

Political Soldiers and the New Man - part one

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Edmund Standing wrote a while ago about a BNP member, Edith Crowther, who had posted a blog comment claiming that: I realised long ago that the BNP is the British equivalent of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, whom I admire and respect and who have great courage. That is why I joined.

There was some bemusement at the idea that a BNP activist could make this claim. However, these ideas are not new on the British far right: in the 1980s Crowther's own party leader, Nick Griffin, was at the heart of an effort to use the Iranian revolution as a model for British nationalism. It is a story about the similarities between different political extremes, and the strange politics that can result from them.

The British far right has always opposed Zionism and Israel as a direct consequence of a basic antisemitism, viewing both as manifestations of organised Jewish power and cruelty. However, this anti-Zionism took an unusual turn at the end of 1983 when a group of young National Front activists unseated the then NF leader Martin Webster and took over the party. This group included Griffin and Andrew Brons (both now MEPs), Derek Holland, Ian Anderson and Patrick Harrington, and was grouped around an NF publication called Nationalism Today and a magazine called Rising. They were strongly influenced by Roberto Fiore (himself now an Italian MEP) and other London-based exiles of the Italian far right group Armed Revolutionary Nuclei (NAR - Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari).

Describing themselves not as British Nationalists - far less neo-Nazis - but as National Revolutionaries, their ideology was a mixture of Strasserism, the rural fascism of Julius Evola and a dose of Lefebvrist Catholic fundamentalism, all of which contributed to what came to be known as a 'Third Position' or 'Third Way', beyond capitalism and communism. This view celebrated a mythical past of racially and culturally pure, agrarian, spiritual societies: the antithesis of the modern Western world, with its materialist decadence and racial and cultural mixing. A vivid strand of antisemitism, which blamed Jews for usury and undermining national sovereignty, was never far from the surface.

Derek Holland, who was the main ideologue within the group, wrote an article for Nationalism Today in January 1984 setting out the "radical roots" of the NF's "radical Nationalist ideology". Citing William Cobbett, John Ruskin, Hilaire Belloc and G.K Chesterton, Holland identified Distributism, which promotes small-scale businesses and land ownership by families and small communities, as the foundation of the NF's social and cultural programme. It did not escape Holland's notice that most of his chosen heroes displayed a strong anti-Jewish animus. He described Cobbett as "a patriot and a racist who deplored the power which was vested in Jewish bankers and money-lenders" - this was intended as a compliment - and highlighted Belloc's support for the Boers against "International Finance...which was predominantly Jewish." In another article marking the fiftieth anniversary of Gregor Strasser's murder on the Night of the Long Knives, Holland combined Holocaust denial with the claim that Hitler was backed by rich Jews to argue that Hitler had betrayed National Socialism "in favour of Capitalists, Jews and reactionary militarists".

The Political Soldiers' doctrine was set out in a short booklet by Holland in 1984, called The Political Soldier, which described a world of "disintegration and decay...the forces of Evil [are] swamping the entire globe in an ocean of Filth, Corruption and Treason". Holland defined the Political Soldiers as men who were inspired by "a spiritual and religious ideal that totally dominated their lives. Nothing came between them and the Ideal. They were willing to sacrifice anything and everything for the victory of their Ideal. If, for some reason, their Cause had been denied to them their lives would have ceased to have meaning, to have any importance whatever. They were fine warriors because a flame burned within, a fire that could only be extinguished when they drew their final, mortal breath." After citing the Spartans, Roman centurions, Christian Crusaders and, more recently, the Romanian Iron Guard as examples of Political Soldiers, Holland wrote:

But Europe does not have a monopoly on Political Soldiers and all peoples and cultures have the potential to produce this type of man, each fitted to his peculiar circumstances. Take for example the Islamic Revolutionary Guards in the Iran of the Mullahs. It is not necessary to agree with any or all of their aims to appreciate and respect their courage. Their belief in their Cause is so strong that they will run through minefields unarmed to attack enemy positions; their ideals are so all consuming that they will drive truck bombs into enemy camps knowing full well that death is inevitable. Whether they are right or wrong is not at issue, but it is clear that this power, this contempt for death, is the stuff of which victories are made. This power drove the Yankee war machine out of the Lebanon - whilst U.S. troops were fighting for job security, a wage packet and a pension, their opponents in the Revolutionary Guards were fighting for an Ideal, an independent Iranian Iran. We must learn that the power of Idealism is beyond calculation.

Holland's admiration for Iran ran deep. In article in Nationalism Today in May 1984, he condemned both the "Western World's Zionist-controlled media" and the "Marxist press" for their criticisms of Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, observing that "not for the first time, we find the reactionary ideologies of Capitalism and Communism standing shoulder to shoulder. What is it", Holland asked, "that has caused these 'class enemies' to unite?"

The answer is found permeating the Ayatollah's speeches: "We will not allow the Superpowers to intervene in the destinies of our country, to intervene in our army, in our culture, or in our economy." The Iranian administration's philosophy is embodied in their slogan: 'Neither East nor West' - it is an affirmation that Iranian cultural identity and national independence will not be submissive to alien power blocs. It is a view of the world which rejects the crass materialism and despiritualization of Yankee imperialism on the one hand and the exploitative brutality and tyranny of Soviet Communism on the other. It is the Iranian National Revolution. [...]

The Iranian Revolution is far from perfect, since Man is far from perfect. The authorities may have used methods of which we would not approve; there are clearly many areas of ideological, historical, cultural and religious disagreement, but are they of such a magnitude that we ought to support armed intervention? [...]

...British national interests overlap far more with Iranian ones than they do with either the USA, the USSR or the Common Market. This is not to minimize areas of fundamental disagreement, but to put them in perspective. Military intervention by reactionary western governments will ... pave the way for the Superpower and Israeli imperialists to re-shackle Iran to the One World slave system... [...]

We have mutual enemies, if somewhat divergent aims. Anti-imperialists and anti-Zionists must stand together. No to Washington! No to Moscow! No to the Warmongers! National Freedom for the enslaved nations of the world!

First in the list of Iranian achievements that Holland listed in his article was "the abolition by law of usury and the expulsion of all Zionist-Jews[©]The importance of eliminating the finance parasites will not be lost on Revolutionary Patriots." He also pointed out that "The contents of the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion have been widely disseminated."

It was not just for ideological sustenance that the Rising group looked favourably on the Middle East. They appear to have been in receipt of funding from the Libyan embassy in London even prior to their 1983 coup; there were strong rumours that Libyan money paid for a four-page supplement to Nationalism Today, called Victory to Palestine!, which was written by Holland. It included articles on "Israel - The Hate State", "Some Jewish Myths About Palestine" and "Why the N.F. Supports the Palestinians". Quoting from anti-Zionist Jews including Alfred Lilienthal and Israel Shahak, Victory to Palestine! Warned:

The war of aggression launched last year by Israel against the Lebanon has caused a major shift in attitude towards the Zionist State amongst many in Europe and the U.S.A. But this in no way reflects any change in the nature of Israel itself. The Zionist State has always been brutal, arrogant and paranoid, and the Palestinian people will never get the justice they deserve whilst the illegal Israeli regime survives.

But if this were true, wouldn't the entire world know of Israel's rabid history and regard Beirut 1982 not as an exception, but as the rule? [...]

The guilty party, the party with the blood of innocents on its hands, is the media, infested as it is with fanatical Zionists or shabbez goyim, grovelling non-Jews, who prefer to propagate pro-Israeli lies for money and prestige, whilst Palestinians languish in indescribable squalor.

In order to hide the truth about Israel the Media Jews maintain an anti-Arab bias day in, day out, using subtle and not so subtle techniques. [...]

Not the least of the weapons used by the Jews to 'justify' the liquidation of the Palestinian people is the "Holocaust" fairy story. This tale has been demolished by Jewish and non-Jewish scientific and historical researchers...The 'Holocaust' is as mythical as Menachim Begin's claim to be humanitarian, but even if every detail of this saga was the Gospel truth, it could not justify the forceable eviction of the Palestinians from their lands, the killing off of its intelligensia and the inhuman persecution that those in the occupied territories have endured at the hands of the Jews. Two wrongs do not make a right and a mythical Jewish Holocaust does not justify a horribly real Arab Holocaust.

"Smash Zionism - Join the N.F.!" ran the strapline at the end of the supplement.

The Libyan connection ended abruptly in April 1984 with the closure of the Libyan embassy in London after the murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher, so the NF looked elsewhere. In August 1984 Searchlight reported that the NF had begun receiving large quantities of glossy literature from the Iranian embassy, including copies of the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion. According to Ray Hill's account in *The Other Face of Terror*, a meeting with the Iranians to discuss future funding plans fell through after Joe Pearce, one of the key NF activists involved in the negotiations, was arrested on unrelated charges. The following year, *Nationalism Today* reproduced an article on 'Islam v Zion' from the Iranian government magazine *Imam*. Antisemitism - presented as anti-Zionism - was a lingua franca for the NF and their new friends. This new line in propaganda did not replace the standard far right themes of Holocaust denial and Jewish conspiracy theory; instead, it weaved these ideas into its explanation of the Middle East conflict and its condemnations of Israel and Zionism.

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