who, upon taking over the BNP in 1999, wanted to rebrand the racist party. The inevitable violent clashes at such marches proved bad publicity for BNP election candidates, and the BNP has consciously tried to distance itself from this more confrontational strategy under Griffin. Historically, the basic approach to the 'march and grow' tactic consisted of holding provocative marches, selected on themes that would garner much-needed wider publicity. High-profile events would hopefully attract new people to extremist movements, while also offering a satisfying boost

²⁰ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article6794080.ece>.

²¹ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/2009/08/16/army-made-of-former-football-hooligans-91466-24450935/>.

²² Nick Lowles, 'Hooligans Disunited', *Searchlight* 411 (September 2009) pp. 6 – 7.

²³ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/2/bnp-supporters-triggered-oldham-riots>.

²⁴ Nick Lowles and Simon Cressy, 'The BNP Past of the EDL Leader', *Searchlight* 421 (July 2010) pp. 4 – 5.

²⁵ <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=25563>.

to the morale of existing supporters.²⁶ This visceral, street-based form of far right activism has been in short supply in the 2000s. Yet with the emergence of the EDL – a social movement freed from the constraints of electoral politics – this potentially effective tactic has been rediscovered and updated. Fusing the old strategy of ‘march and grow’, with the ‘new far right’ cause of anti-Muslim sentiment, all centralised through internet mobilisation and online networking, the EDL has rediscovered a potent form of political campaigning.

Indeed, the sustained use of new media, discussed more fully in the next chapter, has been vital to the EDL’s rapid expansion. Ultimately this has been important because online networking has helped to create a culture able to organise offline encounters. Attendance at both the EDL’s official and its flash demos has been a major part of the attraction for its core followers. More generally, social movements thrive on such demonstrations: they are ‘performances’ that can reinforce the perceived senses of injustice and being ignored by mainstream voices to followers. Indeed, the theatre of demonstrations can act as arenas where such general grievances can be lived out in what is believed to be an empowering manner, and grounded in a specific issue, such as opposing a specific mosque. It also creates ‘safe’ environments, where extremist views can be openly aired. Tellingly, some of the, albeit limited, academic fieldwork to date has recorded some typical expressions found at EDL rallies:

See that [points at St. George’s flag flying above a church] that makes me proud, it’s what being English is all about, but where I come from that isn’t seen anymore. The Pakis have taken over the churches and turned them into mosques, now what the fuck is that about, eh? [sings] Give me bullets for my gun and I will shoot the Muzzie scum, No surrender to the Taliban. (Bradford EDL Demonstration, 2010.)

I am sick of the lot of them [Muslims] and their demands, all take, take, take. They take the piss out of us, bringing in hundreds of them over through arranged marriages and that, looking after one another and fucking us over. It has to stop; this is England, not Afghanistan! (Bradford EDL Demonstration, 2010.)

They can’t live like us cos they are not evolved for it, they are simple, made for backward villages in the mountain where they can sit around eating stinking curries and raping chickens. They come over here and ruin England, I mean, would you want to live next to

²⁶ Matthew J. Goodwin, *New British Fascism: Rise of the British National Party* (London: Routledge, 2011) p.43 – 44.

them? I don’t, but they are taking over. That is why I want them gone. (Leicester EDL demonstration, 2010.)²⁷

To date, major EDL events have found a number of ways to cultivate anti-Muslim sentiment. These include protests against the building of mosques, for example the purpose of the April 2010 demonstration in Dudley;²⁸ opposing controversial speakers, as with the aborted demonstration in Wembley in June 2010 against the Al-Khair Peace Convention;²⁹ or marching in support of key figures, as with the March 2010 demonstration for Geert Wilders.³⁰ Another tactic is for the EDL to develop a localised law and order issue through the lens of anti-Muslim politics, as with the May 2011 demonstration ‘Justice for Charlene Downes’ in Blackpool.³¹ Finally, protests may be simply chosen as they will potentially impact upon an area with existing tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, as witnessed in the August 2010 demonstration in Bradford,³² and in September 2011 in Tower Hamlets. The success of the ‘march and grow’ tactic relies on the continued ability of the EDL’s leadership to locate and exploit such issues in order to extend the social movement’s cause. Given the flexibility found in the EDL’s core ideology here, the movement has been able to seize upon a wide range of emotive issues to exploit. Some of its localised protests have been more generalising, gravitating around the perceived threat of militant Islam more generally, or against the construction of a building connected to a local Muslim community, such as a community centre linked to Muslim usage. Finally, it is important to stress that EDL demonstrations highlighting a particular ‘injustice’ do not necessarily have the backing of those directly connected to the issue. For example, the 3 April 2011 demonstration in Blackburn focused on a variety of hit-and-run cases where Muslim drivers had killed non-Muslims. Families of victims found the politicisation of their losses by the EDL deeply distressing, and publicly distanced themselves from the protests.³³

Since 2009, the EDL has been able to establish diverse supporting ‘divisions’. According

²⁷ Jon Garland and James Treadwell, “No Surrender to the Taliban”: Football Hooliganism, Islamophobia and the Rise of the English Defence League’, *Papers from the British Criminology Conference*, available at: http://www.britisoccrim.org/volume10/2010_Garland_Treadwell.pdf.

²⁸ http://www.dudleynews.co.uk/news/5051298.EDL__s_rally_fuels_unrest_fears/.

²⁹ http://www.harrowtimes.co.uk/news/8222357.Police_in_talks_over_Muslim_peace_conference_protests/.

³⁰ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8551220.stm>.

³¹ http://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/news/local/charlene_focus_of_quiet_peace_vigil_1_3428598.

³² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/video/2010/aug/30/english-defence-league-bradford-protest?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>.

³³ http://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/8955666.Blackburn_protests_Hit_and_run_victim_s_family_condemn_EDL_use_of_her_photo/.

to EDL webpages, there have been around 130 regional divisions formed to date, many of which developed a Facebook page in their lifetime.³⁴ The bulk of these divisions have been located in the midlands and the northwest of England, although there is a fair regional spread across the rest of England too. Scotland and Northern Ireland both claim to have a national defence leagues, though in comparison these are much more limited, lacking the same dynamism possessed by the English Defence League. The failure of the Scottish case could well result from Scotland's current issues with hostile football firms and sectarianism, preventing the sort of cooperation amongst antagonists that has developed in England. The case of Wales is more complex as a Welsh Defence League was created by Jeff Marsh in early 2009. Indeed briefly at the start, the EDL was called the English and Welsh Defence League. However, as has been the case elsewhere with the EDL, the Welsh division was subject to close media scrutiny. This intensified in 2010 as identifiable neo-Nazis were suspected of associating with the Welsh Defence League. Following an undercover BBC Wales investigation in December 2010, it was revealed that WDL activists travelling to a demonstration in Leicester had openly revealed their neo-Nazi sympathies to fellow activists.³⁵ In the immediate media flurry after the exposure, Jeff Marsh closed down the Welsh Defence League and replaced it with a new group, the Welsh Casuals, essentially drawing Welsh support into the wider Casuals United organisation (which had always mixed Welsh and English football hooliganism).

In addition to regional divisions, the EDL also attracted a range of specialist divisions. Quite unlike traditionally anti-Semitic far right movements, these included a Jewish Division, headed up by Roberta Moore. A vocal supporter of the EDL, who claimed the Jewish Division showed the movement reached beyond football hooligan supporters, tellingly, Moore resigned in June 2011 due to her on-going concern with a neo-Nazi element within the movement. Beyond furnishing the EDL with a high-profile Jewish figure, Moore cuts a controversial profile, for example developing links in early 2011 with the Jewish Task Force, an American organisation whose leader has been convicted of terrorism offences.³⁶ Meanwhile, the EDL boasted a prominent Sikh member, Guramit Singh, again a key public face of the EDL's commitment to diversity and attempt to disassociate itself from the history of the British

far right (though it is worth noting that in recent years the BNP too has tried to appeal to Sikh communities too). Yet like Roberta Moore, Singh has also recently resigned, in June 2011.³⁷ Most strikingly perhaps, the movement boasts an LGBT division, which also maintains an active Facebook wall. Again, this diversity of interests significantly distances the EDL from the more traditional racist and neo-Nazi far right, which would consider such minority interest groups antithetical to the ideology of 'white nationalism'. However, following the logic of the 'new far right' ideology, the cultivation of these wider community groups, as a further vehicle for promoting the EDL's core anti-Muslim campaigning, should not be surprising. Limited acceptance of diversity helps to mask the EDL's potent demonisation of Muslims.



Female English Defence League member marching to 'Ban the Burka' in Westminster, July 2010. (Image courtesy of David Hoffman.)

The EDL also established a youth division, English Defence Youth, although its webpage has been inactive since August 2010.³⁸ Ostensibly led by Joel Titus, the English Defence Youth emerged in the early days of the movement, though as a discrete unit has failed to fully capitalise on its role in developing the social movement. This may have been a consequence of Titus' receiving a CRASBO, preventing him from participating with the EDL in any way. Meanwhile, the EDL also has a women's

³⁴<http://maps.google.co.uk/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&t=h&oe=UTF8&msa=0&msid=106505025136548765274.000487ff74adb2e3e21d1>.

³⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-11916458>.

³⁶ <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/50932/edl-jewish-division-leader-roberta-moore-quits>.

³⁷ <http://www.pickledpolitics.com/archives/12859>.

³⁸ <http://www.englishdefenceyouth.org/>.

division, the Angels. Arguably, this is primarily designed to highlight aspects of Islam that are seen as prejudicial against women, including dress, restrictions on movement, and subordination to men. As such, the Angels' rhetoric in general allows for a simplistic, caricatured representation of Shari'ah law to be further deployed by specialist divisions.³⁹

Closely associated with this new form of social movement, the EDL has created an online merchandising operation as a key method of generating revenue. Here, eBay has been the key website for selling EDL hoodies, polo shirts, facemasks, badges, England flags and wristbands. This operation appears to be sophisticated and well-run, as the feedback at the time of writing registers as 99% positive – meaning the satisfaction registered by customers – an impressive record by eBay standards. Nevertheless, the online auction website has not always allowed the EDL to use its services, and the movement has also encountered problems with PayPal, the online payment system.⁴⁰ Moreover, use of the profits from this merchandising operation has become a controversial, at times divisive, issue within the movement. Thus, while the merchandising operation itself has been successful, it has created unexpected consequences. Finally, it is important to stress that EDL clothing is ubiquitous at demonstrations, helping to create an informal uniform and sense of common identity, frequently with regional markers used by local divisions. Once again, the connection between online tools and offline activism is both substantial and direct.

Standardisation of the social movement

As stated, we can identify four approximate stages for any social movement: initial emergence; coalescence and stabilisation; formalisation; and eventual decline. While the events in Luton in spring 2009 correspond with the first stage; and the subsequent successes of the 'march and grow' tactic in 2009 and 2010 – as well as developing merchandising operations and expanding the movement's profile – correspond to the second stage; a series of events in the summer of 2010 helped to bring about a growing formalisation of operations within the central Social Movement Organisation. As stressed above, the SMO is not the whole social movement which, in the case of

the EDL, also has many related components, ranging from football hooligan networks and neo-Nazi hangers on, to special interest groups, and regional divisions. Instead, it merely reflects the formalised structures used by the social movement's leadership to attempt to exercise control over, and set the wider agenda of, the wider movement.

The summer of 2010 was a period of intense instability at the top of the EDL. The July 2010 edition of *Searchlight* unmasked 'Tommy Robinson' as Steven Yaxley-Lennon, in an article also stressing Lennon's connections with both the BNP and football violence. These revelations emerged during a period when Yaxley-Lennon was exchanging threatening YouTube videos with early EDL activist – and by this point a self-styled 'spiritual guru' to the movement – Paul Ray, now located in Malta. In these videos, Ray announced that he would reclaim leadership of the movement, along with his new associates Nick Gregor, a 'reformed' German neo-Nazi, and Johnny 'Mad Dog' Adair, a Loyalist terrorist with a history of directing terrorism, and who has subsequently been associated with Combat 18.⁴¹ In one of these exchanges, Ray posted a YouTube video unmasking Lennon, heightening the sense of crisis around the movement's leadership.

In response to these developments, the EDL's leadership initiated a new, more formal structure, which allowed Lennon to weather the storm. Despite Paul Ray's internet protestations in 2010, he was unable to reclaim leadership, and currently still blogs from his rival www.lionheartuk.blogspot.com site. The response from the leadership was to issue formal statements explaining Yaxley-Lennon's temporary absence in summer 2010, and the need for a more formalised structure to restore internal clarity. This ran as follows:

Moving forward we are proposing that divisions and areas continue to operate in their own way and carry out meetings as they wish. What we are proposing however is to have an Regional organiser (RO) in each region that is in direct contact with the division administrators. These RO's will report direct to Jack Smith and will meet on a monthly basis to pass on any suggestions or issues that may have been presented to them from the ground level.

Each RO will also have at least 2 deputies or more in larger areas to assist them with the work they will be carrying out.

The Regions will be broken down into the following areas with the following Regional Organisers North East – Paul Duffy, North West – Pablo, Yorkshire

³⁹ <http://4freedoms.ning.com/group/women/forum/topics/edl-angels-leaflet>.

⁴⁰ <http://lancasteruaf.blogspot.com/2011/06/ebay-and-paypal-dump-edl.html>.

⁴¹ Nick Lowles and Simon Cressy, 'The BNP Past of the EDL Leader', *Searchlight* 421 (July 2010) pp. 4 – 5.

and Humberside – Snowy, East Midlands – Tony Curtis, West Midlands – Steve Eddowes, East Anglia – Anthony Bamford, South West – Mark Stevenson, South East – Darren Gibbo and London Diamond Geezer. Joel will continue to head up the EDL youth. The regional organisers have been picked from loyal trusted members and will announce their deputies at a local level. If you have any questions or issues with this then please refer them to Jack Smith. This new structure will come into effect immediately and will ensure that the leadership have the assistance they need.⁴²

By this time, the English Defence League had begun to develop a series of further initiatives in order to create a more formal structure for the main Social Movement Organisation.⁴³ Steven Yaxley-Lennon was confirmed as leader of the movement, and appointed his cousin, Kevin Carroll, already a prominent figure within the EDL, as joint leader. To help steer the movement, a board of key figures including Jack Smith (brother of BNP activist Chris Renton), Trevor Kelway and Jeff Marsh, sat between the leadership of Lennon and Carroll, and the newly established Regional Organisers. Further statements explained that, should Regional Organisers encounter a dispute lower down in the organisation (among Division Leaders for example) then either this board, or the leadership itself, would get involved in resolving the issue. In short, a clearer sense of hierarchy was put in place. Lennon described the need for this more formal structure in one announcement as follows:

The main thing that is now stopping the EDL from progressing in the way we have in the last year is the arguing and disagreements between members within the EDL. We are a massive movement and have people from all walks of life and all parts of the country there are bound to be some people who do not get on with each other. If this is the case, then as the saying goes 'GET OVER IT'. The public slating of fellow members by Facebook, Youtube or Forums stops immediately. We are losing good members who do a lot of work for the EDL due to this behaviour.⁴⁴

The movement survived the leadership crisis of 2010, and Lennon emerged from it with a more commanding hold over the organisation. Indeed, messages from Lennon at this time reveal the lack of control he had over the wider organisation. For example, he was unaware of exactly how many divisions were active, and what their future plans were.



Local English Defence League division member marching on September 11, 2010. (Image courtesy of David Hoffman.)

Finally, to further create unity and a common voice with the movement, a new Code of Conduct was also established.⁴⁵ For some members, such a development ran counter to the spirit of the organisation, which was not intended to become so formalised. However, the Code of Conduct has been broadly accepted, and reposted on many EDL divisional Facebook pages. The Code of Conduct reminded followers that statements they made to the press would be taken as formal views of the EDL; called for unity among followers; and asked supporters to respect and follow the new leadership structure. Moreover, some EDL divisions have even developed their own code of conducts, specific to the local division, again in an attempt to enforce an element of discipline among followers.⁴⁶

Grass-roots activities

Apart from a series of national campaigns based on the 'march and grow' tactic, EDL divisions have often taken it upon themselves to develop localised campaigns. These again tend to gravitate around the anti-Muslim agenda driving the wider movement. Some of the most striking examples here include the deliberate targeting of mosques in a manner designed to inflame Muslim sensibilities. In a recent example of this tendency, the EDL member responsible for organising events in the Nottingham area, Christopher Payne, along with three associates, were convicted of Racially or Religiously Aggravated Criminal Damage, as well as causing Racially or Religiously Aggravated Alarm, Harassment or Distress Through Word or Writing after placing a pig's head atop a 4 foot pole on a site where a new mosque was planned in West Bridgeford. The slogan 'No mosque here EDL Notts' was written in spray-paint on the pavement,

⁴² https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=125697084139608.

⁴³ Copsey, *The English Defence League* ch. 4.

⁴⁴ <http://casualsunited.wordpress.com/2010/07/24/statement-from-tommy-robinson-edl/>.

⁴⁵ http://en-gb.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=140447379326291.

⁴⁶ For example: <http://edl-nottingham.co.uk/code-of-conduct/>.

while the pig's head itself was covered in further anti-Muslim slogans. During the trial, the court heard how the event unfolded: after Payne was given a pig's head one evening in a local pub by a friend, a small group of EDL supporters communicated via text message to arrange a meeting. Spontaneity developed through new media communication, inspired by the core EDL attitude of opposing Muslim buildings, thus characterised this act of Islamophobic criminality.⁴⁷

The example above is but one of several instances where pig's heads have been placed on or around sites clearly intended to cause offence to Muslims. Indeed, it has been a tactic deployed across Europe by movements developing similar anti-Muslim agendas. Another striking example occurred in May 2010, when EDL protestor Kevin Smith was given a 12 week suspended for Religiously Aggravated Intentional Harassment, again after placing a pig's head on a wall of Dudley central mosque. Smith even placed a photo of the crime scene on his Facebook site.⁴⁸ These activities are often motivated by the need to 'perform' to others one's prejudices, essentially as an act of empowerment. That EDL members use Facebook to develop this 'performance' should not be surprising, even if it does incriminate them. Such tactics show the provocative nature of the grass-roots activities within the social movement. In fact, the latter example came ahead of a planned EDL march against the creation of a so-called 'super mosque' in the Dudley area.

As well as pig's heads, a further inflammatory, grass-roots tactic has been the burning of the Koran. The EDL previously supported Pastor Terry Jones, who has been associated with this type of provocative act in Florida.⁴⁹ This precedent apparently helped to give license to local EDL groupings to burn copies of the Koran. Examples here include the six men from Gateshead who posted a burning of the Koran on YouTube in September 2010, at the height of Jones' own provocative declarations to the global media.⁵⁰ More recently, in January 2011, EDL supporter Andrew Ryan burned a copy of the Koran in Carlisle town centre, again showing how the 'performance' of prejudice can become

important consideration for EDL followers. He was convicted of Racially or Religiously Aggravated Intentional Harassment, as well as the theft of a copy of the Koran from Carlisle library. His court case itself became a focal point for local EDL supporters and, as detailed in the next chapter, also resulted in an online campaign. Tellingly, in police interviews he admitted to knowing that his actions would promote religious hatred. Moreover, Ryan has previous conviction for racist chanting at a football match, further highlighting links between football racism and the EDL.⁵¹

Aside from these more clearly criminal actions at a grass-roots level, there are many EDL flash demonstrations that are entirely locally organised. These have been on the increase, especially since the autumn of 2010, which appears to mark a turning point in the promotion of this tactic by the EDL. To give some instances here that are representative of nature of these flash demos, it is useful to start with September 2010. Building upon the attention surrounding the 9/11 commemorations, which included an EDL presence in New York, on 12 September, approximately 120 EDL members laid a wreath on a war memorial in Oldham. Despite a smaller size, the protest became violent, and bottles were thrown at police. In total, eight EDL members were arrested.⁵² The following day saw another flash demo in Nuneaton, initially with around 60 EDL protestors cheering a parade of soldiers. The protest then became mobile, and moved to target a local Asian area. Policing here was similarly flexible, and the protest was successfully diffused with one arrest.⁵³

It is important to highlight that mobile phone footage of such demos is regularly uploaded to EDL websites, along with film from social events afterwards, such as singing in pubs after EDL events. This 'real time' element of social networking, and sharing of communal experiences, all adds to the online-offline sense of community generated by EDL divisions operating within their locality. Across 2011, the tactic has continued, and even increased. For example, EDL web pages are often used to help coordinate these flash demos. In the sample taken from May 2011 studied in the following chapter, the Casuals United blog promoted several such flash demos, showing their centrality as part of the local activities of the movement.

⁴⁷ <http://www.thisisnottingham.co.uk/Pig-s-head-left-pole-near-site-mosque/story-12844274-detail/story.html>.

⁴⁸ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/06/24/exclusive-edl-pig-head-yob-in-court/>.

⁴⁹ Terry Jones sparked controversy ahead of September 11 2010 by threatening to burn a copy of the Koran. The threat of this act provoked the murder of several UN Staff in Afghanistan. For more details on this issue, see: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/02/pastor-terry-jones-burning-koran>.

⁵⁰ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1314534/Defiance-YouTube-Koran-burning-yobs-We-English-nationalists.html>.

⁵¹ <http://www.newsandstar.co.uk/news/carlisle-man-jailed-for-burning-koran-in-city-centre-1.829161?referrerPath=news>.

⁵² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-11275810>.

⁵³ <http://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/north-warwickshire-news/2010/09/13/nuneaton-soliders-parade-ends-in-race-storm-92746-27257449/>.

Finally, it is important to stress that grass-roots activists can develop into attacks on Socialist Workers Party activists, seen as opponents to the EDL's politics. One such case in Newcastle in September of 2010 subsequently saw the men charged with the attack appear in court proudly wearing EDL apparel.⁵⁴ Another attack on a left wing bookshop in April 2011 is glorified by the English Defence League Extra blog. One posting claims the bookshop was a legitimate target because:

Trotskyists, Communists and left-liberals have systematically and opportunistically supported the very Islamofascists the EDL is against. Without the far-left types who run this bookshop, the threat of Islamism, and even Islamoterrorism, would not be as great as it actually is.⁵⁵

So, for some EDL supporters at least, the political left and well as Muslims can be seen as a clear target for grass-roots attacks.

Pressure campaigns

Aside from both large-scale and flash protests, the EDL has tried to bring further consistency to its protests by recently launching a series of broader pressure campaigns. These too are designed to court publicity and tap into an ultra-patriotic sentiment, while also allowing the movement's anti-Muslim rhetoric to take centre stage.

In late 2010, one of the most notable of these pressure campaigns by the EDL was its open letter to British local authorities, warning that if they 'banned Christmas' then the EDL would protest in 2011, at great financial cost to such local councils. The EDL's letter emphasised a critique of an encroaching political correctness allegedly found in events put on by local authorities to celebrate Christmas. Essentially, if local authorities used language such as 'winter festival', then the EDL would mount expensive protests in the coming year:

Any council that does not keep the word Christmas in the annual celebrations and opts for Winter Festival, out of the politically correct appeasement of others to the detriment of our traditions, will have their town/city visited by the English Defence League throughout the following year.⁵⁶

The campaign even received some broadly favourable coverage in the wider press. On 26 October 2010, the *Daily Star* picked up the story,

and highlighted how the campaign chimed with the views of its own readers:

EDL leader Stephen Lennon said "working class people" in the UK were "at boiling point" over what he says is the "Islamisation of Britain". His declaration comes after yesterday's *Daily Star* poll found 98% of readers fear that Britain is becoming a Muslim state.⁵⁷

Following this populist campaign, in the spring of 2011, Lennon began talking about two new campaigns that would bring further focus to the movement: 'No More Mosques' and the 'Halal Campaign'. Yet in spring 2011 the development of these campaigns was hampered by the emergence of the Infidels faction (see below), according to one YouTube statement delivered in May 2011.⁵⁸ In this address, significantly, Lennon claimed that these two strands of anti-Muslim campaigning were designed to bring further cohesion to the movement. This is again revealing of how the EDL is becoming much more open in the way it widens out its anti-Muslim politics. Both campaigns are now included on the EDL's new webpages, which were launched in July 2011.

The aim of the 'No More Mosques' campaign is largely self-explanatory. What the issue does is empower localised EDL activists to demonstrate against any building of possible use to Muslim communities. As previously noted in the EDL Mission Statement, the movement operates on the premise that, to become acceptable to the movement, Islam as a whole needs to undergo a sort of 'cultural revolution'. The 'No More Mosques' campaign develops on this premise. Without some form of fundamental Muslim 'cultural revolution', the EDL has assumed the right to oppose the building of all mosques, or Muslim-related buildings, anywhere in Britain.

One example of this process in action is the Noor A Madina Mosque in Blackpool. With reference to the Blackpool case, Lennon describes the 'No More Mosques' campaign as follows:

We are opposed to them building mosques until they shown they can integrate. This is happening everywhere they are building mosques and not just in Blackpool. We are running a 'No More Mosques' campaign, which says we want their religion to reform.⁵⁹

In the case of the Noor A Madina Mosque in Blackpool, the EDL's LGBT Division leader, Liam Wood, has led the campaign with allegations that

⁵⁴ <http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/north-east-news/evening-chronicle-news/2011/03/11/accused-extremists-face-court-over-affray-72703-28319707/>.

⁵⁵ <http://theenglishdefenceleagueextra.blogspot.com/2011/05/edl-invades-merseyside-islamist.html>.

⁵⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-11848225>.

⁵⁷ <http://www.dailystar.co.uk/posts/view/159945/EDL-threaten-to-close-your-towns-over-Xmas-bans>

⁵⁸ 'Tommy Robinson Video Statement', *English Defence League News*, (7 May 2011).

⁵⁹ http://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/news/local/right_wing_group_in_mosque_protest_1_3541533.

the local LGBT community are being excluded from the development.⁶⁰ Other tactics being highlighted by the EDL include allegations that the mosque contravenes planning regulations. In sum, the 'No More Mosques' campaign is flexible enough to be adopted around the country, and can inspire localised campaigning.

Similarly, the 'Halal Campaign' gravitates around the argument that British people are being forcibly given Halal meat by a conspiracy of silence. The EDL had already developed demonstrations around this theme. For example, in October 2010 EDL supporters in Blackburn mounted a demonstration against KFC for selling Halal chicken.⁶¹ The literature for the 'Halal Campaign' argues that meat sold by supermarkets, restaurants and elsewhere is not labelled as Halal. The online component of the campaign includes a 13 minute YouTube video, also posted on the central EDL website. This webpage also contains a lengthy essay outlining the aims of the campaign. In this text, emotive arguments are the order of the day. The online statement emphasises the process of slaughtering and meat that it sees as inhumane, and compares Halal and Kosher techniques. As one would expect given the EDL's pro-Jewish position, the analysis here claims that Kosher slaughter is not problematic as it typically stuns animals before slaughter. Halal meat production, on the other hand, allegedly does not, and thus is singled out by the campaign. Moreover, statistics are presented to argue that many more animals are slaughtered according to Halal practices than could ever be demanded by Britain's Muslim population. So Muslims are presented as enforcing a cruel cultural practice upon the wider population through deception. Thus, the narrative of the 'Halal Campaign' chimes with the underlying EDL message of a hidden Islamification of Britain:

In the last few years, public bodies such as schools, hospitals and even football grounds have been serving halal meat to the public with no choice, and we are none the wiser. In the past many Islamic authorities have also rejected halal slaughter using machines, after the internationally-recognised Malaysian Halal Standard 'MS 1500' removed machine slaughtering as an acceptable practice in 2009. The Birmingham Council of Mosques has also said that Muslims should not accept halal slaughtered by machines, and that the only acceptable halal is from manual slaughter.

Another popular view is that for meat to be 'truly halal' it has to be slaughtered and handled exclusively by Muslims. This is yet just another way of

providing jobs exclusively for Muslims and Muslims alone right through the supply chain. No wonder 5,000 halal butchers moved to the UK in 2008/9.

The analysis then seeks to connect Halal food and Islamist-inspired terrorism:

Of late, halal meat has been linked to the funding of terrorism through some halal certification bodies. CBN news has discovered that the halal meat in France is certified by the UIOF, the Union of the Islamic Organizations in France, who have strong ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and other known transnational terrorist organisations such as Hamas. So it seems halal is a double edged sword for the non-Muslims of Britain: not only is the food chain slowly being taken over with halal meat, but the money you are spending is also being siphoned off to fund terrorism. Of course that's not an accurate portrayal of all suppliers of halal meat, but what other nationally available products have been linked to the funding of terrorism!?⁶²

The 'Halal Campaign' also fits with similar campaigns in Europe, such as the recent campaign by the French Bloc Identitaire against the fast food chain Quick, again discussed in the following chapter.

The EDL's attempts at internationalisation

Despite its many unique features, the EDL is nonetheless representative of a wider political change that has swept across Europe over the past fifteen years. The combination of a deeply anti-Muslim political agenda and populist ultra-patriotism, powered by grass-roots critiques of mainstream politics, has been a core component of the 'new far right' in Europe. Unsurprisingly, the EDL has tried to develop connections with other 'new far right' groups on the Continent, while also cultivating links with populist right wing American figures too.

This international outreach began in earnest during April 2010, when EDL activists demonstrated in support of Geert Wilders at the Dutch Embassy in Berlin. The Pax Europa Citizens' Movement co-organised the event – a clear instance of the EDL developing a wider international network. Then, in June 2010, the EDL sent two representatives to the annual conference of the International Civil Liberties Alliance, and again the EDL was able to network with other anti-Muslim activists from Europe.⁶³ At this conference, the EDL gave a presentation detailing its organisational style, and approaches to its

⁶⁰http://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/news/local/community_back_mosque_1_3567437.

⁶¹http://www.thisislancashire.co.uk/news/8429843.EDL_targets_Blackburn_KFC_in_protest_over_Halal_chicken/.

⁶² <http://englishdefenceleague.org/campaigns/halal-campaign/>.

⁶³ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/hate-groups/edl/international>.

successful campaigning. A statement put out by the movement described the event as follows:

This provided an invaluable opportunity to network and to get to know and develop rapport with other delegates in an informal setting as well as to see the very attractive and impressive city of Zurich. We found that we had a great deal in common with our overseas counterparts who shared our absolute determination to succeed in our opposition to sharia.

The statement also hailed the EDL's positive reception as the beginning of a new era of international co-operation between the movement and other, like-minded groups. Elsewhere in the statement, it also said that the high profile activities of John 'Snowy' Shaw (who is discussed in more detail in Chapter four of this report) were of particular interest to the wider conference.⁶⁴

The most high-profile of the EDL's attempts to develop international links to date was their September 2010 trip to New York. The contingent was led by Yaxley-Lennon, though he was refused entry at JFK Airport. Fellow EDL activists were more successful, and joined a demonstration – also attended by Geert Wilders – in Lower Manhattan to protest against the 'Ground Zero Mosque', a high profile issue at the time.⁶⁵ The event was planned by the anti-Muslim organisation Stop the Islamisation of America, Pamela Geller's offshoot of Stop the Islamisation of Europe.⁶⁶ The American connection continued, with the EDL associating itself with the US Tea Party movement. Indeed, several key figures within the right-wing American movement actively associated with the EDL. These included Pamela Geller, founder of SIOA, and Rabbi Nachum Shifren.⁶⁷ Geller has since withdrawn her support, citing an infiltration from neo-Nazi elements within the movement.⁶⁸ The International Civil Liberties Alliance has also been connected to both anti-Muslim sections of the Tea Party movement and the EDL. Then in December 2010, the EDL was able to gain national headlines upon inviting US-based Pastor Terry Jones to the UK, as the EDL hoped to book Jones for its homecoming rally in Luton in February 2011. However, the EDL quickly withdrew the offer following much public pressure, claiming that further research had

uncovered Jones' deeply homophobic views, which were deemed unacceptable to the movement.⁶⁹

Apart from these American connections, the EDL continued to develop its European contacts too; for example, at a demonstration in the Netherlands in October 2010, organised by the European Freedom Initiative. Again, the event was designed to support Geert Wilders, though ultimately Wilders did not want to be associated with the EDL or the event, which ended up a disaster. More police and journalists attended the rally than supporters, which was moved from a city centre location to an industrial estate by police.⁷⁰ A similar situation developed again when EDL leaders, including Yaxley-Lennon, attended a rally in Lyon in April 2011 alongside Bloc Identitaire,⁷¹ which was much hyped by the movement as part of an internationalisation strategy. This protest also was poorly attended, and led to arrests – including that of Yaxley-Lennon himself. Coverage was posted on an EDL Facebook page, to which the most 'liked' response was:

We need riots with the Muslims at the tower hamlets demo, peaceful demos solve nothing and r a waste of time and effort we should take the fight to the Muslim scum,smash back to where they belong...⁷²

At present, EDL leaders are still attending international events, like the recent 'new far right' 'Counterjihad' conference, hosted in Stuttgart in June 2011 by Pax Europe. An EDL statement described this meeting as follows:

The EDL met with key international figures including Robert Spencer of Jihad Watch and Stop the Islamization of America, and Sheik Yer Mami of the excellent website Winds of Jihad. The work of the EDL is held in great esteem by members of the German Counterjihad and EDL involvement at this event has strengthened the friendship between the EDL and German groups. Of course EDL activists also met people from other countries including France, the Netherlands, United States, Australia, Switzerland, and Denmark, who also attended the conference.⁷³

Without doubt, the EDL has developed a sustained attempt to cultivate an international presence, and here it has been relatively successful.

⁶⁴ <http://www.libertiesalliance.org/2010/06/17/english-defence-league-represented-at-counter-jihad-zurich-2010/>.

⁶⁵ For more details on the issue of the 'Ground Zero Mosque' controversy, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/andrewbrown/2010/aug/18/poison-behind-new-york-mosque-furore>

⁶⁶ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/hate-groups/edl/international>.

⁶⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/oct/10/english-defence-league-tea-party>.

⁶⁸ http://atlasshrugs2000.typepad.com/atlas_shrugs/2011/06/edl-shake-up.html.

⁶⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-11986228>.

⁷⁰ <http://news.sky.com/home/world-news/article/15786804>.

⁷¹ Bloc Identitaire are a French new far right movement, broadly akin to the EDL. More details available on their website, www.bloc-identitaire.com.

⁷² <http://www.islamophobia-watch.com/islamophobia-watch/2011/5/14/far-right-anti-islam-protestors-in-lyon-outnumbered-by-count.html>.

⁷³ <http://www.libertiesalliance.org/2011/06/07/edl-attend-international-conference-in-stuttgart/>.

It is interesting to note that the campaigning website Hope not Hate lists a number of international 'spin offs' of the EDL:

Norwegian Defence League, Russian Defence League, Belgium Defence League, Australian Defence League, United States Defence League, Serbian Defence League, Norsk Defence League, American Defense League, Italian Defence League/Casuals United, Swedish Defence League, German Defence League, Cyprus Defence League, Chinese Defence League, Canadian Defence League, Lebanese Defence League, Nigerian Defence League, Indian Defence League, French Defence League, Indonesian Defence League and the Ulster Defence League.⁷⁴

However, there is only limited evidence to suggest that these groups have successfully imported the EDL social movement model into other national contexts. Some foreign supporters from smaller 'defence leagues' in Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands have come to Britain to protest, for example at the demonstration in Luton in February 2011.⁷⁵ Yet as discussed above, the EDL emerged from a particular coming together of various grass-roots networks, primarily consisting of football hooligans and far right activists, looking for a unifying cause. How successfully such a model can be exported by creating a new Social Movement Organisation, which then would need to cultivate wider grass-roots support to sustain it, remains to be seen. Yet it is important not to dismiss these smaller offshoots too lightly either. Indeed, perhaps now the most high-profile figure to date to participate in one of these defence leagues is the Norwegian mass killer Anders Behring Breivik, formally a member of the Norwegian Defence League.⁷⁶ He also claimed to have chatted online with many EDL supporters, and was in discussion with EDL founder Paul Ray from 2002.

Nevertheless, there are defences here too. In Breivik's estimation, the EDL lacked a clear enough ideology, meaning that true 'conservative revolutionaries' like him had a role in further educating such organisations, including by deed. Nevertheless, for Breivik the EDL's role as a 'youth organisation' with an ability to provoke public unrest represented 'progress' towards his goal of a European Civil War intended to last for decades. To take an example from his *2083: A Declaration of European Independence*, the 1,516 page manifesto posted online just hours before his terrorist atrocities:

⁷⁴ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/hate-groups/edl/international>.

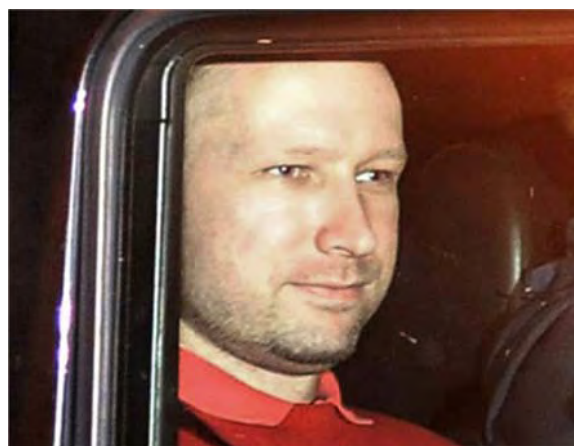
⁷⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/feb/04/edl-rally-european-far-right>.

⁷⁶ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/38/anders-behring-breivik-was-in-contact-with-th>.

Organisations like EDL, doesn't have an official extreme political doctrine. When they 'bait' the UAF, and Jihadi youth (in the thousands) in to rioting, they ensure that the riots are covered by national and international press. During the Harrod protest there were only 16 or so from SIOE and EDL, while there were 3000+ Marxist extremists and Jihadi youth. While it is perhaps morally questionable to bait like this they enticed an overreaction which again lead to 'favourable' coverage (a significantly unfavourable coverage of Marxist extremists and Jihadi youth). Favourable in the sense that Brits gets an indication of the true potency and potential threat of the Jihadi mob, which again results in more Europeans waking up from their self induced coma. It also results in increased polarisation. Is it really that bad that more Europeans are shocked out of their slumber?⁷⁷

Gerry Gable has highlighted further links between Breivik and the EDL. Writing under the pseudonym Sigurd Jorsalfare – a 12th century Norwegian King who led one of the Crusades – Breivik posted the following statement on the EDL message boards, on 9 March 2011:

Hello. To you all good English men and women, just wanted to say that you're a blessing to all in Europe, in these dark times all of Europe are looking to you in surch of inspiration, courage and even hope that we might turn this evil trend with islamisation all across our continent. Well, just wanted to say keep up the good work it's good to see others that care about their country and heritage. All the best to you all Sigurd.⁷⁸



Anders Behring Breivik, who was in contact with the English Defence League in the months prior to his attacks. Breivik was also complementary of the EDL, viewing it as the type of ultra-patriotic 'Youth Movement' he wanted to see more of in the coming years.

⁷⁷ <http://unitednations.ispnw.org/archives/breivik-manifesto-2011.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Cited in Gerry Gable, 'Introduction', Paul Jackson and Gerry Gable (eds.) *Far-Right.com: Nationalist Extremism on the Internet* (London: Searchlight and RNM Publications, 2011) p. 2.

The EDL and the August 2011 Riots in England

The analysis so far here has pointed to the importance of interpreting the EDL as a movement with both an active leadership and a dynamic grass-roots support. Given the EDL's critique of state institutions, it is unsurprising to find the movement taking a vocal – and at times active – role in the rioting and disturbances in London and other parts of England in August 2011. Shortly after the outbreak of disturbances on 6 August, EDL supporters on the group's Facebook wall began to talk openly of schemes to patrol the streets in order to combat looters and rioters. To be sure, all far right groups contain within their makeup a strong critique of social unrest and disorder, often styling themselves as alternate street forces perfectly placed to combat such social tension. From the rise of Italian Fascism onwards we can see far right movements trying to occupy such a space once it becomes available. The 'new far right' is no exception here. Correspondingly, EDL message board discussions regularly linked the rioting in inner city areas to a failure of the state to protect citizens from social decay. The EDL leadership was clear that Islam was not directly to blame, but message board discussions on social networking sites did suggest that, at the grass-roots level at least, EDL supporters could see a connection between a Muslim presence in Britain and a wider social malaise leading to the August 2011 riots.

This was not always mere talk. Around 100 supporters appeared on the streets of Enfield on Tuesday, 9 August 2011 to 'protect' the community. This contravened police guidance, and came after a large increase in police numbers in the capital. Worryingly, this episode of vigilantism itself descended into violent disorder, as protestors turned on attempts at law enforcement during the period of crisis and threw bottles at police. Although the police denied that EDL members were clearly involved in spontaneous street responses to the initial rioting, this does raise the issue of defining what consist a 'genuine' EDL demonstration. A group calling themselves the Eltham Defence League, gained notoriety in the press coverage of the events.⁷⁹ While this was not an official EDL event, the protestors clearly identified themselves with the EDL. Meanwhile, outside of London, Facebook messages similarly claimed that EDL supporters helped to maintain calm on the streets of other towns and cities in the

days after the initial rioting calmed down. This appears to be imagined rather than actual achievements, but shows how the movement can capitalise quickly on disorder to present its street politics as a relevant and trustworthy force.

In sum, EDL reactions during the August 2011 riots show several concerning trends. The EDL can gain some localised credibility by taking credit for restoring order, giving grass-roots protestors an organisation to identify with; moreover, the riots providing the leadership an opportunity to develop further their critiques of mainstream politicians and state institutions.

Growth of opposition to EDL

Successful social movements are likely to inspire opposition, and this certainly has been the case with the EDL. The issue of 'tit for tat radicalisation' has already been raised here, and many EDL demonstrations attract counter-protestors from a diverse range of movements. This can itself prove a major policing problem, leading to arrests and resentment among opponents. In terms of direct opposition to EDL demonstrations, the organisation at the forefront of protest is Unite Against Fascism, an offshoot of the Socialist Workers Party.⁸⁰ UAF demonstrators believe that direct confrontation with the EDL is a necessary strategy, and through a broadly Marxist viewpoint regard the EDL as a classic 'fascist' organisation – in their understanding of this term, lacking a clear ideology and bringing violent elements onto the streets. Yet much discussion by the UAF perspective fails to note the distinction between the extreme right-wing neo-Nazi elements and the general tenor of 'new far right' politics.⁸¹ All are simply 'Nazi scum' for many UAF supporters. It is important to stress that this heated context is one that many EDL activists actually desire form such counter-protests, as they add to the dynamism and potential for confrontation at demonstrations. As such, protestors can help to give a physical manifestation to the left-wing, cultural enemy that EDL supporters believe the movement is trying to defeat.

Affiliated with Unite Against Fascism is the Muslim Defence League: United We Stand, Divided We Fall.⁸² It is to be expected that Muslim opposition to the EDL should develop, and some of this opposition is also, like UAF, concerned with physically opposing the EDL on the streets. There

⁷⁹<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8694472/London-riots-vigilantes-hurl-bottles-at-police-in-Eltham.html>.

⁸⁰ More details are available at www.uaf.org.uk.

⁸¹ The UAF position is developed in a downloadable factsheet: <http://uaf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/EDLfacts.pdf>.

⁸² <http://www.facebook.com/muslimdefenceleague>.

have been other Muslim Defence Leagues proposed too, but currently this appears to be the most organised movement claiming the 'defence league' title. The MDL's online literature is critical of the government's Prevent Strategy, and sees no reason to apologise for Islamist terrorists simply because such figures claim to be Muslim. The movement is connected to the Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPACUK), and its formal literature distances the movement from figures such as Anjem Choudry. Via its Facebook wall, followers can participate in anti-EDL demonstrations such as those organised by UAF.

While these and other movements operate on the principle of being merely anti-EDL, other campaigners have developed a more positive strategy as the core message. The Hope not Hate campaign has been particularly resonant here.⁸³ Controversially, especially among anti-fascist campaigners, it does not follow the UAF line that all demonstrations must be opposed with a direct counter-demonstration. The Hope not Hate campaign has also recognised that addressing underlying political problems, which create the demand for movements such as the EDL, are a central part of any long-term solution. As a result, Hope not Hate has developed parliamentary links (with the Labour Party in particular) in order to reconnect disaffected people with local and national political processes.⁸⁴ This more 'left realist' position demonstrates a greater awareness of the social issues driving EDL support, when compared to the Marxist viewpoint of the UAF group, and so helps to avoid the dangers of 'tit for tat radicalisation' on the streets of Britain.

With a distinct brand, the Hope not Hate campaign also targets individual demonstrations, regularly calling for them to be banned or turned into static protests. Its most high-profile campaign came in August 2010, when the campaign helped to united disparate community groups based in Bradford for in peaceful protest against the EDL demonstration on 28 August. In a nightmare scenario, this demonstration could have potentially re-ignited tensions in a city with a recent history of rioting between far-right and Muslim youths. However, the Hope not Hate campaign spearheaded an inclusive strategy of bringing together many communities – including Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus from the Bradford area – as well as developing good links

with the Police and local authorities.⁸⁵ In terms of counter-protests, such broad-based, community-driven opposition to the EDL appears as a more intelligent campaigning strategy compared to the hard-line UAF attitude.

Finally, online we can find a wide range of sites that develop oppositional stances to the EDL. UAF and Hope not Hate both have well-developed websites. Moreover, other radical left-leaning online spaces regularly host news stories about the EDL, including Indymedia, Lancaster Unity, 1MillionUnited, and Islamophobiawatch. This information-gathering approach allows much incriminating activity committed by EDL activists retaining an online record.

Infidels factions

Finally, when examining the growth and change of the EDL, the newest faction to develop within the social movement is important to discuss: the Infidels. Again, the social movement model adopted here stresses that we should not view the EDL merely as a single, coherent organisation with a central leadership controlling regional branches. Though a loose structure of this type is in place, the EDL's grass-roots are much more empowered than those of a traditional far right party, like the BNP. The appearance of factions and sub-groups should therefore be expected within the wider social movement. Though the central Social Movement Organisation, headed by Yaxley-Lennon, distances the EDL from many components of the wider movement, they are still a key part of the social dynamic that has been generated since 2009.

Exemplifying this potentially fractious mix, the Infidels emerged from growing discontent within the EDL in late 2010 and especially early 2011 to form a splinter group. Entering 2011, the EDL's northern contingent was becoming concerned that a north-south divide was developing within the movement. By this time, some of the EDL's northern divisions were already referring to themselves as 'Infidels'. Also at this time, the renegade figure John Shaw, nicknamed 'Snowy', previously an EDL Regional Organiser, was cultivating a profile as an alternate leadership figure within some of the more autonomous, northern EDL divisions. Snowy had been much feted by the EDL leadership, especially after his

⁸³ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/hate-groups/edl/>.

⁸⁴ For an academic assessment of contemporary anti-fascism, see Nigel Copsey, 'From Direct Action to Community Action: The Changing Dynamics of Anti-Fascist Opposition', in Nigel Copsey and Graham Macklin, *The British National Party: Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2011) pp. 123 – 141.

⁸⁵ The Joseph Rountree Foundation assisted the creation of a film of this response to the EDL, *When Hate Came to Town*, available at <http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/work-area/bradford-programme/when-hate-came-to-town>.

notorious rooftop protest in Dudley in May 2010.⁸⁶ Following his increasingly vocal dissent against alleged financial impropriety by Yaxley-Lennon and Carroll resulted in his being termed a 'Muppet' (amongst other epithets) by the EDL leadership. Moreover, in early 2011, Shaw began to openly threaten EDL opponents such as UAF, claiming to be able to call upon northern sections of the EDL to fulfil such threats. Such statements were themselves resonant of a growing divide within the EDL.⁸⁷

The major 'homecoming' EDL demonstration held in Luton in February 2011 witnessed the start of some significant clashes between EDL divisions. Yet it was the April 2011 demonstration in Blackburn that saw these simmering tensions come to a head. Blackburn's EDL following has been notably strong, and had already established a sense of autonomy from the wider movement. 'Snowy' threatened to turn up, and it quickly became clear that Blackburn was going to lead to a confrontation within the movement. In their speeches that day, Carroll and Yaxley-Lennon asserted their control over the whole movement, and even called a prominent figure in the dissenting factions to the front, only to be dismissed as a neo-Nazi. The day ended in inter-EDL violence, as Yaxley-Lennon and Carroll were cornered near a car park by elements from the northern factions, and were 'dealt with'. 'Snowy' has been linked to this violence against the leadership, while the fallout has continued to cause shifting allegiances among EDL divisions.

At the time of writing, the North East Infidels and North West Infidels have now emerged as discrete factions, separate from the leadership of the EDL, with their own Facebook pages and divisional substructure. Yet social movement theory suggests that these offshoots should still be considered part of the wider social movement, though representing more radicalised reinventions of the core EDL message. The case of the Infidels, examined further in the next chapter, points to the development of a much more clearly neo-Nazi style of far right activity, moving away from the 'new far right' ideology promoted by the main Social Movement Organisation.

Conclusions

From this analysis it is possible to draw a number of key conclusions. Firstly, clearly the EDL

operates as a social movement rather than a political party. It should be considered as a complex patchwork of networks and affiliated groupings, which grew out of a localised instance of 'tit for tat radicalisation'. These wider networks are coordinated by a central Social Movement Organisation, principally via the internet. Currently, the social movement is led by Steven Yaxley-Lennon, alongside Kevin Carroll, despite the recent appearance of splinter groups like the Infidels.



English Defence League supporter being arrested. (Image courtesy of David Hoffman.)

Secondly, in terms of its formation, the legacy of football firm networks was crucial to the creation of the EDL. The role of March for England and Casuals United epitomises this trend. Although the former has since distanced itself from the EDL, the latter remains a key network within the movement's grass-roots structure. Moreover, the pseudonym Tommy Robinson draws attention to the celebration of football violence so central to the EDL's culture. In addition to football hooliganism, a number of leading figures in the EDL had a history of BNP or other, 'traditional' far right activism.

Thirdly, The EDL has developed a sustained culture of grass-roots activism through the strategy of 'march and grow', combined with online networking. Both the online sphere and the offline world of protesting are crucial to appreciating the dynamic posed by EDL. In particular, demonstrations offer a visceral opportunity for shared experiences, confrontations with police, anti-fascist protestors, and the Muslim 'enemy' more generally. Quite beyond the stress this places upon community cohesion, by generating headlines, the 'march and grow' tactic has also allowed the movement to expand rapidly.

Fourthly, by the summer of 2010, the central Social Movement Organisation had sought to exert more control over the wider movement

⁸⁶http://www.dudleynews.co.uk/news/8304532.Charges_dropped_for_EDL_rooftop_protestors/.

⁸⁷ Matthew Collins, 'War Breaks Out Between EDL and "Infidels"', *Searchlight* 431 (May 2011) pp.8 - 10.

via a clear structure, specific campaigns, and centralised directives. This formalisation has included a clearer command structure, allowing for greater control over regions and individual divisions. To date, this still offers broad coordination of the wider social movement.

And finally, in keeping with the social movement model outlined here, grass roots activists for the EDL have been empowered to act on their own. Especially since autumn 2010, specific divisions and regions have been encouraged to develop more localised flash demos, or to launch single-issue campaigns like the 'No More Mosques' and 'Halal Campaigns'. This has led to localised acts of criminality largely directed towards Muslim communities. Such autonomy also contains the seeds for the further development of splinter groupings. To date, the most significant of these has been the emergence of the Infidels in the north east and north west of England.

Chapter 3: The English Defence League's 'New Far Right' Rhetoric and the New Media

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As we have seen, the English Defence League is best understood as a social movement, comprised of a central Social Movement Organisation, as well as a range of grass-roots groups. As such, innovation from below is vital to its on-going success. As with all social movements over the past ten to fifteen years, it has benefited from new media technologies that are now freely available. As Nigel Copsey has noted, the EDL 'is a child of the Facebook revolution',¹ and the movement is notable for its use of online products and services. Facebook, smartphone communication, YouTube videos, free blogs, merchandise sales through eBay, and networking via message boards have been wholeheartedly embraced by the EDL. By exploring aspects of this online culture, it is possible to see how the movement tailors a 'new far right' rhetoric for a number of target audiences. This 'targeted rhetoric' ranges from central EDL websites putting forward the official line to local sites and grass-roots blogs, such as that by Casuals United – offering similar perspectives for specific football 'firm' audiences – to semi-breakaway movements like the Infidels, who are reverting back to more traditional far right themes of glorification of violence, anti-Semitism and neo-Nazism.

By examining elements of this online world constructed from the top down by the EDL leadership and bottom-up by its followers, it is possible to glean a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics and the major concerns of the movement. In doing so, it is important to stress that new media has not created the EDL. Rather, it has provided a new and effective vehicle for the

EDL's 'new far right' messages and networks to be developed.

National and local use of new media

A good starting point is the EDL's use of Facebook, the most well known new media vehicle used by the movement. When loading up the main page for the EDL, one finds a well-tended online space. Here, regularly updated sets of messages are designed to recruit new followers as well as to inform EDL supporters of the movement's latest developments. Aside from hosting key documents, like the EDL Mission Statement discussed in the opening chapter of this report, its Facebook wall functions as a central source for disseminating details of recent and upcoming campaigns and planned demonstrations, as well as offering news updates on key items. These range from statements or court appearances by Tommy Robinson, to commenting on news developments – such as the EDL's criticism of the June 2011 *Prevent* Strategy or the national riots in August 2011 – to dealing with internal cohesion. In response, Facebook has raised concerns with the EDL's politicised use of their website, although the EDL Facebook page currently remains highly active.

Unlike more traditional far right movements, the EDL has encouraged the grass-roots development of new media spaces.² EDL followers correspondingly take a much more active part in this online sphere. Such participation might take the form of uploading video from a 'flash', or unplanned, EDL demonstration, or commenting on EDL media appearances (often in real time); or more typically, using Facebook to develop networks among fellow activists. Such a dynamic online space has been crucial to the EDL's ability to develop scattered anti-Muslim attitudes into a more coherent and sustained movement. Yet Facebook and other new media tools can also be over-emphasised in terms of EDL successes. Although tens of thousands of people are registered as supporters on Facebook (over 90,000 at the time of writing) this ever-growing figure does not necessarily translate into an ever-growing number of supporters attending EDL demonstrations.

¹ Nigel Copsey, *The English Defence League: A Challenge to our Country and our Values of Social Inclusion, Fairness and Equality* (London: Faith Matters, 2010) p. 5.

² For the BNP use of new media see Chris Atton, 'Far-right media on the internet: culture, discourse and power', *New Media & Society* 8, 4 (2006) pp. 573 – 587; and Sonia Gable, 'The British National Party and the Internet: A Love-Hate Relationship', Paul Jackson and Gerry Gable (eds.) *Far-Right.com: Nationalist Extremism on the Internet* (London: Searchlight and RNM Publications, 2011).

Localism online and ephemera

The EDL's national Facebook site is only the tip of the iceberg. Embracing new media by social movements can lead to national and even global networking. Yet in academic literature on how social movements use such communication tools, research stresses that online activity is often used to cement much more localised networks too.³ Unsurprisingly, this is also the case with the EDL, whose individual divisions and interest groups have developed their own 'local' Facebook pages, in addition to other material like blogs and YouTube videos. Unlike the main EDL Facebook page, however, with over 100 such divisions and special interest groups across the country, these more localised and specialised Facebook sites are more guarded, and tend to be closed to general viewing.

Aside from Facebook, localised EDL groups have also rapidly developed online. One typical example of such grass-roots networking can be found at the EDL's Macclesfield Division's blog site – operational until the summer of 2011. These pages have hosted a number of YouTube videos from EDL demonstrations, streamed patriotic songs, and various links to EDL causes. These include 'Justice 4 Charlene Downes'; condemnation of the 2010 student protests (dubbed 'student scum' by the site); and another campaign, 'Free Andrew Ryan'. The latter regards a former soldier and EDL supporter jailed in 2011 for burning the Koran, discussed in the previous chapter. Highlighting the anti-Muslim tenor across these pages, the 'Free Andrew Ryan' campaign described the state's response to Ryan's burning of the Koran as follows:

The muslim extremist scum burnt our poppy on remembrance day and get a £50 fine. Is this country taking the fucking piss, the fact is they are scared of upsetting the muslims in this country and this has gone to far.

In contrast with the EDL's Facebook page, the less guarded general tone of the site, and the centrality anti-Muslim perspective, are notable here.⁴

Such individual campaigns advertised on localised sites and elsewhere illustrate the way new media products can be linked together. For example, the 'Free Andrew Ryan' campaign space on the Macclesfield blog is hyperlinked to a members only Facebook group called 'FREE ANDY

RYAN!!!!', which at the time of writing has over 700 members. While not a large-scale campaign in itself, the EDL's networked use of new media allows for many such local issues to be integrated into the wider campaign. As with national issues, single-issue protests that resonate in a localised environment can be used to evoke the EDL's core themes: an encroaching Islamisation of Britain; failings by the state to prevent this alleged threat; and ultra-patriotism.

Apart from developing national and local networks, or specific campaigns like 'Free Andy Ryan', the new media is used to develop EDL ephemera as well. This can lead to rather curious developments that, on first impression, appear superficial and insignificant. One striking example is recent YouTube videos linked to an EDL protestor's warnings against 'Muslimic Ray Guns'.⁵ This theme first developed when a viral YouTube film (boasting around 500,000 views at the time of writing) depicted a largely incoherent interview in which an EDL protestor who warned of the threat posed by an encroaching 'Mulsamic law' and 'Muslimic rayguns'.



A still taken from the 'Muslimic Rayguns' YouTube film.

The video was soon cited by anti-EDL sites as typifying the allegedly inarticulate organisation.

³ Donatella Della Porta and Lorenzo Mosca, 'Global-net for Global Movements? A Networks of Networks for a Movement of Movements', *Journal of Public Policy* 25, 1 (2005) pp. 165 – 190.

⁴<http://www.englishdefenceleaguemacclesfield.co.uk/>. This website is no longer active.

⁵<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjuNuqlv8M&feature=related>.

Yet fellow EDL supporters re-appropriated the interview by remixing it into a song with a dance beat, and the interviewee has since become a cause celebre within the movement.⁶ The re-edited video now has found no less than half a million YouTube views, and is often posted on various EDL sites. Alternate versions of the new song have even been recorded by other young EDL supporters, popularising lyrics that reiterate the core ideological views of the movement: violent Islam seek to take over a nation in decline. The song has also been turned into EDL ringtones and other ephemera, such as T-shirts bearing the slogan 'Muslimic Rayguns'.⁷

The politicised use of music has been a long-standing feature of fascist and far-right movements as well as football firms,⁸ and it is therefore not surprising to find the EDL developing this culture as well. Other EDL songs include rallying lyrics, such as:

We're coming, we're coming
We're coming down the road
We're the infidels of the EDL and we're coming down
the road.⁹

The above is also a chant commonly heard at EDL rallies. The creation of such cultural products is important as it helps to cement a common identity, thus creating a more unified sense of community, both online and offline. Both are key components of a well-developed social movement.

Scrutinising key themes in the English Defence League's online discourses

From Facebook messages, to localised blogs and campaigns, to songs and YouTube ephemera, it is clear that the new media is the primary source for EDL material. As a result, it is often the space where its views are constructed and disseminated to supporters. Given the importance of such new media, it is possible to get a better idea of how some of the major EDL sites put forward these messages by examining a snapshot of some discussions occurring over a period of a month. The following analysis seeks to present the major themes from three key EDL sites – English Defence League News, English Defence League Extra, and

the Casual United blog – during May 2011. The first of these sites is clearly an example of the movement's 'front stage', while the second and third blog takes us more clearly into areas really only intended for those already initiated into the movement, giving us glimpses into the EDL's 'back stage' thoughts.

English Defence League News

The English Defence League News site offers a window on the way the EDL's leadership present the movement to followers, and presumably others too. Hosted by the organisation's main website, a total of 15 articles were posted on this forum over May 2011, approximately one every two days. As elsewhere, the most striking feature of these articles is an anti-Muslim tenor. Yet the messages have a multiple purposes. Here, examples include giving a positive spin to EDL news stories, as well as offering Steven Yaxley-Lennon a platform for maintaining unity within the ranks. One instance of the latter is the posting of a 40-minute YouTube address, where Yaxley-Lennon denies accusations of fraud from Infidel factions while maintaining his authority over the organisation.¹⁰

Similar to the EDL's Mission Statement, on the whole the language on the English Defence League News site is very consciously couched in terms of combating Islamist extremism. In doing so, there is always the strong implication that British Muslims as a whole either support jihadi Islamists, or are led by just such extremists. Correspondingly the notion that Islam is somehow menacing is evident in nearly all of 15 articles posted for May 2011.

Typifying this emotive criticism of British and other Muslims, and linking this to a patriotic agenda, the first posting for the month embeds and offers comments on a YouTube film by Evan Mark, a non-EDL figure. The film loosely narrates the rise of the Taliban, the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, and features violent images of a stoning and beheadings. As this suggests, the war in Afghanistan is a particularly resonant issue for the EDL as it emotively combines key themes of combating jihadi Islamism and comradesly patriotism, while also raising issues with the mainstream political establishment's record of supporting front-line troops. In addition to the film's images, the EDL's commentary is especially keen to remind followers of the potential threats posed by the

⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIPD8qHhtVU>.

⁷ <http://www.redbubble.com/people/alexvegas/t-shirts/6949471-muslimic-ray-guns-large-emblem>.

⁸ For a discussion on the British far-right and music, see: Anton Shekhovtsov, 'Far-Right Music and the Use of Internet: Final Conflict and the British National Party Compared', Paul Jackson and Gerry Gable (eds.) *Far-Right.com: Nationalist Extremism on the Internet* (London: Searchlight and RNM Publications, 2011).

⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOL6b4YXk4>.

¹⁰ 'Tommy Robinson Video Statement', *English Defence League News*, (7 May 2011).

introduction of Shari'ah law to Britain.¹¹ This message keys in with the core EDL narrative: warning of a threatening Islam overtaking British society.

The on-going war in Afghanistan also connects with a thread running throughout the postings of May 2011: the death of Osama bin Laden. Most strikingly, the various statements from this site present bin Laden's Islamist violence as a direct product of his Muslim faith, not the product of a particular political agenda that has emerged from a specific context. For example, English Defence League News commentary stresses that he was 'a devout Muslim who sincerely believed the words of the Qur'an and the example of the prophet'.¹² Such simplification argues that devotion to scripture alone was the reason for bin Laden's terrorist actions. Furthermore, bin Laden's 9/11 attack are seen as the starting point for a western confrontation with political Islam. Yet such short-term, simplified analysis neglects to identify any long-term causal factors for the emergence of jihadi Islamism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Broadly speaking, this could include the impact of European decolonisation, or the complex postwar politics of the wider Middle East, or the internecine war in leading to Afghanistan's identification as a 'failed state'. Most textbook discussions on the emergence of Al-Qaeda and similar groups include such themes among others, but are glaringly absent from the EDL's portrayal. The EDL's perspective is not simply misguided; it is intended to associate all Muslims with bin Laden's violent extremism. To achieve this, the editing out of important facts, and selective storytelling, misrepresent Islam as an inherently violent faith.

In the fallout from bin Laden's death, other reports during May 2011 discuss the EDL 'in action'. Often describing itself as a 'street movement', the EDL responded to events in May with a 'tit-for-tat' approach. In early May, several postings highlight clashes between the 'brave patriots' of the EDL and Muslims Against Crusades (MAC) activists, which occurred outside the American Embassy in London.¹³ Updates on these clashes were disseminated through uploaded YouTube video, which is a popular by-product of EDL actions.¹⁴ The speed and scale of this new media approach is a potent propaganda tool for

EDL followers, as it offers dynamic images of Islamist protestors who, as with EDL textual discourses, can be styled as representative of wider Muslim communities' attitudes towards the death of bin Laden.

The behaviour of the police is also discussed in these postings. As previously highlighted, developing a strong critique of the state is a crucial component of far right politics, old and new. This theme can be deployed whenever the issue of policing the EDL is discussed. English Defence League News reports tend to present street level officers as essentially in sympathy with the aims of the movement. Meanwhile, more senior police are strongly criticised for giving orders allegedly privileging Muslim protestors above those of the EDL.¹⁵ This juxtaposition, suggesting a distinction between the honourable bobby and the out-of-touch bureaucrat, is given immediacy when discussing an anti-Muslim theme, such as MAC demonstrators.

Beyond major news events, localised stories are also foregrounded in order to develop more general anti-Muslim arguments. For example, anti-Muslim sentiment was highlighted in a post discussing the case of an 18-year old Muslim man who had mounted a homophobic sticker campaign in Whitechapel, London. The article concluded by stating the EDL 'will continue to challenge the Muslim world's intolerance of sexual freedoms', and pointed to statistical data suggesting that British Muslim communities are more homophobic than the wider British population.¹⁶ Again, such discussion lends itself to the underlying 'new far right' message, and allows the EDL to style itself as the defender of liberal values over intolerant Muslim ones. This theme also allowed the article to establish contrasting views on homosexuality via a typically caricatured representation of Shari'ah law. The article simplistically argued that Shari'ah law would inevitably lead to the death penalty for homosexuality, once again caricaturing the Islamic faith as a whole as violent and intolerant.

The EDL's international context is also notable in this forum, especially with reference to two developments within the European 'new far right'. The first related to the French fast-food chain Quick, which had ceased selling pork products at some of its restaurants. This issue had already become a rallying point for French far-right movements like the National Front and Bloc Identitaire. These French 'new far right'

¹¹ 'Afghanistan: An Important Front in the Battle against Radical Islam', *English Defence League News* (2 May 2011).

¹² 'He's Bin and Gone!', *English Defence League News* (2 May 2011).

¹³ 'Standing Shoulder to Shoulder With Our American Cousins', *English Defence League News* (10 May 2011).

¹⁴ 'EDL Oppose Radical Muslims Outside the US Embassy', *English Defence League News*, (10 May 2011).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ 'Muslim Man Faces Charges for "Gay Free Zone" Campaign', *English Defence League News* (19 May 2011).

campaigns argued that Quick's actions typified an encroaching Islamification of Europe. Using the online space to mix media, the report on this issue contained a YouTube posting of a speech by Yaxley-Lennon, who attended a rally in Lyon organised by Bloc Identitaire. Presenting the issue as a binary one between patriotic western values and an enforced Islamification, the posting then connected this struggle to the defence of European freedoms during the Second World War. Conflating 'radical Islam' with Nazism, the forum claimed: 'Today we face a new enemy. But the ideology of radical Islam is just as dangerous and repulsive as that of Nazism, if not more so.'¹⁷

Similarly, the developments on the Continent came to the fore again in a supportive article on Geert Wilders' proposed film to retell the story of the prophet Mohammed. Having offered some sympathetic comments on Wilders' own problems with state prosecutions in the Netherlands, the article then uses this theme to offer a brief, highly critical biography of Mohammed. The commentary stresses the purportedly violent, militaristic nature of the prophet, and that it was this warlord figure who first inspired the more intolerant side of Shari'ah law. The piece then characterises the prophet as a paedophile, even a 'serial murderer, torturer and rapist'. The English Defence League News then offers a stark and damning commentary on the significance of this for modern Muslims:

Regardless of whether or not it is fair to refer to Mohammed as a child abuser (he lived in a different time, with very different ideas about sex, childhood, and the rights of the individual), its [sic] clearly very worrying to think that this is the man Muslims are still told they should emulate. Some perfect example he set!

The piece, brimming with assumptions and prejudice, finally suggests that Mohammed's alleged tendency towards paedophilia actually influences higher rates of sex offending among modern Muslims, and moreover, that Islam is the only religion to license terrorism.¹⁸

In fact, the allegation that Muslims have a greater propensity to engage in paedophilia was a very lively topic across May 2011. The theme keyed in with an EDL demonstration at the end of the month in Blackpool. The protest on 28 May 2011 focused on the 'Justice for Charlene Downes' theme. The case of Charlene Downes became an issue the EDL made their own in the spring of 2011 – again showing the flexibility and 'localism'

that can be employed by the movement. The crux of the story involves a collapsed prosecution of two Muslim men for Downes' murder. This has allowed the English Defence League News postings to charge young Muslim men more generally with paedophilia. It also facilitated strong criticism of the criminal justice system and mainstream politicians. Once more, the EDL's wider message is developed: dangerous Muslims are scoring victory after victory over non-Muslim communities, in a growing Islamification of Britain. This simplistic analysis is packaged in a highly emotive online and street campaign that contains a wide variety of anti-Muslim sentiment.

This summary of English Defence League News postings from May 2011 only scratches the surface of a complex set of messages developed in but one month. It is important to note that these messages, particularly from formal EDL sites like this one, do at least attempt to make distinctions between moderate Muslims and what is usually termed 'radical Islam'. Such a binary distinction is itself highly simplistic, yet is offered as the central get-out-clause for allegations that the EDL is Islamophobic. This is the EDL's 'front stage', and to a certain degree more guarded commentary is to be expected. Still, the site evinces a strong anti-Muslim tenor, one going beyond merely critiquing Islamist violence. The Koran itself rather than any radicalising political contexts is repeatedly presented as the inspiration for criminal activity, countering liberal values, and terrorist violence.

English Defence League Extra

While the English Defence League News offers a somewhat guarded presentation of the EDL's views, other blogs are explicit in their anti-Muslim critiques. In this context, the English Defence League Extra blog site can be considered another key source of the EDL perspective. The site is edited by a Birmingham-based supporter who claims not to represent formal EDL positions, and so offers an example of grass-roots website development within the EDL. It posted 32 stories during May 2011. In addition to being more frequent, these articles also tend to be longer than those of the English Defence League News. Here, most posts are again specifically critical of Muslims in Britain and around the world, backing up core EDL messages. There is also significant space given over to criticising anti-EDL protestors, such as Unite Against Fascism. Yet this is all done through more a lengthy analysis when compared to English Defence League News postings, including engagement with high profile academics

¹⁷ 'This Little Infidel Marched All The Way to Lyon', *English Defence League News* (15 May 2011).

¹⁸ 'Mohammed: A Perfect Role Model?', *English Defence League News*, (26 May 2011).

like the late Edward Said, as well as grander political theorising broadly around Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilisation' thesis. The English Defence League Extra site thus offers supporters a comparatively in-depth level of discussion, notably relating to foreign affairs, critiques of the state, activities of anti-EDL protestors and, of course, on-going EDL campaigns.

Similar to the EDL's Mission Statement, here too the anti-Muslim sentiments are couched in a way that attempts to distance the movement from accusations of being far right or racist – both fiercely rejected by the EDL. To achieve this, one common rhetorical tactic is to develop anti-Nazi themes that offer opportunities to conflate Islam and Nazism. For example, when castigating *Sun* journalist Anila Baig, analysis quickly veers into this territory by comparing Muslims who have contributed major cultural achievements to intellectual Nazi supporters, like Martin Heidegger and Richard Strauss.¹⁹ Such comments help to create a common sense view that the two are essentially similar.

Importantly, several articles from May 2011 also specifically address the issue of the EDL's political identity and governing ideology. In keeping with the 'new far right' ideology, accusations of fascism and biological racism are strongly contested. Yet these articles do argue that, although the EDL is not racist, it is an avowedly 'culturalist' organisation. On the one hand one entry mocks racism based on notions of superior and inferior forms of human biology – 'All this is bullshit' – on the other hand, it argues that anti-Muslim prejudices are erroneous 'only if seen in blood / genetic terms, not necessarily if seen in cultural terms'.²⁰ This self-identified 'culturalist' position is used to develop much negative commentary on Islamic culture. So despite rejecting the biological racism of, say, Nazism, such messages openly embrace anti-Muslim discrimination based on cultural 'otherness'. For such 'culturalists', Muslims are irredeemably 'other'.

Correspondingly, the critique of all Muslims is actually much stronger here than on the English Defence League News site. Although the strategy of guilt by association remains a key rhetorical device, the English Defence League Extra site develops this theme in a more detailed manner. Anti-Muslim discussions typically characterise the Islamic faith as a whole as

inherently violent and threatening. An explicit article published from May 2011 on the threat posed by non-violent Muslims, 'Muslim "Moderation" = Patient Strategy', exemplifies this strategy.²¹ Yet again, non-violent Muslims are considered an on-going threat to the nation. In fact violence and non-violence are presented as two, interrelated strategies for the supposedly imminent Islamification of Britain. The article further contends that, since Muslims are currently a minority population, it does not always make sense for them to adopt militant tactics for their alleged Islamification of Britain. So here, all Muslims are styled as a kind of Trojan Horse for extremist values. Whether associated with jihadi Islamism or not, all Muslims are alleged to adhere to values that are inherently 'outside' those of a British way of life and want to impose extremist views on wider society. All followers of Islam, in this reading, are therefore more susceptible to terrorism. For example:

There is nothing to stop a Muslim from becoming a suicide bomber or a terrorist. That is, he need not accommodate himself to British law and custom because, from the beginning, he is evidently outside that system.

Simply put, Muslims calling for moderation are actually enacting a long-term strategy of Islamification, yet sometimes impatient Muslims turn to terrorism in order to try speeding things up. Both of these reductive characterisations, moderate and extreme, portrays Muslims as an existential threat to the British way of life. The article then argues that Muslim states worldwide are in a similar position of weakness. However, should such a Muslim state gain parity with the USA, this would result in nuclear Armageddon due to the inherent drive toward aggression and domination within Islam. By this logic, the piece asserts that the threat to Britain would be much greater if the Muslim population was even double its current size. To stress this point, it concludes by stating the British Muslim population is increasing at ten times the rate of the average population growth. Thus wild inaccuracies, conspiracy theories and much inflammatory rhetoric are all added to the core theme of guilt by association, which repeatedly seeks to present all Muslims as potential, if not actual, jihadi terrorists due to their religious culture.

In analysis of English Defence League News postings, it was noted that the war in Afghanistan featured heavily in EDL rhetoric.

¹⁹ 'The Sun's Anila Baig Is a Right Laugh!', *English Defence League Extra* (4 May 2011).

²⁰ 'The EDL is Culturalist – Not Racist', *The English Defence League Extra* (17 May 2011).

²¹ 'Muslim "Moderation" = Patient Strategy', *The English Defence League Extra*, (13 May 2011).

Alongside Afghanistan, bin Laden's death in May 2011 allowed for Islamism in Pakistan to enter into its analysis. The English Defence League Extra's perspective, in contrast, shows some awareness of different Muslim communities in Pakistan; for example, examining demographics and key faith groups, as well as talking about links between Deobandi interpretations of Islam and the emergence of the Taliban. On first inspection, perhaps, this suggests some potential to raise valid points regarding the impact of such politicised Islam in Pakistan, and in turn, how this relates to Britain. The propaganda purpose of the site, however, quickly highlights the underlying reason for such discussion. Once more analysis is deeply one-sided, simply using a more nuanced set of explanations to develop the same core narrative arguing that, internationally, Islam has an inherent tendency toward violent extremism. Awareness of detail can be convincing to the uninitiated, and so more finessed discussion of Pakistan's complex circumstances are merely conjured up to present the country as a hothouse for extremists – individuals who are then finding their way to Britain to ferment trouble.²² Though the issue of jihadi Islamism is a real and pressing one, the presentation here omits all context, proportion, or clear research, and merely serves the purpose of extending the EDL's anti-Muslim views.

English Defence League Extra, across May 2011, also castigates the British state for being cowed by Muslim lobbies. This comes out most strongly on the high-profile issue of installing and then decommissioning CCTV cameras in the Sparkbrook area of Birmingham. Entries criticised the 'victory' by Muslims, while stressing that the initial presence of CCTV nonetheless identified a deep-seated problem of violent extremism in the Sparkbrook area.²³ For the English Defence League Extra, the story of the removal of the CCTV system effectively legitimised the Muslim ghetto in the city, while also wasting state resources. We can see here how the EDL can make some political momentum from *Prevent* Strategy related projects, themselves designed to ease community tensions.

The English Defence League Extra site also contains strong critiques of the local media reporting on EDL activities. For example, one entry examines the reporting of a demonstration in Weymouth by the *Dorset Echo*.²⁴ Here and elsewhere, the local media is presented as failing

to represent the true views of the local population, and condemned for drawing its analysis from organisations such as *Searchlight*. A common tactic in such media critiques is to reproduce a news article from the local press, which is then interpolated with comments on alleged inaccuracies by the blogger. These interpolations reiterate core EDL views on the failings of mainstream politicians and British society with respect to jihadi Islamism, the need for patriotism, and the threats posed by an alleged Islamisation of Britain. The far right 'outsider' status of EDL is also confirmed through such an approach, implying all mainstream interpretations of such issues are misguided and need correcting. Such an approach appears with a good degree of regularity in May 2011, and offers a quick way to develop a lengthy blog entry. Examples include comments on a story taken from *Carlisle News & Star*, which reported on a Carlisle United steward who resigned because of his support for the EDL, in particular Andrew Ryan's burning of the Koran;²⁵ and a piece taken from the *Fulham & Hammersmith Chronicle* reporting a clash between EDL supporters and Muslims outside West London Magistrates Court in Hammersmith, at the time Steven Yaxley-Lennon's public order offence was heard.²⁶

As with the English Defence League News, by the end of May, entries also become focused upon the impending EDL demonstration in Blackpool. Here too, the Charlene Downes case became a vehicle for developing anti-Muslim sentiment, especially towards kebab shop workers. The overarching theme is to use the topic as a means to present all Muslim men as potential paedophiles. As one entry declares:

Of course all ethnicities have members who abuse young girls. But not all ethnic groups have a religion, like Islam, which sanctions and even encourages that abuse. This is but one strand of the Islamic jihad and which specifically goes back to the Koranic notion of 'booty' (i.e. in the Blackpool case – non-Muslim girls) and/or Islamic slavery – among other Islamic things.

So forget race. This is about the nature of Islam and therefore the nature of Muslim communities in the UK.²⁷

What is particularly striking here is how quickly the rhetoric slips from an ostensible anti-jihadi theme to into condemning the Islamic faith as a whole – a common quality with English Defence League Extra postings.

²² 'Is Pakistan an Islamist State', *The English Defence League Extra* (3 May 2011); and 'Pakistan and Pakistani Islamists in the UK', *The English Defence League Extra* (3 May 2011).

²³ 'Birmingham's Muslims are appeased over the "spy Cameras"', *The English Defence League Extra* (10 May 2011).

²⁴ 'The Hateful Dorset Echo on the Weymouth Demo', *The English Defence League Extra* (3 May 2011).

²⁵ 'Carlisle's latest victim of Islamophobia – a steward at Carlisle United', *The English Defence League Extra* (8 May 2011).

²⁶ 'Trouble at Tommy Robinson's court appearance', *The English Defence League Extra* (12 May 2011).

²⁷ 'The EDL: Why Blackpool on Saturday', *The English Defence League Extra* (26 May 2011).

To summarise, issues relevant to the EDL's ideology on the English Defence League Extra blog are given more detailed discussion, offering supporters a greater level of nuance that helps rationalise the radical messages developed by the social movement. These more articulate, radical positions are not imposed from above but are cultivated from within the EDL's grass-roots. This more complex discourse offers details missing from the English Defence League News postings, yet still conforms to a scare-mongering attitude that styles all Muslims as alien to a patriotic identity, as being closer to terrorism, and actively engaged in a long-term project of turning Britain into a state ruled by Shari'ah law.

Casuals United Blog

Moving on, with just over 150 discrete entries in May 2011, the Casuals United blog is the most prolific of the three websites under analysis here. However, unlike the English Defence League Extra site, many of these postings tend to be either very short, with text pasted from other sites, or simply uploaded YouTube videos (there are two cover versions of the Muslim Rayguns song, for example), or footage from EDL demos. The site is largely run by 'Joe Cardiff', also known as Jeff Marsh. As discussed elsewhere, he created the Casuals United organisation in 2009 and its network is closely affiliated with the EDL. The Casuals United blog's politics again gravitates around ultra-patriotism, anti-Muslim sentiment and populist critiques of the British state, while also drawing on Marsh's previous 'career' in organised football hooliganism. The Casuals United blog shows the way in which cognate organisations cluster together to form networks around compatible themes within the wider EDL social movement. As such, Casuals United has developed a key blog site that is well integrated into EDL campaigns.

Like previous EDL related sites, the predominant characteristic of the Casuals United blog is the use of both text and image to advance an anti-Muslim agenda. Here, however, entries offer neither the more detailed analysis presented by the English Defence League Extra site, nor the more careful tenor of the English Defence League News site. The language often veers into expletives and *ad hominem* attacks on opponents.²⁸ As elsewhere in the EDL discourse, opponents are not

only Muslims, but also left-wing critics, such as Unite Against Fascism.

Moreover, the double standards expected of Muslims and EDL supporters are also more clearly represented by postings here. For example, one posting decries a piece of graffiti on an advertising hoarding where a Burka has been painted over a woman wearing a bikini.²⁹ Elsewhere, another posting complains of two EDL supporters being prosecuted for spraying poppies on a mosque.³⁰ The implication seems clear: graffiti is acceptable when committed by the EDL, but not by others. Moreover, the idea that many in Britain would find extremely distasteful an EDL related appropriation of the poppy image for such a politicised, anti-Muslim agenda is not even entertained by the blogger.

As elsewhere in EDL-related sites during May 2011, the bin Laden theme is frequently raised in the Casuals United Blog. This is primarily achieved by re-printing news stories lifted from other publications. As such, while this blog is more prolific than the other two surveyed above, it is also more reliant on wider sources for its material. The most common daily newspaper for developing such news postings is the *Daily Mail*, while the BBC and the *Daily Express* were also used during May 2011 to reproduce particular news stories, helping to fuel an anti-Muslim agenda. Even international media is employed, such as in a piece titled 'Bin Laden's wank pit'.³¹ This entry reproduces an article from Fox News on the alleged predilection for pornography among bin Laden and Islamist militants generally (a medium often used to communicate concealed messages to fellow terrorists). Britain's local press is also used for selective re-blogging by Casuals United, such as a piece from the *Shropshire Star* detailing allegations of Muslim men grooming children for sex.³²

As with other sites, many postings relate to EDL demos. At the start of the month, an entry positively describes a grass-roots EDL protest in Weymouth gravitating around the ostensible threat posed by Islamist radicalisation in the area.³³ This theme centred on accusations of 'grooming' of a local youth by Muslims Against Crusades. (Allegations that were denied by the family in question, but this did not deter the EDL supporter's concerns.)³⁴ In addition to reporting

²⁸ For example the post referring to an anti-fascist campaigner titled 'im no gynaecologist but I know a cunt when I see one', *Casuals United Blog* (30 May 2011).

²⁹ 'burkha graffiti', *Casuals United Blog* (21 May 2011).

³⁰ 'Another example of one law for them and another for us', *Casuals United Blog* (20 May 2011).

³¹ 'Bin Laden's Wank Pit', *Casuals United Blog* (13 May 2011).

³² 'Telford Nonces in Court', *Casuals United Blog* (16 May 2011).

³³ For example, 'EDL march in Weymouth: Police pleased with outcome', *Casuals United Blog* (2 May 2011); and 'Weymouth - EDL Casuals Demo Weekender' *Casuals United Blog* (2 May 2011).

³⁴ http://www.dorsetecho.co.uk/news/9002798.EDL_march_in_Weymouth_A_peaceful_day_of_protest/.

on such demos, other Casuals United postings relating to EDL events relay pragmatic information. For example, the EDL's counter-demonstrations against Muslim Against Crusades protests at US embassy in May 2011 were announced in advance by a posting inviting readers to 'go pay our (dis)respect'.³⁵ Supporters were invited to meet at a pub close to the Embassy ahead of the MAC protest. Posts after this London demonstration again highlighted alleged failings by the police, although here distinctions between junior, on the ground police, and more senior officers, were not made. Later in the month, a similar notice for a protest against Amnesty International was also announced on the Casuals United blog, further revealing the links between such online activity and the impact of localised EDL flash-demos.

As with other EDL blogs, a European perspective on the anti-Muslim theme is also developed by the Casuals United site. One posting detailed the state suppression of various anti-Muslim campaigners in Finland, such as Jussi Kristian Halla-aho, who argued in 2009 that Muhammad was a paedophile – leading to a notorious prosecution in Finland.³⁶ These international anti-Muslim postings help to connect the EDL's anti-Muslim campaign to a wider European perspective, allowing the movement to align itself with other organisations with similar agendas; in this case, the far right True Finns party. Another post from the end of May shows that this international support is further extended to Australia, with a YouTube video contributed by the Australian Defence League.³⁷

A number of other indicative topics were also raised by the Casuals United Blog entries from May 2011. One theme that received many postings related to the controversial appearance by Anjem Choudry at the Hay Festival, scheduled for the end of the month. In the weeks leading up to the event, blogs included planning for a counter-demonstration. (Anjem Choudry ultimately did not appear at the festival following a more high-profile protest from UKIP). Meanwhile, the prosecution of a key EDL organiser was discussed here but not elsewhere. Joel Titus was given a criminally sought Anti Social Behaviour Order (or 'CRASBO') for three years on 6 May 2011, preventing him from all EDL-related activity following public order offences at a north London pub in December

2010.³⁸ This topic was raised in several articles during May 2011, and advanced the familiar argument that the state clamps down only on the EDL, while allowing Muslim Against Crusades and UAF protestors to escape arrest and prosecution. The sentencing of Joel Titus also allowed for the reposted opinion blog by Patrick Hayes, writer for *Spiked Magazine*, again condemning such restrictions on freedom to protest.³⁹

Many postings later in the month again developed the backstory to the Blackpool protest. Here, as well as anti-Muslim rhetoric, merchandising is also promoted, such as Charlene Downes memorial badges available at 50 pence per badge.⁴⁰ Also, developing the connection between Muslims and paedophilia, there are many re-postings of press stories that suggested Muslims in Blackpool and elsewhere groom young girls for sex. More pragmatically, details of coach trips were also discussed.⁴¹

The EDL often claims it tries to avoid anti-fascist campaigners. The movement contends such counter-demonstrations bring violence to otherwise peaceful gatherings. However, the posting related to the Blackpool demonstration titled 'Excellent, they took the bait – UAF will now demo in solidarity with child killers/groomers – at least they are open with their views now'⁴² suggests a different attitude among the EDL grass roots: protestors actively seek to provoke confrontation and develop situations for conflict. Indeed, the actions of anti-fascist protestors are regularly discussed, as is the radical left in general. According to the Casuals United blog, active campaigning against such targets can be deemed legitimate. This point is most clearly revealed in a reposting of an English Defence League Extra entry that endorses an attack on a Merseyside left-wing bookshop.⁴³ Such re-postings also highlight a synergy between the blog sites under analysis here, allowing similar messages to be developed for different audiences within the social movement.

At the end of the month another localised EDL demo in Shotton, Deeside is highlighted on the Casuals United blog.⁴⁴ The main aim of this

³⁵ 'Counter demo London Tomorrow (Friday)', *Casuals United Blog* (5 May 2011).

³⁶ 'Muslim Immigration Transforms Finland' *Casuals United Blog* (1 May 2011).

³⁷ 'ADL Sydney demo July 30th', *Casuals United Blog* (31 May 2011).

³⁸ 'More illegal EDL Asbo's and a question', *Casuals United Blog* (9 May 2011).

³⁹ 'More left wing hypocrisy', *Casuals United Blog* (11 May 2011).

⁴⁰ 'Charlene Downes memorial badges', *Casuals United Blog* (17 May 2011).

⁴¹ 'Coaches for Blackpool from Southern divisions all now full', *Casuals United Blog* (23 May 2011).

⁴² 'Excellent, they took the bait – UAF will now demo in solidarity with child killers/groomers – at least they are open with their views now', *Casuals United Blog* (18 May 2011).

⁴³ 'The EDL "invades" a Merseyside Islamist-supporting, "radical" bookshop', *Casuals United Blog* (8 May 2011).

⁴⁴ for example, 'EDL/CDL Shotton Demo Saturday May 21st', *Casuals United Blog* (17 May 2011); 'Shotton Demos Saturday 21st', *Casuals United Blog* (19 May 2011); 'Now you see it, now you dont Shotton

demonstration was to campaign against the building of an Islamic cultural centre on the derelict site of an old social club. Postings to organise a protest included basic organisational information, comments on critical reports from the local press, and photos related to the demonstration. Entries also noted the inclusion of EDL splinter group, the Infidels, at this demo. Indeed, the Casuals United blog appears broadly hospitable to these 2011 offshoots. The final postings for the month begin to give details of another unofficial EDL demo, this time in Dewsbury, again showing the connection between the Casuals United post and the organisation of unofficial demonstrations.⁴⁵

In comparison with the English Defence League News and English Defence League Extra, then, the Casuals United blog is more of a grass-roots site. Though it offers little in the way of detailed discussion, it clearly structures its messages around the same anti-Muslim, ultra-patriotic views found elsewhere within the EDL. Like Venn diagrams, these blogs overlap, and centre on the role of anti-Muslim sentiment common to all three blog sites. Moreover, as they by developing this anti-Muslim ideology at such great length, they frame the cultural racism that the EDL's ideology is founded upon.

Infidels online

As is becoming apparent, the wider EDL social movement develops many shades of online discourse. We saw in the previous chapter that in 2011 the social movement has developed splinter organisations: the North East and North West Infidels. These groupings have also developed their own web spaces, largely on Facebook. These offshoots of the EDL operate within a much more openly racist and violent register, which we can detect by looking at their own online presences.

For example, the North West Infidels have developed a main page, as well as several localised Facebook pages, also linked to the breakaway movement. At the time of writing, these include: Stoke, Yorkshire, Manchester, Blackburn and even a youth page. The general tenor here is one of co-opting the EDL's agenda, while developing a more extreme variant of the ideology. As the Yorkshire's description of itself puts this point:

We will (sometimes) peacefully protest against Militant muzrats. But any nonsense from them, or their UAF

brothers, then we will peacefully KICK THEIR FUCKING HEADS IN. THE END. FULL STOP.⁴⁶

The more guarded language found elsewhere within the EDL online is not developed here, and so a much more openly racist and violent tenor is immediately detectable. While the mainstream currents of the EDL try to take the British far right agenda away from an open embrace of violence and a neo-Nazi heritage, the Infidels groups are much happier to associate themselves with this agenda, even on open access new media sites such as Facebook.

To take some example of this openly extreme right-wing sympathy found within the splinter groups, in June 2011 the Cumbria splinter division ran Facebook postings including:

- fuck pakis & muslim cunts!!! & any other fucker!! fuck em all!!!! ktf (w)

- Paki bashing season has started, game on ktf (w)

- still right wing not silent and very violent and a cunt \o/\o/

Moreover, showing how the culture of this extremist splinter grouping can turn to the terroristic neo-Nazism found in America for inspiration, we find references to David Lane notorious '14 Words' slogan on this Facebook wall too. For example, one posting from June 2011 explicitly aligns the North West Infidels movement with Lane's blend of neo-Nazism and terrorist violence:

"WE MUST SECURE THE EXISTENCE OF OUR PEOPLE AND A FUTURE FOR WHITE CHILDREN." The Final Address of David Lane to the Jury From the era of Plato, Socrates, and Cato to that of DaVinci and Michelangelo, to Locke and Shakespeare, to Jefferson and Franklin, Western civilization

The posting also contains a hyperlink to a copy of David Lane's final statement in court.⁴⁷ Lane's statement to the jury narrates the 'the deliberate destruction of our very racial existence', and so he offers the brand of brazen neo-Nazism that is carefully eschewed by the EDL's 'new far right' leadership. Beyond examples endorsing violence and racial hatred, further evidence of a reversion to the 'old', neo-fascist far right is evident across the Infidels sites. Indicators of a more extreme milieu also include uploaded YouTube videos of key far-right musicians, like the Swedish nationalist singer, Saga (a figure endorsed by

contrast pics', *Casuals United Blog* 21 May 2011; and 'Shotton demo a big success', *Casuals United Blog* 21 May 2011.

⁴⁵ 'EDL Dewsbury demo June 11th', *Casuals United Blog* (31 May 2011).

⁴⁶ <http://www.facebook.com/pages/North-West-Infidels-Yorkshire/100533926701057?sk=info>.

⁴⁷ www.churchoftrueisrael.com/the-order/lanefinal.html.

Anders Behring Breivik), and the original Blood & Honour, neo-Nazi group, Skrewdriver. The latter were central to the formation of the international network promoting neo-Nazi ideas through (usually) punk music.

Finally, it is important to stress that the mainstream EDL comes under much criticism here. Posts mock the pro-Israeli stance of the EDL, for instance, as well as its pro-LGTB position. Furthermore, the central leadership of the EDL is represented as corrupt. Yaxley-Lennon is frequently insulted, sometimes including *ad hominem* attacks. Although composed of splinter groups that still contributed significant support to the wider EDL social movement, these breakaway factions cannot be seen as part of the 'new far right'.

The verdict of the extreme right-wing online

The Infidel's clear reversion to a more openly extreme right-wing rhetoric, begs the question of the ways in which the wider extreme right-wing views the EDL. Needless to say, more traditionally anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi organisations have also developed their own perspectives via online spaces. In its early days, the movement attracted the support of now defunct organisations such as the Aryan Strike Force. Typifying the attitude of the extreme right-wingers towards the EDL at this time, the National Front's website somewhat presciently adopted the following position towards the movement in 2009:

They are obviously groups who need to be educated correctly on the political implications of their actions. The National Front has long predicted that spontaneous groups such as the EDL and the Casuals would emerge ... The NF says to these groups. Get yourself POLITICALLY organised behind the NF rather than these random anti-Muslim protests.⁴⁸

Yet perhaps tellingly, since such postings were originally made, *Searchlight* has reported emergent links between some Infidel splinter groups that are taking a turn towards neo-Nazi themes, and the National Front.⁴⁹

It is also instructive to see the way in which the EDL is discussed on the leading extreme right-wing online hub, Stormfront.org. The diversity of postings referring to the EDL here highlights the range of potential positions open to the extreme right-wing. Many extremist commentators simply reject the movement out of

hand. This is often because the EDL has developed a pro-Jewish agenda, which is often seen as simply incompatible with the extreme right-wing's anti-Semitic, conspiratorial worldview. Similarly, for some on such online message boards the EDL is to be rejected because they are seen as a state sponsored organisation, or are simply allowed to exist at the behest of the state to act as a sort of 'pressure valve' for the far right. There is also some strong criticism of the leadership, including comments on Steven Yaxley-Lennon's supposed racial impurity, while elsewhere commentary dismisses the movement as no more than organised football hooligans.

However, a more accommodating attitude can also be found on sites such as Stormfront.org, at least among those who are willing to put aside the EDL's pro-Jewish stance. For some, 'useful idiots' could summarise why the EDL is significant to the British far right politics. There are a number of ways this is spun. Echoing with the National Front's position, the EDL's street protests offer opportunities to mobilise a wider support base. These contacts can then be 'poached' by other far right organisations. Indeed, one post even likens this technique to Christian missionary work. Some posts further suggest that, in time, the EDL could to embrace a more traditional far right ideology. For other, critical Stormfront.org contributors, the EDL usefully occupies the time and focus of the police and anti-fascist campaigners, who correspondingly neglect more potent forms of far right extremism.

Finally, Stormfront.org discussions offer more fulsome support too, especially regarding the EDL's anti-Muslim agenda. These types of online messages include praise for offering opportunities to engage in street violence against Muslims, and for offering a general fillip to the white nationalist cause. Several postings also recognise that, while the EDL leadership professes to support Israel, this is secondary for many grass-roots supporters. For some, then, pursuing an anti-Muslim agenda while creating situations for engaging in street politics (both non-violent and violent), are prime motives for supporting the EDL.

Online responses on extreme right-wing websites like Stormfront.org range from rejection to active support, especially at a grass-roots level. The development of breakaway factions more hospitable to right-wing extremism also suggests that, as the social movement progresses, it is likely to continue creating host environments capable of attracting interest from extreme right-wing activists and groups.

⁴⁸ <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t621875-10/>.

⁴⁹ "Infidels" link up with National Front', *Searchlight* 432 (June 2011) p. 20.

Conclusions

This chapter has surveyed the diversity of EDL online media, and from this it is possible to draw a number of conclusions. Firstly, new media networking sites have become a vital tool for the EDL. Services such as Facebook and localised blogs allow complex ties between the local and the national to develop, key for the success of a social movement.

Secondly, sites directly associated with the Social Movement Organisation, like the main EDL Facebook page, tend to maintain a strong 'party line'. This centres upon anti-Muslim, 'new far right' rhetoric and views, championing local issues, and promoting national campaigns warning of a looming threat of Islamisation by a minority Muslim population. Thirdly, websites and blogs that are more indirectly associated with the Social Movement Organisation send out a more diverse set of messages. The English Defence League Extra blog takes this in one direction, advancing a more nuanced view of the threat allegedly posed by Muslims in Britain, for example positing a sustained conspiracy by both 'moderate' and 'extreme' Muslims. Meanwhile, the Casuals United blog is far less sophisticated, though seemingly effective at tapping into the movement's central concerns at the grass-roots level. This forum promotes localised protests, tends to support the more openly racist, breakaway factions, while also frequently reposting stories from other new media sources to support its anti-Muslim agenda. Finally, at the most extreme end of the spectrum, breakaway groups like the North East and North West Infidels promote an openly violent, extreme right-wing set of messages.

Fourthly, there is evidence of a clear relationship between new media and offline activity. Crucially, the new media advertises EDL events by giving details of times and places, allows supporters to network and disseminate ideas, and even helps develop a mood tailored to particular demonstration, such as prompting analysis linking Islam to paedophilia ahead of the protest in Blackpool in May 2011. More generally, the new media also helps to create an alternate, direct access culture promoting the EDL's 'new far right' views amongst grass-roots followers. Finally, by examining its own new media blog sites and postings, the more traditional far right organisations in Britain have a mixed reaction to the movement. For some, the EDL fights an incompatible campaign and fails to identify a Jewish conspiracy. Yet for others, it is seen as a

potent host organisation for developing extreme right-wing politics.

Chapter 4: The English Defence League's Leaders and Followers

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The English Defence League has denied any official links to the far right since its formation on 27 June 2009. As detailed elsewhere, the catalyst for its creation was abuse by small group of Islamists protesting at the homecoming parade of the Royal Anglian Regiment on 10 March 2009 in Luton. It brought together a number of football hooligan firms and anti-jihadist groups. Therefore, the EDL's origins are not typical of established or previous far right groups such as the National Front (NF) or British National Party (BNP). This has taken many forms, including the use of placards explicitly rejecting the BNP and racism, the carrying of the Israeli flag as a token of its disavowal of anti-Semitism, and the televised burning of a swastika flag on the BBC's *Newsnight* programme. The EDL continued this stance from its forerunner, the United Peoples of Luton (UPL). For example, one placard at the UPL's demonstration on 13 April 2009 read 'NF Go To Hell'. Nor is this antagonism one sided. The BNP has proscribed the EDL, which means that it is a disciplinary offence for BNP members to attend an EDL meeting, or to encourage others to do so.

How accurate are these claims that EDL leaders and followers are discrete from other far right movements? On the surface, the EDL may fit neatly into one of the four distinct types of contemporary right-wing extremism identified by Matthew Goodwin, 'a grassroots social movement'.¹ It claims to have an inclusive membership rather than an ethnically defined one, and mobilises mass support in favour of a single issue instead of engaging in the democratic process and adopting the behaviour of a political party. From its beginning, however, the EDL has undeniably attracted the attention of more traditional far right activists. The presence of certain individuals among the EDL's leadership

and at its demonstrations connect it with the three other types of right-wing extremism that Goodwin has identified. This fact poses problems for those seeking to understand the EDL's current position, and its likely trajectory (discussed in depth in the following chapter). This chapter addresses the EDL's connections with Britain's wider far right culture by examining the profiles and behaviour of some of the most prominent individuals that lead and support it, and considers what this means in terms of how we view the EDL.

Beforehand, however, we require a clear understanding of the term 'support'. The EDL has no official dues-paying membership, unlike the BNP. Instead, as far as we know, the EDL derives its funds from the donations of one individual and the revenue received via its internet merchandising. These considerations raise the obvious problem of how to identify someone as being a supporter of the EDL, other than those expressly identified with it. In one sense, the answer is relatively simple: anyone sympathising with the EDL, via word or deed, self-identifies as an EDL supporter. Such a definition is permissible so long as the EDL eschews an institutional membership. However, this definition is too embracing as it potentially includes the idly curious and ignorant, neither of which are likely to become activists and thus play a significant role in determining the nature of an organisation. Therefore, a tighter parameter is required that explicitly identifies an individual as a supporter of the EDL and/or its aims. In this respect, an individual's known, or reasonably suspected, beliefs add weight to their identification as an EDL supporter. Hence, we can confidently identify an EDL supporter as someone who attends an EDL function and who also possess similarly anti-Islamic views, regardless of the varying nuances within such views, unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise, such as an explicit and convincing denunciation of its aims.

Alan Lake

Starting with the key figure **Alan Lake**, here we find a wealthy businessman from North London who made his fortune in the IT industry. Lake has allegedly used his wealth to bankroll the EDL.² Yet a number of factors suggest he is not a traditional fascist. There is no evidence that race or anti-Semitism is prominent in Lake's views. Nor is there any overt evidence that Lake is trying to create a new society that harks back to a mythical

¹ The other three are: 'political parties', 'extra-parliamentary groups' and 'lone wolf' actors. Matthew J. Goodwin, *New British Fascism: Rise of the British National Party*, Routledge, Abingdon (2011), 5-6.

² <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/Businessman-bankrolls-street-army.php>.

British 'golden age', a characteristic shared by Mussolini's Fascists, Hitler's Nazis and many neo-Nazi groups. He is connected to a European 'new far right' network, including figures such as Kent Ekeroth of the Swedish Democrats. Lake's 4Freedoms.ning.com website contains a liberal-sounding mission statement that espouses freedom of speech, election and religion, and denounces discrimination.³ Moreover, it appears that Lake donated to the EDL on the condition that it distanced itself from the BNP.⁴ Indeed, it is possible that Lake has been closer to the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). In May 2010, Lake introduced UKIP's prospective parliamentary candidate Magnus Nielsen to a *Guardian* reporter as a man 'who has agreed to speak at forthcoming EDL rallies', and a few weeks later told the same reporter that he was focusing on 'the Ukip thing'.⁵ It would seem, therefore, that Lake is closer to the 'libertarian' right, and may even wish to create a version of the American Tea Party movement.⁶

This image of Lake, however, requires a few caveats. First, Lake advocates street politics, in which demonstrators use intimidation and violence to achieve their objectives. He has claimed that 'The EDL has a lot of support and is growing quickly and crucially what it has done is deliver an activist on the streets ... if they continue to be suppressed it will turn nasty ... if we are going to have a mess that is so much grist to the mill.'⁷ Nor is this an isolated incident. In a 4Freedoms blog, Lake spoke about the execution of individuals trying to escape from 'Islamic enclaves'. This comment suggests that Lake intends a violent solution to the problem he identifies. Moreover, the title of the blog's thread, 'Treatment of Traitors, Leftist and Liberal Sympathisers and Appeasers of Islamofascism',⁸ indicates that Lake would not limit such violence to Islamists. Secondly, therefore, Lake's comments and the non-Islamic people he identified in the blog as deserving violent measures, questions the narrow basis on which the EDL claims to be a counter-jihad movement rather than a fascist one. Indeed, Lake's comments regarding Muslims are similar to those by post-Second World War fascist groups in Britain regarding Black immigrants. Just as these groups claimed that black people could

not be British by definition of their skin colour, the EDL's cultural racism implies that Muslims cannot be English because of their religion. Using (or abusing) liberal-sounding notions of freedom as characteristics of English society, Lake portrays Muslims as antithetical to such ideas. For Lake, moderate Muslims do not exist because he believes they all accept the immutability of the word of Allah as revealed by Mohammed. In this respect, through a culturally racist agenda the EDL scapegoats Muslims today just as the National Front did to blacks in the 1970s. Thirdly, the EDL's followers also appear unable, or unwilling, to adhere to a solely anti-Islamist position, using racist terms such as 'Paki' at their demonstrations.⁹ Fourthly, although Lake has not overtly identified a mythical golden age, he clearly has one in mind; i.e. the one that existed before Muslim immigrants came to Britain and found woolly-minded liberals to appease them. Finally, Lake may seek respectability within the 'libertarian' right, but his chances of succeeding are minimal. UKIP considers the EDL 'extremist',¹⁰ and so many groups already exist along the Conservative Party's nebulous right-wing border that there is very little political space for such a version of the EDL to operate.

Founders and Current Leaders

Lake is not the only leading EDL individual who is difficult to categorise. **Paul 'Lionheart' Ray** claims to have created the EDL with members of the UPL and other anti-jihad activists.¹¹ Ray quickly fell out with other EDL leaders. He believed that the EDL was making a mistake by organising a demonstration in Birmingham on 8 August 2009, as this date's particular appeal to neo-Nazis would result in them attending, and thus become associated with the EDL.¹² Ray left the EDL in March 2010, rejecting linking the EDL with the far right. However, other events suggest that this picture of Ray as an anti-BNP individual is inaccurate. Ray accepted the assistance of a BNP activist at the UPL's 13 April 2009 protest march.¹³ His views on the BNP are far from condemnatory. Ray has portrayed the BNP as the only upholders and defenders of Christianity in Britain,¹⁴ and

³ <http://4freedoms.ning.com/>.

⁴ N. Copsey, *The English Defence League: Challenging Our Country and Our Values of Social Inclusion, Fairness and Equality*, Faith Matters (2010), p. 15.

⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/may/28/english-defence-league-protest-bnp>.

⁶ *The Observer*, 10 October 2010.

⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/may/28/english-defence-league-protest-bnp>.

⁸ www.1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/06/03/alan-lakes-edl-final-solution.

⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/may/28/english-defence-league-protest-bnp>.

¹⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/may/28/english-defence-league-protest-bnp>.

¹¹ <http://www.familysecuritymatters.org>.

¹² <http://lionheartuk.blogspot.com/2010/03/infiltration-of-edl.html>.

¹³ <http://threecountiesunity.blogspot.com/2009/04/marck-for-divise-st-georges-day-gathers.html>.

¹⁴ <http://lionheartuk.blogspot.com/2009/04/st-georges-day-in-luton.html?showComment=1239573360000#c696844604009678550>.

expressed qualified support for the BNP generally on his blog. Moreover, Ray's support for the BNP's position before he founded the EDL resulted in a member of the American Tea Party movement ending her association with him.¹⁵ In summer 2010, Bedford police arrested Ray on suspicion of stirring up racial hatred, having already warned him about the content of his blog in January.¹⁶ These facts leave open the possibility that Ray's split with the EDL owes more to thwarted personal ambition rather than any disavowal of his stated far right sympathies.

Ray's description of the EDL upon leaving it is also revealing. He argued that 'the EDL in most part is not a Nazi movement', and that he knew that 'the majority of the core leadership are not Nazis, and most of the membership are not'.¹⁷ This suggests strongly that Ray believes some of the EDL leadership and its followers do have more traditional neo-Nazi sympathies. Ray's comment is similar to that of the Secretary of the League of Empire Loyalists (LEL), a far-right group operating in the 1950s and 1960s, who countered accusations that it was fascist by claiming that there were 'only' four former fascists within it.¹⁸ The LEL proved the breeding ground for subsequent prominent far-right activists such as John Tyndall, John Bean and Colin Jordan, and was a founding group of the NF alongside an earlier incarnation of the BNP and the Racial Preservation Society. Historical precedent suggests the futility of downplaying far right connections, but it is even more difficult to accept Ray's attempted limitation of far right influence at face value when we consider the antecedents of the EDL's 'core' leadership. More recently, Ray has been associated with Anders Behring Breivik, and admits that some of his postings as 'Lionheart' could have influenced Breivik's actions.¹⁹

Leadership of the EDL passed to **Tommy Robinson** even before Ray's departure. Robinson is an articulate individual who has presented the EDL's position on television, both in Britain and abroad.²⁰ However, Robinson is not the reasonable individual that his television persona suggests. He is a former member of the football hooligan firm Men in Gear (MIG), associated with Luton Town

and initially adopted the pseudonym 'Tommy Robinson' from a leading figure within MIG. Although MIG violence originally focused mainly on other football firms, they also targeted Asians; in November 2001, the police were sufficiently concerned about MIG activity to warn Asian shopkeepers and householders in Luton to expect possible attacks.²¹ The police's warning occurred eight years earlier than the EDL's formation, ostensibly in response to the actions of a small group of Islamists. This, of course, questions whether it is fear of Islamism at the root of the EDL's formation, or merely the racism usually associated with other far right groups. Admittedly, it is possible that the Islamists' Luton protest awakened the likes of 'Robinson' to the threat that Islamism posed to a liberal-democratic country such as Britain. Yet we have to ask: is this really a believable scenario? The Islamists' protest focused on British foreign policy, not pluralism or culturally liberal issues such as civil partnerships and the right to drink alcohol. Making anti-Islamism even less credible as the sole driver behind the EDL's formation are the previous activities of its leaders, especially 'Robinson'.

Initially, 'Robinson' covered his face when speaking at EDL meetings, claiming that he feared reprisals because he lived in a 'heavily populated Islamic extremist town'.²² However, 'Robinson' had another reason to disguise himself. When *Searchlight* identified 'Robinson' as **Stephen Yaxley-Lennon**, they revealed that in 2004 he had joined the BNP under a family membership. It is difficult to believe that Yaxley-Lennon had no perception that racism is a permanent feature of the BNP's ideology. Also noteworthy is his persistent association with violence. In 2005, he received a 12-month jail sentence for occasioning actual bodily harm, and a concurrent 3-month sentence for intent to resist arrest.²³ His girlfriend at the time, Jenna Vowles, whom the police cautioned for cocaine possession at the time, was also a BNP member.²⁴ Increased age and the responsibility of leading a political movement has not resulted in any significant change in Yaxley-Lennon's actions. On Armistice Day 2010, police charged him with assaulting one of their colleagues at Kensington,²⁵ and on the 2 April

¹⁵ http://atlasshrugs2000.typepad.com/atlas_shrugs/2010/03/uk-violence-erupts-fascists-uaf-and-muslims-descend-on-patriots-edl-and-police.html.

¹⁶ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/08/22/racial-hatred-arrest-for-internet-blogger/>.

¹⁷ <http://lionheartuk.blogspot.com/2010/03/infiltration-of-edl.html>.

¹⁸ *Reynolds News*, 18 August 1956. See also M. Pitchford, *The Conservative Party and the extreme right, 1945-75*, (Manchester: MUP 2011), Index, League of Empire Loyalists.

¹⁹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/norway/8669670/Oslo-attacks-EDL-member-Paul-Ray-admits-he-may-have-been-Anders-Breiviks-inspiration.html>.

²⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeD5maZmAXg> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJnL-BKc5JO>.

²¹ Booth, Jenny (4 November 2001). "Luton: a town pulled apart by extremism" London: *The Daily Telegraph*.

²² <http://fromleedstopalestine.blogspot.com/2009/11/who-is-tommy-robinson-leader-of-edl.html>.

²³ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/06/25/unmasked-the-bnp-past-of-the-edl-leader/>.

²⁴ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/06/25/unmasked-the-bnp-past-of-the-edl-leader/>.

²⁵ <http://www.demotix.com/news/515213/edl-leader-tommy-robinson-charged-assaulting-police>.

2011 with assault at the Blackburn EDL demo.²⁶ Moreover, it is clear that he views violence as a legitimate expression of people's grievance. This was obvious as recently as July 2011, when Robinson implicitly advocated the use of violence to stop the building of a mosque in Blackpool.²⁷

If violence was the limit of Yaxley-Lennon's similarity and connection with the far right, however, we could conclude that he is merely another football hooligan. Yet, his links to the BNP indicate that this is inaccurate, especially as his denunciations of the BNP and neo-Nazism does not necessarily match his actions. For example, if Yaxley-Lennon detested the BNP and neo-Nazis so much, why then did he attend a meeting hosted by the Holocaust denier and senior BNP activist Richard Edmonds?²⁸ Could it be that what Yaxley-Lennon states in measured tones is not necessarily what he actually believes? If so, then we could expect to see occasional deviations from the stated line, especially in certain circumstances.

Tellingly, at the EDL's Leicester demonstration of October 2010, Yaxley-Lennon gave what he claimed was an impromptu speech. The speech contained the usual claim that the EDL was not anti-Islam, but anti-Islamist. However, when he compared the treatment that he and his family received from police with how he believed the police treated Muslims, Yaxley-Lennon's careful distinction between Islam and Islamism slipped. He argued that whereas the police had arrested his pregnant girlfriend, they 'would not dare arrest a pregnant Muslim woman'. Similarly, the police would never throw the Koran on the floor, yet they had done this to Yaxley-Lennon's parent's Bible, in what he clearly thought was 'one rule for them, and another rule for us'.²⁹ Nor is this an isolated incident. In December 2010, American Pastor Terry Jones decided not to attend an EDL's Luton demonstration in February 2011. He had come to prominence in July 2010 by announcing his intention to burn the Koran on the anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, a plan he subsequently, if belatedly, carried out.³⁰ The Home Secretary's indicated that she might refuse him entry to Britain probably influenced Jones' decision. According to Yaxley-Lennon, Jones had contacted him personally to ask if he could attend the demonstration, to which he presumably assented. Yaxley-Lennon responded

to Jones' decision not to attend by explaining that he had simply wanted 'to speak about the evils of Islam at the protest. It is a medieval religion'.³¹ This was another missed opportunity to distinguish between Islamism and Islam.



Steven Yaxley-Lennon (a.k.a. 'Tommy Robinson') taken at his court appearance on 22 November 2010. Kevin Carroll is in the background, to the right. (Image courtesy of David Hoffman.)

More difficult for Yaxley-Lennon is the fall-out from the atrocity committed by Anders Behring Breivik in Norway on 22 July 2011. This is because Breivik claimed in a 'manifesto' published in the wake of his attack: 'I used to have more than 600 EDL members as Facebook friends and have spoken with tens of EDL members and leaders'.³² As Breivik was a mass murderer who believed he was presaging a sixty-year race war, his claim of links with the EDL was especially problematic for a leader who was trying to maintain the line that he led a non-violent, non-racist, single-issue movement. The pressure told in a BBC *Newsnight* interview with Jeremy Paxman, in which Yaxley-Lennon stated that 'Islam is a threat'.³³

It is possible that Yaxley-Lennon mispeaks when having to give an unscripted speech, or when faced with aggressive questioning on camera. However, given that this has occurred on a number of occasions, and given Yaxley-Lennon's previous interests in the BNP and hooliganism, this seems less likely. Indeed, the more that EDL leaders like Yaxley-Lennon fail to differentiate between Islam and Islamism, the more their claims to anti-Islamism seems like the far right's version of *taqiyya*. It is this failure to differentiate constantly and consistently that leaves the EDL firmly mired amongst the anti-Muslim far right. It also leads to the conclusion that Yaxley-Lennon's claims may be deliberately crafted to appeal to individuals with genuinely-held concerns about immigration, but who are unwilling to vote for

²⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-13784285>.

²⁷ <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=25563>.

²⁸ <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2011/07/482658.html?c=on>.

²⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2Vrk8EAHuU>.

³⁰ <http://www.gainesville.com/article/20110401/ARTICLES/110409944/1169?Title=Dove-World-denies-it-s-responsible-for-violence-over-Quran-burning>.

³¹ <http://news.sky.com/home/uk-news/article/15852073>.

³² <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2011/07/482658.html?c=on>.

³³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14286363>.

perceived fascist groups such as the NF and BNP. In other words, Yaxley-Lennon could be attempting a populist appeal, capturing the *zeitgeist* to secure political influence. If so, this sheds interesting light on Yaxley-Lennon's alleged statement in March 2011 that he was considering turning the EDL into a political party.³⁴ Finally, it is worth noting Yaxley-Lennon was arrested following the EDL's Tower Hamlets demonstration in September 2011. He has since claimed to be on hunger strike, in protest against the state curtailing his right to lead his organisation.³⁵

Yaxley-Lennon's second in command is his cousin, **Kevin Carroll**. Following *Searchlight's* exposure of Robinson's previous BNP activity, Carroll temporarily took charge of the EDL. However, this did nothing to improve the EDL's image. Carroll revealed in a BBC documentary *Young, British and Angry* that he had signed the nomination papers for Robert Sherratt, a BNP candidate in Luton in 2007, and that only his partner's intervention stopped him from standing for the BNP also.³⁶ Sherratt was also an activist in the neo-Nazi November 9th Society.³⁷ As Steven Woodbridge pointed out, the November 9th Society is one of a number of 'hard-line groups that draw their inspiration directly from National Socialist racial philosophy and fantasise about revolution and "race war"'.³⁸ This particular EDL connection clearly does not limit its hatred to seventh-century Islamism. More prosaic, if unsurprising, was Carroll's conviction for violence in Luton just before taking over from Yaxley-Lennon.³⁹ Carroll is a little more circumspect than Yaxley-Lennon. His speeches often contain a clear distinction between Muslims and Islamists,⁴⁰ and he is clearly aware of the need to distance the EDL from neo-Nazi groups that attach themselves to its events.⁴¹ Does this mean, therefore, that Carroll has repudiated his BNP-past? So far, no such *mea culpa* exists. A chance to do so occurred when EDL members used Carroll's Facebook page to commend the desecration of Muslim graves in High Wycombe Cemetery in April 2011.⁴² The opportunity remains.

³⁴ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/farright-group-to-become-a-political-party-2233613.html>.

³⁵ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/blog/article/1391/edl-leader-on-hunger-strike>.

³⁶ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/32/The-Extremist-Defence-League>.

³⁷ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/hate-groups/edl/structure>.

³⁸ S. Woodbridge, 'Ambivalent admiration? The response of other extreme-right groups to the rise of the BNP', in N. Copey & G. Macklin (eds), *British National Party: Contemporary perspectives*, (London: Routledge, 2011) p. 116.

³⁹ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/07/30/edl-bradford-bloodbath-exposes-further-links-to-bnp/>.

⁴⁰ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHoG_o-P_rw.

⁴¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOxKAtx8tuM>.

⁴² <http://forum.mpacuk.org/showthread.php?t=48932>.

Nor is Carroll alone among EDL leaders in having far right connections. According to Paul Ray, Chris Renton stepped up to become '*de facto* commander of the EDL as a whole' when the police arrested Yaxley-Lennon.⁴³ Renton uses the alias 'John Sheridan' when posting on various blogs. He attended the UPL's 24 May Luton demonstration, and subsequently has played an important role within the EDL by taking responsibility for its Facebook site. Renton, from Weston-super-Mare, is also a 'Gold' member of the BNP (no. 19732). This connection did not seem to bother either Ray or Robinson. Ray dismissed Renton's political affiliation by stating that 'people's political views are their own affair',⁴⁴ whilst Robinson denied that anyone had sacked or pushed Renton out of the EDL.⁴⁵ It would seem, therefore, that EDL leaders are at best ambivalent about Renton's connection with the BNP. The same ambivalent attitude appears to apply to other known members or associates of far right political parties too. Davy Cooling, for example, is a driver for his local council. He is also an administrator of the EDL's Luton Facebook group, and a 'key activist in the EDL Luton "division"'.⁴⁶ Cooling came to the EDL via membership of the Luton-based football hooligan gang MIG. He is also a 'fully-fledged BNP member',⁴⁷ who remained active on their website whilst performing this prominent EDL role. Sean Walsh is also an activist for the EDL in Luton. He is a member of the BNP's Bedfordshire Facebook group.⁴⁸

Other EDL leaders might not have such obvious connections to far right organisations such as the BNP. Nevertheless, they do share similar, unsettling characteristics. **Guramit Singh** has been an important figure for the EDL. As a Sikh, he lends credibility to the EDL claim to be non-racist. The problem for the EDL, however, is that Singh apparently shares Yaxley-Lennon's inconsistent attitude towards Muslims. His Facebook page contains racist jokes and offensive comments against all Muslims, which he frequently lumps together under the well-known far right tag of 'Pakis'; the approval of them by other EDL supporters shows that he is not alone in his prejudice.⁴⁹ Indeed, Singh is prepared to go a

⁴³ <http://lionheartuk.blogspot.com/2010/03/infiltration-of-edl.html>.

⁴⁴ *TalkSPORT*, 6 July 2009.

⁴⁵ <http://lionheartuk.blogspot.com/2009/08/edl-talksport-radio-interview.html>.

⁴⁶ <http://hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/9/english-defence-league-football-hooligan>.

⁴⁷ <http://hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/9/english-defence-league-football-hooligan>.

⁴⁸ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/articl>.

⁴⁹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/articl>.

⁴⁹ <http://thesamosa.co.uk/index.php/news-and-features/society/210-exclusive-f-the-pakis-meet-the-edls-anti-racist-poster-boy.html>.

little further. In a YouTube broadcast in February 2011, Singh did, admittedly, say there was such a thing as moderate Muslims, but then explained this away by saying that 'there is no such thing as moderate Islam ... Islam is a militant, extreme ideology ... Islam, evil to its core'.⁵⁰ In Singh's interpretation, based on his selective reading of the Koran, Muslims are bound to segregate from, and eventually attack, non-Muslim societies. Moreover, Singh seems intent on stirring up racial antagonism. In the same YouTube appearance, Singh blames Islam for the civil wars in the Sudan and Nigeria, where 'Islam has made the black brother turn against his black brother; that's how evil it is'.⁵¹ Singh's comments resulted in a threat of excommunication from the global Sikh community.⁵² In the summer of 2011, Singh has stepped down from his post with the EDL, citing family illness.⁵³

Jeff Marsh is an organiser for both the EDL and its sister organisation the Welsh Defence League (WDL). He is another individual with a background in football violence, and prominent in the Soul Crew Seaside, a football firm that supports Cardiff City F.C. In 1986, Marsh was convicted for a football-related assault in Halifax, and in 1989 received a two-year prison sentence for stabbing two Manchester United supporters in Cardiff.⁵⁴ In August 2009, Marsh helped form Casuals United, an amalgamation of football firms, many containing BNP and NF supporters, who had united to support the EDL. Casuals United announced their arrival by attacking young Asians in Birmingham city centre.⁵⁵ In March 2010, the 44-year old Marsh proved that advancing years does not equate with increasing maturity by receiving a four-month suspended jail sentence, 150 hours community service, and a five-year ban from all football grounds for possession of a knuckle-duster during an affray in Cardiff.⁵⁶ Marsh clearly glorifies violence, which is obvious in the two books that he has written providing an account of his time as a football hooligan.⁵⁷ It is also obvious that these books contain racist comments that belie the EDL's claims of

inclusiveness.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, like the EDL the WDL claimed to be non-racist. However, there is evidence that shows this is incorrect. In March 2010, the BBC published results of its infiltration of the WDL, as discussed elsewhere in this report. Its content led Judge Mark Powell QC to state of the comments expressed by WDL supporters: 'It's mindless, it's racist, the purpose of what they are doing is to inflame racial hatred. I think from what you have shown me it is criminal behaviour and no doubt something that the police would want to look at'.⁵⁹ It appears, therefore, that the WDL that Marsh has led also engages in doublespeak. Also of interest is Marsh's role as administrator of the Norwegian Defence League (NDL), one of whose supporters was Anders Breivik.⁶⁰

Joel Titus is another who came to the EDL through football violence. He is the leader of the EDL's youth organisation. Being of mixed race, Titus also fulfils the role played by Guramit Singh of poster-boy for EDL inclusivity. He became involved with the EDL through Marsh's Casuals United. The EDL might claim to be separate from the EDL, but Titus' text messages when organising violence proves that they are connected.⁶¹ In April 2011, Titus received a nine-month prison sentence for involvement in a pre-arranged brawl between Leyton Orient and Brentford football supporters.⁶² His violence is apparently not, however, limited to attacking fellow football hooligans. In May 2011, Uxbridge Magistrates gave Titus an ASBO that barred him from entering or loitering outside mosques or Islamic prayer rooms, attending any EDL demonstration, or visiting an area of Whitechapel for three years.⁶³

Others who fulfil, or have fulfilled, the role of poster boy or girl are **Liam Wood**, **Leisha Brookes** and **Roberta Moore**, leaders respectively of the EDL's LGBT, Women's and Jewish divisions. Wood swiftly withdrew a leaflet campaign in Manchester supporting the NDL when he realised that the atrocity in Norway was not the work of Islamic terrorists.⁶⁴ His opponents describe him as a drug dealer and football hooligan.⁶⁵ Wood downplays this,⁶⁶ but he cannot

⁵⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRr157Cquzw>.

⁵¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRr157Cquzw>.

⁵² <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2011/04/25/edl%e2%80%99s-guramit-singh-responds-to-excommunication-ultimatum-with-doublespeak-religious-hypocrisy/>.

⁵³ <http://www.pickedpolitics.com/archives/12859>.

⁵⁴ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/2010/03/05/football-hooligan-barred-from-matches-for-five-years-91466-25965658/>.

⁵⁵ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article6794080.ece>.

⁵⁶ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/2010/03/05/football-hooligan-barred-from-matches-for-five-years-91466-25965658/>.

⁵⁷ J. Marsh, *Soul Crew Seaside*, (Mixed Swede Project, 2007), and *The Trouble with Taffies: Welsh Hooligan Gangs* (Headhunter, 2009).

⁵⁸ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/06/02/exclusive-edl-marshs-violent-threats-to-guardian-writer/>.

⁵⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-11916458>.

⁶⁰ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/38/Anders-Behring-Breivik-was-in-contact-with-the-EDL>

⁶¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-1238213/This-England-On-trail-English-Defence-League.html>.

⁶² http://www.courtnewsuk.co.uk/online_archive/?name=joel+titus&place=&courts=0.

⁶³ http://www.harrowtimes.co.uk/news/9015485.Teen_banned_from_far_right_protests/.

⁶⁴ <http://manchestermule.com/article/edl-lgbt-division-cancels-canal-street-leafleting-encourages-support-of-norwegian-defence-league>.

⁶⁵ <http://www.islamophobia-watch.com/islamophobia-watch/2011/7/22/no-surrender-edl-lgbt-division-calls-off-tomorrows-mancheste.html>.

deny his drugs involvement because in February 2011 at Preston Crown Court Judge Christopher Cornwall gave him a six-month deferred sentence for possession of cocaine with intent to supply.⁶⁷ Leisha Brookes seems to have played a prominent role in organising the EDL's September 2009 Birmingham demonstration, where Police confiscated from her a knuckleduster, and has contacts with the criminal underworld.⁶⁸ Her Myspace website links her with known football hooligan **Jason Marriner**,⁶⁹ whom Donal McIntyre revealed as a leading figure in the Chelsea Headhunters football firm.⁷⁰ In March 2011, Marriner received a two-year prison sentence and six-year ban from football grounds for violent disorder.⁷¹ For Roberta Moore, the EDL's frequent attacks on Muslims fit nicely with her ultra-Zionist views. The EDL provides Moore with a platform to make un-contextualised attacks on Islam, such as those made at the EDL's Dudley rally on 17 July 2010, in which she claimed, inter alia, that 'The Koran condones rape'.⁷² Moore failed to make any textual comparison with similar passages in the scripture of the other Abrahamic faiths. It did seem that Moore had gone too far when she allied the Jewish Division of the EDL with the Jewish Task Force, a USA-based organisation run by convicted bomber Victor Vancier.⁷³ However, within a few weeks of issuing a threat to disassociate itself from the Jewish Division, the EDL leadership restored normal relations after a meeting with Moore.⁷⁴ It would seem, therefore, that anti-Muslim terrorism is acceptable, another example of EDL double-speak. In June 2011, Moore quit the EDL, ostensibly for another job. Although she maintained her support for the EDL leadership, Moore warned that Nazis had hijacked the movement and would destroy it unless the leadership dealt with it.⁷⁵ Considering the antecedents of some EDL leaders, who is going to deal with whom?

Another person who has quit is **John 'Snowy' Shaw**. He was a Yorkshire and

Humberside Regional Organiser for the EDL,⁷⁶ with the unusual occupation of llama farmer. On 5 May 2010, Shaw appeared before Dudley magistrates on burglary and inciting religious hatred charges,⁷⁷ although the Crown Prosecution Services subsequently dropped them for insufficient evidence.⁷⁸ Shaw is also a former crack addict. He has fallen out with the leadership of the EDL, particularly Yaxley-Lennon and Kevin Carroll, and has accused the EDL Luton Division leadership of financial mismanagement. The EDL leadership has retaliated with YouTube productions lampooning Shaw as a 'Muppet'. In a move typical of the fissiparous nature of extremist movements as discussed elsewhere, Shaw is now prominent in the Infidels splinter faction of the EDL.

For one EDL leader, however, violence is not the limit of their criminality. **Richard Price** is the EDL's West Midlands co-ordinator. In December 2010, Judge Lord Parmoor sentenced 41-year old Price of Quinton in Birmingham to 12-weeks imprisonment and gave him a 10-year Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) for his role in violence during the EDL's 1 May demonstration in Aylesbury.⁷⁹ Alongside Price in court was fellow-EDL supporter **Collum Keyes**, a 23-year old from Birmingham who also received a 10-year ASBO as well as a fine.⁸⁰ Aylesbury magistrates bailed a third EDL supporter at the demonstration, 43-year old **Daryl Hobson** of Worthing, to appear at Aylesbury Magistrates Court in November.⁸¹ Yet, the tale does not end there. The EDL, which described Price as a 'political prisoner', launched a campaign to free him, urging its supporters to write to the Prime Minister and MPs to 'win justice for Richard Price, EDL'.⁸² The EDL seem to have failed to spot that after Price's arrest for an EDL-related incident in 2009, that the police had discovered cocaine and crack cocaine at his house, and indecent images of children on his computer, for which he received a three-year community supervision order and a place on the sex offenders register for five years.⁸³ As Price received his

⁶⁶ <http://ukfd.org/topic/8849124/1/>.

⁶⁷ http://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/news/local/hotelier_at_centre_of_drug_syndicate_1_3033002.

⁶⁸ <http://kirkunity.blogspot.com/2009/10/just-who-is-edl-leadership.html>.

⁶⁹ <http://lancasteruaf.blogspot.com/2009/09/violence-in-birmingham-authorities-to.html>.

⁷⁰ <http://video.google.co.uk/videoplay?docid=2218940492996010738#>.

⁷¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-12864974>.

⁷² <http://www.islamophobia-watch.com/islamophobia-watch/2011/3/16/roberta-moore-and-stephen-lennon-kiss-and-make-up.html>.

⁷³ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2011/02/16/roberta-moore-publicly-aligns-english-defence-league-with-convicted-terrorists/>.

⁷⁴ <http://www.islamophobia-watch.com/islamophobia-watch/2011/3/16/roberta-moore-and-stephen-lennon-kiss-and-make-up.html>.

⁷⁵ <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/50932/edl-jewish-division-leader-roberta-moore-quits>.

⁷⁶ N. Copsey, *The English Defence League: Challenging Our Country and Our Values of Social Inclusion, Fairness and Equality*, (Faith Matters, 2010), p. 19.

⁷⁷ <http://www.birminghammail.net/news/top-stories/2010/05/06/english-defence-league-protesters-appear-before-dudley-magistrates-97319-26387779/>.

⁷⁸ http://www.dudleynews.co.uk/news/8304532.Charges_dropped_for_EDL_rooftop_protestors/.

⁷⁹ http://www.bucksheald.co.uk/news/local-news/judge_blasts_edl_hooligans_as_senior_member_jailed_1_2193578.

⁸⁰ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/12/22/judge-blasts-edl-%e2%80%98hooligans%e2%80%99-as-senior-member-jailed-local-bucks-herald/>.

⁸¹ http://www.bucksheald.co.uk/news/edl_members_in_court_over_alleged_disorder_1_1074499.

⁸² <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/news/article/1791/far-right-hero-is-a-convicted-paedophile>.

⁸³ <http://lancasteruaf.blogspot.com/2011/01/far-right-hero-is-convicted-paedophile.html>.

conviction for paedophilia at Birmingham Crown Court six-months before becoming the EDL's 'political prisoner', this questions whether the EDL understand who its supporters are.

Responsible for presenting the EDL in a reasonable light is **Trevor Kelway**. He told *Guardian* reporters that he had taken over public relations because 'the previous mouthpiece for the organisation was "Islamophobic"'.⁸⁴ Kelway does appear a reasonable figure to interviewers, giving coherent answers that, unlike other EDL leaders, do not depart from the anti-Islamist, inclusive line.⁸⁵ Others, however, see Kelway as leading 'a major propaganda assault on online newspaper forums, posting reams of lies, contortions and misinformation centred around the rights of free speech, while playing down the obvious unpleasant facts about the organisation.'⁸⁶ Who, then, is the real Trevor Kelway? His Facebook page shows that Kelway has some unsavoury connections. These include Frank Atack, who stood for the BNP in Dewsbury in 2007 and has a penchant for SS insignia; BNP supporter (and probably BNP member no. 20842) Ian Sayers; Wales BNP member Roger Phillips who has a photograph of himself with Nick Griffin; and two who appear supportive of the BNP, Paul Tranter (probably no. 130915 on BNP membership list) and Dave Brennan.⁸⁷

Other leading figures within the EDL have not attracted as much public attention. These include **John Smith**, the EDL's London Organiser with responsibility for Regional Organisers,⁸⁸ and **Steve Simmons**, another spokesperson who appears to have been responsible for co-ordinating the EDL's activities in Europe.⁸⁹ One person for whom avoiding recognition is difficult is 'Leon Britain'. Considered as close to the EDL inner circle, hostile bloggers have identified 'Britain' as **Leon McCreery**, an EDL Police Liaison Officer and a member of the Orange Order.⁹⁰ He is also the EDL's Head of Security.⁹¹ 'Britain' is in fact Leon McCreery, nephew of the former Manchester United and Northern Ireland footballer David McCreery.⁹² He appeared alongside John 'Snowy'

Shaw on the same charges of burglary and inciting religious hatred on 5 May 2010.⁹³ Whether prominent or not, EDL leaders are distinguished by their connections to other far right organisations, criminality and violence.

Followers and Fellow-Travelers

For BNP members who attend EDL events, the attraction seems to lie in potential for violence at them. Copey has highlighted how the BNP's withdrawal from 'street politics' in the 1990s removed anti-fascists' opportunity for direct action.⁹⁴ However, the BNP's eschewal of such tactics does not mean that its members have lost their desire for it. This probably explains the involvement of known BNP members in UPL and EDL events. For example, **Laurence Jones** is a Dunstable BNP activist;⁹⁵ he is also the individual that helped Ray organise the UPL's Luton demonstration on 13 April 2009. In addition, the BNP's Young BNP Bedfordshire organiser, **Chris Mitchell**, attended this early demonstration. This may have resulted from the encouragement to attend this demonstration by the BNP's Luton organiser, **Peter Fehr**, who also advised BNP members not to wear identifying party badges.⁹⁶

The attendance of BNP members at early EDL events led to their party leader proscribing the EDL in September 2009, but this has failed to stop the crossover.⁹⁷ Indeed, quite a number of BNP members have attended EDL events since, such as **Karen Otty**, the BNP's Merseyside Secretary. **Alan Spence** was a BNP parliamentary candidate for Newcastle East in May 2010. He is a Gold member of the BNP. His son, Steven (probably no. 27830 on BNP list), stood for election in Fawdon ward of Newcastle Council in May 2010. Both have attended EDL meetings. Other BNP election candidates seen at EDL meetings include **Charlie Baillie** and **Max Dunbar**, who both stood in the 2009 European Elections.⁹⁸ Also seen at EDL meetings are Rotherham BNP organiser **Marlene Guest**,

⁸⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/2009/aug/10/english-violence-militant-football-islamist>.

⁸⁵ <http://europenews.dk/en/node/31024>.

⁸⁶ <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2009/12/443258.html>.

⁸⁷ <http://www.zimbio.com/Orly+Taitz/articles9SYKba1aXjq/ENGLISH+DEFENCE+LEAGUE+EDL+THUGS+SUPPORTED>.

⁸⁸ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/07/13/exclusive-edl-statement-confirms-links-to-other-factions/>.

⁸⁹ <http://www.islamophobiatoday.com/2010/08/31/edl-launches-european-defence-league-organises-amsterdam-demo-in-support-of-wilders/>.

⁹⁰ <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2010/04/448744.html>.

⁹¹ Copey, *The English Defence League* p. 19.

⁹² <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/32/The-Extremist-Defence-League>.

⁹³ <http://www.birminghammail.net/news/top-stories/2010/05/06/english-defence-league-protesters-appear-before-dudley-magistrates-97319-26387779/> See above.

⁹⁴ Nigel Copey, 'From direct action to community action: the changing dynamics of anti-fascist opposition', in N. Copey & G. Macklin (eds), *British National Party: Contemporary perspectives*, (London: Routledge 2011) pp. 128 – 9.

⁹⁵ <http://threecountiesunity.blogspot.com/2009/04/march-for-divise-st-georges-day-gathers.html>.

⁹⁶ <http://threecountiesunity.blogspot.com/2009/04/lionheart-held-at-bay.html>.

⁹⁷ <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/bnp-leader-reminds-bnp-supporters-edl-proscribed>.

⁹⁸ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/32/The-Extremist-Defence-League>.

Wakefield BNP organiser **John Aveyard**, Swansea BNP organiser **Sion Owens**, and members of the BNP West Midlands security team **Stuart Bates** and **Michael Fritz**.⁹⁹ Another BNP bodyguard seen at the EDL's 'flash' 9/11 Oldham protest is convicted drug dealer **Jock Shearer**.¹⁰⁰ **Dave Bradley**, a BNP supporter who gave evidence in court supporting party leader Nick Griffin, is close to the Blackburn EDL leader **Shane Calvert** and attends EDL meetings.¹⁰¹ Attendance at EDL meetings is not, however, the only evidence of support from the BNP: **Rob Purcell**, a former BNP Birmingham organiser, sells BNP and EDL merchandise on eBay under the name 'Brit Pancake'.¹⁰² It would seem, therefore, either that Griffin's proscription of the BNP is a sham, or that his members simply ignore it. So far, the BNP has not disciplined a single member for attending an EDL event.

Nor is attendance at these events by known right wing extremists limited to members of Britain's most prominent extremist party. **Wayne Baldwin**, a convicted criminal and open Nazi sympathiser, has attended WDL meetings with Sion Owens.¹⁰³ **Tom Holmes**, a former NF chairman and sometime critic of the BNP, also attended the UPL's Luton meeting on 13 April 2009.¹⁰⁴ Police arrested former NF activist **David Tull** twice for foul and abusive language at EDL demonstrations.¹⁰⁵ The desire for violent street action among far right individuals seems to be alive and 'kicking', and opportunity for it provided courtesy of the EDL.

Some EDL supporters are also notable for their incitement of racial violence. **Bill Baker** is an Essex member of the BNP (member no. 29356 or 131031).¹⁰⁶ His attempt to acquire a leadership position within the EDL by forming an over-45's division failed, resulting in Baker creating the supposedly separate English National Alliance (ENA), but which in reality often merges its protests with the EDL.¹⁰⁷ The ENA trots out the familiar mantra via its website that it opposes only

extreme Muslims, but it also contains gratuitous insults to Mohammed under the obviously Nazi-derived slogan 'One People. One Nation. One Cause'.¹⁰⁸ Baker's own comments, however, remove any ambiguity. Instead of calling for action against individuals that commit crime, Baker advocated attacking religious communities that he believes support them.¹⁰⁹ On one blog thread Baker was even more explicit when he stated, 'Nuke Islam and be done with it. Sooner we start killing Muslims the Better and their socialist pals'.¹¹⁰ Not until February 2011 did the EDL distance itself from Baker. Yet, the EDL's reasons for doing so did not contain any condemnation of Baker's attitude to Muslims as a whole,¹¹¹ possibly because others within the EDL share his views, such as the EDL administration leader, **Helen Gower**, who has stated that 'it is a fact that Muslims are scum bags'.¹¹² Nor is Baker the only link between the EDL and ENA. **Roger Firth**, a 49-year old security guard from Eltham, South London, is an EDL steward and a leader of the ENA.¹¹³

Two other extremists prominent in a now defunct neo-Nazi organisation are **Trevor Hannington** from South Wales and **Michael Heaton** from Leigh, Greater Manchester. Both men have attended several early EDL rallies and have used their website to praise it.¹¹⁴ Heaton has also been an EDL forum moderator.¹¹⁵ They were also members of the Aryan Strike Force (ASF). **Ian and Nicky Davison**, the founders of the ASF, received custodial sentences in February 2010 for possessing material useful to commit acts of terror, including the poison ricin.¹¹⁶ (Their conviction supports Goodwin's categorisation of the ASF as being one of the 'more openly neo-Nazi groups that are less interested in mobilizing mass support than recruiting elite activist cadres'.¹¹⁷) Hannington and Heaton also fit this description. They have posted anti-Semitic and racist messages on their website, and advocated the use of violence against non-Aryans. When the police, who had

⁹⁹ <http://www.vote-no-to-the-bnp.org.uk/2010/04/bnp-liverpool-secretary-attends-westminster-edl-demonstration.html> and *Searchlight*, no. 424, October, 12ff.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/32/The-Extremist-Defence-League>.

¹⁰¹ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/32/The-Extremist-Defence-League>.

¹⁰² <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/32/The-Extremist-Defence-League>.

¹⁰³ <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/32/The-Extremist-Defence-League>.

¹⁰⁴ <http://threecountiesunity.blogspot.com/2009/04/luton-bank-holiday-monday.html>.

¹⁰⁵ <http://hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/9/english-defence-league-football-hooligan>.

¹⁰⁶ <http://lancasteruaf.blogspot.com/2010/09/english-nationalist-alliance-in.html>.

¹⁰⁷ <http://exposingon.tumblr.com>.

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.englishnationalistalliance.org/>.

¹⁰⁹ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/07/27/exclusive-edl-man-makes-terrorist-threats/>.

¹¹⁰ <http://exposingon.tumblr.com>.

¹¹¹ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2011/02/27/edl-leadership-finally-dissociates-itself-from-english-nationalist-alliance/>.

¹¹² http://www.islamophobia-watch.com/storage/Hel%20Gower%20on%20Muslims.jpg?__SQUARESPACE_CACHEVERSION=1298787695537.

¹¹³ <http://www.searchlightmagazine.com/index.php?link=template&story=351>.

¹¹⁴ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/06/25/convictions-point-to-rise-of-far-right-extremism/>.

¹¹⁵ <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2009/12/443645.html>.

¹¹⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/may/14/neo-nazi-ian-davison-jailed-chemical-weapon>.

¹¹⁷ Matthew J. Goodwin, *New British Fascism: Rise of the British National Party*, (London: Routledge, 2011) pp. 5 – 6.

been monitoring their comments, raided their houses, they found Nazi flags, and weapons that included knives, a samurai sword, knuckledusters and a machine gun.¹¹⁸ Heaton is a former member of the NF, and is possibly involved in white supremacist movements such as the Wolfs Hook White Brotherhood and Patriots of the White European Resistance.¹¹⁹ Jailing Heaton for two years, Justice Irwin said of him, 'You wanted to start a race war. You are clearly filled with racial hatred and also with violent and angry beliefs.'¹²⁰ Hannington received the same punishment, and Justice Irwin's condemnation as a 'long-standing racist who has never hidden your views, which are violent and vicious in the extreme'.¹²¹ The EDL has denied any links to Hannington and Heaton. Nevertheless, Hannington and Heaton are exactly the type of individual that the EDL's adoption of street politics attracts. They are violent neo-Nazis whose notoriety at best calls into question the EDL's security measures, but also leaves them open to the charge of collusion, and of being neo-Nazi fellow travellers. In this light, the EDL's refusal to attend an interview to discuss evidence of its association with these neo-Nazis takes on a more sinister hue.¹²²

Indeed, violence, criminality and incitement are persistent features of English Defence League supporters. On 2 June 2010, EDL supporter **Kevin Smith** received an 8-week jail sentence, suspended for 12 months, for religiously aggravated intentional harassment.¹²³ As discussed elsewhere in this report, Smith had placed a pig's head on the wall of Dudley Central mosque, hardly an action designed only to target Islamists. The following month, Bristol Magistrates Court handed out a suspended sentence to 45-year old **Kevin Jenkins**, an EDL supporter who had groped a fourteen-year old on a bus.¹²⁴ Also in July 2010, **Mick Bridge**, a school gardener from Burnley, boasted on the Internet of getting children to chant 'E E EDL' in their school playground.¹²⁵ Two months later, Flintshire Magistrates Court remanded in custody 36-year

old **David Jared Evans** of High St, Rhos on charges of racially aggravated threatening, abusive and insulting language. The prosecuting counsel stated that he sought Evans' remand in custody 'after reading texts on Evans' mobile phone between himself and the English Defence League'.¹²⁶ At the EDL's Leicester demonstration on 9 October 2010, a group of its supporters attacked women and children in a fast food restaurant.¹²⁷ Three of the EDL attackers, **Deejay Avfu Doyle**, **Andrew Millard** and **Tom Hagues** are from Birmingham, and a fourth, identified as 'Gaz', is from Middleton in Greater Manchester.¹²⁸ Two have posted racist comments on the Internet. Doyle stated 'If it aint white it aint right', and Millard wrote 'pakkie bastards' and referred to footballer Emile Heskey as a 'MONKEY'.¹²⁹

Perhaps one of the most shocking examples of violence by EDL supporters appeared in December 2010. **Daryll Jones** and **Mark Jackson**, aged 17 and 21 respectively, are Lincoln FC supporters. Football intelligence officers identified them as two targets for Lincolnshire Police to try to exclude from certain areas during match days. However, Lincolnshire Police suspended their case against them after their arrest on suspicion of killing Shaun Rossington, a 21-year old Aspergers sufferer. Rossington suffered more than forty injuries, resulting from punching, kicking and stamping. PC Karl Williams, a Lincolnshire Police football intelligence officer, stated that 'there were some indications they were connected to the English Defence League'.¹³⁰ So far, the EDL has not denied these links, or condemned the killing. Then again, it is difficult to condemn violence when leaders of the EDL also engage in it.

The most persistent feature of EDL criminality, however, continues to be racially aggravated. In March 2011, for example, Doncaster Crown Court handed a ten-year Criminal Anti-Social Behaviour Order (CRASBO) to self-proclaimed EDL leader **Shane Overton**. As the title suggests, a CRASBO differs from an ASBO in that it results from a criminal conviction. It is the second time that a court has given an EDL supporter a CRASBO. Overton pleaded guilty to a racially aggravated public order offence. He racially abused a family, terrifying the children, whilst returning from the EDL's Newcastle

¹¹⁸ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1289459/Neo-Nazis-convicted-inciting-racial-hatred-posting-incendiary-comments-far-right-website.html>.

¹¹⁹ Gerry Gable & Paul Jackson, *Lone Wolves: Myth or Reality*, (London: Searchlight, 2011) p. 143.

¹²⁰ <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/33689/aryan-strike-force-houses-horror-revealed>.

¹²¹ <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/33689/aryan-strike-force-houses-horror-revealed>.

¹²² <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/06/25/convictions-point-to-rise-of-far-right-extremism/>.

¹²³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/09/english-defence-league-super-mosque>.

¹²⁴ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/07/30/edl-man-sentenced-for-sex-crime/http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/07/30/edl-man-sentenced-for-sex-crime/>.

¹²⁵ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/07/27/exclusive-edl-gardener-stirs-up-racial-tension-in-school/>.

¹²⁶ <http://www.leaderlive.co.uk/news/93319/wrexham-man-in-custody-after-incident-at-mosque.aspx>.

¹²⁷ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/10/11/edl-in-leicester-restaurant-diners-attacked/>.

¹²⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-8sFkZqaGc>.

¹²⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-8sFkZqaGc>.

¹³⁰ <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/12/22/asperger%e2%80%99s-sufferer-is-punched-kicked-and-stamped-to-death-no-edl-condemnation/>.

demonstration on 29 May 2010. Chief Inspector Tom Naughton of British Transport Police stated that, 'Racist abuse of any sort is unacceptable, but the nature of Overton's insults levelled at a family minding their own business sat on the platform were despicable'.¹³¹ Three months later in Rochdale town centre, a middle-aged man wearing an EDL T-shirt racially abused a 31-year old Asian man before assaulting him.¹³² In the same month, EDL members 28-year old **Peter Craven** and 23-year old **Michael Riley**, both from Hull, admitted criminal offences whilst among a group of fellow supporters chanting racist songs in a Halifax pub.¹³³ These attacks, which make no distinction between Islamism and Muslims, are typical of those that continue to involve the EDL.

For the EDL, skin colour and race are not exclusively the catalysts of their supporters' violence. **Robert Gavin Tromans**, a 29-year old EDL supporter from West Bromwich, pleaded guilty to threatening behaviour at Blackburn magistrates' court in June 2011. Tromans had attended an EDL demonstration in Blackburn. He admitted trying to pull PC Palmer Davies from her horse, and when this failed resorted to punching the horse. Tromans justified his action by claiming that the police horse had 'stood on his foot and he showed the bruises it caused to an officer when he was being interviewed after his arrest'.¹³⁴ Therefore, we might accept some doubt as to his nature due to the pain he suffered. What is not in doubt, however, is that a Mr. Tromans of Beverley Rd, West Bromwich is a member of the BNP (membership no. 7113), which brings us back to the issue of BNP support for the EDL.

Conclusion

These profiles beg the question: is the EDL really just the latest vehicle for football hooliganism, or are we witnessing something even more closely associated with the far right? The former interpretation has some merit. From its inception, the EDL has had links to football 'firms'. Football hooliganism continues to be prominent among the EDL. However, these profiles suggest strongly that the EDL is potentially more than a concatenation of irate football hooligans who have temporarily

cast aside their club loyalties to meet the danger of radical Islam. From the outset, among leaders and followers it is clear that the EDL has had sustained connections with the BNP and other extreme-right groups. Moreover, the EDL might profess itself a single issue, counter-jihadist movement, but its failure to adhere to this line leaves it looking like all previous racist extreme-right groups. This failure makes it even more difficult to ignore the neo-Nazi methods, antecedents and current connections of the EDL's leaders and its followers.

Consequently, these profiles allow four conclusions. First, the EDL is unarguably connected to the BNP and other far-right groups, whether by previous association or by shared interest. Secondly, some of these far-right individuals have possessed significant weaponry that identifies them as potential 'lone wolf' terrorists. Thirdly, EDL leaders and followers have engaged in criminality, especially racially aggravated incidents. Fourthly, the EDL engages in double-speak that powerfully questions their claim to be a single-issue, non-racist movement.

¹³¹ <http://www.lincs.police.uk/News-Centre/News-Releases/10-03-2011-Lincoln-Man-Given-EDL-CRASBO.html>.

¹³² http://menmedia.co.uk/rochdaleobserver/news/crime/s/1422863_hunt-for-racist-thug-in-english-defence-league-t-shirt-who-attacked-asian-man-in-rochdale.

¹³³ http://www.halifaxcourier.co.uk/news/local/racist_chants_by_edl_in_pub_1_3484058.

¹³⁴ http://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/archive/2011/06/05/Blackburn+%28blackburn%29/9066578.EDL_supporter_punched_police_horse_8_times_at_Blackburn_demo/.

Chapter 5: The English Defence League's Contexts and Trajectory

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As noted earlier, social movements tend to move through a number of stages: initial emergence; coalescence and stabilisation; formalisation; and finally, eventual decline. At the time of writing, the EDL may be located in the third of these four stages, though this in itself is not an indicator that moving to decline will occur in the near or even intermediate future. To frame a response to the English Defence League's development, it is useful to employ a multi-dimensional approach for identifying and understanding factors producing the present 'fertile conditions' for new far right groups to operate. Such conditions are vital for the on-going viability of ultra-patriotic, protest-type social movements, and are crucial when identifying the EDL's potential future trajectory.

Of course, discussing the future is a notoriously difficult aspect of any analysis. To be able to make more than speculative statements is problematic – academics do not have a crystal ball and nor does anyone else. In order to underpin any informed guesswork regarding the EDL's future, a number of overlapping approaches drawn from psychological criminology, social and political sciences, and history, can directly assist in better understanding both why the far right has grown in Britain in this, and the last, century. In particular, this analysis highlights the rising prominence of anti-Muslim sentiment in British society more widely as a key driver in the development of the EDL. Combatting this, alongside the movement's ability to mount demonstrations, will be crucial to diminishing its appeal.

Psychology of EDL support

Amongst the varied writings available to date, there is an emergent consensus that elements of the core support for the EDL consists of former football firm activists, who have found a new

vehicle for violent street protests. Academic research into the movement is also beginning to piece together the psychology of support found among these grass-roots activists, especially in terms of the empowering, 'positive' perception of violence that exists among many EDL supporters. The fieldwork of James Treadwell and Jon Garland, based upon qualitative interviews, offers an especially clear perspective on the allure of violence directed against a clearly defined enemy figure for many supporters.

Treadwell and Garland stress that EDL participation allows (mostly) young, working-class men the opportunity to engage in activity that is part of a codified 'masculine' sub-culture. Participation in or around violence, and attendant expressions of aggressive masculinity, in turn, allows supporters to re-establish a feeling of control and power in a world seen as 'anomic', or descending into a state of crisis. The focus on demonising the Muslim 'other' in much EDL rhetoric therefore provides a target for such latent – and sometime active – violent tendencies. Often the sense of communal participation is important too, and the idea of 'performing' violence in front of others who share a similar value system only adds to a sense of empowerment. Though Islamist extremism is the EDL's specified target, underlying frustrations of activists often centre upon perceived structural and social problems with modern Britain.

Treadwell and Garland's fieldwork includes an interview with one EDL supporter's striking articulation of how Muslims have become the identified enemy within the EDL rank and file:

The Paki, the Muslim, to me is the enemy, they are like everything we are not, like Sikhs and Hindus are not cunts, the Indians, they are ok. They are not like Pakis. Pakis are different. It is like they enjoy taking the piss and trying to fuck around with us. Like Sikhs and Hindus, and the blacks, they know you have to follow English laws, but the Pakis, the Muslim ones, basically, they are all different. They come here to take advantage of us, they sell fucking smack, rob off whites but not their own, force young girls into prostitution. They are fucking scum.

Another telling interview highlights a key connection between the perceived threat posed by Islamist terrorism, and the appeal of a movement offering a pathway for direct-action responses:

They got it together, the Pakis, and now whites run scared of them a lot of the time You get them now, blowing themselves up on trains—we have to do something about that. I want them to feel fear, put it back on the Pakis, you know. I love the satisfaction I get when I know that they are shitting themselves cos the

EDL are on the way to give it to them. But they need to be put in place, they didn't come here to run the show, it's about time that we give them some of their own fucking medicine.

Insofar as these views may be taken as to some degree representative of the EDL rank-and-file, we can see how the movement appeals most strongly to those who feel marginalised and disenfranchised, while appearing to offer active solutions to underlying social issues. The EDL provides a platform for direct action, one that is potentially violent in nature, for those who feel alienated within society. Worryingly, for many supporters any actively violent involvement with the movement is likely to continue a cycle of disorder – and thus disconnection – from wider society that has often brought them to the movement in the first place. Violence in this context is not merely restricted to Muslims, but can also be directed at anti-fascist protestors, journalists, and, of course, police at demonstrations.

In consequence, without a wider policy-based response to engage disconnected individuals and groups, potentially through *Prevent* Strategy activities, over and above already existing mechanisms, the EDL is likely to continue to have significant appeal. As Treadwell and Garland conclude: 'Unless and until their voices are heard and their concerns listened to, then there is every danger that the English Defence League will seem ever more appealing as an outlet of violence to increasing sections of England's "lost" communities.'¹

Thinking about supply and demand for the 'new far right' ideology

Psychological approaches to EDL activism can be augmented by analysis of structural factors that allow for the growth of far-right perspectives. There is no clear academic consensus that sets out hard-and-fast laws for predicting the rise and fall of far-right movements. Yet among political and social scientists of the far right, Roger Eatwell's public-facing research has boiled down complex debates into a number of key issues that frame analysis on factors that affect the supply of, and demand for, far right politics. In turn, these have provided for focused thinking in recent years. Predicting the fortunes of far right is far more an art than a science, and these factors should not be

seen as a series of 'laws' foretelling the future of the far right. Rather, they should be seen as inter-related, not than mutually explanations.²

Political Opportunity Structure: This theme emphasises strategies whereby mainstream parties can actively occupy (or leave) the political space in which far right organisations tend to operate. A classic example here is Margaret Thatcher's 'ownership' of the anti-immigration agenda across the 1980s, which helped to deny the populist British far right the political space within which to grow. Perceived 'establishment' weakness on immigration in the later 1990s and 2000s, meanwhile, arguably allowed for an expansion of the populist far right in Britain. Yet it is far from clear that simply developing hard-line language on immigration in the political mainstream is preferable to such positions being expressed by far right movements, which only ever have limited, if any, influence upon government policy.

Media Agenda-Setting: Quite aside from politicians creating an environment for the far right to exploit, the messages put out by the mainstream media are also crucial in the growth (or otherwise) of far right parties. In particular, the populist media outlets can give tacit support to far right campaigns by offering clear scapegoats for the public to latch onto, such as new migrants. Sensationalist mass media coverage of immigration and Islamist terrorism over the last decade, for example, has undoubtedly helped to fan the flames of the 'new far right's' anti-Muslim prejudice. In the case of the EDL, we can see that the *Daily Star* in particular has helped to develop the wider populist framework for the movement to gravitate around. Moreover, scoops such as the *Daily Star's* February 2011 headline suggesting the EDL is to become a political party arguably work as propaganda pieces for the movement.³

Single Issue and/or Programmatic Agenda: Broadly put, far right movements have had relative success by either focussing a single emotive issue, or by attempting to develop a wider political 'package'. Typically in the past, however, far right movements have tended to sit somewhere between these two poles. In the case of the EDL we largely see a focused, single-issue agenda based upon anti-Muslim prejudice clearly event – despite limited attempts to develop a wider political

¹ James Treadwell and Jon Garland, 'Masculinity, Marginalization and Violence: A Case Study of the English Defence League', *British Journal of Criminology*, 51, 4 (2011) pp.621 – 634.

² Roger Eatwell, 'Ten Theories of the Extreme Right', Peter Merkl and Leonard Weinberg (eds.) *Right-Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

³<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/greenslade/2011/feb/10/dailystar-english-defence-league>.

programme on, say, law and order or pro-military themes. This narrow focus does limit the potential of the movement, especially if the current visibility of the anti-Muslim scapegoating declines.

Protest Thesis: This longstanding approach holds that far right movements are able to gain wider support as they allow people to register a 'populist' protest against the political mainstream. This approach does not view supporters of such movements as people who necessarily agree with a far right perspective, but rather as largely opportunists seeking to register more general dissatisfaction with the political mainstream though limited support of (in this case) far right groups.

Charismatic Leadership: A cliché of far-right politics is the importance of a centralising charismatic figure, around whom the wider movement gravitates. Though charismatic figures can dominate a far right movement, examples are also numerous of comparatively successful far right movements lacking a charismatic leader, as well as ones that fail despite possessing a powerful leader figure. To some limited extent, Steven Yaxley-Lennon has been able to carve out such a role through media appearances on radio and television. Yet the appearance of splinter groups within the EDL shows his authority is not universal within the organisation. In fact, it has continued to be challenged from various quarters.

Far Right as a 'Post-Modern' Lifestyle Choice: This more general approach identifies a growing fragmentation of society over the past thirty or so years, leading to a breakdown of traditional class and gender identities, which in turn acts a key factor for renewed far right growth. As a more traditional, and seemingly stable, forms of society fragment, a number of social and economic 'losers' from such processes are thus created. These 'losers' of modernisation generally believe they have poorer job and life prospects than that of previous generations, and so can become attracted to the far right – especially through its simplistic promises of community, traditional identity, and security in an increasingly complex world.

Economic interest: This view holds that far right activism succeeds when its messages connect with far more material concerns. Similarly, the far right gains traction when it is able to present ethnic minorities and migrants as a threat in the competition for scarce resources, which could include access to social housing, or projects for localised regeneration. It is notable that the theme

of politicising the state's resources is a striking feature within EDL rhetoric, especially as it relates to *Prevent* Strategy funds directed toward Muslim projects.

National Traditions: The far right develops in different countries in different ways. Comparative analysis of the national histories of far right activity helps establish how various factors can mark the growth of such organisations in different settings. What works in one country will not necessarily work in another. In the British case, a strong undercurrent of neo-Nazism has often energised some of the more extreme far-right parties (like the National Front), while the EDL marks a partial break with this tradition.

Taken together, these approaches are not mutually exclusive. Yet considered as a whole they give a series of focal points for mapping the 'fertile conditions' that allow for the growth of far right movements generally. As such, they help inform speculation into the future viability of the EDL. Before continuing to discuss the present situation, it is worth briefly re-examining Britain's longer history of far right parties in order to appreciate how this political tradition has developed throughout the twentieth century.

Historical development of the British far right and the growth of the anti-Muslim agenda

The history of far right movements in Britain is a complex series of overlapping developments, comprising many small scale groupings, as well as larger movements (most recognisably the British Union of Fascists, or BUF, in 1930s Britain). This pattern is typical of far right politics, in both Britain and abroad. Yet only rarely does a far right movement grow to the size of the EDL, let alone rise to executive political power. In total, Britain has witnessed four sizeable far right organisations: the BUF, the National Front (NF), the British National Party (BNP) and the English Defence League. Unlike the previous three, the EDL can be usefully seen to represent the emergence of a large 'new far right' movement – at the same time as another large-scale far right party, the BNP, one far more clearly identified with neo-Nazism, is in decline. Such an overlap between major far right movements has not previously occurred in Britain.

Looking further back, organisations marked by ultra-nationalism, racism, and anti-establishment views came of age in the interwar years across Europe, though many analysts trace

its ideological roots to the late nineteenth century.⁴

In 1920s and early 1930s Britain, a range of small fascist groupings emerged. These included the British Fascisti, the Britons Society, the English Mystery and the Imperial Fascist League. It was not until Oswald Mosley developed his New Party in 1931, and then British Union of Fascists (BUF) a year later that far right politics gained wider traction in Britain. The BUF grew rapidly in its early days, in part thanks to the support from the Rothermere Press – as well as growing concern with the direction of mainstream British politics and its handling of the economy during a period of economic crisis. The BUF quickly grew to around 50,000 members, until violence began to tar the movement, like at a notorious ‘Olympia rally’ in June 1934. Largely from this point on, the BUF received negative media coverage and a haemorrhaging support base. In particular, the movement’s swift recourse to violence was seen as contrary to British values.



Oswald Mosley depicted in the notorious publication of the British Union of Fascists, *Blackshirt*.

The BUF was able to make a partial recovery during the mid-to-late 1930s by increasingly deploying anti-Semitic messages, which did allow the movement to pick up support in areas like the East End of London.⁵ In some industrial parts of Britain, the BUF was able to find localised pockets of support during this time, where its economic critiques resonated. For example, support was relatively strong in both Lancashire and Yorkshire, where tailored BUF economic policies connected with the concerns of textile workers. By the end of the 1930s, the BUF enjoyed growing support as it tactically embraced

an anti-war campaign, which chimed with a wider willingness to appease Hitler’s expansion in Europe. This anti-war policy was especially resonant in the South East in the months leading up to the outbreak of war in September 1939.⁶

So for the BUF, economic doctrine, racist politics and single issue campaigning on foreign affairs became three key areas for developing limited support during its lifetime. Especially in its later years, it also functioned more successfully as a campaigning, street movement than it did as a political party. Like postwar far right groups, the BUF offered a kind of counter-culture that its supporters could buy into wholeheartedly, while also generating wider, often latent support through street demonstrations and populist campaigns. In May 1940, the BUF was eventually decapitated through internment of its leadership (along with other far right extremists) under Defence Regulation 18(b) following the Nazi invasion of France and the Low Countries in the Second World War.

In the years immediately after 1945, far right politics was a small-scale concern in Britain, with the ideology of fascism indelibly associated with the horrors of Nazism and the Holocaust. Yet movements did appear, such as Mosley’s postwar Union Movement, and the marginal League of Empire Loyalists under A.K. Chesterton. The latter was especially motivated by new international contexts, for example the end of empire became a key theme for the British far right to exploit after 1945. Linked to this concern was the new wave of non-European migration, and its impact upon local politics across Britain. Both issues were framed by the far right as emblematic of an alarming national decline in Britain. By the late 1950s a new wave of small, often neo-Nazi movements began to develop in response, including the White Defence League and the National Labour Party (with the latter merging to form an earlier incarnation of the British National Party in 1960). A new anti-immigration message showed some significant signs of interest among the wider electorate too, and into the 1960s new groupings emerged, such as the Greater Britain Movement and the Racial Preservation Society. Many of these new groupings from the early to mid 1960s merged to form the National Front (NF) in January 1967.

The NF was able to gain some early success by associating itself with more mainstream, hard-line, anti-immigration messages typified by Enoch Powell’s notorious “Rivers of Blood” speech in 1968. In contrast, the mainstream currents of Edward Heath’s

⁴ Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism: 1914 – 1945* (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁵ Thomas Linehan, *East London for Mosley: the British Union of Fascists in East London and South-West Essex, 1933-40* (London: Cass, 1996).

⁶ Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front* (London: I. B. Taurus, 1998) ch. 3.

Conservative Party appeared weak on the issue of immigration, and moving into this political space became a key factor for the rise of the National Front across the 1970s. The movement largely appealed to often working-class, disenchanted Conservative voters, as well as Labour supporters, both fearful of immigration and a loss of national identity. Developments such as the arrival of Ugandan Asians added further fuel for NF rhetoric across the 1970s. This issue, combined with the relatively successful adoption of 'march and grow' tactics witness a rise in momentum throughout the decade; in fact, at its height in the mid 1970s, the NF boasted some 14,000 paying members. In consequence, a more populist 'front stage' agenda espousing anti-immigration policies, underpinned by a neo-Nazi 'back stage', defined the ideology of the National Front.



A young Nick Griffin marching with the National Front in 1983.

The NF's bubble burst at the 1979 General Election, when the movement expected to achieve an electoral breakthrough. Denying the movement its 'political opportunity structure', the new hard-line messages of Margaret Thatcher, who, from 1978, talked of Britain being 'swamped' by migrants, drew voters away from the far right, thus claiming this political space for mainstream politics. The notable growth of anti-fascist campaigning in the late 1970s also raised awareness of the neo-Nazi undercurrents within the National Front, which helped to stem the movement's growth. Finally, failure to meet expectations in the 1979 General Election destroyed the NF, quickly killing off the

momentum it had generated throughout the decade. As the shell of the National Front today makes clear, political momentum is vital for the viability of such far right politics.

In contrast, the 1980s were a barren time for political far right movements. With the mainstream politicians more clearly 'owning' an anti-immigration message, the far right ideologues in Britain floundered. John Tyndall set up a new British National Party in 1982, only to see limited success in its early years. Yet by the same token, this period was significant for the cultural development of the extreme right wing in Britain. The 1980s, in particular, are notable for the development of neo-Nazi 'Oi!' music networks, like Blood and Honour (their names taken from the inscription on Hitler Youth daggers: *Blut und Ehre*). This has led to a sustained, extremist culture of the far right, gravitating around White Power music, which still is of significance today.⁷

Far right growth in the 1990s was also slow compared with the past decade. For example, the BNP's first electoral victory in Tower Hamlets in 1993 now looks to be something of a fluke. This minor breakthrough came about via the more successful tactic of door-to-door campaigning. This was also the period that saw the emergence of extremist splinter groups, especially Combat-18, a development that hampered the BNP's election successes. A 1999 leadership coup against Tyndall saw the BNP elect a new leader, Nick Griffin, who has tried to bring a more respectable 'new far right' image to the fascist party. His attempted 'rebranding' has transformed the BNP squarely into a political campaigning organisation, and in the past decade the party has far more successfully cultivated the latent electoral potential for far right politics, both at local and supra-national levels. In fact, the BNP's high point came in the 2009 European Parliamentary elections, bringing about the election of Andrew Brons and Nick Griffin as MEPs. Since this 'breakthrough', however, the BNP has been in electoral freefall, while simultaneously crumbling from within due to internal feuding and financial irregularities.

This brief narrative highlights a number of key historical factors affecting the growth and decline of far right movements in Britain. Most importantly, emotive social and political issues can be framed in a way that the far right is able to 'claim' them. Historically, this has ranged from fears around Jewish immigration to economic concerns, and from appeasement in the late 1930s,

⁷ Trevor Preston, 'The Tip of the Iceberg? Analysis of Blood & Honour online and offline behaviour' in Paul Jackson and Gerry Gable (eds.) *Far-Right.com: Nationalist Extremism on the Internet* (London: Searchlight and RNM Publications, 2011) p. 2.

to postwar migration and the decline of Empire. Such a strategy continues in the anti-Muslim politics of the past decade. All of these issues can be given a far right 'spin', blurring ultra-patriotic politics with more localised campaigns aimed at presenting the British public as being betrayed by an out-of-touch political elite. Moreover, the mainstream media can play a significant role in creating supportive or hostile environments for the far right. More often than not, British media sources are openly hostile to the far right. Yet they can also offer latent support for such politics by normalising prejudices that are then further radicalised by far right movements. Similarly, more 'populist' right wing views can set an agenda that the far right can easily exploit. Enoch Powell is a classic case in point, but more recent figures can also be appropriated by the far right, notably columnists for tabloid newspapers. The role of mainstream politicians is also crucial, and far right movements often develop a following on the back of both national and localised political crises (the best example being the birth of the BUF from the Great Depression). Finally, regionalism is also important to stress, as understanding why local pockets of support have grown at particular periods – such as the North West, and Yorkshire and Humberside, electing two BNP MEPs in 2009, or the EDL from Luton in 2009 – is crucial to explaining the rise and fall of the far right more generally. We need more localised research on these issues to more fully understand the regional dynamics of the far right.

Growth of the anti-Muslim far right in the 2000s

The development of the far right in Britain over the past ten years merits consideration in more depth. The decade since the attacks of 9/11 has seen a range of smaller far right groups emerge, alongside two larger far right moments, to develop a potent electoral and street politics. As the direct precursor to the EDL, the factors allowing the BNP to grow in the 2000s need to be more fully understood.

The electoral success of the BNP in the 2000s has been widely linked to the growing currency of anti-Muslim politics, which has been particularly marked in areas with social deprivation, divided communities, and poor access to social housing. This prejudicial politics has also developed as a result of a disconnect between mainstream local and national politicians in some pockets across the country, and the wider communities they represent. Inner city areas such as Barking and Dagenham in London, as well as

those like as Stoke on Trent, have offered the BNP some localised 'fertile conditions' in which to grow.⁸ Although the BNP grew during a period of economic prosperity for many in Britain, the movement's targeted campaigns achieved the greatest relevance in areas where the local economy did not share in this wider wealth creation. BNP heartlands in Barking and Dagenham and Stoke on Trent epitomise this trend. The 'political opportunity structure' was right, with anti-Muslim politics having a high visibility, while the mainstream politicians appeared unwilling to offer hard-line positions. Moreover, a national media climate helped to set an anti-Muslim tone as well as framing immigration through a lens of failings and crisis.⁹ It is important to stress that Luton, the birthplace of the EDL, has also witnessed a similar trajectory in recent decades (see chapter 2).

The influence of more general anti-Muslim attitudes in Britain in this period has also been crucial, and Muslims have correspondingly become the major target figure for both the BNP and the EDL. In order to map changing perceptions of Muslims in modern Britain across this period, the work of Clive D. Field is of especial relevance. He has conducted an authoritative survey of recent British opinion polling on attitudes towards British Muslims, roughly from the emergence of a distinct Muslim identity in the imagination of the wider population at the end of the 1980s, until the mid 2000s. His findings reveal a number of spikes in hostility that has framed an increasingly prejudicial public perception of Muslim communities in Britain. These 'crisis points' began with the Salman Rushdie affair in 1989 – with an assassination 'fatwa' declared on the author of the *Satanic Verses* – and have similarly spiked during the 1991 Gulf War; the 9/11 attacks; the 2003 invasion of Iraq; the 7/7 bombings; and finally, the protests against the Danish Cartoons in 2006. Field stresses that, by the mid 2000s, the British public tended to believe that Muslim communities needed to do more to integrate into British society, emphasising the limits of multiculturalism when doing so. His research also found that public perceptions of Islam are often constructed through the lens of Islamist extremism, helping to popularise the view that all Muslims can be perceived as 'closer' to being terrorists. Relatedly, there is also significant criticism of Muslim leaders for failing to act against extremists. In 2001, some

⁸ Stuart Wilks-Heeg, 'The canary in a coalmine? Explaining the emergence of the British National Party in English local politics', *Parliamentary Affairs* 62, 2 (2009) pp.377 – 98.

⁹ For a wider range of perspectives on the rise of the British National Party, see Nigel Copsey and Graham Macklin, *The British National Party: Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2011).

32% of the British public deemed Islam to be a threat to Western liberal democracy, yet this figure had risen to 53% by 2006. Thus, claims Field, by taking 'a cross-section of attitudinal measures, somewhere between one in five and one in four Britons now exhibits a strong dislike of, and prejudice against, Islam and Muslims'. Groups more likely to be hostile towards Muslims are 'men, the DE social class, oldest age cohort (not least pensioners) and, most especially Conservative voters'. The extent to which anti-Muslim prejudices have become normalised in the 2000s is unmistakable, according to Field's study.¹⁰

Furthermore, expert on anti-Muslim politics, Chris Allen, similarly highlights that roughly half of the British population in 2010 believed that society was marked by a sense of religious division, while just under half felt that such a split was detrimental to the country's wellbeing. Discussing mainstream political responses to Islamism in recent years, Allen contends:

what cannot be denied is the fact that numerous events, incidents and undertakings – as well as the events of 9/11 and 7/7 amongst others – have all contributed to a climate where the immediacy of recognition and acknowledgement of Muslim and Islamic difference, the growing receptivity to anti-Muslim ideas and expressions about Muslims and Islam posing a threat, and the sense of justification that is recurrently evident in being fearful and normatively against Muslims and Islam has increasingly been seen to make sense.¹¹

The problem of anti-Muslim sentiments 'making sense' in mainstream Britain has not emerged overnight. Nevertheless, such views have become quite pronounced over the last ten years, even passing what Baroness Warsi recently called the 'dinner table test' of casual racism. Matthew Goodwin's most recent analysis of the BNP provides additional discussion of the connection between growing anti-Muslim sentiment in the 2000s and the rise of the BNP in this period. Indeed, Goodwin seems to suggest that a process of 'tit for tat radicalisation' has framed the growth of the British far right in recent years.¹²

As stressed above, this is far from an issue affecting Britain alone. Across Europe and in the US, anti-Muslim sentiment also has developed rapidly over the past decade. In Europe, as a result

of this fertile climate, an anti-Muslim 'new far-right' is having a genuine impact on public policy; for example, both Belgium and France have banned the *niqab* and *burka* in public, while Switzerland has banned any further construction of mosques. Another leading scholar, Liz Fekete, has described the resonance of this anti-Muslim agenda the 'new McCarthyism' in Europe. For her, media narratives are at the heart of this growth:

Around much of Europe, the media is launching its own 'with-hunts' of Muslims who display symptoms of 'unacceptable behaviour' as enunciated by terrorism laws. No other communities are placed under the microscope, constantly questioned about their personal beliefs, their 'foreign allegiances', as the Muslim communities of Europe. It's former Tory minister, Norman Tebbit's cricket test gone mad.¹³

Without doubt, therefore, a substantial growth in anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain, especially since 9/11, also operates in a pan-European context. In turn, this has been a driver for the growth of the 'new far right' over the last decade.

Finally, this is a perspective shared by Nick Lowles' and Anthony Painter's 2011, report *Fear and Hope*. This study not only stresses that a 'new politics of identity, culture, and nation has grown out of the politics of race and immigration, and is increasingly the opinion driver in modern British politics', but even more significantly in terms of the future of the EDL, there

is popular support for a sanitised, non-violent and non-racist English nationalist political party. Britain has not experienced the successful far-right parties that have swept across much of Western Europe. Our report shows this is not because British people are more moderate but simply because these views have not found a political articulation.¹⁴

This point is vital for understanding the successes of – and the limits to – the English Defence League. The identification of a larger demand than supply for populist far right politics has been confirmed by other academic commentators on the contemporary British far right as well.¹⁵ While older far right organisations are indelibly associated with a past era of overt fascist (and oftentimes neo-Nazi) politics, there is genuine public interest in the 'new far right'. Despite achieving historically unprecedented successes for a British far right party, the BNP continues to be constrained its older, neo-Nazi identity. This is

¹⁰ Clive D. Field, 'Islamophobia in Contemporary Britain: The Evidence of the Opinion Polls, 1988–2006', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 18, 4 (2007) pp. 447 – 77.

¹¹ Chris Allen, 'Fear and loathing: the political discourse in relation to Muslims and Islam in the contemporary British setting', *Politics & Religion* 4, 2 (2010).

¹² Matthew J. Goodwin, *New British Fascism: Rise of the British National Party* (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹³ Liz Fekete, 'The New McCarthyism in Europe', *Arches Quarterly*, 7, 4 (2010) pp. 64 – 68.

¹⁴ <http://www.fearandhope.org.uk/executive-summary/>.

¹⁵ Robert Ford, 'Who Might Vote for the BNP?: survey evidence on the electoral potential of the extreme right in Britain', Roger Eatwell and Matthew J. Goodwin (eds.), *The New Extremism in 21st Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 2010).

exemplified by Nick Griffin's disastrous performance on the BBC's flagship Question Time programme in 2009 where he failed to clearly repudiate Holocaust denial, or the ideas of one-time KKK leader David Duke. The now-haemorrhaging British National Party has thus been limited in its ability to occupy this 'new far right' political space.

Unlike the BNP, the EDL has been able to tap some of this potential reservoir of support for the 'new far right' rather more successfully. Yet as Lowles and Painter stress, the wider public seems to prefer a non-violent vehicle for this 'new far right' politics, which starkly contrasts with the EDL's nature and reputation. Moreover, the public are looking for an established political party, meaning that the EDL's current composition as a social movement could prove restrictive to further growth.

Conclusions

What we can draw from psychology, political science, history and a contemporary appreciation of the anti-Muslim 'new far right' is that the EDL has been successful because it taps into concerns which genuinely affect sections of British society. As with all far right movements, demand for the EDL can be viewed as a symptom of more general political shortcomings to engage whole communities. As such, we need to understand more about the localised situations that provide the 'fertile conditions' for such movements to grow, such as localised economic issues. This issue of locality in particular needs to be researched in more detail with regard to the far right in modern Britain. Often, local political solutions will help to provide answers to wider far right support.

We can also see that the EDL's style politics is a particularly extreme expression of more generalised fears surrounding Muslims, who have become a central scapegoat figure within many ultra-patriotic discourses, taking centre stage, alongside migrants and others who can be styled 'outside' the national community. The wider context that helps to normalise these exclusionary discourses need to be challenged, especially in the populist media.

So through political and economic issues, and a wider culture of anti-Muslim sentiment, a significant demand for a 'new far right' style of political movement has arisen. We can expect this demand to remain substantial until the general profile of British Muslims in public discourses improves, and wider social grievances exploited by the 'new far right' are seen to be ameliorated by

mainstream politics. Yet though a major part of the solution to the EDL, and the growth of the 'new far right' more generally, lies in addressing the social conditions that allows such extremist perspectives to find an audience, it also would be beneficial to use existing approaches for tackling extremism to further address the issue. In particular, drawing on the *Prevent* Strategy more fulsomely as a means to challenge the views of potential EDL and far right supporters, not just those susceptible to jihadi Islamism, would be a useful addition to state's responses to the far right. Nigel Copsey has responded to the new *Prevent* Strategy with the following call for the far right to be fully addressed by future implementation of the policy:

One suspects that much of the Government's concern with extreme-right terrorism still remains largely symbolic. Revealingly, the *Prevent* strategy is reluctant to discuss any extreme-right groups. The EDL is not subject to any consideration. This might reflect current thinking in the Home Office that the EDL is not an 'extreme-right' group (the National Co-ordinator for Domestic Extremism currently defines the EDL as a 'right-of centre' pro-nationalist social movement engaged in direct action demonstrations). Neither is there any discussion of the British National Party (BNP), a far-right organisation with a deeply Islamophobic agenda (in a recent e-newsletter the BNP declared its intention to mobilise against 'Muslim Paedophile Scum'). For those attracted to its racist and Islamophobic message, like the EDL, the BNP can lay the foundations of further radicalisation. A cautionary note here: Terence Gavan was a former 'gold member' of the BNP. And whilst the current implosion of the BNP may remove the far right as an electoral threat, there is a possibility that disaffected BNP members might give up on the democratic process altogether and instead turn to violence as the only viable alternative.¹⁶

Clearly, we are facing a strong challenge from the far right in the present.

Nevertheless, there are signs for limited optimism here too, and we should be careful not to overstate the problem. Clearly, from what we have seen the EDL is a limited social movement, which though disruptive at its sites of protest, has not risen to a level where it can influence the political agenda. Moreover, although it has found a gap in the 'political opportunity structure', it is not able to fully exploit this. As with many far right organisations in British history, its brand has become indelibly associated with violence and extremism. Its media portrayal is caustic, so although it may have limited appeal among the marginalised, it lacks an ability to mainstream such messages. To put it bluntly, the EDL does not have a respectable Geert Wilders style figure. The

¹⁶ <http://soundings.mcb.org.uk/?p=137>.

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reported links, and ideological synergy, with Anders Behring Breivik have only cemented such a discredited identity. So it is unlikely that the EDL in itself will become a major political force, above and beyond its scattered, local areas of support. In this, the EDL is typical of far right political movements in Britain. Though Lowles and Painter have powerfully argued that there is a demand for the EDL's anti-Muslim agenda in the form of a new political party, the EDL itself is in no position to successfully rebrand and reorganise itself as a genuinely credible political actor. Of course, this does not prevent other movements forming that do offer a better supply of this agenda.



Police at an English Defence League march in Preston, November 2010. (Image courtesy of Garry Cook.)

So although the EDL may have successes at its current level for some time, which will prove a significant cost to police forces in particular, it seems unlikely to move beyond a direct action social movement. It is worth noting the Garry Gable estimates the overall cost of the EDL to date at over £10 million. This broad prognosis, then, stresses that the EDL will continue to put significant pressure on state resources, while also continuing to exhaust the patience of local communities, for as long as the movement can retain an internal coherence. In other words, its future is much more dependent on its on-going

ability to supply an engaging politics by developing 'new far right' themes, and then offering exciting opportunities to protest, to its limited range of supporters than any other factor.

So tackling the EDL will need to find ways not only to discredit the 'new far right' agenda among current and potential supporters, but also will need to find ways to curtail the opportunity for the movement to link its 'new far right' agenda to a series of on-going demonstrations. The former calls for a greater focus on far right issues within *Prevent* Strategy activities, while the latter could potentially require a re-assessment of the EDL's ability to demonstrate in the manner it currently does.

It is worth noting the words of Steven Yaxley-Lennon, aka 'Tommy Robinson', at the English Defence League's latest demonstration in Tower Hamlets in September 2011. Clearly, here the targets of the movement are rather less directed at merely jihadi Islamists, and more clearly at Muslims as a whole:

EVERY SINGLE MUSLIM watching this on YouTube, on 7/7 you got away with killing and maiming British citizens, you got away with it. You had better understand that we have built a network from one end of this country to the other end, and we will not tolerate it, and the Islamic community will feel the full force of the English Defence League if we see any of our citizens killed, maimed or hurt on British soil ever again.¹⁷

¹⁷ <http://www.pickledpolitics.com/archives/13622>.

Chapter 6: The Views of Professionals and Practitioners

In the process of writing this report, the authors came into contact with a number of figures that have views and opinions on the English Defence League. Though these are not necessarily the views of the report's authors, fostering debate on the nature of, and responses to, the EDL is crucial. Below is a selection of such statements to help develop on-going debates on the EDL.

Fiyaz Mughal, OBE, Director of Faith Matters:

The EDL regards itself as a socio-political movement that is supposedly based on grass roots activism and with the desire to confront radical extremism from Islamism. The reality is that the leadership of the group is built on pseudo-hatred of all things Muslim couched in the narrative of confronting radical extremism from some sections of Muslim communities, and this filters and feeds the supporters of the group by playing into their own fears of Muslims and Islam. Whilst the BNP and the EDL are not the best of bed-fellows, ideologically on this issue, there is synergy and demonstrations have given space for Far Right activists to turn up and agitate in mainly diverse areas like Harrow, Birmingham, London etc. This has meant that local communities have had to pay the price, literally physically and socially for the agitation created by the EDL and its followers.

The truth is simply this. Those who drive the EDL and who fund it, have a strategy of trying to isolate Muslim communities by reaching out to other communities in society. They have tried to reach out to LGBT and Sikh communities for example in areas like Tower Hamlets, Wolverhampton and Walsall and have paraded their ex-member and trooper, Guramit Singh as a shining example of a 'Sikh Warrior' combatting 'Muslim hordes'. This is far from the truth since the EDL leadership simply attempts to manipulate other communities to promote its underlying message of hate and fear. Thankfully, Sikh and LGBT communities have rightly rejected this poison and have given no succour to it. We all therefore need to shine a light on this organisation of hate and continue to be vigilant against its manipulation of communities.

Bob Pitt, Editor of *Islamophobia Watch*:

The English Defence League differs from far-right groups of the past in that it is not a party with an overall political programme but a single issue protest movement whose stated objective is to resist what it claims is the "Islamification" of the UK. Nevertheless the continuities between the EDL and its predecessors are clear.

In its attempts to control the streets in order to intimidate Muslim communities the EDL imitates the 'march and grow' strategy of the 1970s National Front or the

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British National Party during its early boot-boy phase. It has combined this with a tactic subsequently adopted by the BNP under Nick Griffin's leadership, of publicising a handful of recruits from the Sikh and Jewish communities in order to deflect attention from the fact that its rank and file consists overwhelmingly of white racists.

The EDL leadership assert that their organisation rejects racism – Islam, they regularly remind us, is a religion not a race – but the EDL's Facebook page features endless sickening, hate-filled comments about Muslims and other minorities of the type you would expect to find on a neo-Nazi website. Calls for physical attacks on Muslims and the burning of mosques are commonplace. Some of the EDL's supporters are prepared to translate words into deeds and an increasing number of them have faced charges of assault or arson.

Opposing the EDL cannot be separated from exposing and countering the lying Islamophobic propaganda in the mainstream right wing press from which the EDL draws much of its inspiration. The media generally and the BBC in particular have to be persuaded that the EDL is not a movement of confused patriots but rather a gang of far right hatemongers who are not entitled to a platform. And in the aftermath of the Norway terrorist attacks the government and the police need to recognise that the 'counter-jihad' ideology promoted by the EDL poses a serious threat of political violence.

Michael Whine, Government and International Affairs Director of Community Security Trust (CST)

Although the message of the EDL is focused on Muslims – all of them, not just extremist groups as they claim – nobody should doubt that the politics of the EDL is still driven by the familiar bigotry and hatred of the far right, with a new language and target to fit with the times. If you look beyond the specific language then the similarities should be obvious: this is the politics of hatred and division, which has nothing positive to offer any part of society. The fact that Muslims are the current target simply means that it is Muslims who should be the recipients of anti-racist solidarity. Nor should anybody be distracted by the bizarre sight of EDL demonstrators waving Israeli flags. They are no friends of the Jewish community, or of Israel.

The EDL intimidate entire Muslim communities, causing tension and fear. Jews ought to remember that we have long experience of being on the receiving end of this kind of bigotry. They present a divisive, hateful politics that demonises minorities and damages social cohesion in a way that is never beneficial for society as a whole. We believe that antisemitism and other forms of prejudice are best fought by bringing communities together, not setting them in conflict against each other.

Hatred, division, cycles of inter-communal violence, intimidation and polarisation feed the extremists on every side. They encourage social division and leave all minorities vulnerable. Anti-Muslim bigotry is a vital recruiting sergeant for both the far right, and its Islamist extremist counterparts. It generates votes for the BNP and, at the furthest ends of this political spectrum, it even provides the fuel for terrorism.

Anders Breivik is not the only convicted far right terrorist to have had contact with the EDL. Michael Heaton and Trevor Hannington, who had a visceral hatred for Jews and other ethnic minorities, attended EDL demonstrations and praised them. It may be best to view the EDL as a gateway organisation: one which does not carry out or explicitly support terrorism itself, but creates and promotes the political discourse and identity-based grievance narrative, from which a small number of individuals

move on to terrorism. As such, it demands the appropriate level of intelligence monitoring and police scrutiny, as is applied to similar gateway organisations in the Islamist world.

Professor Nigel Copsey of Teesside University, and author of *The English Defence League: Challenging our country and our values of Social Inclusion, Fairness and Equality* (Faith Matters, 2010):

What is the English **Defence** League supposedly defending? The EDL cry out for 'English' culture to be given the 'right to exist and prosper in England'. But what do the EDL mean by 'English' culture? Reference is made to freedom, democracy and individual or human rights, but nobody should be fooled. The EDL's England is mono-cultural. If, as the EDL believe, other 'foreign' cultures can integrate and adapt, Islam (and not just its more militant form) is in fundamental conflict with 'Englishness'. This point is non-negotiable. In other words, the 'English Muslim' is an impossible identity.

For all the spurious rhetoric about inclusion – reaching out to 'all people' in England, whatever their background or origin, united in their opposition to the 'imposition' of Islam – culture in the EDL's 'green and pleasant land' would be, in practice, exclusivist and discriminatory. The EDL insist that what defines the 'people of England' is not their race but their culture. But make no mistake the 'English' culture that the EDL is supposedly defending is a predominantly white culture, the culture of the indigenous (white) English. In the end, it is this visceral urge to restore white ethno-national dominance that positions the EDL on the far right of the political spectrum.

Yet the EDL is not simply a redoubt for fascists. Some of its violent support associates with the football hooligan scene, where ultra-patriotic pride simply goes with the territory. More significantly, when it comes to mobilising numbers on the streets it is the EDL's nativist clamour for recognition, crudely articulated through sometimes racist and often violent Islamophobic language, which above all resonates with disenfranchised, disengaged, and resentful sections of the white working-class. In the throes of an English identity crisis, buffeted by socio-economic change, their concern is not with some fascist revolution but with the loss of national and cultural identity. In the EDL, a part of England, however objectionable, has spoken. We ignore it at our peril.

Zaheer Ahmad MBE, President of the National Association of Muslim Police:

The English Defence League (EDL) and other associated groups are allegedly a grass-roots organisation tackling and challenging so called Islamification of Britain and Europe. These groups have quickly gained momentum. It could be argued that this momentum is linked to the acceptability of Islamophobia in mainstream society, including in politics, and secondly due to the lack of ideological challenge by mainstream politicians and society. One has to look very carefully at the links of these groups to other right-wing movements to understand their objectives, rather than take them on face value, based on their carefully chosen words for media marketing or their website. The demonstrations taking place nationally by the EDL have confirmed a deep-seated hatred and fear of Muslims. These demonstrations have been the cause of much damage, concern and vulnerability to the Muslim communities, who have frequently felt let down by the services there to protect them. Indeed, a look at these so called peaceful gatherings and demonstrations shows that there is an unacceptable level of Violence, Harassment and Criminality. There is considerable body of

independent evidence which, is growing at a staggering pace to highlight the serious threat of the EDL to our communities. Yet the police service has failed to even acknowledge that the EDL are right wing. Furthermore, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), a body responsible for issuing guidance to the police forces nationally lacks sufficient foresight to understand the EDL and the courage to take on the challenge posed to community relations. There is a strong perception in Muslim communities that the police service does not take the threat of the right wing seriously. This perception is fast becoming reality when communities witness an inconsistent, somewhat relaxed police approach to EDL demonstrations resulting in very few arrests and prosecutions. This perception is reinforced by the position of the National Domestic Extremism Unit (NDEU) which does not view EDL as right wing. Protest and Freedom of Speech are to be cherished but threats, intimidation and criminality against our citizens needs to be challenged in the strongest terms.

Dr. Robert Lambert, Co-director of the European Muslim Research Centre at the University of Exeter

An important aspect of my research involves the adverse impact of EDL demonstrations on Muslim communities in towns and cities in England. EDL campaigns and demonstrations do not occur in a political vacuum but significantly take place at the end of a decade dominated by the war on terror in which Islamophobia generally and anti-Muslim hate crimes in particular have become familiar experiences for many Muslims. For instance, prior to 9/11 very few mosques, Islamic institutions, Muslim organisations, Muslim graves and Muslims of distinctive Islamic appearance experienced criminal attacks in a way that has become commonplace since. Thus when an EDL demonstration targets a particular mosque or Muslim community for a provocative and threatening demonstration it may well be that the local mosque or a mosque in the vicinity has been subjected to a criminal attack or to harassment and vandalism in the recent past. In these circumstances an EDL demonstration re-enforces the anxiety and fear experienced by victims of anti-Muslim or Islamophobic hate crimes. Equally EDL campaigns and demonstrations are sometimes followed by criminal attacks on mosques, Islamic institutions, Muslim organisations, Muslim graves and against individual Muslims. However strenuously the EDL leadership (if that is what it is) seeks to disown members or supporters who engage in anti-Muslim violence of this kind it does not diminish the fact that EDL demonstrations licence Islamophobia which in turn increases the risk of violence for Muslims in the area.

Although it is offered with the best of intentions Muslim communities will also experience an increased sense of being at risk of attack and of being under siege more generally when they are advised by police and community leaders to stay at home when EDL demonstrations take place in their neighbourhoods. Whether or not such advice is correct is a matter for debate and a matter for careful case by case assessment. However, it is sufficient to note that it may not always be beneficial in terms of community confidence. For instance, I was encouraged to observe a successful multi-faith, multicultural counter demonstration to the EDL in Tower Hamlets in 2010 that served to empower a local community that has bitter memories of racist intimidation from the National Front and the value of successful resistance that was hard won. Such pro-active multi-faith, multicultural solidarity is especially empowering when the intended target of an EDL demonstration is wrongly demonised as being 'extremist' as in the case of the East London Mosque.

Gerry Gable, Publisher of *Searchlight* magazine.

The activities of the English Defence League (EDL) present a significant challenge to society, in particular to race relations and to law and order. Although many people view the EDL as a social movement, its Nazi and racist links cannot be ignored.

Evidence of these links emerged soon after the formation of the EDL at a time that SO15 and the Home Office were both denying such links. The EDL's members included people who were, or had been, BNP activists and even party officers, right-wing football hooligans, and various unaffiliated racists, as well as a few Nazis who had been convicted in terrorist trials.

Last year the Home Office department tasked with dealing with the EDL was clearly out of its depth with reference to producing evidence of the EDL's criminal links, including in the drugs scene in the UK and with like-minded extremists abroad, including the Norwegian mass killer Anders Breivik.

Dozens of EDL activists have appeared in court and been convicted and sentenced or are currently awaiting trial or sentence.

The cost to the Treasury of policing EDL marches and even static demonstrations now stands at well over £10 million. The cost to community relations and the losses to businesses as a result of disruption caused by the EDL have not been quantified.

Yet the response of Adrian Tudway, the police National Coordinator for Domestic Extremism, to the EDL's activities was to state that the EDL was not an extremist organisation and that Muslims should open 'a line of dialogue' with the organisation. As one Muslim observer put it, that would be like asking Jews to sit down with Hitler.

A root and branch shake-up of the way the criminal justice system tackles the EDL is well overdue.

Chronology of the English Defence League

Trevor Preston, University of Northampton

March 2009, Luton

On the 10 March, an organised protest against the homecoming parade of the Royal Anglian Regiment through the streets of Luton by the Al-Muhajiroun Islamic group led to conflict with local and national anti-Islamic groups. The United People of Luton (UPL) was formed, which included members of the March for England (MFE, an anti-Islamic protest group), UK Casuals United (a football hooligan network) and local community members. After contact with another anti-Islamisation street protest group, The United British Alliance (UBA), a United People of Luton's website was established.

4 July 2009, Birmingham and London

EDL attendance: Unknown. Arrests: 2

Birmingham was the location for a protest against alleged 'Islamisation', and was attended by members of United People of Luton and the Welsh Defence League (WDL).

Meanwhile in London, members of UPL, MFE and UBA attended a demonstration at Wood Green mosque to protest against the alleged 'Islamisation' of London. Attendees included Jerry Watson and Richard Price who both became founder members of the English Defence League.

8 August 2009, Birmingham

EDL attendance: Unknown. Arrests: 35

A large protest was held by members of the English and Welsh Defence Leagues, backed up by football hooligan elements, and some neo-Nazis. A counter-protest was also organised by the Unite Against Fascism (UAF) group. Violent clashes broke out after the two groups met and police were forced to intervene. Claims that social networking sites had been used to organise the right wing protest were becoming more evident.¹

¹ www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1205263/Police-arrest-31-demonstration-Islamic-fundamentalism.html#ixzz1V60M95jV (8th August 2009).

5 September 2009, Birmingham

EDL attendance: Unknown. Arrests: 45 EDL and 45 anti-EDL protestors²

English Defence League and other right wing supporters held a demonstration in Birmingham city centre, protesting against Socialist and Islamic supporters. Violent clashes broke out and the police were forced to use riot units to disperse the protestors. West Midlands Police indicated that the EDL appeared to be aiming for violence from the outset. Socialist protesters responded with violent attacks against EDL.³

13 September 2009, London

EDL attendance: Unknown. Arrests: 0

English Defence League organised and attended counter demonstration in London against pro-Palestinian groups holding an annual Al-Quds day march. Protests passed without violence and no arrests were made.

10 October 2009, Manchester

EDL attendance: 700 approx. Arrests: 48

Around 700 English Defence League supporters demonstrated against alleged 'Islamisation', and were met by around 1,400 Unite Against Fascism counter-protesters. Violent clashes soon broke out and riot police were forced to intervene and separate groups⁴. Police costs for 500 officers, dog units and communications for dealing with the protest was estimated at £200,000.⁵

31 October 2009, Leeds

EDL attendance: 900. Arrests: 9

Demonstration in Leeds was countered by around 1,500 Unite Against Fascism supporters, who held a protest 300 meters away from the main demonstration. Nine arrests were made in connection with the protest, with offences ranging from public disorder, to affray and conspiracy to commit affray, to drunk and disorderly. The policing operation was hailed a major success.⁶

5 December 2009, Nottingham

EDL attendance: 500. Arrests: 11⁷

The English Defence League attended a homecoming parade for the Mercia Regiment in Nottingham. Following the parade, members of the EDL traded slogans with a counter demonstration

² www.birminghammail.net/news/2009/09/07.

³ www.sundaymercury.net/news/midlands-news/2009/09/06/english-defence-league-and-socialist-protesters-in-violent-rampage-through-birmingham-streets-66331-24616522/.

⁴ www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/manchester/8300431.stm.

⁵ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/manchester/8303150.stm>.

⁶ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/west_yorkshire/8336469.stm

⁷ 'Arrests at English Defence League (EDL) Demonstrations', www.homeoffice.gov.uk/about-us/freedom-of-information/released-information (14th Feb 2011).

by Unite Against Fascism and some Asian students. Police were forced to prevent the EDL from clashing with the UAF and the EDL, who responded by attacking the police lines. Some 700 police officers, including many drafted in from neighbouring counties, were used to maintain order.⁸

23 January 2010, Stoke-on-Trent

EDL attendance: 1,500.⁹ Arrests: 23

The English Defence League demonstration attracted 1,500 supporters, the largest so far, and was opposed by a group of 300 UAF supporters in the city centre of Stoke on Trent. Following the planned demonstration, some disguised and facially covered EDL supporters attacked police lines and caused damage to police vehicles – injuring several officers. The EDL blamed ‘agitators’ and other groups for the violence.¹⁰

5 March 2010, London

EDL attendance: 300. Arrests: 50 counter protesters

The English Defence League paraded past the Houses of Parliament in support of visiting Dutch ‘new far right’ politician Geert Wilders, who was visiting the UK to promote his anti-Islam film. The EDL march was opposed by approximately 100 UAF supporters. All of the arrests made by the police were counter demonstrators.¹¹

20 March 2010, Bolton

EDL attendance: 2,000. Arrests: 74, 9 of which were linked to the EDL¹²

Approximately 2,000 English Defence League supporters clashed with over 1,500 UAF members at an organised EDL demonstration in Bolton city centre. The majority of arrests were UAF members who were allegedly frustrated at the EDL being granted permission to march and receive police protection.¹³ City centre businesses were affected and the protest caused major disruption throughout the day.¹⁴ Police costs were estimated at £300,000.

3 April 2010, Dudley

EDL attendance: 2,000. Arrests: 12

Approximately 2,000 members of the English Defence League descended on Dudley town centre in the West Midlands to demonstrate against plans

for a new mosque. Some of the protesters broke out of a pen in a car park, breaking down metal fences and throwing the metal brackets at officers, who were armed with riot shields and batons. Members of the demonstration started fighting their own stewards, who were trying to calm them down as they attacked the fences penning them in. The UAF had held a static protest in the town earlier that day, but were unable to be seen by the EDL contingent, and therefore were unable to clash with the EDL. Police costs estimated at £150,000.¹⁵

1 May 2010, Aylesbury

EDL attendance: 800. Arrests: 8

English Defence League carry out a demonstration in Aylesbury town centre, but trouble started when the demonstration ended and EDL supporters are shepherded out of the area. Cans, bottles and stones are thrown at police. Riot police were forced to intervene. 75 UAF members were present at the demonstration but left before the violence began. The eight arrests were primarily for suspicion of carrying an offensive weapon.¹⁶

29 May 2010, Newcastle

EDL attendance: 2,000. Arrests: 0

Large English Defence League march through Newcastle city centre passed without major incident despite the 1,000 UAF counter-protestors present. A large police presence prevented any trouble.¹⁷

17 July 2010, Dudley

EDL attendance: 500. Arrests: 20¹⁸

English Defence League targeted Dudley once again for demonstration carried out against the council's wishes, and countered by 350 UAF supporters. Dudley council alleged that the EDL appeared to have come with the intention of violent action. Costs for policing were estimated at £150,000.¹⁹

28 August 2010, Bradford

EDL attendance: 700. Arrests: 13

After intervention from the Home Office, the English Defence League were only allowed to hold a ‘static’ demonstration in Bradford. This attracted noticeable attendance from British National Party

⁸ <http://www.artreview.com/video/nottingham-5th-december-2009>.

⁹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/staffordshire/8476873.stm>.

¹⁰ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/staffordshire/8476873.stm>.

¹¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8551220.stm>.

¹² ‘Arrests’, www.homeoffice.gov.uk/about-us/freedom-of-information/released-information (14th Feb 2011).

¹³ <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/breaking-news/ukandireland/74-arrests-in-demo-clash-14733310.html>.

¹⁴ www.menmedia.co.uk/manchestereveningnews/news/s/1201095_74_arrested_in_bolton_edl_rally_protest.

¹⁵ www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1263276/English-Defence-League-protesters-clash-police.html.

¹⁶ www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/7664491/Police-clash-with-anti-Islamist-protesters-in-Buckinghamshire.html.

¹⁷ www.sundaysun.co.uk/news/breaking-news/2010/05/29/no-arrests-at-english-defence-league-newcastle-march-79310-26549428/.

¹⁸ ‘Arrests’, www.homeoffice.gov.uk/about-us/freedom-of-information/released-information.

¹⁹ www.dudleynews.co.uk/news/8278354.EDL_UPDATE__Council_leade_r_condemns_pointless_protests/.

supporters, as well as smaller far right groups. UAF counter demonstration of around 300 members was attacked with missiles. EDL and supporters then proceeded to attack some of the 1,300 on duty police officers. Running battles took place during the day.²⁰ The Hope not Hate campaign organised a series of successful community engagement responses.

11 September 2010, Oldham

EDL attendance: 120. Arrests: 8

English Defence League announced a planned wreath laying in Oldham. Local police were informed of the event. Later in the day, a small group of EDL supporters attacked a police car and minor skirmishes spread throughout Oldham. EDL were accused of using 'flash mob' techniques via new media to cause trouble.²¹

11 September 2010, New York, U.S.A

Steven Yaxley-Lennon and seven English Defence League members arrive in New York to take part in a protest against a mosque at 'Ground Zero' site. Yaxley-Lennon was refused entry to the USA and was sent back to Britain. The other members met up with right wing organisations from around the world and staged a high profile protest.²²

9 October 2010, Leicester

EDL attendance: 1000. Arrests: 13

Leicester City Council banned an English Defence League march, and so the EDL held a 'static' demonstration, opposed by 700 UAF and local community members. The EDL threw missiles and fireworks at police. Violent clashes occurred all over Leicester as the day progressed. One police officer was injured. A huge police operation to monitor and cover the demonstration was estimated at £850,000.²³

25 October 2010, London

EDL attendance: Unknown. Arrests: 0

English Defence League attended a rally supporting hard-line, Jewish, anti-Islamic groups and a visiting US Rabbi.

12 November 2010, Kensington, London

Founder and proclaimed leader of the EDL, 'Tommy Robinson' (Stephen Yaxley-Lennon) was arrested and charged with assaulting a police officer during anti-Islamic protest.

16 November 2010, Peterlee

3 members of EDL were arrested and charged for conspiracy to deface a mosque.²⁴

November 2010, Burnley

Extreme right-wing members of the English Defence League started to declare themselves to be 'Infidels', a sub-group following a more extreme far right ideology than the 'new far right' perspective laid down by the EDL leadership.

27 November 2010, Preston

EDL attendance: 1000. Arrests: 14

A large demonstration by over 1,000 English Defence League supporters was held in Preston. Once again, around 150 UAF supporters opposed the EDL. Some minor scuffles occur, but generally peace was maintained throughout the day.



Supporters at an English Defence League march in Preston, November 2010. (Image courtesy of Garry Cook.)

27 November 2010, Nuneaton

EDL attendance: 500 to 1500. Arrests: 8

English Defence League held a protest in Nuneaton, styled as opposing Shari'ah law being practiced in the area. The UAF opposed the EDL with 150 protestors, and missiles were exchanged between the groups.²⁵ Police were forced to keep the EDL from surging at the protesters, and had to use police dogs and mounted officers in doing so.²⁶

11 December 2010, Peterborough

²⁰ www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/aug/28/english-defence-league-bradford-demonstrations.

²¹ www.oldham-chronicle.co.uk/news-features/8/news-headlines/46908/hate-mobs-terror-reign.

²² www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/sep/12/english-defence-league-mosque-protest.

²³ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-11505724.

²⁴ www.asianimage.co.uk/feeds/9020799.EDL_members_charged_with_criminal_damage/.

²⁵ www.sundaymercury.net/news/midlands-news/2010/11/28/arrests-during-edl-protest-in-warwickshire-66331-27728947/.

²⁶ www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/2010/11/29/missiles-thrown-during-tense-edl-march-in-nuneaton-92746-27735718/.

EDL attendance: 500. Arrests: 5

The biggest policing operation in the history of Peterborough saw 11 men arrested following two protest marches through the city. Around 1,000 officers from 18 forces were drafted in to police the English Defence League march and a Peterborough Trades Union Council counter demonstration on Saturday in an operation that cost £750,000.²⁷

21 December 2010

The English Defence League website was hacked and follower details were leaked onto the internet.

13 January 2011, Toronto, Canada

Steven Yaxley-Lennon broadcasted on Canadian radio, urging the Canadian Jewish Defence League to rise up and combat Islamic extremism.

5 February 2011, Luton

EDL attendance: approx 3,000. Arrests: 0

The EDL held a mass rally and 'homecoming' march through Luton. Invited members from Defence Leagues across Europe and UK divisions also took part. Two smaller counter demonstrations were also held in the town but were kept apart successfully. Massive police presence prevented trouble from breaking out, although some missiles were thrown.²⁸

25 February, 2011

The leadership of the English Defence League distances itself from the group's Jewish Division due to its partnership with the hard-line far right American Jewish Task Force. The head of the EDL's Jewish Division, Roberta Moore had previously announced (16 Feb 2011), that the group was working with the JTF leader Victor Vancier, who had been imprisoned for terrorist offences.

5 March 2011, Rochdale

EDL attendance: 500. Arrests: 31

An English Defence League protest was segregated from UAF counter demonstration by fencing and strong police presence. Much abusive chanting but very minor trouble and most arrests were for drunken behaviour and public disorder offences.²⁹

2 April 2011, Blackburn

EDL attendance: 2000. Arrests: 12

The English Defence League demonstrated in Blackburn and gathered at the Town Hall for speeches. Some violence erupted in the crowd as

Yaxley-Lennon targeted individuals for abuse. Sporadic incidents throughout the day, but they were primarily dealt with by the EDL stewards. The UAF hold a counter demonstration later with incidences of violence between the groups.³⁰ Violent clashed end the day, as the 'Infidel' factions became more high profile to observers.

28 May 2011, Blackpool

EDL attendance: 1500. Arrests: 10

English Defence League demonstration in the name of justice for Charlene Downes passed relatively peacefully and with few incidents. Arrests were made for drunken behaviour, public disorder and offensive weapon incidents. There was a counter demonstration of 75 UAF supporters.³¹

29 June 2011

Roberta Moore, head of the English Defence League Jewish Division declared her decision to leave the EDL due to 'Nazi' elements within the organisation.

9 July 2011 Cambridge

EDL attendance: 300. Arrests: 7

English Defence League attempted to target a Cambridge mosque but a strong police presence prevents further action. Fighting broke out between EDL members in the rallying area. The majority of arrests were for public order offences and one for assaulting a police officer. Over 1,500 UAF protesters held a counter demonstration but were kept apart from the EDL group.³² The day also saw EDL demonstrations in Halifax, Middlesbrough and Plymouth.

16 July 2011, Portsmouth

EDL attendance: 500. Arrests: 7

English Defence League marched through the city whilst some 200 UAF supporters held a counter demonstration. Heavy police presence kept both sides apart despite EDL attempts to disrupt counter protest. Arrests were for public disorder offences and all were EDL members.³³

22 July 2011, Norway

Anders Behring Breivik carried out his terrorist atrocity in Norway. He has previously declared

²⁷www.peterboroughtoday.co.uk/content/site/news/specials/2010/edl-ptuc-marches-dec.html.

²⁸www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/feb/05/edl-stage-protest-luton.

²⁹www.asianimage.co.uk/news/united_kingdom/8892235.31_arrests_at_EDL_protest/.

³⁰www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/blackburn/8950896.12_arrests_in_Blackburn_EDL_protest_and_counter/.

³¹ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-13583525.

³² www.cambridge-news.co.uk/Cambridge/English-Defence-League-march-ends-after-failed-bid-to-target-mosque-09072011.htm.

³³www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/local/easthampshire/seven_arrested_ater_portsmouth_far_right_march_1_2873463.

support for the politics of the English Defence League.³⁴

30 July 2011, London

Steven Yaxley-Lennon appeared on BBC's Newsnight programme in order to deny any formal English Defence League connection to Norway atrocity.

13 August 2011 Telford

EDL attendance: 350. Arrests: 46

350 English Defence League members demonstrated in Telford and were countered by approximately 250 opposing demonstrators. Police reported sporadic small-scale skirmishes throughout the 4-hour demonstration.³⁵



An English Defence League protestor wearing a pig's head mask at the Tower Hamlets demonstration in September 2011. (Image courtesy of David Hoffman.)

3 September 2011, Tower Hamlets, London

EDL attendance: 1,000. Arrests: 60³⁶

English Defence League holds a 'static' protest near Algate Tube Station after a ban is placed on political marches in the area by the Home Secretary. Steven Yaxley-Lennon makes an appearance, breaking his bail condition, and is later arrested. An estimated 1,500 people countered the EDL march.

³⁴ www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jul/25/anders-breivik-edl-political-violence.

³⁵ www.shropshirestar.com/news/2011/08/15/forty-six-arrests-after-edl-protest-in-telford/.

³⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-14778429>.

Glossary

Biological Racism: A form of racial ideology based on the notion that people can be divided into a 'scientific' hierarchy of discrete races, with inferior and superior qualities. Pioneered by Nazism, and based on many now-defunct anthropological ideals, biological racism is rejected by the 'new far right', which now couches an extremist discourse in cultural racist arguments.

Cultural Racism: A form of racial discrimination that claims certain subsections of society hold a set of culturally fixed values that renders it impossible for them to integrate into a national community. The common pattern is for such cultural definitions of exclusion to legitimise more casual racial prejudices against a minority community, such as the Pakistani community.

David Lane's '14 Words': David Lane was a prominent American-based neo-Nazi, and founder member of The Order group, which committed robberies and murder in the mid 1980s. After his prosecution, Lane styled himself as a guru of neo-Nazi thought, and contributed a number of highly influential texts. His '14 Words' slogan drawn from *Mein Kampf* – 'We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White Children' – has become a byword for contemporary neo-Nazism.

Extreme Right-Wing: A form of far-right politics that is inherently dangerous to the wider public. Often extreme right-wing views will be openly developed through variants of neo-Nazism, though high-profile cases such as Anders Behring Breivik show that this is not always the case. The core ideological principles of the British National Party still fall within the extreme right-wing category, despite it having developed a more presentable front stage in recent years. Many experts would still classify the movement's core ideology as fascist. The 'extreme right-wing' often embraces violence in order to develop an ultra-national or racial revolutionary agenda, and ultimately entirely rejects the democratic political process.

Front Stage / Back Stage: All political movements try to develop a clear set of public messages that present their ideas in a considered manner. However, to fully understand a political organisation analysis always needs to penetrate the unguarded back stage. With all far right groups, this penetration

into the back stage is particularly crucial, as there is an inherent tendency for the far right to hide underlying core motives, which may veer into criminality, in a more coded, misleading public language. It would be naive to take the public statements made by a far right movement at face value.

Hope not Hate: An anti-fascist protest organisation that has taken a strong line on the English Defence League, and is strongly linked to *Searchlight* magazine. Led by Nick Lowles, it combines community action with a positive message to develop its campaigns.

Host Organisation: Within social movements such as the English Defence League, there is a significant capacity to offer refuge to more extremist perspectives – even if the leadership does not want to give support to such views. Though the EDL styles itself as opposed to Nazism, it has 'hosted' a wide range of extreme right-wing groups. This has included the Aryan Strike Force, the neo-Nazi Welsh Defence League and the Infidels splinter groups that are developing a more clearly neo-Nazi outlook, as well as other, individual neo-Nazi supporters. The EDL has even developed links with extreme right-wing terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, again showing its ability to 'host' extremist sentiments that its leadership claims are not typical of the movement as a whole.

Islamophobia: Problematic term for describing many forms of anti-Muslim bigotry. Both Islamists and far right activists use the term to deflect attention away from more nuanced discussions on the make-up of Muslim communities. Though care needs to be exercised when developing considered analysis, the term usefully conveys the extreme fear and prejudices developed towards Muslims by the 'new far right'.

Islamism: A system of thought that presents Islam as a political ideology. Islamists assert that Shari'ah law should become state law, and that all Muslims should aspire to the creation of an Islamic state.

Jihadism: The vehicle that Islamists use to develop their political ideology for creating an Islamist state. By politicising the ideal of jihad, Islamists promote violence to achieve their political revolution.

March and Grow: a common far right tactic that develops a series of high profile demonstrations to gain wider publicity. Successful demonstrations both

offer supporters a morale boosting opportunity to express their grievances, and will garner much-needed publicity that helps the movement expand.

Nativism: Linked to 'cultural racism', nativism is a term that highlights cultural forms of racism that regards certain cultural values as inherently alien to a patriotic identity.

Neo-Nazism: Ideology broadly founded on the ideas of Adolf Hitler, and other inter-war Nazis. Since 1945, this potent form of fascism has gravitated around biological racist themes. Key figures who have 'reinvented' Nazism include the British extremist Colin Jordan, the founder of the British National Party, John Tyndall, and the American neo-Nazi terrorist David Lane. Unlike the more populist 'new far right', neo-Nazis tend not to cultivate a large following, and seek to develop a revolutionary, potentially violent politics outside the formal political process.

New Far Right: A more recent form of far right activism that places anti-Muslim sentiment at the core of its extremist politics. Its public messages are broadly compatible with pro-Zionist and pro-LGBT themes, and can even embrace a selective form of multiculturalism. Aside from a core ideology based on scapegoating social problems by developing anti-Muslim messages, it is marked by the following qualities: promotion of populist, ultra-patriotic values; development of an uncompromising critique of the political establishment; a public rejection of links to older far right organisations; and evoking a sense of the present in profound political and social crisis.

Searchlight: A monthly magazine that is notable for being a central source of campaigning and investigative journalism, which seeks to unmask all forms of far right extremism.

Social Movement Organisation (SMO): To give long-term direction, social movements will develop of a central organisation that tries to offer a sense of coordination to the grass-roots networks. By formalising the social movement in a Social Movement Organisation, it develops official posts, a clearer sense of goals and campaigns, and a broad 'party line' for supporters to follow.

Social Movement: a complex organisation that, once established, tends to be coordinated by a Social Movement Organisation, and is held together by a broad ideology (sometimes called an 'issue frame' or

a 'master frame' by academic specialists). All social movements move through a series of lifecycle stages: initial emergence; coalescence and stabilisation; formalisation; and eventual decline. Historically, social movements have sought to achieve progressive ends, such as the Labour Movement, or the Feminist Movement. In recent times, social movements have developed non-materialistic causes, such as the EDL's core themes of promoting an ultra-patriotic identity, opposing Muslims and rallying against the political mainstream.

Populist: not to be confused with popular, populism is a method of framing ideas that tries to make them appeal to a wide audience. Populist ideas will be presented as 'common sense' and will downplay any links to extremism.

The 'Other': A term used to identify any scapegoat figure within extremist ideologies. The cultures of such movements do not seek to understand people deemed as 'other', but rather present them as an inherently threatening and dangerous presence. A sense of self and community identity can be defined through the definition of an 'other'. Within Nazism, Jewish people could be styled in this way, while the new far right seizes on caricatures of Muslim communities to develop a sense of the 'other', in order to define its own patriotic identity.

'Tit-For-Tat' Radicalisation: A reciprocal relationship between two or more extremist groups that actively feed off each other's messages and ideologies. The EDL was formed from an instance of 'tit-for-tat' radicalisation, with local activists in Luton responding to an Islamist demonstration in March 2009. As with the EDL's implication that all Muslims are somehow tainted with the characteristics of Islamist terrorism, often tit-for-tat discourse will present an opponent's extremist qualities as representative of a wider community.

Ultra-Patriotism: an extreme form of patriotism that aggressively excludes sections of the wider community from a selective national identity. Because of its selective attitude towards who can be considered a legitimate part of the national community, especially with regard to faith groups such as Muslims, it is a type of patriotism that tacitly undermines truly liberal democratic values. In its more clearly political forms, it can be termed ultra-nationalism, a core quality of fascist ideology.



About The Radicalism and New Media Research Group

Harnessing expertise in the University of Northampton's School of Social Sciences, the Radicalism and New Media Research Group is an initiative that generates practitioner-focused research projects. Linking academia with the wider world, these partnership activities coalesce around the understudied connection between radical and extremist political movements and their use of new media technologies.

From the English Defence League's use of Facebook for directing activities to Islamist jihadi beheadings filmed for the purposes propaganda and global dissemination, this connection is both striking and increasingly relevant.

There has been, as yet, no coordinated network to systematically undertake research in the crucial connection between new media and new forms of radicalism. In taking on this role, the Radicalism and New Media Research Group invites academic researchers, practitioners and civil servants (particularly the police and others concerned with community cohesion) to compare experiences and develop collaborative enterprises in the analysis of this wide-ranging phenomenon, particularly as it relates to the contemporary UK.

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