When I ask Ray about the likelihood of the conversations he has with young people, he remembers a decisive incident from his days gold mining in South Africa that he likes to tell people: ‘The roof came down on me and I was trapped, several thousand feet underground, and it was a shit experience. I got pulled out by a Zulu boy. He came down at massive risk to himself… And the Yorkshire lad, who I thought was a personal friend of mine, did a runner.’

‘I’m not in any organisation, I don’t have any rules, I just do it off the top of my head, the way it strikes me. I see an in and I jump in.’

Ray gives the impression that his work would be a good deal harder if he was tied to an official programme or organisation. ‘I’m not in any organisation, I don’t have any rules, I just do it off the top of my head, the way it strikes me. I see an in and I jump in.’

His lack of establishment credentials, as he sees it, are a good fit for the disaffection of those he tries to talk to. But I’m keen to get a better idea of what Ray thinks of more formal approaches to countering violent extremism. ‘I have grave doubts about it [CVE], because he’s face it, extremism depends on where you’re standing, some of the terminology is fucking mad. Radicalisation, what you mean like the peasant’s revolt?’ Ray doesn’t think that his kind of background is often represented in official programmes. Although he sees them as ‘well-intentioned and may do some good’, he doubts that those involved could connect with the types of people and places he engages with. So, what drives him on?

‘I’m 77 years old now. I do this purely out of conviction. There’s no financial inducement, I’m as poor as a fucking church mouse, I’m driving a 12 year old car… I just go out and do it because it’s become my raison d’être, you know, it’s why I’m here.’

This is not de-radicalisation or counter messaging as we generally think of it. Ray makes no bones about his lack of government or NGO support. Equally, it is difficult to imagine a narrative as oppositional as Ray’s finding much traction in official circles. Nevertheless, his work is a good illustration of how extremism is being countered outside government and formal CVE programmes. I conclude by asking Ray how his background as an active member of the far-right relates to his motivation to dissuade young people from following the same path. I ask him directly if he is trying to atone. In response he says, ‘I think I’ve done fascism more harm than I ever did it good.’