

# The 'obnoxious mobilised minority': homophobia and homophobia in the British National Party, 1982-1999.<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article examines the British National Party's opposition to gay men during the 1980s and 1990s. Drawing on the sociological concept of 'homophobia', it examines written material from BNP publications during those decades, looking specifically at the AIDS crisis, the party's belief in a 'queer conspiracy', and the role which homosexuality played in the decline of the National Front and the birth of the BNP. The first study dedicated to British fascism's anti-gay prejudice, this article argues that the existing scholarship fails to understand the degree and nature of anti-gay sentiment in the BNP, concluding that the party was homophobic from its inception.

**Key words:** fascism, homosexuality, homophobia, homophobia, British National Party, BNP, AIDS.

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<sup>1</sup> The title is taken from the caption of a picture of gay men kissing on a demonstration: 'Obnoxious mobilised minority: Queers 'demonstrate' in London' in *Spearhead*, No. 328 (June 1996), p. 3.

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## Introduction.

'I took a party ten years ago which said that homosexuality should be outlawed, people should be driven underground and persecuted. The British National Party position now is that what people do in the privacy of their own homes is absolutely up to them...'

These were some of the last words spoken by Nick Griffin, then a Member of the European Parliament and leader of the British National Party (BNP) (1999-2014), on the BBC's flagship political programme *Question Time* on 22 October 2009. This, along with the rest of Griffin's speech against 'militant homosexuals', led many commentators to label him and his party homophobic (Czyzowska 2009). However, this statement did not spark the scholarly attention it warranted, which is surprising given the major question it arouses: how did the BNP go from being a party unashamed and unreserved in its opposition to homosexuality to one content for homosexuals to exist in private? This article aims to establish the party's attitude towards gay men under John Tyndall, former leader of the National Front (NF) and the BNP's founding leader (1982-1999), thus serving as a starting point for those seeking to answer this question. In that vein it will examine anti-gay sentiment in the 'early' BNP, from its founding in 1982 to Griffin's election as leader in 1999, at which point a period of 'modernisation' began (Thompson 2004; Copsey 2007; Rhodes 2009).<sup>3</sup>

Not to be confused with the British National Party founded in 1960 by John Bean, a group which went on to merge with several other fascist parties to form the National Front in 1967, the 'modern' BNP with which this article is concerned emerged from the NF.

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<sup>3</sup> One should be cautious of the fact that the far right, especially in times of modernisation, was keen to change its image to the electorate, whilst not necessarily changing its core beliefs or fascist dogma. Cas Mudde has referred to this as 'the front stage of the extreme right parties' (Mudde 2000, 21).

Founded in 1982 by John Tyndall, the party situated itself on the extreme right-wing of British politics. Among its key concerns was a committed opposition to immigration (and the integration of migrant/minority ethnic people with what it saw as 'indigenous white British' communities), feminism, and homosexuality. The party remained belligerently nostalgic towards the British Empire, advocated a policy of compulsory repatriation, and constantly articulated passionate support for the nuclear family as a bastion of national reproduction. Whilst it is true that, following its emergence from the NF, many BNP leaders and members were concerned with distancing themselves from previous fascistic associations, the party remained part of a neo-Nazi ideological tradition (Eatwell and Mudde 2004, 65).

The BNP has received a great deal of scholarly attention over the last few decades, and there now exists a wealth of secondary literature on the party, ranging from broad surveys of its ideology and political activity, to comparative and transnational studies (Copsey 2008; Goodwin 2011; Mammone, Godin and Jenkins 2012; Trilling 2013). Far fewer in number, however, are studies concerning British fascism's explicit and trenchant opposition to homosexuality. Julie V. Gottlieb provides a thoughtful analysis of 'Britain's new fascist men', in a refreshing contribution which successfully seeks to 'gender the history of British fascism' by examining the levels and depictions of male hegemony in the propaganda of early British fascism (Gottlieb 2004, 83). Gottlieb's work provides a framework for understanding the gender history of early British fascism, specifically focussing on the British Union of Fascism (BUF) led by Sir Oswald Mosley (b. 1896 – d. 1980). Specifically, we glean that the BUF held a materialist, physical conception of masculinity, centred on the male body and framed by what Gottlieb terms the 'fascist-Futurist paradigm', i.e. one which married fascism's propensity for seeking examples of the ideal masculine form in the past with its newly discovered penchant for science, technology and

'progress' (Gottlieb 2004, 90). Whilst the BUF operates largely outside the scope of this article, it is worth noting that the Union's gender politics operated within a sexual binary, with male and female bodies existing in political opposition to one another. Fascist new men were recognised as such through their 'healthy male bodies', whilst women, though often depicted as strong defenders of the fascist cause, were confined to 'single-sex gang formation' and often sexualised in propaganda in order to recruit young men (Gottlieb 2004, 91-92). There is a necessary lack of emphasis on the sexuality of fascist new men, but Gottlieb makes it clear that, from its inception, British fascism was inherently concerned with masculinity and the binary relationship between masculinity and femininity. This gendered conception of fascist masculinity has been central to the political and gendered identity of individual fascist men, as well as to ideological fascism itself.

Similar themes emerge in Martin Durham's article 'Gender and the British Union of Fascists' (Durham 1992). By examining how a future fascist Britain was being imagined by, and in the 'interests' of women, Durham's study reveals that early British fascism was indeed engaging in discourses which propagated a sexual binary, though this is not discussed explicitly by the author. There was a place for women in the BUF during the 1930s, yet Mosely was keen to emphasise their roles would 'be different from that of the men: *we want men who are men and women who are women*' (Durham 1992, 515). Though not concerned with sexuality, this article does begin to highlight a nascent fear of forces which might blur these gendered sexual boundaries, as well as a dislike for the individuals who did not embody the ideologically prescribed sexual norms. James Drennan, an early fascist chronicler of the BUF, singled out 'the womanish man' as a particularly urban phenomenon and as an obvious group for the movement to oppose (Durham 1992, 522). Alexander Raven Thompson, editor of the BUF periodical *Action*, believed that democracy

bred 'more sissies than it does Empire builders', echoing Drennan's statements about the effect of liberal democratic modernity on the masculinity of British men (Durham 1992, 523). Though Durham was not interested himself in the dynamics of the sexual binary fostered by this discourse, it is clear that there was one, and that evidence of gendered lines becoming blurred was opposed by the BUF, even thirty years before the Sexual Offences Act 1967 partially legalised homosexuality in Britain.

More attention has been paid to twenty-first century fascism's engagement with sexuality. Matthew J. Goodwin includes an analysis of homophobia in the BNP in his book *New British Fascism*, whilst studies from the University of Oregon and *Expo* have given the issue independent evaluation in a European and North American context (Goodwin 2011; Commerer 2010; Hannus 2012). Most recently, the journal *Patterns of Prejudice* released a special issue in 2015 dealing with 'gender and the populist radical right'. All of these have proved useful and illuminating contributions to our understanding of contemporary far right European and North American parties, yet they do little to aid our understanding of fascism's thinking about gay men during the 1980s and 1990s. The *Patterns of Prejudice* special issue, for example, tracks the tendency of contemporary fascists to defend homosexual rights in order to add to their arsenal of Islamophobic rhetoric. Tjitske Akkerman writes that '[a]lthough radical-right parties may generally not be very much inclined to defend the rights of homosexuals, in some cases they may do so in the context of immigration', whilst the editors point out that post-9/11 far right parties in Europe have argued 'that Islamic values are at odds with liberal democratic values, such as... emancipation of homosexuals and women...' (Akkerman 2015, 43; Spierings, Zaslowe, Mügge and de Lange 2015, 8-9). Attention is starting to be paid to the ways in which far

right parties engage with issues of sexuality, though they remain overwhelmingly confined to the contemporary political scene.

Homosexuality's place within late-twentieth century British fascism was briefly discussed in Nigel Copsey's recent chapter concerning the representation of the British far right in popular culture. Copsey uses the novel *Children of the Sun* by Max Schaefer (2010) to highlight the presence of gay British neo-Nazis within the popular press, as the book 'intersperses narrative text with actual cuttings from far right periodicals and newspaper reports' (Copsey 2015, 115). This is just one of Copsey's contributions to the beginnings of a wider understanding of the British far right's engagement with homosexuality in the post-war period, upon which this article is able to build.

This article seeks to fill the vacuum of historical attention paid to British fascism's interaction with homosexuality. By examining the documents produced by the NF and the BNP from 1981 (the year before the party's founding) and 1999 (the year in which Griffin defeated Tyndall to become party leader), this article will address the themes of anti-gay sentiment prevalent in party discourse and policy. It focuses specifically on the material published by the BNP during this period, namely *Spearhead* and *British Nationalist*, though the former is Tyndall's own publication used for party political purposes. Other sources were consulted during the research process, such as *The Thunderer: The Newsletter of the British National Party Christian Fellowship*. However, this article is overwhelmingly concerned with the two major party publications of the period as, by engaging with the anti-gay rhetoric evident within them, it is possible to begin to discern the prejudicial attitudes being articulated and consumed by BNP writers and readers.

Specifically, it aims to make three central arguments. First, that the BNP emerged from a homohysteria milieu and thus established itself as a homophobic party (the differences between these two terms is discussed below). The party's unique selling point to members in 1982 was that it was opposed to (and supposedly devoid of) gay men – it became *the* anti-homosexuality party of choice for would-be fascist members in the early 1980s. Second, that homophobia and homohysteria operated symbiotically throughout the period, largely due to the party's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Third, that the BNP's anti-gay sentiment manifested itself in positioning gay men within fascism's traditional conspiratorial discourse. The Jewish-Bolshevik-Masonic conspiracy was made to accommodate gay men.

Though the party was vocally opposed to lesbianism in its literature throughout the period, the vast majority of its attention was paid to gay men, stemming from the party's belief that the 'conspiratorial' nature of gay men threatened the British nationalist movement, as well as a perceived biological threat posed by HIV/AIDS. For this reason, the overwhelming majority of what follows will focus on the BNP's opposition to gay men.<sup>4</sup> Fascist writers are varied in their terminology when referencing sexual minorities, with 'gay', 'queer' and 'homosexual' being the most common. In what follows, I refer to both 'homosexuality' and 'gay men'. 'Homosexuality' because often the party uses this (and 'queer') as a 'catch all' term for sexual minorities, including but not limited to gay men. I endeavour to refer to 'gay men' when it is this group specifically being targeted or discussed by the sources.

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<sup>4</sup> Virtually nothing has been written on the BNP's opposition to gay or queer women. For initial primary material on this issue, see 'Labour Fat Cats Stalked by 'equality'' and 'Queers on Top!', *British Nationalist* (August 1993), p. 2 and p. 4 respectively, and Nigel Jackson, the Australian fascist and supporter of the holocaust denier David Irving, 'In Search of Well-being', *Spearhead*, No. 328 (June 1996), pp. 12-13.

## II

### **Homophobia and homophobia.**

Insofar as the BNP's opposition to gay men is mentioned in the secondary literature, two assumptions are made: that it existed as a present, though peripheral force in the minds of the party's leaders and members, and secondly that it can be described as 'homophobia'. This article argues that both of these presuppositions are largely inaccurate and betray the glib indifference with which anti-gay sentiment in the British far right has been treated to date. Even Commerer's laudable work which focuses exclusively on Europe's far right opposition to homosexuality makes the mistake of narrowly discussing the attitude in terms of 'homophobia' (Commerer 2010).

The reason that 'homophobia' is unsatisfactory as a term to describe the attitudes and behaviour of the BNP towards gay men during the period becomes apparent when it is defined alongside 'homophobia'. The common sense (and widely accepted) definition of 'homophobia' is a fear or hatred of homosexuals, and it seems that writers such as Trilling and Goodwin accept this definition in their employment of the word (Trilling 2013, 70; Goodwin 2011, 116). A cursory glance at almost any BNP publication which discusses homosexuality, however, suggests that this term is insufficient given the party's opposition to homosexuality both socially and politically. The BNP was arguing that homosexuality should be outlawed, rather than simply articulating an aversion towards an 'alternative sexuality'. In short, the party demonstrated more than just a general disdain for homosexuals, but rather a desire to see their erasure from Britain.

Homophobia, however, is far more applicable. Coined by the sociologist Eric Anderson, homophobia 'is characterized by the witch-hunt to expose who they



[homosexuals] are. When one adds homophobia, to the social understanding that homosexuality exists in great numbers... we have homohysteria' (Anderson 2012, 86). Anderson points out that homohysteria was at its 'apex' in the 1980s, writing that '[t]he public's awareness that homosexuals looked normal (even if still believing that they were not), and that they lived among us' was most pronounced during that decade, not least because of the outbreak of HIV/AIDS which, during the early 1980s, appeared to be affecting gay men in isolation (Anderson 2012, 86; Berridge 1996, 5-6).

There has been some confusion about the term 'homohysteria'. Two of the leading scholars working on studies of homohysteria set out to clarify it more concretely in 2014, and these definitional efforts serve to lay some of the theoretical foundations of this article (McCormack and Anderson 2014). The authors were keen to emphasise that homohysteria is a sociological measure of the impact of changing levels of homophobia on heterosexual men's gendered behaviour, especially towards each other (McCormack and Anderson 2014, 154-155). When levels of homophobia spiked, and when gay men were obvious *en masse* rather than erased from society because of a homophobic culture, then homohysteria becomes more palpable. In short, 'homophobia conceptualizes the nature and effects of prejudice and discrimination on sexual minorities' whilst 'homohysteria conceptualises the contexts when homophobia effects (or is used to police) heterosexual men's gendered behaviours' (McCormack and Anderson 2014, 153).

It is just such a context that this article addresses. Namely, the homohysterical culture out of which the BNP was born. From its genesis, as we shall see, the party was engaged in what can be seen as a witch-hunt to expose gay members, as well as writing, organising and agitating in opposition to gay men. This, alongside the party's role in the homohysterical

backlash which accompanied the AIDS crisis, clearly marks out a shift in the behaviour and attitudes of the heterosexual men of the British far right, both at the top and the grassroots. As these themes are expanded on below, the homohysteria credentials of the early BNP will become apparent. It will be argued that the BNP emerged from a culture of homohysteria, making homophobia a defining and central feature from its outset, whilst the AIDS crisis ensured that, for the rest of the period, homophobia and homohysteria co-existed in the party's policies and rhetoric.

### III

#### **Anti-gay sentiment in the British far right.**

The BNP was not alone on the far right in harbouring opposition to homosexuality. As will be outlined later, the BNP emerged out of a debate within the NF about the 'problem' of homosexuality, and how best to deal with it. There was, though, an historical pedigree out of which this debate, and indeed the BNP itself, emerged.

It is worth remembering that homosexuals, and gay men in particular, were victims of the Holocaust. Arrests of gay men began in 1933, the year Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, with these numbers increasing following the extension of state powers to persecute homosexuals in June 1935. In all, 100,000 men were arrested in the period leading up to 1945, with between 5,000 and 15,000 ending up in concentration camps (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016). This is significant because a great many post-war British fascists maintained a passionate nostalgia for Nazi Germany. Historians have noted that Hitler was often seen 'as a divine being within a cosmic order', whilst Combat 18's connection to Hitler has been well noted ('1' and '8' referring to Hitler's initials, 'A' being the first letter of the alphabet and 'H' the eighth) (Jackson 2015, 91; Shaffer 2015,

149). BNP sources from the period do not tend to use the Nazis' assault against homosexuality as a form of historical justification, though this early example of fascist opposition to gay men should not be ignored. Whether the 'gay holocaust' should be spoken of as homophobia requires attention elsewhere. For the purposes of this article, it suffices to say that there was a precedent of far right anti-gay sentiment taken to its most violent extreme, one which many BNP members and leaders were aware of.

Before homosexuality was largely decriminalised in Britain in 1967, fascist parties were less concerned with issues of sexuality than those of the later post-war period. A cursory glance at the publications of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) or its leader Sir Oswald Mosley betrays this, with party concerns being much more centred on issues of empire and race (Mosley 1970). This is unsurprising, given the fact that homosexuality's criminalised status necessarily confined gay and lesbian activity to 'underground' cultural spaces, resulting in a blinkered visibility of homosexuals both to contemporaries and to historians of the period (Houlbrook 2005, 19-21).

Absence of evidence, though, is not evidence of absence, and historians of British fascism would be wrong to assume that the writings of early British fascists were not gendered. Indeed, the BUF's 'new man' has significant implications for notions of masculinity within official party dogma. Early British fascism, though gendered, was not overly concerned with questions of sexuality. As the period went on, especially into the 1970s, this began to change. There were, for example, smaller parties on the far right which became especially concerned with opposing homosexuality. The National Democratic Freedom Movement (NDFM), active in Leeds in the mid- to late-1970s, is particularly worthy

of note here, not least because there are anti-fascist activists who initially opposed the NDFM because of the party's intense anti-gay stance.<sup>5</sup>

Though homosexuality was not necessarily the central issue of the NDFM, accounts from former members do emphasise both the revulsion they felt at the perceived homosexuality within the NF, as well as their street-based opposition to gay anti-fascists. In particular, Eddy Morrison, a prominent figure in the British far right having been involved in the NF, New National Front and the BNP before establishing his own short-lived National Action Party, mentions the party's opposition to 'Transsexuals against Nazis', as well as 'a bunch of red weirdos' (Malatesta 2010; Morrison 2013). Of course, this group did not attract the hatred of people like Morrison based solely on their sexualities. Their antifascist politics was always going to be a source of conflict with members of the far right. What is crucial, though, is Morrison's description of the group as 'weirdos' and later as 'filth' (Morrison 2013). It seems that the 'different' genders and sexualities of this group aroused a particular kind of attention in Morrison and others like him in the NDFM, and he singles them out for that reason. In short, the sexual identity of this particular antifascist group generated an additional layer of hatred from the far right groups with which it was already in conflict.

Furthermore, the NDFM's co-founder David Myatt's written work is believed to have influenced the right-wing bomber David Copeland, who targeted the gay district of London, blowing up the Admiral Duncan pub in Soho in April 1999, as well as black and Asian areas in the same year. Following the explosion, a copy of Myatt's *A Practical Guide to Aryan Revolution* was discovered in Copeland's flat, a fact which, though arguably tenuous, does link the leaders of the NDFM to a right-wing terrorist who targeted gay men (Kapiris 2014).

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<sup>5</sup> The NDFM was brought to my attention initially by one such activist, Terri, at the launch of Fred Leplat (ed.) *The Far Right in Europe* (London, 2015) in December 2015 at Housmans Book Shop, London. I am grateful to her for taking the time to enlighten me.

Copeland himself clearly represents a special case of far right hatred for gay men, and one of the most active examples of homophobia. Graeme McLagan and Nick Lowles argue that his attack on the Admiral Duncan, and on gay men especially, was more 'personal' than his other targets, due to frequent assumptions from his family and peers that he might not be heterosexual. 'In denying any homosexual leanings', they write, 'his hatred towards gay men became even more bitter' (McLagan and Lowles 2000, 149-150). Here we see a particularly extreme example of the way in which homophobia can (and does) affect male behaviour. Copeland is useful here in demonstrating that the BNP were not alone during the period in harbouring an extreme hatred for gay men, though it should be noted that he was a member of the party (McLagan and Lowles 2000, 20). This far more extreme example of homophobia, stemming from Copeland's belief that 'homosexuals were degenerates, with no place in society', his desire to 'kill and maim' gay men, as well as to terrify others into heteronormative conformity, ought to be born in mind during discussion of the BNP's homophobic polemic which follows, as one possible result of this particular brand of political rhetoric (McLagan and Lowles 2000, 150).

Finally, the NF's 'homosexuality debate' requires attention. Though this period of internal in-fighting has been well studied, the centrality of homosexuality to the schism often goes unappreciated. Nigel Copsey is one notable exception to this, having identified the link between the 'schism at the "gay" National Front and the birth of the British National Party', though it remains surprising how limited the attention has been to homosexuality as a factor in the history of this dispute (Copsey 2008, 21).

NF publications from the period demonstrate homosexuality's centrality to the party division. Initially latent, as the party leadership appear to have been keen to under-

emphasise its importance for fear of alienating its membership, homosexuality soon became the major piece of political capital in use between rival factions in the NF. Andrew Fountaine, a founding member of the NF, became a prominent critic of the party elite and led a faction in leaving the party after failing in his bid to challenge Tyndall for the NF leadership, citing endemic homosexuality within the party elite and the 'symbiotic' relationship between Tyndall and Martin Webster, National Activities Organiser for the NF and himself a gay man, as his primary motivation (Copsey 2008, 21). This is perhaps most clear in John Tyndall's discussion of homosexuality in *Spearhead*. In the December 1979 edition, one which was keen to emphasise the party's unity and to foster the notion that the schism had ended, Tyndall was asked in a printed interview whether allegations made by Fountaine 'that he attempted to bring certain matters of members' misconduct, including matters of a homosexual nature, to the attention of the Directorate and that [Tyndall] would not allow this' were true. Tyndall dismissed the claims as nonsense, though he claimed that Fountaine was interested in the issue 'as one to be exploited so as to **cause** embarrassment to the party'. In the next edition (January 1980), however, Tyndall resigned from the National Front, offering a whole-page explanation in which he clarified:

'As I predicted to the Directorate, its failure to remove the taint of homosexuality from the party's leadership has caused widespread defections from the party, particularly in the West Midlands.'

Clearly, then, whether it was suppressed or highlighted, homosexuality was the major 'political football' of the internal debate, largely capitalised on by Fountaine and his fellow defectors. The gay men at the top of the Directorate, largely assumed to be led by (or

exclusively) Webster, were discussed in a wholly pejorative discourse and positioned as the 'enemy' within this Manichean narrative.

In his analysis of the schism, Copsey notes the fact that homosexuality within the NF was used by Tyndall (amongst others) for the purposes of political point scoring, but maintains that the split can be more aptly attributed to the dispute between Tyndall and the NF Directorate, the former having resigned following the Directorate blocking multiple attempts to vest 'dictatorial powers' in himself. The New National Front, he argues, was essentially Tyndall's 'pressure group for wresting control from the NF Directorate', and as a result 'remained committed to the political ideas of the original NF... [whilst offering] an alternative leadership to disaffected Front members' (Copsey 2008, 23). Of course, Copsey is right to emphasise the point that homosexuality was not the only issue at play during the schism, and that the power rivalry between Tyndall and the Directorate could more aptly be described as 'the reason' for the NF's split. However, the fact that opposition to homosexuality was used as the political tool of those leaving the NF (from Fountaine in November 1979 to Tyndall in January 1980) cannot be overlooked. Even if homosexuality was not the overwhelming reason for Fountaine's exit, the fact that he broadcasted it in such terms set the tone of future discussions of the movement's direction. Party publications from the period consistently discussed the schism in these anti-gay terms, both in leading articles and members' contributions (*Spearhead* Feb 1982, 7; *Spearhead* May 1982, 6). Thus, though the NNF and later the BNP may have nominally subscribed to the same political project as the NF, the schism which marked the split between them ushered in a new culture of anti-gay sentiment. The BNP inherited the homophobic culture of the NF (Copsey 2008, 22), but was established during a period of intense opposition to gay men, and one in which they were being actively sought out and removed.

With this in mind, it is fair to say that the BNP was established within a culture of homophobia. The British far right at the time was concerned with the reality of the presence of gay men within its midst and were organising new political organisations which would exclude them. Take, for example, Eddy Morrison's article for *Spearhead* in February 1982 'Time for a Name Change' in which he writes '[l]et's face it, members of the New National Front – Webster's NF, with all its stigmas of homosexuality and punk nationalism is not going to pack up and go home!' (Morrison 1982, 7). Indeed, in the edition of *Spearhead* published in March 1982, a month before the BNP was founded, one commentator described the NF leadership as 'that preposterous collection of clowns, babies, queers and crypto-marxists', once again placing homosexuality at the centre of the schism between the NF and the BNP, though as this quote suggests, homosexuality within the NF was not the only reason for the split. The conclusion of these articles and many like them from the time was that homosexuality within the NF had been too widely reported in the mass media and was too embedded in the party elites for the NF to ever 'recover'. A new party was needed, one which would not tolerate homosexuality.

The BNP, therefore, came into being both during and because of the far right's homophobic culture, and could justly be described as a homophobic party. If we revisit Anderson's definition from *Inclusive Masculinity* this seems much clearer:

'fundamental to the creation of a culture of homophobia is the necessity of public awareness that reasonable and 'normal' people could also be gay. [...] When one adds homophobia to the social understanding that homosexuality exists in great numbers, and that it is not easily identifiable... we have a culture of homophobia' (Anderson 2012, 86).



The BNP became a political necessity for people like Morrison and other members because of the recognition that homosexuality existed within the existing hierarchies of the British far right and the desire not to coexist with them. What follows will discuss the ways in which homophobia and homohysteria operated symbiotically within BNP discourse and policy orientation during the period. The point remains, however, that the party was born out of a homohysterical culture, and that homohysteria was therefore at the heart of the party at the moment of its founding.

It is crucial to note, moreover, that this was not only an issue for the BNP at the moment of its founding, but was continuously central to the party's rhetoric for the entirety of the period. Before he became leader of the party, Nick Griffin had contributed to many BNP publications, and in one notable *Spearhead* article from June 1999, wrote about David Copeland and the nail bombs he had planted across London. Concerning the bomb placed in the Admiral Duncan gay pub in Soho, Griffin wrote that '[t]he TV footage of dozens of 'gay' demonstrators flaunting their perversion in front of the world's journalists showed just why so many ordinary people find those creatures so repulsive'. Much can be extrapolated here, from Griffin's dehumanising of gay men by describing them as 'creatures', to his positioning of homosexuals as a group separate from 'ordinary people'. What is of immediate importance, though, is that the anti-gay polemic represents an escalation from the 1982 discourse. Rather than arguing for political organisations devoid of gay men, Griffin was revelling in the fact that a far right bomber had succeeded in killing several homosexuals. Removing gay men from far right political parties had been the primary objective in 1982; the homohysterical scope seems to be broader and more insidious at the end of the period. Indeed, a special April 1994 issue of *British Nationalist* in preparation for the local elections in May listed as its penultimate election promise:

‘OUTLAW HOMOSEXUALITY: The BNP believes that homosexuality should be outlawed, to prevent the further spread of AIDS, and to protect our young people from corruption.’

This is quite clearly the language of homohysteria, and can be situated comfortably in the party’s discourse on homosexuality.

When the BNP was founded, the polemic against gay men was specific to those within its own ranks and looked towards an internal purge. The language evident in publications from 1994 and towards the end of Tyndall’s tenure, however, speaks of proscribing homosexuality nationally. Interestingly, there is one article in *Spearhead* from the period (June 1996) which does not call for express outlawing of homosexuality, though the Australian author does recommend that it ‘should be firmly, though compassionately, discouraged in society’ (Jackson 1996). With this in mind, it is not without grounding to define the polemic of the BNP as homohysterical, given that it was this language which founded the party and which remained consistent throughout the period.

#### IV

##### **HIV/AIDS and the BNP.**

When attempting to understand the AIDS crisis and the BNP, 1982 is a seminal year. Firstly, as we have seen, the BNP formed in 1982 and was actively seeking out gay members in something of a purge after splitting with the NF and identifying themselves in opposition to the NF’s ‘gay’ image. Yet 1982 was also the year in which cases of HIV/AIDS were first identified in the UK. The leading historian of the British AIDS crisis, Virginia Berridge, writes

that, thanks to the crisis, '[g]ay men were more publicly visible, their sexuality more discussed and accepted than ever before' (Berridge 1996, 56). Of course, Berridge is not concerned with the far right here, and though her assertion that gay men became more accepted during the epidemic is contentious, the point that gay men became increasingly obvious (if not ubiquitous) is vital in understanding the climate of popular homophobia which fostered the BNP's attitudes towards them.

BNP literature from the period consistently conflated male homosexuality and the AIDS virus, a trait by no means exclusive to the BNP but one which it in particular capitalised on. Indeed, there was an explicit polemic of homophobia present in BNP publications throughout the period which drew heavily on the AIDS epidemic. Writing retrospectively in his autobiography, John Tyndall described the 'effeminate looking men' he encountered in London in 1954 as 'the advance guard of the 'gay' plague that was later to sweep through society like a poisonous virus', clearly referencing the virus in this polemic against gay men (Tyndall 1998, 42). Indeed, once this 'plague' became apparent to the party, as it did to Britons in general in 1984-1985, the BNP placed AIDS at the heart of its homophobic discourse (Berridge 1996, 56). The party began anchoring its commitment to 'outlawing' homosexuality to a belief that the logical conclusion of such a policy would be the 'wiping out of AIDS', and printed this as official policy every month in *British Nationalist*, a trend which was only curtailed with the advent of Griffin's modernisation process. Even when lamenting the state of the education system, party authors included homophobic arguments prejudiced on a conflation of gay men as necessarily being HIV/AIDS carriers. 'Now the Labour Government is making it legal again for education authorities to promote and encourage homosexuality', wrote Carol Garland, a BNP lay member, in a *Spearhead* article in December 1999, 'not seeming to understand that the best possible protection

against AIDS is not to indulge in it'. Here, as with other examples, Garland is writing under the assumption that gay sex necessarily leads to AIDS, a belief which was central both to her thinking and the homohysterical attitudes of the BNP more widely.

For much of the period it was possible for supporters to purchase stickers from the party which read '[p]rotect us from AIDS: Outlaw homosexuality!' (see Plate 1). Party material such as this suggests that the BNP was involved in an active campaign against homosexuality. Though not as active as 'gay bashing', a tactic which had been favoured by the NF (Kelly 2013), the process of displaying such a sticker was by no means passive. It required its user to make a public declaration that they were both against homosexuality being tolerated (agreeing that it ought to be 'outlawed') and that they believed male homosexuality to be the cause of the AIDS virus. [Insert Plate 1 here. Title 'BNP Sticker, dating from the 1990s. Source: The *Hope Not Hate* private archive']. Of course, the sticker alone is not reflective of when and by whom it was displayed, the data for which would be virtually impossible to accrue. However, it permits historians of the BNP to determine that the party was campaigning actively against gay men, that the party leadership was aiming to disseminate homohysterical material to grass-roots activists (potentially because of demand, though this is unclear), and that the outlawing of homosexuality, specifically male homosexuality, was a central tenant of the BNP agenda 1982-1999, primarily because of the AIDS crisis.<sup>6</sup>

Much of the language employed around the issue of homosexuality in BNP publications from the period can be read as implicitly linking gay men with the spread of AIDS. Articles were consistently published describing homosexuals as 'destructive' and

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<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Mr Joe Mulhall (RHUL and *Hope Not Hate*) for sourcing these stickers for me. The interpretation of the source is my own.

‘threatening’, with ‘ordinary’ people posited as in need of protection from this group. Many of these referenced AIDS explicitly, but we can clearly see the virus’ influence on the authors who do not anchor their argument in it. In May 1994 Linda Miller, a BNP organiser based in London, wrote in *Spearhead of homosexuality*: ‘today it is one of the most sinister and destructive forces in society’, going on to suggest that homosexuals were ‘more likely to wage psychological warfare against the family and heterosexual society’. Clearly, Miller was not concerning herself with a discussion of the AIDS crisis, but she buys into the language and view of gay men as posing a biological threat to nuclear white ‘indigenously British’ families. Indeed, she goes on to compare heterosexual and homosexual men with red and grey squirrels in Britain, making her belief in a biotic danger emanating from the gay community palpable. Homohysteria from the period which did not explicitly reference AIDS, then, was clearly influenced by the discourse of homohysteria which did associate gay men with AIDS, suggesting just how pervasive this conflation was in party discourse.

As a case study of party attitudes towards gay men, the AIDS crisis is useful in demonstrating the ways in which homophobia and homohysteria functioned symbiotically during the period. As has been argued above, the BNP emerged in a culture of homohysteria, but this did not necessarily mark it out as a homohysterical party by default. With gay men seemingly erased from party ranks, the BNP could have become a quietly homophobic party; one which was not supportive of homosexuality or gay rights but not one involved in active anti-gay politics. The advent of AIDS in Britain, though, ensured that the BNP was a homohysterical party throughout Tyndall’s premiership. Anderson has argued that HIV/AIDS ushered in a heightened wave of homohysteria as it meant that the ‘ubiquitous presence of gay men could no longer be denied’, as well as pathologising gay men as a biological threat (Anderson 2012, 87). This seems to have been the case in the

BNP. Homophobia was an underlying current in the BNP since its founding as the anti-gay far right party, yet the AIDS crisis meant that homophobia operated alongside homophobia throughout the period.

## V

### The 'Queer Plot'.

These two examples (the origins of the party and HIV/AIDS) are vistas into the homophobia of the BNP, but they should not be viewed in isolation. Homophobia was not just a factor of the BNP during its genesis or in reference to the AIDS crisis, but was instead a consistent train of thought throughout the period. This becomes most clear when one realises that the BNP viewed homosexuals as a conspiratorial people, placing them alongside Jews, Masons and communists who are the traditional groups believed to be working against nationalists and/or the state by fascist groups, usually termed the 'Jewish-Masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy'. In one notable *Spearhead* article in May 1994, Linda Miller made the case for viewing gay men in the same light as the party's traditional conspiratorial 'enemies'. In it, she argued that a parallel existed between gay men and Masons, both being a 'society, which excludes women, and which has some odd rituals of the kind that only certain types of men would find particularly appealing'. A tenuous link, perhaps, but the connection is one with particular resonance in BNP thought. Miller goes so far as to compare gay men with Jews, a traditional enemy of the 'old' BNP and their Mosley-led predecessors, arguing that homosexuals were infiltrating powerful Zionist groups, whilst the Zionists thereafter blackmailed gay men into adhering to their global programme for fear of being 'outed'. The 'queer plot', therefore, is aptly named, as BNP writers placed gay men at the heart of fascism's traditionally conceived conspiratorial network.

Another explicit link drawn between homosexuals and a conspiratorial 'underground' movement was made by Ellen Strachan, described by Anti-Fascist Action in 1997 as the BNP's 'in-house "trained psychologist"' (*Fighting Talk* March 1997, 16). In September 1996, Strachan argued in *Spearhead* that gay men tended to be 'free market internationalists' (an obvious enemy of the British nationalist movement, especially one with its roots in National Socialism) because of their 'strong group loyalty and high disposable income'. Though not as trenchant in her homohysterical rhetoric as Miller, Strachan clearly believed that gay men were involved in a conspiratorial agenda which was mobilising against nationalism in a manner particular to homosexuals. This article was so well received by the BNP that John Tyndall gave it outright endorsement in an article written for the same edition of *Spearhead* on the subject of 'authority's collapse', alluding to both the omnipresence and legitimacy of this idea within the party.

Moreover, as with many homophobes, the BNP saw gay men as paedophiles. The aforementioned 1994 election promise that '[t]he BNP believes that homosexuality should be outlawed, to prevent the further spread of AIDS and to protect our young people from corruption' is relevant here also. This quote is one of many which suggest that much of the BNP's homohysteria was grounded in a belief that gay men were predatory and paedophilic. Indeed, this election promise was juxtaposed with a caricatured election promise of the 'main parties': '[t]he Lib/Lab/Con parties have legalized queer sex at 18, and are now pressing for it to be practised by 16-year-olds', and later in the same April 1994 edition of *British Nationalist*:

'[i]t is no coincidence that many Lib/Lab/Con politicians are campaigning for sex with sixteen-year-old boys. Many are queers themselves! The Establishment is riddled

with queers and paedophiles who would love to indulge their filthy practices with our children’.

Quite clearly, the polemic of homophobia here is one which attempted to establish a link between gay men and paedophilia, paedophilic homosexuality and the main parties and gay men as a direct and impending threat to the children of British families, furthering the assertion of gay men as a threatening ‘other’ or outsider group.

Throughout the period gay men were viewed by the BNP as an enemy in a number of ways. The biological example has already been discussed in reference to HIV/AIDS, yet party authors were notably concerned about the political threat they believed gay men posed to their movement. In her May 1994 *Spearhead* article, Miller concluded that ‘[w]hen the BNP achieves victory, we must remember that the queers will always be a fifth column. They must be found out and removed from any position of influence.’ This extreme passage situates gay men (to whom the word ‘queer’ invariably refers throughout the literature) in direct political opposition to the BNP. Indeed, description of them as a ‘fifth column’ conjures imagery of an ‘enemy within’ during wartime, a point with stark connections to the BNP’s conception of gay men as a threat to both themselves and to the nation, but also to the way in which the AIDS virus attacks the body. It is uncertain whether Miller was aware of this connection, as her article does not appear to be reflective of the nuanced authorship that such a subtle comparison would require. However, as we have seen, other BNP authors certainly do make the connection, often unwittingly. Gay men were not only being written about by BNP authors as part of the Jewish-Bolshevik-Masonic conspiracy during the period, but also as an organised group threatening British nationalism in particular.



It is clear to see that contributors to BNP publications throughout the period accepted the view of gay men as a minority which existed outside the national 'norm', which goes some way in explaining the small but regular articles which vent a degree of anger that gay men (and, less frequently, lesbians) were receiving 'special treatment' from government. One notable example from the December 1999 *Spearhead* had it that:

'[p]rostrate [sic.] cancer kills 10,000 men a year in Britain, yet just £47,000 annually is spent on researching it. AIDS, on the other hand, kills a mere 400 a year. And how much is available for AIDS research? £18 million!'

What this illustrates, besides the conflation of AIDS as a disease affecting and propagated by gay men (as has been outlined above), is the ubiquitous belief that homosexuals were receiving special treatment over the interests of the heterosexual 'British' populous. Accepting this parallel, the outcry that homosexuals were having more public funds spent on them unnecessarily which is so visible in the BNP literature, places homophobia even more centrally into the BNP's agenda, so much so that it almost exactly mirrors one of the ways in which the party famously bemoaned asylum seekers (Schuster 2003; Kushner 2003; Trilling 2013, 94-99). Though this is less conspiratorial in the orthodox sense of the term, it does point to the BNP's belief that homosexuals were receiving special treatment from the government, a fact which undoubtedly contributed to the paranoia-fuelled sense of the group as an 'obnoxious mobilised minority' which was extracting more than its fair share from local and national government.

## VI

### Conclusion.

This article set out to challenge the pre-existing suppositions present within the literature regarding the British National Party's engagement with gay men. Current scholarship contends that anti-gay attitudes were peripheral and that, where they were present, they could be defined as homophobia. Yet by examining the ways in which the party wrote about gay men, and how it shaped its policies towards them, it is clear that these premises were inaccurate. The BNP itself was born out of a culture which anchored the party in opposition to gay men, opposition which extended to a belief that the group should be nationally proscribed. When AIDS became a major issue in Britain in the mid-1980s, the BNP's polemic against gay men took on a more vitriolic tone; one which adopted a viral discourse and which conflated gay men with the dissemination of the disease. The party also placed gay men within its orthodox conception of the underground anti-nationalist conspiratorial movement, a fact which prompted more homohysterical rhetoric and which offers a new dimension to how the BNP viewed gay men, namely as a dangerous, mobilised minority. In short, a thorough reading of BNP documents 1980-1999 reveals that the party's opposition to gay men was a central and continuous doctrine.

Had it not been for the advent of the AIDS crisis, it is entirely possible that the BNP would have reverted to an NF model of intense homophobia. Yet the backlash which the HIV/AIDS epidemic prompted cemented homohysteria's place in the party's policies and rhetoric for the duration of the period. Homophobia was extant from the outset of the BNP's political life, and the circumstances in which the party had come into being set its early days aside as homohysterical. What the AIDS epidemic and the accompanying backlash ensured was that homophobia and homohysteria operated symbiotically within the BNP. It was not enough to hate gay men, the party made it official policy to erase them.

Both the AIDS crisis and the widespread belief that gay men were organising against the nationalist movement by undermining the NF added weight to the notion that homosexuality was part of the anti-fascist underground conspiracy. This belief, developed by party writers during the period, situated gay men within the Jewish-Masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy, contributing to a mounting belief that gay men were a political enemy to the British nationalist movement. Not only does this add to our understanding of the way BNP prejudice operated against gay men, it also begins to question the rigidity of orthodox fascist discontents. As we increasingly recognise the extent to which modernity has disturbed received wisdoms of all kinds, it is crucial to continue to question the ways in which traditionally conceived prejudices functioned. As this example has shown, gay men can very easily be overlooked, despite their centrality within the BNP's particular world view.

Though not alone in discussing the ways in which gender and sexual minorities have been engaged with by British fascism, this article has begun to fill a sizable lacuna of knowledge. Very little had previously been written about the ways in which British fascism located itself in opposition to homosexuality, nor the ways in which that prejudice operated. By analysing the BNP's anti-gay sentiment and policy in terms of homophobia, this article has sought to challenge the current thinking on fascism's 'homophobia', and to set out some of the ways in which its anti-gay sentiment functioned in reality.

It is hoped that this study of the BNP's homophobia will help to facilitate and stimulate future scholarly endeavours, and that it has, to a certain extent, challenged traditional notions of how the party situated itself in opposition to gay men. The gender history of British fascism has been well served over the last few decades, yet despite a few

brief but trailblazing efforts, its sexuality history has been overlooked. As one of the first studies dedicated solely to examining the ways in which British fascism engaged with homosexuality, it is hoped that others will see the merit in pursuing a sexuality history of fascism, and begin to question the place of homosexuality within their own histories of the far right.

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