

The National Front, and the search for a 'nationalist' economic policy

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Summarizing the economic policies of the National Front (NF) is a little problematic. Compared to their copious discussion of race and nation, of immigration, culture, history and even the environment, British fascists since WWII have had little to say, in detail, on their political-economic ideology. In one of the first content analytic studies of the NF's mouthpiece *Spearhead*, for example, Harris (1973) identified five themes which dominated the magazine's all pervasive conspiracy thinking: authoritarianism, ethnocentrism, racism, biological naturalism and anti-intellectualism. The economy was barely discussed, other than in the context of imagined generosity of the welfare state. The topic is so under-developed that even Rees' (1979) encyclopaedic bibliography on British fascism, covering over 800 publications on and by fascists (between 1923-1977) doesn't include a section on political economy. Frequently, the closest fascists get to outlining their political-economic ideology is to identify 'the problem': the forces of 'cosmopolitan internationalism' (that is: the Jews) importing migrants, whose cheap labour threatens white livelihoods, and whose physical presence threatens the racial purity of the nation. 'The solution', on the other hand, is far less frequently spelled out. In essence, fascist parties, like the NF, are comparatively clear about what political economies they oppose – international capitalism and international communism – but are far less clear or consistent about the political economy they support.

This under-theorisation in fascist discourse is also reflected in an under-representation of economic policies in academic analysis of post-war British fascism, where the two principal political economic theories – autarky and distributism – are discussed only rarely (though see Sykes 2005, chapter 4, for a detailed discussion of pre-war "alternative economics"). Lunn (1980) does discuss the links between distributism (see below) and fascism, pointing out that G.K. Chesterton's *Weekly Review* "showed much sympathy towards fascism" and that "Speakers from the BUF [British Union of Fascists] and the IFL [Imperial Fascist League] took part in Distributist meetings and used the correspondence columns of the *Review* to put over their fascist principles" (p.34). Lunn suggests the "emphasis on the efficiency of the authoritarian corporatist state as well as their strong condemnation of liberalism and parliamentary government, disposed the Distributist circle to an acceptance of fascism" (quoting Corrin 1976: 296, in Lunn 1980: 34). Sykes (2005) discusses Mosley's post-war abandonment of the Corporate State and his proposed "wage-price mechanism" which drew on Social Credit. Through "definite, conscious and deliberate economic leadership" – which was fascist newspeak for 'dictatorship' – Mosley believed that he had come up with "the most potent instrument for shaping the future development of industry which could be devised" (quoted in Sykes 2005: 96). Sykes (2005: 82) also acknowledges, but doesn't go on to detail, the fact that distributism shaped the economic and environmental thinking of the NF during the 1980s (see also Fielding 1981).

In an article written for the NF's esoteric magazine *New Nation*, Martin Webster provides a revealing and self-reflexive examination for the under-theorisation of fascist political

economics. First, he acknowledges that the NF was rather late to discuss and settle upon its economic policies, preferring to emphasise its 'racial nationalist' ideology and the party's "one paramount objective: *to save and enhance our race and nation*" (Webster 1980: 12). Such a commitment tended to reduce any discussion, where it actually appeared, to a base opposition to 'internationalism' and its twin conspiratorial forces of finance capitalism and international communism. However, the key question of how to organize a national economy in which the influence of 'the internationalists' is removed was not answered. Webster cites as an example the first leader of the NF, A.K. Chesterton, who "waged relentless war on the British Empire destroying, One World building activities of the 'International Money Power'. He did not however, as far as I can recall, attempt to articulate a basis for a Nationalist economic and social policy" (p.12-13). But, Webster suggests, this absence of economic policy was not an oversight on the part of Chesterton, but a deliberate omission. At a leadership training event organised for the NF

A.K was asked about the party's lack of clear policies on economic and social matters. He replied that to develop policies on such issues would be dangerous as the exercise might divide the party on 'class war' lines and/or might lose the party's capacity to attract voting support from all classes in society. (p.13)

Whilst fascists universally opposed communism, "on account of its anti-national, anti-racial and anti-patriotic subversion" (Webster 1980: 12), capitalism is very rarely criticized *in toto* in fascist discourse since this would logically entail adopting class as an analytic concept. Pointing out the structural inequalities endemic to capitalism might deter the more conservative supporters of the NF; but, equally, praising capitalism is likely to repel their radical or working class supporters. The answer lay in a 'third way' economy, but the party was not that forthcoming about what that would look like in practice. The objectives of the NF, agreed at the merger of the League of Empire Loyalists and the British National Party on 7 February 1967, seem to pull in two political economic directions. Their Objective 3 announced their autarkic principles, committing "To achieve for the system adequate economic and agricultural self-sufficiency" (quoted in *Patterns of Prejudice* 1967: 23). However, their later Objective 9 appears much more indebted to the BUF's theory of the Corporate State, where they propose: "To ensure that just profits, salaries and wages, founded on a fair partnership between employers and employees, are guaranteed by maintaining the principle of private enterprise within a framework of national guidance, wherein employees would be genuinely represented in all matters" (Ibid.)

Implicit in Webster's article is a third reason why summarizing the economic policies of the NF is difficult: they change over time and, in part, reflect the changing attitude of the party towards electoral politics. During the 1970s, when the NF was pursuing power through democratic elections, and party members were (reportedly) more middle class, party economic policy tended towards a more conservative attitude to the capitalist status quo. Following their woeful achievement in the 1979 General Election, the party magazines and newspapers through the 1980s show a diminishing interest in popular elections and a corresponding increase in more radical responses to capitalism, partly in order to attract younger supporters "before they become enmeshed in the system which has trapped their parents" (Webster 1980: 13). However, as I show below, even at their most radical, the

ideologues of the NF couldn't transcend a capitalist political-economy, and their attempts to develop 'third way' solutions, in essence, simply recalibrate and rehabilitate capitalism in the service of 'the nation'. This chapter examines two political economies advocated by the NF: during the 1970s, the party drew implicitly on the example of Nazi Germany, and argued for autarky; during the 1980s, the party advocated distributism, as a native rather than imported economic ideology. But first, I will discuss some important historic precursors that lay the groundwork for understanding fascist political economies in general.

Fascist political economies

During the inter-war period, it was only really the British Union of Fascists (BUF) that advanced an elaborated political economic theory, principally in the writings of Alexander Raven Thomson. Emulating Fascist Italy, the 'Corporate State' was proposed by the BUF as the solution to the inequity and inefficiencies of capitalism. Contrary to fantasies of a 'Workers' State' (Wegg-Prosser 1936) or a radical reorganisation of the economy to the benefit of all (Mosley, no date circa 1933), the corporate state "would be superimposed upon capitalism, rather than substituted for it" (Benewick 1969: 146). "Private property, enterprise and initiative would not be eliminated" (Benewick 1969: 145) and nor would profit or exploitation, as long as the fascist government considered it in 'the national interest'. What *would* have been eliminated was dissent. As Mosley (no date circa 1933: 5) declared: "All who pursue a sectional and anti-national policy will be opposed by the might of the organised State." Unions would have been permitted under the British version of corporatism but, like in Fascist Italy, they would be expected to serve the nation and the state, rather than represent any "sectional" interests, such as the workers. In Fascist Italy "the purpose of fascist corporations was [...] to settle disputes between labour and capital, on opposite sides of the class divide. But while organized capital continued to be represented by its own speakers in the CGII [Confederazione Generale dell'Industria Italiana] labour found itself 'represented' by fascist party bureaucrats" (Neocleous 1997: 45).

Baker (2006: 242) argues that all forms of fascist political economy divide "the world between 'good capital' nationally based and orientated to production – and 'parasitic capital' – considered international, profit maximizing and anti-nationalistic". In the more racist and conspiratorial varieties of fascism, such as those that dominate the British tradition, international 'parasitic capital' is tied to Jewish economic activity, Jewish power, and, hence, is a key trope in antisemitic conspiracy theories. 'Marxism' is also attacked for its internationalism – indeed, for Hitler, the chief crimes of Marxism were its internationalism and its Jewishness, two qualities that, for him and other Nazi ideologues, spiralled around and mutually reinforced each other (Neocleous 1997: 40). At the core of Nazi economic ideology was an obsession with a strong Germany and, as they saw it, a zero-sum conflict which pitted Germany's interests against that of international companies and investors (Szejnmann 2013: 370) – an obsession that made them visceral opponents of both the politics and economics of 'internationalism'. Indeed, Gottfried Feder, in his works on 'interest slavery', proposed "a distinction between 'rapacious' (*raffendes*) and 'productive' (*schaffendes*) capital, (or, to put it differently, 'parasitical Jewish finance capital' and

‘creative national capital’)” (Szejnmann 2013: 358). Such antisemitism lay squarely and thoroughly at the heart of the Nazi autarkic economic project. Szejnmann (2013: 360) demonstrates that, in repeated speeches, “Hitler did not tire of emphasizing the importance of protecting the ‘national economy’ (the ‘honest working economy’) with the power of a ‘national state’ against Jews and Marxist leaders, who he described as the main supporter of ‘internationalisation’ and the exploitation of Germany.” In more detail, Szejnmann (2013: 359) argues that “Hitler’s economic vision” consisted of two prime directives:

- (a) a replacement of the capitalistic economic system with one that was dominated by state control and planning but allowed private initiative in a ‘national economy’ that served the common good (re-establishing the primacy of politics) and was free of Jews (racism);
- (b) opting out of crucial parts of the global free market economy and pursuing autarkic policies and expansion in a quest to secure agricultural land to feed one’s own population [not including Jews of course, JER] and to secure raw material for industry

The point above, that Nazis “allowed private initiative” acknowledges a key point regarding the Nazi economy that also accords with the Fascist Italy’s economy: neither during the more radical programmatic phases of fascism in Italy and Germany, nor once in power, when “both regimes abandoned any attempt to alter radically the structure of economic organization” (Baker 2006: 232), did fascism oppose private property or private ownership of the means of production. True, they were by no means ‘capitalist markets’ in the conventional sense. Indeed, Buchheim & Schemer (2006: 411) suggests that a way to name/describe the economy of Nazi Germany “would probably have been ‘state-directed private ownership economy’ instead of using the term ‘market’”; more forcefully, Baker (2006: 237) suggests that Hitler’s *volkisch* economics amounted to “a genocidal slave and permanent war economy”. However, in both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, “the industrial sector was allowed to remain in private hands but was charged with meeting ‘national needs’” (Baker 2006: 233).

Fascist conspiracy theorists maintain that both (international, finance) capitalism and communism are tools used by Jews (variously labelled Jewry, International Jewry, Zionism, and in more recent iterations simply ‘Internationalists’ or ‘Globalists’) to subvert the power of nation states and, in the case of racial fascists, to undermine white people. One of the more concise examples of this conspiracy explanation was written by William Joyce, in the BUF publication *Fascism and Jewry*:

The Jews control and actuate alike the decadent democratic capitalism and the hideous fratricidal Communism. Using both instruments they hope to prevent every white people [sic] from achieving the freedom to work out the fullness of their own economic destiny. Only through the defeat of Jewry can Britain be free. (Joyce, n.d. p.7)

This I refer to as the *core conspiracy* of fascism, which has shaped all fascist proposed plans to nationalise the economy and insulate it from perfidious internationalism (Richardson 2017). In fascist discourse, ‘the international’ is a source of anxiety and threat; it is a nexus of power that threatens to overwhelm Us; a potential usurper of resources that properly

belong to Us. For British fascists, the economy should be limited to, and within, the national space and “those to whom it belongs” (Joyce 1936: 532), to the exclusion of non-national others (including, or perhaps especially, Jews). It should also be structured in a way different to either of the two opposing poles of internationalism – international capitalism and international Communism – and the conspiratorial (Jewish) ‘Money Power’ that fascists believe lies behind both.

The Core Conspiracy in NF discourse

The NF Manifesto for the 1979 General Election stated baldly that “We loathe the Communist system” (p.34) and, in their Manifesto for the 1974 elections, that they “totally reject the idea of ‘détente’ with Communism”, since it “has not abandoned its ambition of destroying the civilized world” (p.26). Britain was, unsurprisingly, frequently cited as a key battleground of this war against the civilized world. One NF leaflet (circa 1976) listed a range of alleged Communist infiltration, from “burrowing deeper into the Civil Service, betraying defence secrets, making war on independent businessmen, directing public money into the hands of subversives at home and abroad” to “taking over key positions in the Mass Media [...] to undermine our faith in ourselves, in our race and nation, and in traditional standards of decency” (NF Leaflet, **Reds Under The Bed?**). Despite the extent of such subversion, the leaflet alleges that “Conservative, Labour and Liberal politicians have done nothing about it [...] *Could it be that even the traditional parliamentary parties have been infiltrated?* (Ibid., emphasis added).

This conspiratorial outlook is discussed at greater length in other NF articles, and frequently in such a way that finishes just short of the ‘core conspiracy’ and openly declaring ‘*it’s the Jews*’. The full answer, it often seems, is provided in another text. One article in *Spearhead* (1970: 8) argues that it is essential to study communism in order to understand the broad “scheme of international conspiracy into which communism fits”. The column then directs the reader to a range of antisemitic works – including Chesterton’s *The New Unhappy Lords*, Knupffer’s *The Struggle for World Power* and the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* – that “exposes vividly the collusion between communism and high finance” (Ibid.) Even John Tyndall was on occasion surprisingly coy about the conspirators, leaving calculated blanks in his abbreviated version of the core conspiracy:

if Communism and capitalism are working together to a common end, what is that end? What is the grand objective of all contemporary policy? [...] the objective is world power, world control [...] But world power for whom? This is the question that is crucial [...] The missing piece in the jig-saw puzzle must for the moment be supplied out of the imagination of the reader (Tyndall 1972: 7)

British fascism during the 1970s was still caught in the rhetorical bind that required it to simultaneously present exoteric and esoteric political commitments, to address both credulous and cadre audiences (Billig 1978; Richardson 2011, 2013, 2017; Wodak & Richardson 2013). This meant that even in that most exoteric of political genres, the General

Election Manifesto, one can find statements confirming (to those who understand the code) their continued adherence to esoteric fascist conspiracy theories:

We must understand Communism, not as a system existing on its own, but merely as the visible part of a movement of world-subversion which rests no less on its invisible pillars of support within the West. We must recognize that the object of this wider movement of which Communism is a part is *to subject us to the rule*, not of Russia as such, but *of a cosmopolitan elite* of whose aims Russia is merely an instrument and America an instrument of a different kind (emphasis added, National Front 1979: 34)

This statement of official party policy reveals that the NF didn't hate Communism merely for what it stood for and executed in the world, but because they considered it a tool "of a movement of world-subversion", which uses both Communism and (capitalist) America as instruments of global rule. The leaders of this "wider movement" are referred to as "a cosmopolitan elite". The 'cosmopolitanism' of this political-economic elite was also invoked in the (1977) pamphlet *Beyond Capitalism and Socialism*. Here the NF poured "scorn" on "utterly phony 'patriotism' the fume of which mingle today with the thick cigar smoke of City boardrooms as cosmopolitan millionaires drape their mercenary consciences with the colours of the flag" (p.2). 'Cosmopolitan' is an important watchword in antisemitic discourse, and not simply that of the extreme right. As Miller and Ury (2015: 11) point out, "the 'anti-cosmopolitan campaign' in the Soviet Union (1949-53) singled out writers, artists, scholars, musicians and athletes of Jewish origin for their 'anti-patriotic' activities and accused them of slandering 'the national Soviet character'." Similarly, for fascists, Jews are "often seen as quintessential cosmopolitans – a transnational community that was at home everywhere (and nowhere)" (Miller and Ury 2015: 8).

A slightly earlier article by Bleach (1976: 6) offered an almost identical argument: "Just as Communism and Capitalism ostensibly appear to be foes, there is much evidence to suggest the existence of a financial power superior to them which frequently uses one or the other, and quite often both, for its execrable ends." Looking at the 'evidence' in the text one is struck by the emphasis placed on Jewish-sounding conspirators:

It is now well-known history that the 1917 Revolution was plotted and financed [...] by international financier based in New York. [...] A wealthy banker called Jivotovsky, whose daughter later married Trotsky (alias Bronstein), had a hand in it too (Ibid.)

Why else, the article insinuates, would the daughter of a wealthy capitalist banker marry the Marxist Trotsky unless they were part of the same cosmopolitan conspiracy? Elsewhere the article uses the phrase "New York money power" comprised of, *inter alia*, "the Schiffs and Warburgs, Morgans and Rockerfellers" as well as Kuhn, Loeb and Company and the Rothschilds, all of whom were apparently involved in bank-rolling Communism – *contra* what you would expect capitalists to do.

Jews are also accused of using financial influence over both business and democratic politics in ways contrary to the best interests of Britain and British people. In the discourse of some British fascist parties, this line of argumentation is expressed openly; given their democratic

pretensions, this financial power tended to be euphemised slightly in NF discourse of the 1970s. In their Manifesto for the 1974 General Elections, for example, the NF strenuously opposed “the dominant and inviolable position of finance over the economy [...] Finance calls the tune, and the potential of industry is ever frustrated by the stranglehold grip of *money power*” (emphasis added, p.3).

Autarky

Autarky is a political-economic theory that advocates national economic independence or self-sufficiency. Autarky is a recurrent feature of fascist economics given the basic assumption, central to all forms of fascism, that economic life should serve ‘the nation’. Mosley’s inter-war economic proposals, for example, included “an autarkic system of trade with an insulated home market, which exchanged manufactured goods for essential primary products” within the British Empire (Thurlow 1980: 105). Fielding (1981) argued that, by adopting autarky as its guiding economic principle, the NF followed the “measures put by Mosley to the Labour Party which later formed part of New Party and BUF policy” (p.67). However, he added, “this is probably because they have been selected from a general currency of ideas on the Right rather than from any explicit orientation” (Ibid.) Before taking leadership of the NF, John Tyndall looked to the autarkic transformation of Germany under Nazism for economic pointers – described as a country where, “by means of magic, as it were, [Hitler] radically eliminated unemployment” (Tyndall 1969: 4). In this laudatory review of the conspiracy text *Red Symphony*, Tyndall simultaneously argues for the rehabilitation of Hitler and National Socialism – a movement that he argues was only stopped because it opposed the evil of international finance – and draws political-economic inspiration for restructuring British industry. The true accomplishments of National Socialism he argued, combatting both communism and “the omnipotence of the financial International”, were apparently being kept from the masses: “The masses must never be allowed to see it [National Socialism] in its essentials, as a national revolt against the stranglehold of the world money power and an attempt to re-establish an industrial system based on the physical and technical resources of soil and people” (p.5).

In later iterations, and with Tyndall now Chairman of the party, the antisemitic underpinnings of their proposed autarky would be hidden behind a veneer of economic rationalisation. In their (1974) Manifesto, the NF argued that the “economy must be wholly transformed in its structure so as to enable the greatest possible immunity from world conditions and the greatest possible national self-sufficiency” (p.3). This transformation would not be so full and complete as to do away with capitalism, however. As John Bean (1970: 4) put it, private ownership and private enterprise are “healthy and instinctive” parts of our economy. The NF, he argued, needed to show the electorate “that a prosperous and united Britain requires private enterprise (productive capitalism) to ensure maximum productivity, and a framework of national control to ensure that it is fairly distributed to the benefit of all who contribute to it.” In more detail, the (1974) Manifesto argued:

In the task of restructuring industry to cater for the needs of this [home] market we will apply a combination of free enterprise and state enterprise [...] We will take

from capitalist doctrine its best features, which are individual incentive and healthy, bracing competition, but in contrast to the old laissez faire capitalism we intend to ensure that competition is fair and conducted according to a set of rules. This shuts out the foreign competitor who utilizes cheap, sweated labour [...] Private ownership and the profit motive must operate within industry if its dynamism is to be maintained, but private industrial endeavour must serve a higher national and public interest (p.4-5)

The extract above demonstrates that analysis of NF economic reasoning in purely economic terms cannot grasp its specific character. NF political economies are not based on classic economic considerations (import/exports, un/employment, GDP, etc) but are riven with the national chauvinism that characterises every dimension of their political outlook. They do not detail here what the authoritarian “set of rules” structuring activities of companies would amount to, other than it would function to exclude “the foreign competitor”. The “higher national and public interest” is also under-defined, reduced to national ownership of capitalist enterprises. Capitalist accumulation is similarly reduced to a matter of ethno-nationality: shut out foreign businesses to better advance the national interests. The interests of British *workers* are not spelled out, other than the implicit assumption that labouring for ‘British’ bosses will somehow be less exploitative than for ‘foreign’ owners. The enthusiastic support for capitalist entrepreneurialism in the extract, and its apparently vitalistic effect on both individual and society, has echoes from the past. Otto Ohlendorf for example, “an enthusiastic National Socialist and high-ranking SS officer, who since November 1943 held a top position in the Reich Economics Ministry” and considered private ownership of industry to be “a precondition to developing the creativity of members of the German race” (Buchheim & Schemer 2006: 408). The constant aim of National Socialist economic policy was, he argued, “to restrict as little as possible the creative activities of the individual. [...] Private property is the natural precondition to the development of personality. Only private property is able to further the continuous attachment to a certain work” (quoted in Ibid.).

It is in the (1977) pamphlet *Beyond Capitalism and Socialism* that we can read the most extended presentation of the NF’s autarkic policies. Its author, John Tyndall, argues “From capitalism we also take the element of incentive that is contained in the profit motive. Profit is quite legitimate as a variable wage to those who provide the brains and initiative that make for national prosperity” (p.17). However, onto this capitalist mode of production, they “superimpose our own doctrine of nationalism, which in economic terms means that we seek salvation through the independence and self-reliance of the nation-state, or our own country and people [...] we reject the internationalism that stands at the centre of both socialism and contemporary finance-capitalism” (Ibid.). In a faux-populist nod to the material conditions of British workers, p.1 of the pamphlet acknowledges “the existence of real grievances in industry”, but only in order to argue that “These grievances arise, almost without exception, out of the iniquities of modern international finance capitalism”. It is the *internationalism* of finance capitalism, rather than the capitalist mode of production *per se*, that Tyndall identifies as the sources of British suffering (p.3) – an “evil, fraudulent and parasitic” racket which creates “monstrous injustices within the national economy” (p.12). As he saw it:

International finance today stands at the centre of the vast jungle of world trade in which Britain is enmeshed. Finance is able by its own operations to cripple national economies [...] In any sane world economy the import/export trade of each country would extend to no greater level than that country's resources [...] Such a system, however, is not allowed because it would cut the ground from under the feet of international finance. (p.5)

In the extract above, and throughout the pamphlet, finance is given agency to act – calling the tune (p.3), intentionally creating deflation and unemployment (Ibid.), calling in loans (Ibid.) and, as above, not allowing any challenge to its power and control. Every feature of the modern international market – international tariffs, interest payments, deregulation and everything else – is interpreted as a challenge to the primacy of the nation; and, behind that, is identified a nexus of interests and conspiratorial powers. Commenting on “the Generalised system of preferences” for example – that is, trade regulations (supported by then-Prime Minister Harold Wilson) that allowed developing countries to pay reduced or no duties on their exports to the EU – Tyndall argued that behind the claims to alleviate world poverty “there is a motive that is far from as idealistic as it is made to sound. Out of such a policy enormous profits accrue to the international financiers, whose money is shrewdly invested in the very coolie industries that are going to benefit from preferential entry into the British market! Behind the façade of socialist idealism there lurks the leering grimace of money power” (p.12).

This, and other passages of the pamphlet reveal that the NF's position on international/finance capitalism is founded – ontologically – on the central, inescapable presence of anti-national conspiracy. And, as in all fascist political economies, this in turn draws on the core antisemitic conspiracy summarised by Joyce (1936), amongst many others. Thus, Tyndall claimed that “Behind the phrases about the ‘fight against capitalism’ stands a big business network as unswerving in its loyalty to Labour as any capitalists are to the Tories. Among the biggest supporters of the Labour Party in recent years have been such names as the Lords Sainsbury and Campbell, Leonard Matchan, Sidney Bernstein, Robert Maxwell and Harold Lever – millionaires all!” It is hardly a coincidence that the majority of this list of donors are Jewish. The exact same list of prominent Jewish businessmen was also included in an earlier article by Tyndall (1972), alleging to expose “the wealth of facts [...] which prove Communist-Capitalist collaboration” (p.6). The (1977) pamphlet also includes the perennial canard that “Leon Trotsky (Bronstein) [...] was financed in Russia by foreign capitalists operating from New York” (p.13). At other points Tyndall derides “cosmopolitan millionaires” (p.2) and “entrenched Money Power” (p.5), and argues “the nature of modern-finance capitalism is such that it makes the finance capitalist nothing better than a huge parasite feeding on the body of the national economy” (p.10). Such a rhetorical flourish bears more than a passing resemblance to Tyndall's infamous words, spoken at a National Socialist Movement rally, at Trafalgar Square in July 1962: that “in our democratic society, the Jew is like a poisonous maggot feeding off a body in an advanced state of decay” (quoted in Walker 1977: 38-39). For Tyndall and the NF, the autarkic solution to international finance capital was little more than a repackaging of the core antisemitic conspiracy theory regarding Jewish money power and its global dominance.

Autarky was also the political economy of choice for other British fascist parties during the 1970s, including the National Party (NP), which split from the NF in 1976. Issue 1 of *The British Worker* (1977), the newspaper of the NP, listed the policies that the party stood for in bullet-points. Following the standard racist commitment to “Stop immigration, start repatriation”, the remainder all related to political-economic issues:

- Get Britain out of the common market
- Fight Communism
- Ban foreign imports we can produce ourselves
- Control Investment overseas
- Bring British industry under British ownership and control
- Halt inflation by reforming our financial system

Ignoring the very vague final political aspiration in this list – tantamount to saying ‘halt inflation by doing things better’ – the remaining five stake out the commitment of the party to autarky. All policies aim to restrict the national economy within the borders of ‘the nation’, restructured to the benefit of ‘British workers’. Across the rest of this first issue of the party newspaper, there were articles celebrating cases “where British workers are put first” – e.g. where “five West Indian nurses” were denied work permits, and where work permits for hotel and catering industries were reduced (British Workers First, *The British Worker*, No.1 1977, p.3) – and articles on international trade, which reported that British companies “now make half of their pre-tax profits overseas. [...] These figures show how the international interests of big business are increasingly coming into conflict with the national interests of this country” (British (?) Capitalism, *The British Worker*, No.1 1977, p.3). Union bosses were also alleged to be in thrall to international capitalism. Reporting an incident, where Bill Keys (the General Secretary of the Printers Union) did not publish a letter from the NP criticizing an article in the Union journal which supported “the capitalist policy of multiracialism”, the article stated:

Multinational capitalism has sought to break down national boundaries and national differences to bring about a cosmopolitan ‘One World’ that is ‘One Great Market’. The only force that can stop it is nationalism. [...] Keys’ talk about internationalism and the wickedness of discrimination puts him right alongside the cosmopolitan capitalist who wants to invest his money wherever in the world it will make the most profit.

Of course, the obvious question that arises from this argument is why did the NP believe that nationalism is the only force that can stop international capitalism? Why not a stronger working class movement? Why not communism? The answer is suggested in an advert on the back cover of the newspaper. Immediately above the bullet-points of party principles partly quoted above there was placed an advert for Raven Books, and amongst the titles on offer were the same conspiracy texts: Skousen’s *The Naked Capitalist*, Chesterton’s *The New Unhappy Lords*, Allen’s *None Dare Call it Conspiracy* and Nesta Webster’s *World Revolution*. All these books advanced more or less explicit variations on the core conspiracy: that Jewish capitalists and Jewish communists were allies and co-conspirators in a plan to achieve global

(Jewish) political and economic power. For the NP, autarky was a means to insulate Britain from internationalist Jewish power.

Distributism: a 'native' fascist economic model

Distributism (also known as distributivism) is a slightly more marginal economic theory within British fascism, principally because it dominated the political economic thinking of the NF during the 1980s, a period when the party was at its most esoteric. Originally, distributism was developed and popularised during the opening decades of the Twentieth Century, principally by Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton. The political economic theory was first coined by Belloc in *The Servile State* (1912), developed in his later *An Essay on The Restoration of Property* (1930), and taken up by G.K. Chesterton in his *GK Weekly* magazine and book *The Outline of Sanity* (1928). Distributism is not an inherently fascist political economic theory, but was adopted by British fascist parties from the 1980s onwards as another 'third way' alternative to capitalism and socialism. As Brons (1984: 20) put it, "As a movement, we are only interested in those ideas which form part of, or complement, the ideology of Racial Nationalism. That ideology **does** form a coherent whole even if the totality of Belloc's does not" (emphasis in original). Distributism advocates a wider distribution of land, property and the means of production than is currently experienced in British society; it is in favour of small businesses and a decentralised economy, and is opposed to collectivism, trade unions, urbanism, internationalism and usury. Inspired by the medieval guild system, distributism advocates establishing small farming and craft communities, where production is based on craftsmanship and small workshops. As with all fascist political economies, distributism is based on chauvinistic and exclusionary nationalism, and the 'principal' that "there must be no foreign ownership of British industry" (Pearce 1985: 18).

The distributist opposition to moneylending and usury entails a strong dislike of banks and systems of (international) finance which, particularly when interpreted and applied by fascist ideologues, frequently spills over into the familiar 'core conspiracy' antisemitic argumentation regarding Jewish 'money power'. However these antisemitic conspiracies were not grafted onto distributism by fascists, but were present from the outset by virtue of both Belloc and Chesterton's antisemitism. Belloc was convinced that the "future was in the hands of Jewish bankers and financiers", and became a supporter of Mussolini (quoted in Veldman 1994: 32). He also wrote the antisemitic book *The Jews*, first published in 1922 and reprinted in 1937 with a new introductory chapter, which was described by the then-leader of the NF Andrew Brons (1984: 20) as his "admirable Yid book". Belloc's thesis, largely inspired by the Russian Revolution, was summarised on the book's contents page: "The Jews are an alien body within the society they inhabit. [...] An alien body in any organism is disposed of in one of two ways: elimination and segregation" (Belloc 1922: xi). The Russian Revolution is referred to as "the Jewish Revolution in Russia" (p.xii) but, precisely reflecting the core conspiracy of fascism, Jews are also assumed to be the controllers of finance capitalism. Belloc alleges that, until recently, "Men hesitated to attack the Jews as financiers because the stability of society and of their own fortunes was bound up with finance – but when a body of Jews also appeared as the active enemies of existing society and of private

fortune, the restraint was removed – since the Bolshevik movement open (and hostile) discussion of the Jewish problem has become universal” (p.xii-xiii). His argument is convoluted, but Belloc suggests that, because he views Bolshevism as a “Jewish movement” this enables him, and others, to debate whether all Jews – not only ‘Jewish Bolsheviks’ but *all Jews* – should be allowed to remain in Britain, or should be “disposed of” via elimination or segregation.

Belloc’s antisemitism is widely accepted by his supporters – indeed, for some, it appears to be a primary reason why he has attracted such support (c.f. Brons, 1980, 1984, 1985). A pamphlet entitled *In defence of Hilaire Belloc*, written by the Church in History Information Centre (nd) acknowledged “Few would deny that as a teenager [...] Belloc absorbed anti-Semitic attitudes” (p.7). His political-economic views, and the ways that these meshed with his antisemitism, are positively evaluated:

Belloc detested both international finance, which exploited and manipulated the ordinary working people, and Marxist socialism and communism which, by making the state the owner of all productive wealth, would be destructive of freedom of the spirit. It was widely believed at the time that the leaders of both these forces were small groups of Jews. Because of this, a negative feeling developed towards them. (p.9)

The rise of distributism in the NF is attributable to the political context of situation at the end of the 1970s, and a decline in party fortunes. With the collapse of their electoral strategy in 1979, younger and more radical members in NF looked for alternate ideological foundations to Hitlerite National Socialism that party policy could draw upon. Initially, Strasserism was touted as an option – several articles were published in *Nationalism Today*, the ideological mouthpiece of this new radical leadership, that argued the Strasser brothers should be included in the list of “people who laid the foundations of Nationalist ideology”¹, or which claimed “the German National Revolution was betrayed [by Hitler] following [Georg] Strasser’s death” (Holland, 1984a: 12).² Other articles argued more ‘native’ traditions in anti-socialist, anti-capitalist politics exist, which were more appropriate for British ‘nationalism’. A review of *Yesterday and Tomorrow* (helpfully also on sale in the NF’s book shop) approvingly quoted the book’s argument that “Capitalism and its Communist offspring” are “two alien dogmas”, and that people

[...] in the White nations are now looking back to out own ideological and spiritual heritage, *seeking in the ideas of our forefathers a future for our children*. The German National-Socialists; the Fascists; the British Distributists and early patriotic socialists; all these an many others have contributed to the great heritage of National Revolutionary thought. (emphasis added, quoted in Acton 1983: 8).

Brons (1985: 15) argues that whilst some of the ideas of National Socialism and Fascism were “similar to those of the Distributists”, since “their nationalism sprang, in part, from the same instincts and traditions from which all European nationalism has sprung”, with distributism “the National Front has a lineage of its own” which it was now starting to reclaim. This lineage enabled the NF to articulate a thoroughly antisemitic political economy, without it being derived from openly Nazi source material. Thus, in this same article Brons

praises the Chestertons and Belloc for attacking “the Judaeo-Financial clique that dominated not only this country but also the United States and later Bolshevik Russia” (1985: 15). A ‘Roots’ article on Belloc described him as the author of a “brilliant expose of Zionism in his book *The Jews*” (*Nationalism Today* 20, Jan/Feb 1984, p.9). Issue 4 of *New Nation* (Autumn 1983, p.11) published a half-page extract from this book; in this same issue, Cecil Chesterton was included in the magazine’s ongoing “Great British Racialists” column (p.18). Chesterton, the column informs us was “unambiguously [...] on the side of the White Race” (Ibid.). He risked “his freedom as well as the wrath of the Judaeo-Financial Establishment” with his journalism and, with the publication *Eye Witness*, “he and Belloc fearlessly exposed tyranny, dishonesty and the power of International Jewry” (Ibid.).

By 1985, the Constitution of the party declared that the NF “is a distributist movement”, opposed to both capitalism and communism. The magazines *New Nation* and *Nationalism Today* included multiple articles that offered detailed discussion and passing reference to distributism as the assumed ideological backbone of the party, as well as selling copies of Belloc’s and Chesterton’s books. When the NF split in 1989, two radical factions broke off, each also subscribing to distributist economic policy. International Third Position, run by Derek Holland, continued to try to put the ‘Political Solders’ ethos of spiritual revolution into practice in its training centre in the UK and by buying property in France. The Third Way, lead by Pat Harrington, supported decentralisation, small businesses and environmental issues, and ideologically fused distributism with social credit - another antisemitic economic theory, developed by Clifford Douglas.³

We can also detect echoes of distributism in later British National Party discourse. During the first few years of Nick Griffin’s leadership, this tended to be most closely associated with opposition to global capitalism (c.f. Griffin 2002) though, as Griffin (2005: 4) was to later categorically state, this “opposition to global capitalism [...] in no way conflicts with our support for private enterprise.” Paragraph 3.2.6 of the 12.2 version of the Party Constitution (2010) demonstrated the BNP’s continued adherence to distributism, declaring: “social stability and contentment is best achieved by the many enjoying a personal stake in the assets and undertakings of their own nation. Accordingly, we believe that private property ownership, including where practicable in the means of production and distribution, should be encouraged and spread to as many members of the nation as possible” (p.8).

In a rare extended mediated endorsement, the BNP magazine *Identity* published a two-part article which purported to discuss distributist economics and its superiority to capitalist economies, where “currencies always accumulate in the hands of the few” (Holroyd 2003a: 18). Holroyd presents two cases what he believed demonstrate the benefits of distributist economics: the historic example of Wörgl where, in 1932, the Mayor issued his own currency which he required inhabitants to spend rather than the Austrian Schilling (2003a); and the contemporary example of Bali, described as “a paradise on earth”, where “Virtually every man and woman [...] is an accomplished artist and dancer” (2003b: 13). The implausible examples in the second part of his article (2003b) are closer to a gift economy and bear little resemblance to distributism. The example of Wörgl is more significant, as it is still presented in online neo-fascist discourse as a paradigm case where (Jewish) ‘Money Power’ was threatened.⁴ However the basic principles of distributism, which these cases are

claimed to demonstrate, are conspicuous by their absence in both articles, despite Holroyd's conclusion that "The Wörgl scrip was *therefore* a Distributist form of currency" (emphasis added, 2003a: 18). Similarly, the origins of distributism in Chesterbelloc's antisemitic arguments are absent, other than a photocaption of Belloc's portrait which informs the reader: "Hilaire Belloc: another leading exponent of distributism" (2003a: 19). The two articles therefore act less as a discourse on distributism and more as an indication that the editor of *Identity* was familiar with the existence of the theory – thereby marking a continuity with the more 'radical' 1980s. Readers unfamiliar with distributism are, in turn, provided with the name of an author – Belloc – that they may wish to read more about.

The departure of 'third position' activists from the NF didn't signal the end of its commitment to distributism. In the early 1990s, the NF published a booklet called *A look at Britain's only democratic nationalist political party* (1993 or 1994). Organised as a series of questions and answers, the booklet presents party ideology in a condensed and simplified way. For example, asked what the NF would do about companies being bought and sold on the stock exchange, the party answers:

The National Front believes in a system of distributist ownership. This means that we would strongly encourage workers to directly own the factories, farms or other places of employment where they work. [...] This would break down the traditional divide between workers and management – they would truly be a team (p.22)

Their motivation for supporting distributism is therefore two fold: it would ensure national ownership of companies, and it breaks down the class distinction between white collar and blue collar workers. Nowhere in the booklet does the NF argue against capitalism, or suggest that they consider labour in a capitalist system to be alienating. Indeed, the very next Q&A openly states that a capitalist mode of production would still be central in their fantasy economy:

56. Does this mean you are against Private Enterprise?

No, quite the reverse. We are strongly in favour of people setting up and running their own business. As the business grows and the number of employees increases we would encourage the company to become a co-operative venture (p.22)

This is, therefore, still very much a capitalist economy, merely with smaller employers. Over the page the party specifically states that it is the concentration of economic power in advanced capitalism that it finds objectionable: "Both communism and capitalism concentrate control of companies in the hands of either finance houses or state bureaucrats. Distributism gives direct ownership and direct control to the people" (p.23). However, the companies that the NF imagines here will still employ workers, and these workers will labour generating surplus value for company owners. It would only be when a company grew to a (vaguely defined) size that it would be 'encouraged' (by indefinite means, again) to include employees in a profit-sharing scheme. Elsewhere in the booklet, the party shows that it is aware of how profit is generated:

Ever since the days of the British Empire, City of London financiers have been investing British money abroad. [...] The National Front believes it is against the best

interests of Britain for these financiers to use the wealth of the British people in such a way. We would ensure that the wealth created by British workers is invested back into Britain to create jobs for our own people. (p.21)

First, needless to say, by “our own people” the NF means ‘white British people’ (see Richardson 2017). Second, the NF acknowledges “wealth [is] created by British workers” (and, one surmises, through workers not being fully compensated for their labour). This is, therefore, a capitalist mode of production, and the only aspect of it that is rendered problematic by the NF is the investment of (British) money abroad by “financiers” and “Money Power”.⁵

Whilst some may conclude that this indicates the NF had, by this point, drifted from the anti-capitalist thrust of distributism and that, in contrast, the party in the 1980s held a more radical (and so accurate) interpretation of Chesterbelloc, in fact, earlier articles in *Nationalism Today* and *New Nation* reveal a similarly forgiving attitude to the capitalist status quo in Britain. Brons (1980: 3), for example, openly declares “Private enterprise is justly praised for providing a profit motive for industry” and that the NF must “restore to people the rights to private property and the incentives of private profit”. Acton (1984: 13) argues that the nascent economic boom “achieved under Thatcher’s government can only be as superficial as it is short-lived”, and that a range of measures are needed, including workers’ co-operatives, nationalising banks and the abolition of the Stock Exchange, to ensure stable growth. The conclusion of the article, emboldened for emphasis in the original, voices the petit bourgeois sensibility under the surface of British fascist economics: “Under the present industrial and financial regime *British industry is virtually the least profitable place to invest money*. Only when a National Front Government is in power [...] can this situation be reversed” (emphasis added, *Ibid.*). Slightly earlier, in issue 16 of *Nationalism Today*, an editorial argued that “the NF is the only party capable of rescuing British industry”, through its policy “that, *where possible*, large and monolithic organisations [...] be broken down into small private businesses and workers’ co-operatives” (Industrial Front, *Nationalism Today* 16, p.18). Not only does the weasel word ‘where possible’ entail exceptions to this policy – i.e. some large, profit generating companies will not be broken down – elsewhere the article explaining party policy reveals its interpretation of “small firms” to mean companies of up to 100 employees.

In fact, statistics from the Department for Business Innovation and Skills reveals that the ‘revolutionary’ changes proposed by distributist fascists already largely exist in capitalist Britain.⁶ Data from 1994 shows that there were 3.5 million businesses operating in Britain, and that 99.4% of these employed 99 or fewer employees. Further, of these 3.5 million companies, 72.3% (3million) employed zero people – they were run by self-employed sole proprietors. Distributists always maintain that “Under capitalism, the natural and unavoidable trend is always towards more and more mergers and [hence...] towards monopoly control” (Pearce 1985: 18). Actually, the reverse is the case in Britain. By 2015, there were 5.3 million small businesses operating in Britain and now 99.3% of them employed 49 or fewer employees; 1.1 million (20%) businesses had only 1-9 employees; and 4.1 million businesses were run by self-employed proprietors with no employees (76% of all companies, up from 72.3% 20 years previous).⁷ In contrast, 0.6% businesses were ‘medium-

sized' (with 50 to 249 employees) and only 0.1% of business were categorised 'large' (with 250+ employees). The 7,000 large businesses in the UK do make a large contribution to employment, but small and medium employers still account for 60% of UK employment.

Essentially, the proposed 'distributist' policies for the UK economy would have had very little impact on the majority of British workers' employment; Britain already is dominated by small and medium employers and by the widespread ownership of businesses. However, this does *not* mean that fascist distributism would be benign. What fascists propose, in effect, is a continuation of the current capitalist mode of production – but with two key differences. First, Jews and other 'non-nationals' will be denied property rights; the antisemitic content of distributism is undeniable and enduring, from those who coined the theory through to its late adopters in the NF. It is another licence for ethnic cleansing, clothed in the literary pretensions of Edwardian aristocracy. Second, distributism re-inscribes the primacy of politics in fascist ideology, and aims to ensure that no institution(s) could challenge the power of the party. As Brons summarises, "those who accumulate, or benefit from the accumulation of, the largest holdings of capital, are not pursuing the perfectly legitimate drive for profit [...] they are active in the pursuit of power [...] **A Nationalist state simply cannot tolerate unconstitutional challenges to its power**" (emphasis in original, 1980: 3). Thus, distributism would constitute a racial and a political revolution in Britain, but it would have done very little to change Britain's capitalist economy.

Conclusion

Despite its claims to be committed to 'third way' political economies, the NF, like all British fascist parties, never freed itself from capitalism (Richardson 2017). Even at its most radical, during the 1980s, capitalism was very rarely criticized *in toto*. Instead, the National Front's critique of capitalism, during both of the phases discussed in this chapter, took one of three forms: it was directed against 'non-British' or international ownership of companies; against profiteering and exploitative practices frequently associated with 'non-British' owners or employers (what used to be called 'sweating', or 'sweated labour'); or against international finance capitalism and globalization. Essentially, British fascists only oppose forms of capitalism where profits are enjoyed by 'non-British' capitalists. Profit accumulation – and the corresponding exploitation of workers – is not viewed as being inherently problematic, as long as companies and capitalists are 'British' (that is, white/Aryan). As Neocleous (1997: 43-4) argues:

Fascism sits comfortably in the tradition of reactionary thought which identifies money and finance capital rather than capitalist commodity production as the 'enemy'. The goal in this tradition is not a classless society and the abolition of exploitation but a 'people's community' in which the excesses of the money-based modern society are curbed. Fascist attacks on 'capital' are always attacks on finance or banking capital rather than capitalist production.

In addition, when fascists use autarkic or distributist policy to attack finance or international capital this equates to an attack on Jewish capitalists – or, more accurately, the fascist attack

on finance capital is part of an antisemitic conspiracy theory that maintains that Jews control capitalism for their own financial benefit and economic power. This is because fascist conspiracies are not only radical simplifications of complex historic and political-economic processes, they are also personifications: the fault lies with (Jewish) people, rather than systems, and so the solution, for fascists, is to remove them from a position of influence within the nation.

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¹ 'Roots', The Strasser Brothers, *Nationalism Today* 18, Sept/Oct 1983, p.12

² See also Holland 1984b

³ Douglas was spellbound by the Protocols (which he describes as revealing "a Machiavellian scheme for the enslavement of the world", Douglas, 1933: 146) – to the extent that Wall (2003: 108) argues "his ideas are based on antisemitic conspiracy theory, with the economics fitted in almost as an afterthought."

⁴ For example <https://realcurrencies.wordpress.com/2012/07/02/the-power-of-demurrage-the-worgl-phenomenon/> [access 16 November 2016]

⁵ The power of finance over the national economy is also covered by the booklet, and in ways that reveal that the NF was still committed to antisemitic conspiracy theory:

'MONEY POWER'

[...] Merchant banks have grown to hold positions of tremendous power – their employees and members sit on the boards of all Britain's major industries – largely because of their ability to move money all around the world. We believe that this leads to 'money power' controlling local factories and thus local jobs. (p.23)

⁶ See

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110920151722/http://stats.bis.gov.uk/ed/sme/index.htm> (accessed 20 September 2016)

⁷ See BUSINESS POPULATION ESTIMATES FOR THE UK AND REGIONS 2015, available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/467443/bpe_2015_statistical_release.pdf [accessed 16 September 2016]