



The Internal Brakes on Violent Escalation

The British Extreme Right in the 1990s

ANNEX B

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	5
2. INTERNAL BRAKES ON VIOLENCE WITHIN THE BRITISH EXTREME RIGHT	10
2.1 BRAKE 1: STRATEGIC LOGIC.....	10
2.2 BRAKE 2: MORAL LOGIC	13
2.3 BRAKE 3: EGO MAINTENANCE.....	16
2.4 BRAKE 4: OUT-GROUP DEFINITION.....	20
2.5 BRAKE 5: ORGANISATIONAL LOGIC	22
3. REFERENCES.....	25

1. INTRODUCTION

Following its disastrous showing in the 1979 general election, the National Front (NF), the principal engine of anti-immigration agitation during the 1970s, collapsed, imploding amidst personal recrimination and factional struggle. NF chairman, John Tyndall, a hard line national socialist activist demanded autocratic control from the party's National Directorate as the only means of arresting the party's ongoing disintegration. When the National Directorate refused, Tyndall resigned in high dudgeon and in April 1982 founded the British National Party (BNP), a small national socialist organization that styled itself as the last bastion of racial rectitude in a profane and culturally decadent world. Tyndall ruled the BNP as his personal fiefdom in accordance with the strictures of the *führerprinzip*. Following the NF's strategy, the BNP staged numerous provocative marches designed to win both publicity, recruits, and ultimately power, with the aim of replacing democratic government with authoritarian dictatorship. In reality, however, for the majority of the 1980s the BNP was a marginal group, operating more as a 'street gang' than a fully-fledged political party. Tyndall's authority as leader rested, in part at least, upon his political past as a racial revolutionary, his activities during the 1960s earning him convictions for paramilitary activity and firearms offences as well as assaulting a police officer, the latter particularly jarring for him given his subsequent efforts to cultivate a more orthodox 'patriotic' demeanour.

The extreme right was not the only ideological tendency to undergo a political transformation after 1979. Following the collapse of the NF, the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) took the decision to wind-down the Anti-Nazi League (ANL). It also undertook to decommission the 'squads' – cadres of activists whom it had utilized to defend ANL activities from attack. Superfluous to its newly emergent political priorities, the SWP expelled numerous 'squadists' from the party altogether (Renton, 2006, pp. 169-173). Without a political home, many of these, predominantly working class, activists banded together to found a new group in late 1981, Red Action (RA). These activists represented a section of the SWP 'who refused to accept that electoral performance was the only indices by which to measure fascist activity or success, and

who therefore advocated a more proactive response to fascists, most of whom were intent on returning to a strategy of street level rebellion' (Hayes, 2014, p. 230). Initially RA had been content to confront extreme right activists on a 'pragmatic basis'. This changed in June 1984, however, after a contingent of skinheads attacked an open-air concert in Jubilee Gardens organized by the Labour-controlled Greater London Council to protest Conservative cuts and unemployment. Thereafter, RA began developing its own 'mobile combat unit' that moved beyond defending left-wing events and meetings to undertake offensive violence against the extreme right (Hayes, 2014, p. 231).

The following year, on 28 July 1985, RA became one of the core components of Anti-Fascist Action (AFA), a broader alliance of militant and moderate left-wing groups who coalesced around the principal of opposing a resurgent extreme right-wing street movement. Tensions between the "liberal" and "militant" wings of the organization led to the group splitting in 1989. It was relaunched shortly thereafter by several ideologically disparate left-wing and anarchist groups, all unified by a single objective: militant physical and ideological opposition to the extreme right (Hayes, 2014, pp. 237-38).

From 1985 onwards, AFA and the extreme right activists were embroiled in numerous violent encounters at a variety of venues up and down the country for over a decade. Initially, AFA had attacked skinheads associated with the remnants of the NF before moving to target the Blood & Honour nazi music network through a series of violent confrontations at the rendezvous points for its gigs in Hyde Park (May 1989) and at Waterloo Station (September 1992). AFA activists also targeted shops in central London that served as outlets for extreme right-wing merchandise, which further undermined the network's capacity to function.

Despite a repertoire of violence that could include the use of bottles, bats, iron bars, chains, and CS gas, against their opponents, anti-fascist activists and extreme right activists generally demurred from upgrading to guns, though C18 reportedly used firearms to threaten and intimidate internal rivals. Use of knives was a more notable feature of extreme right violence, anti-fascist activists highlighted. The choice of weapons, which helped enshrine the 'normal' and indeed expected parameters of violence, was underpinned both by

INTRODUCTION

ANNEX B. The British extreme right in the 1990s.

moral objections to killing and political calculations as to the level of violence required to close down an extreme right meeting or march, which stopped short of lethality.

These concerns, combined with conceptions of activist risk (i.e., arrest and imprisonment), and the internalization of developments in the legislative and policing environment which severely limited 'casual' opportunities to engage in lethal violence, served to inhibit lethality.

There were outliers where actions exceeded these norms. Persons unknown firebombed the home of Leicestershire BNP organizer John Peacock in 1989.¹ In November 1990, a crude explosive device was sent to an AFA meeting in Whitechapel (Birchall, 2010, p. 209). During 1992 unknown perpetrators committed arson attacks against several left-wing premises in London (i.e., the Morning Star offices in April and May) and the West Midlands (i.e., the Democratic Left in August and the Sandwell Unemployment and Community Resource Centre in November). However, these remained relatively isolated events and did not give rise to sustained campaigns of violence marked by tactical escalation.

For numerous reasons, in the midst of this ongoing pattern of violent interaction, leading BNP organisers began questioning the utility of violence as a strategy for advancing their political aims. In 1990 the BNP had begun to concentrate its limited resources on its nascent 'Rights for Whites' campaign in London's east End – a slogan adopted by the NF in the 1970s but used by the BNP 'to neutralize the Nazi "smear" through local contact and thereby establish the BNP as a legitimate defender of local white residents' (Copsey, 2008, p. 57). The launch of the 'Rights for Whites' campaign dovetailed with a series of promising local election results in Tower Hamlets during the course of that year which culminated, ultimately, with the party winning a local council seat on the Isle of Dogs in September 1993.

Such results engendered a transformation in how the BNP practiced politics. Following an encouraging 20% of the poll in a local by-election in Millwall, and reflecting the evolving reality on the ground, Tyndall

issued a memorandum to party organisers stressing the need for a new (community-orientated) approach that would enable the BNP to distance itself from 'street-gang politics' and 'stake its claim in the serious political arena'. AFA responded to this by focusing increasingly upon countering BNP activities leading to an intensification of violent street conflict. The political progress of the BNP in London's east End also led the SWP to relaunch the ANL whilst another group, the Anti-Racist Alliance, also emerged during this period. AFA perceived that these groups aimed simply to 'protest' rather than 'stop' the extreme right. Its response, argues Copsey, 'was to differentiate itself from this competition by further emphasizing its physical mettle' (Copsey, 2011, p. 128).

AFA's ongoing campaign led the BNP to upgrade its own tactical response to AFA's assault upon the group. In late 1992 the BNP formed its own 'Steward's Group' to protect its meetings and leadership as well as to meet the anti-fascist challenge offensively too. Those who comprised the BNP Stewards' Group soon adopted the name Combat 18 (C18), its numerology signifying their ideological proclivities: 1 = A. 8 = 8. AH = Adolf Hitler. Initially at least C18 was controlled by the BNP through their Chief Steward Derek Beackon, a malleable figure dependent for direction upon the local BNP leadership. C18 quickly began operating autonomously of the BNP, however. Its emergence coincided with a 'crisis of authority' in Tyndall's leadership. Following the 'false dawn' of the BNP electoral victory on the Isle of Dogs – the seat was lost several months later – younger militants in particular, whose hopes had perhaps been raised by the initial victory, became disillusioned with Tyndall's leadership, some rejecting 'politics' as a waste of time. This added to the allure of C18, which was styling itself as a revolutionary vanguard preparing for an inevitable 'race war'.

C18's emergence, and its subsequent history, implies a weakening or undermining of the internal brakes on violent escalation amongst a section of extreme right activists during this period. As the two groups began pulling apart BNP leaders made overtures to C18, hoping to restore their control over the party's wayward progeny. Increasingly, however, local BNP organisers identified C18's violent activities as detrimental to the party's electoral ambitions, and to the party itself,

¹ *Spearhead*, May 1989.

which was beginning to hemorrhage younger activists to C18. Tensions increased as C18 abrogated to itself the right to ‘punish’ several key BNP organisers associated with the party’s increasingly influential ‘modernizing’ faction for a range of perceived transgressions. As the breach widened, C18 refused to protect the BNP from anti-fascist militants e.g., once, when AFA attacked BNP activists, one militant appealed to C18 activists drinking in a nearby pub for help. ‘The BNP can go and fuck themselves,’ came the reply, to laughter. ‘They said that they didn’t need us, well that’s fine by us. Fuck off and tell them that’ (Lowles, 2014, p. 54).

Ultimately, however, C18’s departure from the BNP’s direct political orbit helped the party prioritise its electoral strategy, putting it on the path away from violent street conflict. The BNP organisers’ conference on 29 January 1994 unveiled a new ‘hearts and minds’ strategy based upon local community politicking. This strategic reorientation implicitly recognised that the traditional ‘march and grow’ strategy, predicated upon controlling the streets as a precursor to wielding political power, had not only failed, it had been counterproductive to its political goals. Richard Edmonds, himself recently jailed for violence disorder, counselled activists in the run-up to the local elections that: ‘Now that the BNP was enjoying much higher levels of support, it was important to behave in a responsible and restrained manner, to prove that the BNP was a serious political party worthy of electoral support’². This new direction was publicly unveiled at a press conference in April, announcing there would be ‘no more marches, meetings, punch-ups.’ BNP organizer Tony Lecomber subsequently acknowledged that one of the reasons for abandoning confrontational street politics ‘was because it hindered our political progress, and that was the only thing holding our extreme opponents together... not that such brawls were of the party’s making, but the party invariably got the blame... and it harmed us politically. Which is primarily why the party has left that sorry excuse for politics behind for good.’³

There were dissenting voices with regards to this strategy. Even during the midst of the ‘Rights for Whites’ campaign the party newspaper asserted ‘a party like the BNP must first win power on the streets if it is to achieve power at the ballot box’.⁴ Tyndall himself, whilst recognizing the political expediency of his party’s new approach, was never really convinced that marches and demonstrations were ‘politically counter-productive’.⁵ Future BNP chairman Nick Griffin also lambasted the ‘over-moderation’ of BNP modernisers – whose approach implied a challenge to Tyndall’s authority – and declared that it was more important for the BNP ‘to control the streets of a city than its council chamber’.⁶

Continued clashes between anti-fascists and extreme right militants throughout this period served to obscure the fact that from 1994 onwards the BNP was beginning to de-escalate its violence and to develop a new ostensibly non-violent tactical repertoire. This reflected, in part, a tactical recognition that it could not compete with its opponents on the streets. Indeed, despite efforts by the BNP leadership to pivot away from street confrontation, if anything the violence intensified in the short term since party activities remained the focus for ‘direct action’ anti-fascism. Indeed, AFA continued its unwavering campaign ‘to destroy all semblance of fascist presence in public spaces – pubs, clubs, halls, streets – and to clear fascists out of working class areas’ (Hayes, 2014, p. 238). In April 1994, a parcel bomb sent to the BNP headquarters by persons unknown injured the BNP activist who opened it. That same month its Newnham election candidate lost an eye when AFA attacked him whilst he was out canvassing. The following month anti-fascist activists attacked BNP press officer Michael Newland in his home.⁷ The following summer the BNP head of administration had his home raided by a gang of men who stole three computers.⁸

² *British Nationalist*, March 1994.

³ *Spearhead*, December 1997.

⁴ *British Nationalist*, January 1993.

⁵ *Spearhead*, September 1999.

⁶ *Spearhead*, February 1996.

⁷ *Spearhead*, May 1994 and *Spearhead*, June 1994.

⁸ *Spearhead*, August 1995.

INTRODUCTION

ANNEX B. The British extreme right in the 1990s.

This ongoing campaign of sustained violence against BNP activists had a profound psychological impact upon the extreme right. As one AFA militant observed: 'By the end of 1994 you could really see the difference. AFA turned their perception of the Left from a laughing stock into a serious and somewhat sinister inevitability' (Birchall, 2010, p. 309). The impact of being regularly 'out violence'd' by AFA left an 'indelible mark' (Copsey, 2011, p. 128) and was an important factor in cementing the BNP's decision to remove itself from the arena of violent contestation. This tactical revision also reflected the party's strategic understanding of the political opportunity represented by the 'white backlash' against 'multiculturalism' within 'white working class' enclaves, which it believed it could exploit if only it could successfully reposition itself. Removing itself from the immediate sphere of violent political contestation (i.e., street activity) also deprived anti-fascists of the opportunity for direct action against the BNP. 'This would drain AFA of its lifeblood,' noted historian Nigel Copsey, 'while also denying the "controlled media" the opportunity to hold the BNP responsible for violent disorder' (Copsey, 2011, p. 129).

The decision to recalibrate the party's political priorities and ergo the tactical repertoire employed to realise these goals did not reap immediate dividends, however. The party had already lost its seat in Tower Hamlets and within four years, its electoral support within the borough had slumped (Copsey, 2008, p. 51). This decline was attributable, at least partly, to the ongoing ructions with C18 which drained the party's electoral campaign of momentum, undercutting the political dividend that its strategists had believed would accrue to the party if it absented itself from street violence. During the course of 1994, the escalating violence attributed to C18 certainly served to tarnish the rebranding efforts of its political parent. In December 1994, Gerry Gable, editor of the anti-fascist Searchlight magazine, received a letter bomb. The following month C18 activists firebombed the home of an ANL activist in Gravesend, Kent. Police raids on the homes of several C18 militants that month led them to seize bomb-making manuals, instruction books for snipers, and documents highlighting the group's surveillance of targets including journalists who had worked on a World in Action expose of its activities. It is impossible to know how serious the intentions of this group were but police raids ended the possibility for action.

In seeking to counter C18's influence amongst the BNP rank-and-file, Tyndall had to tread a fine line between his own desire for political legitimacy and alienating those younger militants who provided the party with its physical muscle. Having failed to negotiate the group's return to the fold Tyndall attempted to reassert his authority, and therefore apply a brake on the milieu's drift towards violent escalation, by proscribing C18 in December 1995. In practice, however, Tyndall encountered difficulties enforcing his writ. Many BNP activists simply ignored the prohibition, reflecting a crisis in Tyndall's authority.

After physically demarcating the boundaries between the two groups, Tyndall turned to re-establishing his own authority and the party's hardline ideological reputation. C18's militant example had tarnished both. In doing so, Tyndall again had to tread the tightrope between excusing violence and simultaneously restraining its possibility. The challenge and promise of reconciling these two countervailing tendencies, militancy and moderation, was particularly evident during the 1995 BNP annual rally. Tyndall's guest speaker, invited for his symbolic value, was William Pierce, leader of the National Alliance (NA) the most prominent national socialist group in the United States. Pierce was infamous as the author of *The Turner Diaries*, a fictionalized account of revolutionary race war that had inspired numerous militants on their path to committing acts of racial violence and terrorism. Importantly, however, Tyndall sought to co-opt Pierce's status not his strategies, which he did not believe were applicable in a British context.

Though C18 enjoyed an exaggerated reputation regarding its capabilities, the group's violent 'revolutionary' potential dissipated, reflecting its immersion in other conflicts beyond the purely political. Having sought to build bridges with Loyalist paramilitaries, C18 leaders quickly lost their initial interest in the Northern Irish conflict, activists focusing more on football violence. Several leading C18 figures became consumed by settling scores with anti-racist football fans at Chelsea and, thereafter, with internal rivals who objected to its takeover of the profitable Blood & Honour nazi music network. Increasingly entrained upon its internal rather than external opponents, internal power struggles consumed C18. Indeed, when Will Browning's faction of C18 embarked upon a terrorist campaign, which involved

a Danish activist sending a series of letter bombs to England, several of the devices were sent to internal rivals or racial targets rather than political enemies like AFA. Acrimonious personal, political, and tactical disputes reached their murderous denouement in 1997 when the C18 leader, Charlie Sargent and another activist Martin Cross, killed a fellow member, Chris Castle, a close friend of Sargent's factional rival, Will Browning. Rather than leading to a spiral of violence, however, the 'moral shock' that the murder generated within the milieu served as a brake upon further violence as seasoned activists, disillusioned by the experience, walked away from the endeavor causing it to break-up.

The most obvious example of the internal brakes upon violence appearing to fail occurred two years later. In April 1999 David Copeland, a former BNP member who had drifted out of the party and into the National Socialist Movement (NSM), a group that had evolved from C18, embarked upon a terrorist campaign in central London. For thirteen days, between 17 and 30 April, Copeland conducted a nail bomb campaign against London's black, Asian, and LGBT communities in Brixton, Brick Lane and Soho. His final attack upon the Admiral Duncan pub in Soho killed three people including a pregnant woman and her unborn child. Copeland had hoped that his terrorist campaign would trigger a 'race war' that would propel the BNP to victory.

That Copeland acted alone signals his isolation from some of the broader moral and strategic norms that predominated within the milieu. Though he had been a part of the wider 'movement' Copeland was more of an isolated outlier rather than an integrated insider and was out-of-step with BNP electoral strategy even whilst he perceived his actions to be aiding it. Even those on the movement's militant flank ideologically attuned to Copeland's racist, insurrectionary fantasy made no effort to emulate his violence. In fact, several of its leading ideologues condemned Copeland's violence, albeit for a variety of different moral and tactical reasons than those activists aligned with the BNP. Rather than offering a defiant justification for Copeland's terrorism even the NSM, which had given rhetorical support for the type of action he had undertaken, disbanded shortly after the moment police identified him as a suspect.

Whilst the radical flank of the movement often acted to frustrate the application of internal brakes upon violence that the BNP were attempting to apply in order to advance their political goals through the ballot box, it also had its own direct and indirect mechanisms for limiting violence, which are discussed in greater detail below. Whilst numerous instances of these internal brakes weakening or failing to be applied successfully can be found, ultimately, the BNP was successful in repositioning itself outside of violent street contestation, though in some respects this appears to have been a result of happenstance rather than cold political calculation. After all, the de-escalation and non-escalation of political violence takes place within a broader relational field that is beyond the scope of this case study to address. That said Tyndall's overarching decision to commit the party to an electoral strategy during the early 1990s leading to its 'modernisation' and, ultimately, to the transformation of its fortunes during the 2000s would not otherwise have been possible had party leaders not attempted to negotiate and apply a range of moral, strategic and tactical limits on violent escalation.

2. INTERNAL BRAKES ON VIOLENCE WITHIN THE BRITISH EXTREME RIGHT

2.1 BRAKE 1

Identification of non- or less violent strategies of action as being as or more effective than more violent alternatives.

Brake 1a

Expressions of scepticism about their ability to beat their opponents in a violent struggle, including concerns that greater militancy will increase backlash or repression from opponents or the state towards them and their supporters.

Extreme right testimonies frequently recognize that with regards the planning and implementation of violence, they lacked the capacity to out-violence their opponents on the streets. AFA's 'practised caution' and 'fastidious attention to detail' (Birchall, 2010, p. 277) when it came to planning violent actions application of violence outranked that of the extreme right. 'We didn't have the cunning or precision planning and execution of the red hit-squads, who seemed to emerge from the shadows like magicians with large smiles and iron bars,' remarked former NF activist Matthew Collins (2011, p. 42). 'The worst of the lot, total scum. When you bump into them, you know it's a fight for survival,' was how another activist described Red Action (Searchlight, 1993, p. 21).

Other accounts highlight that at the action planning level they lacked the political discipline to do so. C18 leader Steve Sargent highlighted the role of pub-culture as an inhibiting factor with regards the preparedness and professionalisation of political violence. 'We never had spotters, the Reds did but we didn't,' Sargent remarked.

'We always lagged behind in things like intelligence. The Reds were always better at that sort of thing. More to the point, no-one wanted to be out of the pub. Who wants to stand around on a street corner looking for Reds when you could be beering it up' (Lowles, 2014, p. 17). Such observations about how high levels of alcohol use inhibited their ability to undertake more organized violence have a parallel with Simi and Windisch's observation about how drug and alcohol use among white nationalists in the USA has hindered possible transition from street violence towards mass casualty terrorism (as opposed to the role of alcohol as a facilitator of opportunistic, racist violence) (Simi & Windisch, 2018, pp. 10-11).

Such realistic appraisals of their capabilities were partly informed by the fact that some activists simply did not identify as 'revolutionaries', linking to brake 3. Regarding his own party, the NF, one former activist recalled:

We had a lot of tough talkers, lunatics and hard nuts but we hardly ran large-scale terrorist operations. We took, on the whole, a voyeuristic and occasionally helpful interest in our colleagues' violent terrorism and occasionally the odd idiot got himself caught playing with a gun in his bedroom or back garden, but we were responsible for little more state subversion than perhaps a gang of third division football hooligans. We were criminally inclined pub brawlers and occasional drunken racist attackers, but it was not as if we had organised the Poll Tax riots or London bombing campaigns like some of our opponents on the Left had. Politically, we were little more than a poorly organised pressure valve built around obsessive personality cults. (Collins, 2011, p. 237).

Some NF activists were also aware that the shrinking size of their organization, which diminished as the fortunes of the BNP and C18 increased, reduced their own capacity for increased violent militancy. 'The NF was no longer big enough, strong enough or capable enough to pull off such stunts... Without even the numbers for a punch up the entire day had been a disaster,' noted the same activist following a failed demonstration in Rochdale in 1989 (Collins, 2011, p. 68). This assessment of the group's capabilities led

to a wider recognition that in comparison to the more ideologically militant BNP, the NF lacked even the basic resources ‘to go into areas where some minor tensions existed and use them to their advantage’ (Collins, 2011, p. 95).

The belief that increased militancy will increase the risk of a backlash or repression from the state towards them or their supporters has also served as a powerful inhibitor on the escalation of extreme right violence. Whilst conspiratorial anti-Semitic politics can have a radicalising impact, they could also act as a brake on action; exerting a dampening effect, tactically, because the paranoia they were capable of producing amongst adherents could cause a paralysing effect upon militant action.

This is observable, for instance, in conspiratorial interpretations of Searchlight. The investigative anti-fascist magazine ‘cast a huge shadow over everybody’s confidence,’ noted Collins. ‘Even in meetings attended by very few people there was a suspicion that even among our closet and most trusted comrades one of us was “selling out”’ (Collins, 2011, p. 189). Those activists favouring a militant response against the magazine and its staff remained hesitant for fear that ‘Mossad’ – the Israeli secret service – would institute lethal retaliation against them.⁹ On one occasion when C18 leader Will Browning planned to attack Gerry Gable, the Searchlight’s editor, with a hammer, he ‘didn’t have the opportunity to use it as he was convinced that the two men [Gable’s minders] were carrying weapons of their own.’ Browning’s own paranoia appears to have contributed to his inaction on this occasion (Lowles, 2014, p. 142).

Fear of arrest and incarceration also caused C18 activists to self-censor on occasion. Whilst preparing the third issue of Combat 18, an 88-page racist and anti-Semitic tirade containing bomb-making instructions and a hit list providing readers with the names of left-wing activists Will Browning had written ‘Kill ‘em all’ next to them. ‘The original draft had included the names and addresses of 300 MPs, something Charlie Sargent had removed in a fit of panic’ (Lowles, 2014, p. 121). Similar articulations of risk were evident in the aftermath of a (failed) C18 letter bomb campaign in 1997 when activists were already feeling the

pressure from the authorities. When the C18 leader Will Browning began planning another bombing campaign in 1998, he travelled with another activist to visit Germany to discuss the idea; his fellow activists were ‘unhappy’ with the idea believing that C18 ‘had attracted too much attention for them to get away with it. Much better, they argued, to lie low for now. Though unconvinced, Browning was forced to accept’ (Lowles, 2014, p. 305).

Even within the radical flank, leading activists understood that violence alone would not win the day, not least because groups like C18 and the NSM lacked the capability to enact an enduring violent campaign, at least for the time-being. David Myatt, a leading ‘theoretician’ involved in both groups, recorded,

In article after article, in letter after letter, in discussion after discussion, I warned of the danger and urged people to uphold the values of honour, loyalty and duty. I also urged them to consider that the best way forward was a proper National-Socialist organization and to forget plans and talk of an imminent armed insurrection, for - as I had discovered from practical experience the time was not yet right for such plans: we needed the people first, properly motivated, in their thousands, and we had but dozens. (Myatt, 2013).

Brake 1b

Expressions of concern that violent escalation will undermine support for the group.

The comparative success of the BNP ‘Rights for Whites’ campaign from 1990 onwards fed back into the application of brake 1b at the campaign planning level. BNP ‘modernisers’ were increasingly aware that the party’s reputation for violent activism and racist politicking might be detrimental to its future progress, repelling those East End voters who, they recognized, might be receptive to its anti-immigration platform but not the aura of violence and thuggery that surrounded its activities. Aware that its reputation as a violent street gang put a ceiling upon the level of support it might win at the ballot box the party invested in trying to build what has been called a ‘reputational shield’ (Ivaresflaten,

⁹ Respondent B1, anti-fascist activist expert interview.

INTERNAL BRAKES ON VIOLENCE WITHIN THE BRITISH EXTREME RIGHT

ANNEX B. The British extreme right in the 1990s.

2006) to insulate it against accusations of racism and violence in order to help it reach out to the wider public. To this end the BNP propaganda handbook, *Spreading the Word*, sought to provide activists with the arguments and skills necessary for persuading the public of the righteousness of its cause, linking to brake 5a, which relates to building capabilities that involve non-violence or limited violence.

Brake 1c

Attempts to build or maintain ties with strategically useful allies who are not supportive of violent escalation.

There was only limited evidence of this in the extreme right case study. The NF chairman Ian Anderson – though less so his activists – was keen to build strategically usefully alliances with right-wing conservatives and to do so sought to redefine his party as a more respectable ‘anti-immigration’ party rather than a violent skinhead movement during this period. There is no evidence that this strategy met with any particular success. This aspiration presumably influenced Anderson’s determination to uphold a ‘non-confrontation policy’ so as not to alienate those allies he perceived might find his ‘anti-immigration’ stance appealing but would be repelled by violence. Whilst this served to an extent as a brake upon violent escalation within the NF, the party’s perceived ‘lack of confrontational ambition’ (Collins, 2011, p. 200) displaced a section of its activist base into the movement’s radical flank (i.e., C18), which, by comparison, was uninterested in building links with allies who were less supportive of violent escalation. Both here and with regards the BNP above, the presence of radical flank actors made it difficult to apply brakes because those drawn to violence had an outlet for such actions.

Brake 1d

Identification of political opportunities that favour (re)adoption of non- or less violent strategies of action.

During the 1980s, it seemed that political opportunities for the extreme right were decreasing, as immigration

slid down the list of ‘salient public concerns’. When Margaret Thatcher gained power in 1979, 16% of the populace considered the issue important. When she was re-elected in 1983 this figure had slumped to just 3% and even when John Major was elected in 1992 the figure had only risen to 5% (Goodwin, 2010, p. 42). Following Margaret Thatcher’s re-election in 1983 extreme right ideologue Colin Jordan perceived that the electoral route to power was no longer an option, and began advocating for the adoption of various forms of leaderless resistance or cellular activity. It is worth noting however that whilst such violent stratagems are common intellectual currency on the extreme right, this does not mean that they will automatically be adopted (Dobratz & Waldner, 2012, pp. 49-66). Indeed, having debated Jordan’s strategies, Tyndall agreed that an electoral route to power was closed, but rejected the adoption of violent anti-State militancy, opting instead to invest in developing the movement, sitting things out until political climate became more favourable.¹⁰

The 1990s appeared to herald new political opportunities, however. Locally, in London’s East End, the ‘white backlash’ against ‘multiculturalism’ was beginning to suggest to party strategists that there might be a way forward. The pages of *Spearhead* and *British Nationalist*, the BNP ideological journal and the party’s newspaper respectively, actively identified this as representing a political opportunity. A series of promising by-election results in the area reinforced this belief. The BNP’s victory in the Isle of Dogs in Tower Hamlets in September 1993 enshrined within the party’s leadership cadre the idea that the type of electoral politicking implied by its ‘Rights for Whites’ campaign could reap reward, encouraging them to invest party resources in this direction which led away from rather than towards violence.

The adoption of non-violent strategies was a matter of political possibility rather than morality, however. Tyndall rejected the idea of armed insurgency for numerous reasons not least of which was that it would not succeed in Britain (as he knew from prior experience).¹¹ This did not mean that he rejected violence out of hand. He acknowledged that it could be valid as a tactic within other national contexts. Indeed, when debating the violent strategies of William Pierce,

¹⁰ *Spearhead*, August 1983.

¹¹ <http://www.spearhead.com/0209-ib.html> [Accessed 24 January 2012].

leader of the National Alliance in the United States, Tyndall denied his strategies were applicable to Britain but conceded that ‘were I in Dr. Pierce’s shoes I may well favour doing exactly what he is doing’ (Tyndall, 1994).

Brake 1e

Identification of non- or less violent strategies of actions that are perceived to be effective, including identification of ‘sufficient’ levels of violence beyond which further escalation is deemed unnecessary.

The BNP ‘Rights for Whites’ campaign is a case in point and has been discussed in detail above. Initially considerable violence marked the BNP campaign (i.e., Weavers Field) but as the strategy began to win electoral support and its potential became evident – not least through increased votes and membership enquiries – party activists internalised the need to move away from violence, forcing their political opponents to follow suit since the former arenas for political contestation were being curtailed. Whilst the detail of this strategy is beyond the scope of this case study, its overarching impact contributed to a further de-escalation of violent street conflict.

However, it might also be noted that Derek Beackon’s election in September 1993 only provided the BNP with a model of ‘success’ that acted as a brake on violent escalation within the milieu for a short period of time. When Beackon lost his seat the following year a growing number of activists drifted into C18, which rejected public support as a measure of ‘success’.

Anti-fascists and the extreme right alike also made political calculations, underpinned by moral objections to killing and personal codes of honour as well as the ‘routine’ nature of street fighting itself, that the escalation of violence to greater levels was simply unnecessary when it came to closing down an opponents’ march or meeting. Quite simply this was achievable without resort to lethal methods.

2.2 BRAKE 2

Construction of moral norms and evaluations that inhibit certain forms of violence and the emotional impulses towards violence (e.g., revenge).

Brake 2a

Articulation and performance of general moral norms and principles that problematise certain forms of violence, require violence to be justified or enable activists to forestall on entering the ‘tunnel of violence’ (e.g., the conception of violence as a tactic of last resort; positioning non-retaliation as a virtue; emphasising values such as mercy and compassion).

Moral norms mitigating against the application of greater levels of violence, or the use of a particular form of violence, emerged throughout the case study. Studies of extreme right-wing violence have highlighted that many activists adhered to a broad set of moral ‘norms’ and ‘codes’ that dictated their targets, choice of weapons, and the level of violence that was either warranted and indeed justified. As Simi and Windisch (2018) have highlighted elsewhere, the general moral norms and principles that problematised certain forms of violence are similar to those governing bar room brawling or fighting on football terrace, both of which extreme right activists are familiar with.¹² Memoirs and journalistic accounts of extreme right violence highlight that even the most violent activists functioned in accordance with personal moral codes, however erratic these sometimes were. One NF organizer with a reputation for violence was described as, ‘the sort of bloke who would help an old lady across the road, turn the corner and punch somebody else to the ground’ (Collins, 2011, p. 40). Similarly, one leading C18 activist was observed to possess ‘a rigid, though unconventional, sense of honour’ (Lowles, 2014, p. 51).

These moral injunctions against a certain form of violent escalation or the manner in which it was carried out was evident in reaction of Tony Williams, leader of the National Socialist Movement, to the London nail bomb attacks in April 1999 which were, it transpired, carried out by one of its activists, David Copeland.

¹² Copes, Hochstetler & Forsyth (2003, pp. 761-794) elaborate upon ‘a code of violence as part of a system of order and honor as articulated by a network of White, working-class males in a southern U.S. city who participate in bar fights.’ Their findings suggest ‘the code these men use prohibits predatory violence, puts exclusive limitations on situations that warrant violence, and constrains the level of violence in a fight.’

INTERNAL BRAKES ON VIOLENCE WITHIN THE BRITISH EXTREME RIGHT

ANNEX B. The British extreme right in the 1990s.

Williams, who quickly dissolved his group, intimated that Copeland's terrorist campaign was "un-Aryan" (and hence dishonourable) because of the manner in which Copeland had undertaken his indiscriminate terrorist campaign, embarked upon without warning and with no accompanying list of demands (Lowles & McLagan, 2000, p. 221). Thus, even when brakes fail, the subsequent reaction to their failure feeds back into the moral prohibitions of certain forms of violence (i.e., that an action was wrong) and such events become part of a process through which barriers and boundaries are reasserted to uphold the original prohibition. This links in part to brake 3 and notions of group identity (i.e., 'we don't do things like that') – though if Copeland's victims had been perceived to be 'guilty' then such statements might have been different. Sections of C18 certainly valorised his actions regardless.

Indeed, brake 2a was most clearly observable on occasions where it was breached, during and after violent encounters or attacks which activists perceived to have gone too far, often, though not always, in the heat of the moment (i.e., in the inner circle of analysis). Recording his involvement in football violence one extreme right activist recalled, 'At one point, I was fighting two Millwall blokes when one of our mob stuck a screwdriver into the cheek of one of them. Fuck that; I didn't mind having a punch-up, but this was over the top' (Portinari, 2016, pp. 25-26).

Brake 2b

Identification of some groups of actors as illegitimate targets for violence.

Whilst caution should be exercised regarding the uncritical acceptance of self-justificatory narratives by extreme right activists, which position themselves as moral political actors whilst distancing themselves from racist thuggery, there is nonetheless a category of extreme right actor who, despite their ideologically enshrined racism, did not regard ethnic minorities as legitimate targets for violence in most circumstances. Whilst reviled and dehumanized in equal measure, ideologically, immigrants and ethnic minority communities during the 1990s were regarded by groups like the BNP as the largely unconscious tools of a wider Jewish-controlled plot to undermine the racial fibre of white European nations. In this sense, they were a

second order target. The real enemy were the Jews and the liberal/left establishment.

At the campaign planning level of analysis, this was reflected in the criticisms by national socialist ideologues of David Copeland's 1999 bombing campaign. Colin Jordan for instance objected to the 'wanton barbarity' of Copeland's actions for several reasons. Foremost was his argument that Copeland had targeted an 'innocent' category of people (i.e., the general public) who had limited culpability for the problems he believed to be ranged against race and nation:

Had Copeland directed his attention to some prime culprits of the system of genocide and repression, and focused his punishment on them alone, one could certainly have felt that they had brought it on themselves by their wickedness against our race and nation, and in what amounts to a war waged by them against us had been fairly and properly punished. As it has been with this misdirected mayhem, prime culprits had gone unscathed, and we have been damaged along with Copeland's victims. Altogether a bad business.' (Frost, 2014, p. 311).

This identification of legitimate and illegitimate targets can also be seen within action planning and situational levels. There is evidence that a minority of activists divided their racial and political opponents into different categories, some more deserving of violence than others. BNP activist Tim Hepple recalled witnessing an attack on a mixed race couple unfortunate enough to pass too close to forty BNP activists following an anti-racist demonstration in the area. Whilst this attack 'nearly made me sick on the spot' because it was both 'unnecessary and unprovoked' Hepple displayed no such aversion when recalling a 'vicious beating' doled out to a left-wing activist he and his colleagues caught tearing down BNP posters.

I didn't feel much emotion. It was just another attack in many ways and did not, for me at least, have the connotations or unprovoked qualities of Thomson's attack on the black and white couple I related earlier. It struck me on the way home that night that I had become quite immune to violence, particularly against left-wingers.

I was in no way prepared to attack ethnic minorities for any reason, and all the attacks I got involved in were against brain dead Marxists like the SWP who need to have some tactical sense knocked into them. (Searchlight, 1993, pp. 21).

For other activists the type of left-wing activist targeted for violence also made a difference. Eddie Whicker, an NF activist involved with C18 activities was never 'entirely comfortable' with the level of violence the group employed, despite his own reputation for violence. 'After participating in the attack on left-wing paper sellers on Brick Lane, he threw up down a side alley.' This emotionally and physically visceral reaction to the level of violence used against a target (i.e., left-wing paper sellers rather than AFA militants) who were unable to defend themselves 'went too far' Whicker later told a fellow activist (Lowles, 2014, p. 69).

Within the moral vocabulary of the extreme right, attacks on women were also constructed as beyond the pale since they conflicted with basic paradigms about what constituted manhood and masculinity, though observance of such norms was uneven, to say the least. The impact of breaching this moral 'norm' can be seen clearly in the individual reactions of Matthew Collins who took part in a BNP-organised attack upon a community meeting at Welling Library, south London, in June 1989, which hospitalized seventeen people, the majority women. For Collins, an NF activist who joined the BNP attack, the event was pivotal. 'Afterwards I agreed with [NF organizer Terry] Blackham that we would never mention what happened in Welling Library that night'. 'It physically shook him, which, with hindsight, I find hard to believe. At the time, however, I thought we were both going to be sick immediately after we left the library...' (Collins, 2011, p. 51).

The emotional impact of participating in such an action engendered a complex feedback loop for Collins, affecting his subsequent trajectory as a committed extreme right militant. Participation in the assault caused a deep sense of shame that conflicted with his self-identity (thus linking this brake to brake 3): 'I was a fucking coward to have done such a thing,' he added upon further reflection. 'I began to realise that this was what race wars were about, the innocent attacked and their dignity destroyed. If my mother had known, she

would have disowned me on the spot.' In his case, these feelings did not dissipate. 'Still Welling Library played on my mind... Did we really attack a meeting of women and gleefully report and celebrate it?' Guilt contributed to propelling Collins out of the movement and led him to cooperate with the anti-fascist Searchlight magazine against his former colleagues. Whilst feelings of shame, guilt, and remorse, fed back into Collins subsequent behaviour, the moral brakes that had begun to assert themselves following the Welling Library attack were not applicable to all forms of violent conduct. Writing of one subsequent violent encounter, Collins recalled 'Sure I had days where I was wracked with guilt and self-pity, but this is what I did and this is what I was part of. I know it was wrong, but there really didn't seem to be anything else and my head was buzzing with the thrill of being a pimply politician for one half of my day and part of a vicious gang of thugs the next' (Collins, 2011, pp. 55, 75, 151, 155 and 175-176). The latter comment also highlights how moral brakes on violence are undermined: violence can simply be too exciting to give up, at least in the short term.

Whilst attack planning did not preclude escalating their violent repertoires to encompass arson attacks against their opponents, within the moment of action moral norms often sharply reasserted themselves when it became apparent that their activities might result in the death of someone unconnected to their political grievance. Recalling his involvement on a recce of a building they regarded as a front for Irish Republicanism, one activist noted that until that point no one had contemplated that people might be living above the offices. When they did suddenly saw someone in one of the rooms above the building:

You could have cut the atmosphere with a knife and there was clearly a great deal of unease among everyone. This was definitely not what had been on the agenda and anger had very nearly led to the potential murder of an innocent woman and her family... If nothing else, it gave people time to consider the consequences of what their actions could potentially lead to. Bluntly put, it became a case of: if you're going to do a big lump of bird, you might as well make the targets worthwhile ones. (Portinari, 2016, p. 96).

INTERNAL BRAKES ON VIOLENCE WITHIN THE BRITISH EXTREME RIGHT

ANNEX B. The British extreme right in the 1990s.

In the case of C18, the ‘moral shock’ experienced by members of the core group after the killing of Chris Castle in 1997, which was related in the introduction, was also related to categories of underserving victims of violence. It was not simply fear for their personal well-being that led activists to drift away from the group. They also believed it to be wrong to be killing people in your own group for ostensibly petty personal reasons.

2.3 BRAKE 3

Self-identification as a group that is either non-violent or uses only limited forms of violence.

Brake 3a

Production of group narratives that emphasise non-violence or the limited use of violence either by themselves or by those they claim have inspired their movement.

Extreme right wing groups during this period represented a form of pariah politics, marginalized politically and culturally. Given a historical and ideological lineage that traces, ultimately, to the interwar politics of Nazism and Fascism this case study did not uncover widespread narratives of movement histories that connected them to non-violent movements or movements that advocated limited forms of violence or the use of violence as a last resort. Though it is slightly beyond the time frame of this case study, in the early 2000s BNP ideologues began reinventing their political past, highlighting past political models of electoral ‘success’ to justify their current ‘modernisation’ strategies and to disconnect the party from anti-Semitism, racism and violence. In re-narrating their past they sought not only to bolster their quest for political legitimacy but also discredit figures like Tyndall, by then viewed as an unwelcome encumbrance to further electoral progress (Macklin, 2011, pp. 19-37).

Where movement narratives addressed violence directly it was usually to emphasize it as a defensive rather than offensive act. BNP publications almost uniformly characterized acts of violence involving their activists as ‘self-defence’ or in extremis ‘very rare’ instances of unsurprising ‘retaliation’ during the course of an ‘open war’ which had been declared upon the party by anti-fascists (Tyndall, 1998, pp. 486-87). When convicted

for violent offences, party publications portrayed this as an injustice. Party narratives also undermined the seriousness of certain convictions. Absent, within BNP propaganda, however, were the types of overt narrative glorifying violence that characterize the publications and pronouncements of groups like C18.

Where the BNP did attempt to connect its political narratives with movements who disavowed violence was in the evolution of how it expressed its racial ideology, which moved from biologically racist calls for ‘white power’ to embrace white grievance narratives, influenced by cultural arguments for ethno-plurality. The ‘Rights for Whites’ lexicon for instance drew upon a wider constellation of ideas from within the milieu which sought to position the movement as a white advocacy group, no different from the black civil rights movement with all the implications that this comparison implied with regards non-violence. These narratives would evolve in sophistication over the course of the following decade as the party’s electoral position embedded.

Brake 3b

Disassociation from more violent groups or factions and/or association with less violent groups or factions.

Though the BNP had created C18 it quickly became a political liability from which they sought to disassociate themselves. The negative headlines C18 garnered in the media inevitably served to discredit the BNP given the group’s provenance. The principal tool used to disassociate the BNP from C18 was to officially proscribe the group, indicating to members the party’s rank-and-file that the BNP could no longer tolerate its style of violent activism.

Another way in which the BNP – and other groups – sought to define themselves against C18 was through the medium of conspiratorial politics. Despite or perhaps because of its militancy C18 was characterized as an MI5 ‘honey trap’ operation. By positioning C18 in this way, the BNP sought to marginalize the group and discredit it in the eyes of its own activists who might be seduced by its siren call for militant action. They also shifted the responsibility for the violence carried out in its name away from ‘genuine’ extreme right activists and onto the State.

The same strategy for disassociating themselves from the violence of the movement's radical flank can be seen vis-à-vis the BNP response to David Copeland's terrorist campaign. British Nationalist, the BNP newspaper, posited four theories regarding responsibility for the attacks: a so far unknown 'racist terror group', a loner 'racist or otherwise', Muslim extremists or 'it was the work of the state itself'. For British Nationalist it was the last explanation that fitted the bill since it tallied with its assertion that its' chief political rival, C18, 'was actively sponsored by at least one state agency'. 'Some readers who might have difficulty accepting that "our" security services might do such a thing,' claimed British Nationalist, 'need think on the state involvement of a number of terrorist outrages on the continent and the probable FBI involvement with the Oklahoma bombing in the USA'.¹³ In a similar vein Nick Griffin, the future BNP chairman, claimed it was 'probable' that MI5, working through a 'state-sponsored "pseudo-gang",' had orchestrated the bombings to derail the party's European election campaign and to enable them to introduce repressive laws that could be used against the party, and legitimize an increase in the security service budget.¹⁴ Linking back to brake 1a, such conspiracy theories also functioned as a warning against involvement with overtly militant groups, since they were construed by their less tactically radical opponents as being not what they purported to be.

Disillusionment also led individual C18 activists to begin disassociating from violence, particularly in the aftermath of the killing of Chris Castle, prior to exiting the group altogether. One leading C18 activist involved in the group's letter bomb campaign in 1997 recorded that after being asked to travel to Germany to post more bombs the following year

I began to take stock of my life and realized that my heart wasn't in it any more. I also saw the futility in the right wing and particularly how many of the idiots within it. How can you talk about racial superiority when you have the perverts, Satanists and weirdos that are constantly attracted to the right within your ranks? When you're involved and are totally committed to the conspiracy theories and simplistic way of looking at life, it is

easy to forget just what sort of people are involved. There were some decent ordinary people, family types, but there were also the trash. (Searchlight, 2001).

Brake 3c

(The threat of) sanctions for activists who advocate or undertake violence beyond the established parameters of the group's action repertoire, and/or opportunities to achieve intra-group respect and prestige without undertaking or encouraging the use of violence at or beyond the parameters of the group's action repertoire.

BNP guidance to party recruiters noted that those talking the 'language of violence' were best kept at 'arm's length' since 'the people who perform best in these [violent] situations are those who talk least on the subject' (British National Party, n.d., p. 13). Within the extreme right milieu, respect and prestige, was afforded activists with a proven record of militancy and commitment. BNP leader John Tyndall was a case in point. His authority flowed from his past and present militancy whilst his own personal experience and the 'mistakes' of his past meant that his rejection of the strategy of revolutionary violence as futile carried some weight. Tony Lecomber and Eddy Butler, the key BNP 'modernisers' also had reputations for ideological and physical militancy which lent a certain gravitas to their efforts to recalibrate the party. The BNP victory in the Isle of Dogs victory in 1993 reinforced their standing within the party, though not across the entire movement, indicated by the fact that C18 subsequently targeted both men, both for personal reasons, and wider perceptions of their political moderation.

Despite being able to apply a range of sanctions against those who breached party edicts, there were very few instances of the party leadership sanctioning its activists for transgressing established parameters, particularly where violence was concerned. 'Eddy Butler, who had gone home from the attack on the ANL with his hands and face covered in his victims' blood, was not disciplined by the BNP leadership and was soon afterwards promoted within the BNP to the post of national elections organizer,' recorded one former activist (Searchlight, 1993, p. 36). Indeed

¹³ British Nationalist, May 1999.

¹⁴ Spearhead, June 1999.

INTERNAL BRAKES ON VIOLENCE WITHIN THE BRITISH EXTREME RIGHT

ANNEX B. The British extreme right in the 1990s.

Tyndall dismissed Lecomber's 1985 conviction under the Explosives Act as 'foolish' which he declined to take further action against because the court had already pronounced upon it: 'He has suffered enough'. He similarly refused to accept, publicly at least, that his national organizer, Richard Edmonds, or the other activists convicted with him, were guilty of the act of racial violence for which they were jailed, blaming the actual attack – in which a black man had his face slashed – upon 'fringe' elements unconnected with the party (Tyndall, 1998, pp. 495-496).

In this case study, the relative absence of sanctions for violence beyond the parameters of the action repertoire might also reflect the limited authority of movement leaders over the movement. Even after Tyndall officially proscribed C18, many BNP activists simply used both labels as banners of convenience, operating as 'BNP' or 'C18' depending on the activity in question. 'We won't admit to having anything to do with [C18], but at the same time, if our policies don't work, it's switched over to them. It's basically the same people, but with a violent side to it,' recalled one Scottish BNP activist.¹⁵ Tyndall and his lieutenants were all mindful that many BNP members 'were keen to align themselves with C18 on a street level while some in the leadership remained national socialists at heart.' C18 and its political wing, the National Socialist Alliance, were at their 'peak' during 1995. Tyndall faced the dilemma that if he applied the brake too firmly (i.e., by expelling BNP activists) he would only strengthen C18 thereby weakening his own political position (Lowles, 2014, pp. 149 and 151).

Whilst there were opportunities for achieving prestige and position within the movement without recourse to extreme violence, albeit based upon a past track record of proven militancy, extreme right subcultures continually privileged certain forms of physical masculinity from which individuals derived 'respect' from fellow activists. Such physical authority can serve as a brake or an accelerant on violence depending upon the context, however. Within the NF, Eddy Whicker's reputation meant that fellow militants sought his view when Matthew Collins' loyalty to the NF was suspect as a result of his proximity to certain figures within the BNP. This selfsame reputation also accorded Whicker the respect of C18 who relied upon his judgement

whilst they pondered Collins' fate once they suspected, rightly, that he was an informer. Whilst Collins notes Whicker's role in preventing violence against his person, he was under no illusion that had Whicker known that the accusations against him were true 'the one protector I'd had on the far right was possibly the one who would finally give the go-ahead for C18 to do me in' (Collins, 2011, pp. 62, 289, 293, 295, 296).

Brake 3d

Circulation of limited expectations that they will be involved in greater levels of violence.

In his autobiographical account of life as the NF youth organizer during the early 1980s Joe Pearce recalled the 'endemic' level of street violence which 'seemed to be woven into the very fabric of life for active members of the NF' (Pearce, 2013, pp. 54-55). Recalling the regularity of its practice and the 'flashpoints' at which it would occur, newspaper sales and marches, what can also be inferred from Pearce's account is the generally predictable nature of when and where violence would take place combined with an expectation of what the activists involved could expect and, perhaps more importantly, what not to expect. Prior experience served to inhibit a serious escalation in future violence. When tactical escalations did occur, for instance with C18's formation during 1992, the activists involved, initially at least, remained bound by the same collective understanding of the limits of street violence. In brawling with AFA, C18 militants expected a 'tear-up' but did not expect anyone to be killed (Lowles, 2014, p. 18).

This weight of expectation led one anti-fascist interviewee to highlight the existence of certain unwritten 'rules of engagement' regarding street violence i.e., you might go out to hurt someone but you wouldn't be going out to kill them or that you wouldn't attack people at home. These rules depended upon the willingness/unwillingness of local activist cultures or clusters of activists to uphold them, however. In Leeds extreme right activists' targeted anti-fascist opponents at home, in one instance firing a crossbow bolt through the window. Anti-fascists in London also assaulted BNP treasurer Mike Newland at home too. More often than not, however, AFA targeted property in an attempt

¹⁵ Channel 4, *Dispatches*.

to ‘inconvenience’ their opponents i.e., cutting phone wires, slashing car tires and gluing locks in a bid to deter future involvement (Hann & Tilzey, 2003, pp. 148 and 151). Importantly, even these transgressions of the ‘rules of engagement’ did not deviate too far from the broadly conceived parameters of the conflict.

Limited expectations of violence inhibited preparations for greater violence, reflected in the choice of weapons taken to events, connecting here with brake 5a regarding the development of capabilities that focused upon strategies of action that entailed more limited forms of violence. Indeed, although some BNP activists upgraded to arming themselves with hammers and adjustable spanners during the escalating clashes in the East End during the spring of 1992 (Searchlight, 1993, p. 34), they did not countenance a serious escalation in violence by acquiring firearms. This brake undoubtedly reflects an internalization of, and interaction with, a powerful external brake on violent escalation: Britain’s restrictive gun laws. These were tightened after the massacres in Hungerford (1987) and Dunblane (1996) making it much harder, though not impossible, for activists to obtain firearms.

These brakes weakened on the radical flank, however, as C18 increasingly exhorted its activists to greater acts of violence, publishing ‘hit lists’ of opponents alongside exhortations for them to be killed and bomb-making instructions. C18 publications frequently called for ‘ethnic cleansing’ to restore racial purity alongside atrocity photographs from the Holocaust but also, contemporaneously, the Yugoslavian civil war in which the C18 sided unambiguously with Serbian paramilitaries. Despite this rhetorical violence, C18 failed to invest in its tactical wherewithal, that was rudimentary. Its lack of professionalisation was evident in a subsequent effort by C18 leader Will Browning and his colleagues to firebomb the home of Gerry Gable, editor of Searchlight magazine:

Arriving at Gable’s road in the early hours of the morning, Browning realized that he had forgotten the balaclavas. He decided to continue and the gang went to a nearby garage, bought some plastic bags and cut out eyeholes. They returned to Gable’s, where Browning leapt out of the car and lit the device he had made. At that moment, a gust of wind swung the plastic bag round on

his head. Unable to see, Browning panicked and hurled the lighted bomb in the general direction of what he thought was the correct house. He pulled the bag from his head only to see the device explode in the next-door neighbor’s drive. Even if he had hit the right house it was unlikely to have had the desired effect as Browning had not realized that to cause maximum damage he needed to pack shrapnel into the device. After a huge blast caused by the petrol igniting, the bomb soon fizzled out. (Lowles, 2014, pp. 142-3).

Even when the group embarked upon a letter bomb campaign in 1997, it did not develop the bombs themselves, outsourcing the task to Danish C18 supporters who shouldered the burden of making and sending the packages themselves albeit at the behest of C18 in London.

2.4 BRAKE 4

Boundary softening in relation to putative out-groups (e.g., opponents, opponents’ perceived supporters, the general public or state actors).

Brake 4a

Resistance to generalizations about their opponents.

The strategic concerns outlined with regards brake 1b led subsequently to boundary softening. This tactical recalibration of the BNP outlined above also underpinned a de-escalation of party’s ideological militancy, at least on the level of public presentation, in order to build an electoral base amongst those elements of the ‘white working class’ that might support its anti-immigration policies but would balk at its overt biological racism. Toning down this element of its programme led the BNP, ultimately, to drop its symbolically sacrosanct commitment to ‘compulsory’ repatriation in favour of ‘voluntary’ repatriation because of the violence that this forced removal of people and their families implied. This reframing of ends and means fed back to action planning; party organisers phased out activities that might associate the party with violence and undermine their electoral ambitions.

INTERNAL BRAKES ON VIOLENCE WITHIN THE BRITISH EXTREME RIGHT

ANNEX B. The British extreme right in the 1990s.

That said, this boundary softening was slow to take effect and not readily observable during the 1990s. It would be another decade before it began to embed. During the period in question conspiratorial extreme right wing rhetoric and praxis across the constellation of groupuscules that comprised the milieu routinely dehumanized racial and political opponents as agents of an 'evil' plot in a way that anti-fascist narratives about fighting the 'fash' or 'boneheads' did not.

The BNP and the NF both did purge their publications of crude racist language, but this was likely primarily because they were aware that its inclusion invited prosecution under the Race Relations Act. C18, meanwhile, was visceral in its racist and anti-Semitic invective, demanding the 'noose' for racial and political 'traitors' whilst reveling in fantasies of 'ethnic cleansing' and 'race war,' which left little room for compromise.

Despite their antipathy towards their opponents, extreme right accounts of anti-fascist violence against them occasionally exhibited a grudging respect for their capabilities, which indicated, at least to an extent, that their opponents had not been completely dehumanized. C18 leader Steve Sargent recalled an attack on Red Action activists drinking at a North London pub following a demonstration: 'I remember that Gary O'Shea just standing there in the pub doorway throwing pool balls. Give him his dues, game geezer' (Lowles, 2014, p. 18).¹⁶ Whether this had any implications for the level of violence that they were willing to deploy towards them is unclear.

Brake 4b

Identification of segments of the public beyond their previously-imagined support base as potential converts to their cause.

The extreme right and anti-fascists were both essentially fighting, beyond their immediate support bases, for the hearts and minds of the broader 'white working class' who were perceived as potential converts, either to the cause of race and nation or the class struggle against capitalism. This central point of conflict also served to highlight a powerful brake on violent escalation, which was not evident in other contexts.

Carter's study of cumulative extremism in Northern Ireland highlights that one of the ways in which the Republican and Loyalist groups could escalate their conflict, particularly when they were not able to attack one another directly, was to target the support base of their opponents through the targeted or indiscriminate killing of Catholics and Protestants (Carter, 2017, pp. 37-51). In the case of the British extreme right, this was never a strategic option since to wage war on their opponents conceived constituency would be to wage war against oneself and ergo ones' own sense of identity, which would be politically counterproductive not to mention cognitively dissonant for the groups in question.

Brake 4c

Limited intra-movement pressure to 'burn-bridges' with social contacts outside of the movement or outside of the radical flank of the movement.

The social and cultural ties maintained by individual militants with friends, family and employers, exerted a powerful brake upon involvement with militant, and indeed less militant, extreme right sub-cultures. Groups like the BNP never encouraged its members to 'go underground' but rather to serve as beacons of racial rectitude within their own communities which the 'community action' component of party activism was meant to entrench. Whilst activists were often dismissive of the 'sheeple' (i.e., people behaving like sheep) the BNP's 'Rights for Whites' strategy was paradigmatic of the party's attempt to mobilise rather than alienate broader public support from the 'white working class.' C18 by comparison was contemptuous of the public. Inspired by US ideas of small, racialised communes, C18 supported developing a white racial 'homeland' in Essex though there were few takers for the scheme or its underlying rationale of withdrawing from wider society.

The BNP's pre-natal policies, which encouraged the cultivation and maintenance of (racially appropriate) personal relationships in order to produce future generation of white children was also indicative of a broader desire to engage rather than withdraw from society. Even without external pressure, racist militants often internalized the day-to-day drudgery of earning a

¹⁶ Portinari (2016, p. 37) also notes a 'begrudging respect' for Red Action based on an appreciation of their capacity for street violence.

living, and remaining employed, as a brake upon certain categories of violent activity. ‘Having concluded with others that a race war would be the only possibility for nationalist survival, I realised that I would do everything I could to make it happen,’ recalled Matthew Collins. ‘However, my job in the civil service was not conducive to revolutionary activity’ (Collins, 2011, p. 38).

Brake 4d

Expressions of reluctance to conceive of the state security forces as ‘the enemy’.

The criminality of many of its activists aside, a basic patriotic respect for ‘law and order’ including the police and the army was a central tenet of ideological faith. Senior BNP activists worked to prevent violence against the police, albeit sometimes for political and pragmatic reasons. During violence at a march in Bermondsey in 1991, Matthew Collins recalled BNP national organiser Richard Edmonds shouting ‘Don’t throw stones at the police’ though other voices in the mob could be heard shouting ‘Get the police on bikes’ whilst stones and bottles are thrown in their direction, highlighting that control over countervailing tendencies was never complete (Collins, 2011, p. 149).

The effectiveness of such brakes was also compromised at times through claims about political bias within the upper echelons of the police as opposed to regular officers. Tyndall for example regularly criticized the ‘political’ leadership of the Metropolitan Police (Sir Paul Condon coming in for a particular amount of vitriol) with the justification that the higher echelons of the police were ‘playing at politics’ and subverting police ‘impartiality’ which fed into wider narratives of ‘establishment’ subversion (Tyndall, 1998, p. 495).

This brake appears almost non-existent on the radical flank. C18 publications regularly denigrated all police officers as ‘scum’ working for ‘ZOG’ (the Zionist Occupation Government) and therefore paid collaborators of a ‘system’ that they wanted to overthrow through revolution. Such rhetoric could be tempered by personal experience at a micro-level, however. David Myatt, one of the group’s most ardent advocates for revolution found, after being arrested in 1998, that the ‘professional attitude’ and ‘courteous’ manner of the arresting officers and those who subsequently interviewed him ‘made me revise my attitude toward

the Police’ (Myatt, 2013). Both the BNP and C18 spoke of the Armed Forces with greater respect than the police.

2.5 BRAKE 5

Organisational developments that either (a) alter the moral and strategic equations in favour of non- or limited violence, (b) institutionalise less violent collective identities and/or processes of boundary softening, and/or (c) reduce the likelihood of unplanned violence.

Brake 5a

Limited investment in capabilities to escalate violence, and/or development of capabilities to undertake strategies of action that either entail non- or limited violence or more controlled violence.

Once the ‘Rights for Whites’ campaign began gathering momentum local BNP activists began refining their tactics. ‘By this stage in our development we decided that the unpredictable, noisy and volatile public meetings were a thing of the past,’ stated local organizer Steve Smith. ‘Although they helped us establish our name in Tower Hamlets, they required a great deal of resources and time to organize. More importantly, we had learnt from canvassing feedback as well as from anecdotal evidence that public meetings were becoming, by this time, somewhat counter-productive’ (Lowles, 2014, p. 39). This also implied a tactical shift away from C18, which was now surplus to requirements, an observation that intersected with brake 3d regarding the group’s limited expectations that they would be involved in greater levels of violence, at least in the short term, not least because the group’s own political ambitions also counselled against investing in such capabilities.

The break from the BNP also coincided with C18 losing interest in Northern Ireland, which it viewed as ‘increasingly futile and counter-productive’ (Lowles, 2014, pp. 78 and 81), and focusing instead upon the football hooligan scene, which, curtailed the group developing the sort of ‘revolutionary’ forms of violence that its publications paid lip service to.

Activists also put measures in place to manage levels and styles of violence during actions. In his memoir of his time as a leading AFA activist in Northern England

INTERNAL BRAKES ON VIOLENCE WITHIN THE BRITISH EXTREME RIGHT

ANNEX B. The British extreme right in the 1990s.

Dave Hann observed that ‘Some of the most dangerous situations came when small groups of fascists and anti-fascists chanced upon each other in back-streets, well away from the police’ (Hann & Tilzey, 2003, p. 223). Both AFA and groups like the BNP generally sought to avoid such encounters by meticulously planning for violent face-to-face encounters. Being able to control violent situations and to modulate the levels of violence applied during them, depends on the extent to which such groups can control the micro-dynamics of violence that arise from the fears and tensions that accumulate in anticipation of violence conflict. This can result in what Randall Collins calls ‘forward panic’ – those moments in which control is lost and panic sets in which leads activists on either side (including the police) to try and re-establish ‘emotional dominance’ through violence.

To minimize the chance of this happening the BNP and NF both sought to manage, modulate and co-ordinate their violence at marches through the institution of certain individuals as ‘Stewards’ answerable to a ‘Chief Steward’ who is in turn answerable to the party. Those who became stewards were likely a self-selecting cadre of experienced militants who came to the fore through ‘voluntary’ participation in street activism, as was the case with AFA (Hann & Tilzey, 2003, pp. 240-241). To what extent an extreme right trained its stewards regarding how not to react to provocation or, importantly, not ‘over-react’ is unclear though the BNP Activist’s Handbook laid down a series of guidelines for personal conduct indicating that some level of thought had been devoted to the issue. Arrangements to limit or at least control violence appeared more advanced within London BNP than amongst its regional branches where one activist perceived a ‘purpose, determination and planning behind the activities’ which had been absent in West Yorkshire where he was previously active (Searchlight, 1993, p. 22). C18 began life as the BNP ‘Stewards’ Group’ though it quickly moved beyond the party’s control, highlighting the fragile nature of said ‘control’ within the extreme right milieu during this period.

Stewarding and security arrangements were also applied to protect activists out canvassing since any violent confrontations would undermine their ‘non-violent’ electoral strategy. To this end:

Groups were not to split up, to use their common sense and to stick together in the face of trouble. We were also told not to leaflet houses obviously occupied by non-whites, although it was quite usual to leaflet a house with left-wing posters or stickers in the window... The thing about activities in south London, with which I was involved on a daily or often twice daily basis, was the animal-like territorial nature of activities. Edmonds, Tyler or White would know a “bad street” from a good one, and often, a “bad house” from a good one. (Searchlight, 1993, p. 22)

Whilst this attention to detail regarding a ‘bad street’ undoubtedly related to an awareness of houses populated by ethnic minorities and therefore not worth canvassing, it also highlights calculations made by senior party activists to avoid knocking on doors where their message was unwelcome which could needlessly provoke, leading to incidents that might spiral beyond their control.

Brake 5b

Foregrounding more modest or intermediate objectives and de-prioritising revolutionary goals.

The intermediate political goals of the BNP i.e., local elections, which came to dominate the day-to-day activities of the organisation, served to undermine the strategic logic of violence and neutered the party’s ‘revolutionary’ pretensions in the process. Whilst the BNP continued officially to campaign for its long-term goal of the destruction of liberal democracy and its replacement with a racial state (which it never renounced) in practice this goal was effectively de-prioritised because the party and its activists ploughed their energies into achieving their intermediate goal of electoral representation and public support.

Brake 5c

Construction and maintenance of spaces in which a range of activists that includes and extends beyond the radical flank are able to freely discuss tactics and movement objectives.

Despite his centralized control Tyndall developed spaces and forums within the party through which

activists could freely discuss tactics, ranging from the annual party rally, which gave activists a role in developing and shaping policy, to contributing to *Spearhead*, the party's ideological journal, which Tyndall used as a forum to facilitate discussion. Whilst Tyndall exerted full editorial control (and ownership) over *Spearhead* (though occasionally he entrusted editorship of the magazine to reliable lieutenants for long periods) he published articles from a range of sources and authors, not simply those who were BNP members or with whom he agreed tactically or ideologically. Tyndall also tolerated publications like *Patriot*, set up as a mouthpiece to further the agenda of BNP 'modernisers', though they were not initially explicit about their overarching agenda, which was to work for his removal (because his reputation was seen as a drag upon their electoral ambitions).

The key question is whether within the ideological and theoretical spaces provided by such publications radical flank actors were exposed to the views of the wider movement that might have led them to understand that support for more militant action was less than they might have imagined. It is not possible to answer this question based on the available data. However, it might be noted that whilst Tyndall tolerated a measure of ideological heterodoxy, so long as contributions adhered to core racial nationalist principles, he operated a tighter control over the political structure of the party itself, which caused some tension. Tyndall had a close circle of long-standing political comrades, which frustrated newer voices with different strategic views who found that this relatively closed clique hard to influence (Tyndall, 1998, p. 486). He also styled himself as the supreme arbiter of ideology and strategy, meaning that those with tactical differences to those he prescribed, were forced to operate outside the BNP. This made it easier for the BNP to distance itself from the resulting violence of group's like C18 which it bore some responsibility for cultivating in the first place.

Brake 5d

Concerns among some group members that violent escalation will compromise their ability to shape the direction of the movement and/or negatively affect their position within the movement.

Following the debacle with C18, the BNP leadership identified how violence and their investment in violent capabilities had actually disrupted their organization

and weakened both their own ability to control their party and tarnished their political capital within the milieu more generally. Having belatedly learned this lesson, Tyndall and his lieutenants made no further effort to re-invest in the party's physical capabilities, which in any case had become surplus to its evolving political requirements.

Brake 5e

Concentration of energy on targeting movement rivals, leading to reduced capability to prosecute campaigns of violence against their external enemies.

From the outset, C18 appeared more interested in attacking internal rivals within the BNP than with protecting the party from external assault. Whilst the BNP dealt with internal discord politically, C18 sought to resolve such conflicts with violence. This approach manifested itself more widely as the group sought to exert its control over the lucrative Blood & Honour music scene, which magnified internal tensions over money, personal prestige, reputational damage, and tactics, that led to the killing.

The impact of internecine feuding within C18 undoubtedly blunted the movement's capacity for violence, leading ultimately to its murderous conclusion in 1997 when C18 leader Charlie Sargent killed Chris Castle, a friend of his factional rival, Will Browning. The impact of the killing had a profound impact, because, as Darren Wells, a senior C18 figure in Browning's faction, suggests, it brought home to even the core C18 group, the consequences of their activism. The psychological impact on the leadership of the group served as a further constraint on external violence as Browning's focus 'moved totally to getting retribution for Chris Castle'. Many members drifted out the group as a result 'because they knew where it was heading... I think it pushed a lot of people away, and a lot of people did think that about Will, they thought he's bad news to be around.' 'I know it sounds awful,' Wells added, 'but really Chris dying probably saved lives because that put an end to any plans for race war.' Wells also highlighted the personal impact of the killing on his own life, leading him ultimately to exit from the scene too (Searchlight, 2001).

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