

The National Front: What Happens to it Now?

Christopher T. Husbands

(The author is a Lecturer in Sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science and has published numerous articles on the contemporary far right.)

The deep roots of much of the leadership of the National Front (NF) in the more virulent historical wing of British fascism represented by Arnold Leese and the Imperial Fascist League are by now well known.¹ Moreover, the basic commitment of the NF leadership to the traditional forms of fascist doctrine, grounded in anti-semitism rather than only anti-black sentiment, has achieved increasingly wide recognition, especially since the publication of Billig's analysis of Front ideological stances.² Tyndall's recent contact with American Nazis is to be seen as only the latest indication of whom the NF regards as its true ideological partners. However, since the electoral decline of the Front became apparent there has been a perceptible move away from examining the mass support of the movement and the precise reasons—as opposed to general and poorly specified attributions of racism—that lie behind this support. The Front's performance in the General Election of May 3, 1979 offers a convenient take-off point for a more exact consideration from a materialist perspective of the causes of NF sympathy.

The 1979 Election

The general story of the NF's electoral reverses in the election has been well publicised in all the anti-fascist media, but some of the details of its decline are additionally interesting and revealing. In 303 constituencies fought, of which 297 were in England,

the NF received a total of 1.3 per cent of votes cast. There was moreover a decline in the absolute percentage of the vote in every one of the 80 constituencies fought in both October 1974 and May 1979. Some of these losses were quite dramatic, particularly those in an area of former strength in the transplanted East End along London's Lea Valley. In Tottenham and Wood Green, for example, both in the London Borough of Haringey, there were respective absolute declines from 8.3 to 2.9 per cent and from 8.0 to 2.8 per cent. In Leyton and Walthamstow, in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, there were smaller but still remarkable absolute declines of 2.5 and 2.3 per cent. Outside London, other former relative strongholds experienced similar losses: in the three Leicester constituencies (East, South, and West) NF support fell from 6.4 to 2.7, from 4.1 to 1.8, and from 5.1 to 2.7 per cent respectively, and similar if slightly less precipitous declines can also be seen in former strongholds in the West Midlands. Within London, what NF strength there is has retreated into parts of the old East End in Hackney and Tower Hamlets (particularly Shoreditch and Bethnal Green) and into the southern part of the old London Docklands area (largely Bermondsey, Deptford, and Peckham). Outside London, the only constituencies where NF performances merit any special comment are the 3.6 per cent in Blaby (Leicestershire), the 2.4 per cent in Hertfordshire East, and the 2.2 per cent in Blackpool North, all strongly Conservative in orientation. Both the first two are spatially adjacent to better-known NF strongholds—Leicester and Enfield respectively—and NF support in these two

¹ See M. Walker, *The National Front*, Fontana, 1977, pp. 15-50.

² M. Billig, *Fascists*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, pp. 124-90.

constituencies has been a spill-over effect of organisational and material dynamics similar to those that have operated in the nearby areas. Blackpool North, despite an insignificant black proportion in its population, is apparently one of those exceptional places where the NF has managed to garner and retain support of an extreme right-wing Monday-Club type. In most other places the NF's past attempts, going back to the early 1970s, to gather this type of support have been ineffective or only temporarily successful.

The Major Issues

The electoral failure of the NF, a reality that the party itself has been forced publicly to concede in the post-election issue of *Spearhead* by rationalising the outcome in terms of experience and publicity gained, raises three major issues for the anti-fascist Left.

I. The nature of the NF's mass electoral support, in particular:

- (a) what have been the dynamics of NF support at the polls?
- (b) to what factors is the NF's electoral decline to be attributed?
- (c) could the factors that produced its high levels of support in certain locations in the past again assume their earlier significance and bring about a resurgence of support for the party, even after such a devastating electoral failure in the General Election?
- (d) will the factors that have contributed to the party's electoral losses continue to be effective against any potential future recovery?

II The effects of the NF on the major parties, particularly the Conservative party—this means asking:

- (a) what are the implications of the NF's decline for the political system as a whole, especially the Conservative government's likely policies on race- and immigration-related issues?
- (b) to what extent has the existence of the Front and the success that it was able to achieve among some of the electorate contributed to the present definition of Thatcherism, even if Margaret Thatcher may well have been pushed into this particular aspect of her political position by a pragmatism enforced by circumstances beyond her control?

The answer to these two questions lies directly in two further related matters:

- (i) who were the recipients of the former NF vote and, in places where NF candidates were present for the first time, what happened to the putative support that their earlier successes elsewhere would have predicted for them in these formerly untried areas?
- (ii) why did this former and potential NF support

favour the option that it did in the 1979 General Election?

III. The future of the National Front, in particular:

- (a) what will become of the NF in organisational terms?
- (b) to what extent and in precisely which respects is it likely to follow the path of certain extreme right-wing continental movements (such as the German National Democratic Party) that have lost or failed to find favour at the polls?

Even if the party's level of popular support were never to be the same again, the NF itself is unlikely spontaneously to disappear.

The Factors behind NF Voting

For the purpose of maintaining appropriate political responses to the NF, it is essential for Marxists to have a theoretical understanding of what have been the precise material dynamics of its mass support. They are otherwise likely to fall victim to the theoretical imprecisions of those non-Marxist excoriators of the NF who seem to regard the phenomenon merely as some kind of product of the dark side of the human soul or who, alternatively and equally imprecisely, attribute it to some ill-defined "legacy of our imperial past". To be sure, the latter factor may well have some value in explaining certain more generalised types of racist expression but it is not sufficient to account for the specific racism of NF support. In order to make this latter argument more pointedly, it is necessary only to observe that the large to overwhelming majorities of the British public who agree (often very strongly) with the imprecise but frequently asked polling question that "too many immigrants have been let into the country"³ and with similar statements provide empirical support for a concept of "consensus racism"; yet no more than a small fraction of those agreeing with such statements or with even more extreme ones could be regarded as NF sympathisers, let alone voters.

In order to appreciate what produces NF support it is important to recognise that the party's vote varies in two distinct ways. Firstly, it varies geographically and its marked concentration only in certain urban areas is a fact that must be able to be accommodated by any theory seeking to account for it. Secondly, it varies over time—it has increased and decreased in response to particular events. Additionally, of course, there have been interactions between these two dimensions of geography and time, where NF support has grown or declined in differential degree in separate places.

³ For example, D. Butler and D. Stokes, *Political Change in Britain*, 2nd ed., Macmillan, 1974, p. 303.

An Urban Phenomenon

Particularly in the approach to the first of these dimensions of analysis, it is theoretically valuable to apply a materialist perspective. Past and recent NF support has shown clearly discernible patterns that have persisted in part to the 1979 General Election. First of all, vote-support for the NF, and at one time also that for the National Party, has been a heavily urban phenomenon. A close inspection of the distribution of NF voting strength—the cities where it is concentrated and its distribution within such cities—permits one to infer some material and other factors behind this support. When we suggest that material factors do operate in producing NF sympathy, we also necessarily argue that processes of long-term economic decline in local communities are felt as such by the people who are affected by them and that among some such people these feelings carry over into the scapegoat-seeking voting behaviour of which much NF support consists.

Well known by now are the areas of particular NF strength in certain medium-sized cities with declining traditional industries (such as Preston and Blackburn in Lancashire, Bradford in West Yorkshire, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton in the Black Country, and Leicester in the East Midlands) and in some inner-city areas of some of the large conurbations like Birmingham. Black immigrants settled in many of these areas in the 1950s and 1960s as replacement labour in poorly paid, declining industries that, despite their long-term decline, were in the short term failing to recruit sufficient local white labour; textiles manufacture is a classic example to cite in this respect. Their one-time white labour pool was migrating to more prosperous parts of the country (or to the white Commonwealth) or, where possible, preferred better-paid local employment opportunities. In the circumstances of today these alternative opportunities for many indigenous whites are far fewer and, as younger whites in particular in these areas come on to their local labour market, they have sometimes been competing, at least until recently, with a more entrenched black group for an ever-falling number of traditional jobs. This entrenchment may have developed in the last ten to fifteen years in industries like textiles through the one-time preference held by some employers for black labour rather than any of the locally available unskilled white labour; this preference was often based on the greater reliability of the former type of labour, its readiness to accept lower wages, and its greater willingness to perform shiftwork.⁴ The

⁴ See B. G. Cohen and P. J. Janner, "The Employment of Immigrants: A Case Study within the Wool Industry", *Race* (1968), pp. 41-56, and M. McGrath, "The Economic Position of Immigrants in Batley", *New Community* (1976), pp. 239-49.

steps taken by some towns such as Rochdale to make good the job loss in their traditional industry by encouraging the expansion of local tertiary-sector employment have not always provided suitable opportunities for those most affected by this loss. The majority of recruits into such an expanded tertiary sector have been relatively unskilled female employees.

Less well known but perhaps no less significant from a materialist viewpoint has been the sometimes relatively good NF showing in some "growth areas" of the 1950s and 1960s that have subsequently been forced by contemporary economic circumstances to retrench (for example, Luton, Slough, and even some of the New Towns such as Basildon and Crawley). This retrenchment has obliged white workers there to consider types of employment that they could afford to pass up during the period of expansion. Now they, or their successors in the next generation, find themselves competing with a black labour force in these once despised jobs, as the "job ceiling"⁵ between white and black labour markets is forced lower by the economic recession.

Patterns of Unemployment

These observations presuppose certain patterns of unemployment among black and white workers; such patterns do not in fact display a uniform across-the-board differential in favour of one or the other group. The 1971 Census showed for the country as a whole a somewhat higher unemployment rate for economically active blacks, though the difference was not great, and black workers have suffered greater relative increases in unemployment since the onset of the present recession.⁶ However, the pattern of unemployment differentials varies substantially by the location and age of the appropriate workforce and by its ethnic composition; young West Indians in cities like London and Birmingham are known to be particularly badly hit by unemployment. Yet in some places one may find situations where the unemployment rate among certain groups of black workers (say, middle-aged Asians) is lower than among other local groups (say, younger whites), a situation that has persisted into the current recession. In a very precise sense then—and it is vital to emphasise this if there is to be no misconstruction or misunderstanding—the white racists' refrain that "they are taking our jobs" may have validity in some local situations, if by

⁵ This notion of a "job ceiling" is found in St. Clair Drake and H. Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945, pp. 219-32.

⁶ See D. J. Smith, *Racial Disadvantage in Britain*, Penguin, 1977, pp. 67-72, and Department of Employment, *The Role of Immigrants in the Labour Market*, 1977, pp. 27-8.

"our jobs" is meant "the jobs that some of us might otherwise have".

Thus, in its attempt to convey the message that black people have in no way, either personally or collectively, been responsible for levels of unemployment, the popular anti-racist observation that there was no black population here during the unemployment of the 1930s Depression fails to make the more vital point that capitalist interest has always benefited from divisions within the working class. This is true both historically in the context of Irish migrant labour as described by Marx and Engels⁷ and also contemporarily in the context of migrant labour in Western Europe,⁸ even if such a situation was fostered in the first place by parts of the capital-holding class from economic motives of capital reproduction and accumulation rather than from political or social-control ones based on the principle of *divide et impera*.

However, there has also been a type of NF support very different from the materially based type found in certain of the declining-industrial and the one-time expanding-industrial areas, all of which have shown a solid or at least predominant political orientation to the Labour Party (although marked by high abstention rates and reverses over the last few years). Since its Monday Club flirtation of the early 1970s, the NF has been able to build some occasional support on the extreme conservatism of several seaside towns and retirement areas; such places typically display monolithic local Conservative control and virtually no black population. In May 1976, for example, conspicuous successes were obtained in Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Districts on the north Lancashire littoral and at Thanet in Kent. It is interesting to note, however, that much of this type of support evaporated quite dramatically in the local elections of a year later in 1977, far more so than the simultaneous decline of NF support in the more industrial context, and one suspects that this former type of support—lacking as it does the specifically material basis of industrial-urban NF sympathy—is much more temporary, and therefore correspondingly likely to desert when a subsequent political situation defines even local elections as inter-major-party contests. The level of support for the NF in the May 1979 General Election in the Blackpool North constituency is one of the few obvious residues of this type of NF vote.

The Significance of Territoriality

Some of the major alternative attempts to explain

⁷ For example, K. Marx, Letter to S. Meyer and A. Vogt, April 9, 1870, *Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1956, pp. 286-7.

⁸ S. Castles and G. Kosack, *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 116-79.

NF support—which in part compete with the importance that I have ascribed to certain material factors—revolve in various ways around the concept of what I shall call territoriality, and it is important also to consider their possible significance. What, however, is encompassed by such a general concept? The essence of all types of territorial explanation of NF voting is that they derive in some way from physical proximity of whites to blacks. Most explanations subsumed by the concept of territoriality are non-economic in their operation, although others have an economic component. Hypotheses about NF sympathy being a consequence of the cultural threats perceived by indigenous whites as deriving from unwanted contact with black people—about such matters as language differences, unusual religious practices, unwonted culinary habits, displays of unaccustomed merchandise in local shops, or a supposed decline in the character and neighbourliness of a local community—are based on non-economic territorial processes. On the other hand, arguments that NF propensity follows from the falsely grounded view that property values in an area decline when black people move in from an adjacent neighbourhood or else from competition for the same housing between spatially proximate whites and blacks in an area whose racial composition is undergoing change are examples of economically based territorial processes. If any kind of territorially related NF voting occurs in a particular urban situation it would of course be significantly more common among whites who live close to blacks than among those further away.

The variation throughout a city as a whole in the ward-level percentages of NF support in local elections can be used as a very provisional indicator of the significance of territoriality for NF sympathy. In fact there is remarkably little territorial concentration in NF voting within those cities where the party has been relatively strong⁹ and it can be stated

⁹ The case of NF support in the East End of London, where it has always shown significant territoriality, is exceptional and requires an additional consideration to explain it. Work by G. S. Jones and others has documented the historic dominance of casualism in certain parts of the metropolitan economy that have a distinctive and longstanding spatial concentration. In these places (such as Shoreditch and Bethnal Green), characterised historically by smallscale marginal manufacturing, there is an imperfectly proletarianised, economic working-class culture which is particularly conducive to the scapegoating of new and ethnically distinctive arrivals who are perceived as economic threats. This theme is further developed in C. T. Husbands, "The 'threat' hypothesis and racist voting in England and the United States", in R. Miles and A. Phizacklea (Eds.), *Racism and Political Action in Britain*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, pp. 174-6.

as a fairly general principle that the territorial component in the causes of NF voting has usually been surprisingly absent, despite the beliefs held by numerous commentators and by NF leaders themselves about the significance of such factors.¹⁰ Territoriality is probably less a dynamic of NF voting than in the comparable case of George Wallace voting in urban America in 1968.¹¹

Thus, it can be asserted that processes at the city-wide level rather than ones at the more local neighbourhood level are of particular importance in understanding the underlying factors behind NF support. Such city-level processes are embedded in the operation of the labour market or perhaps in the "market" (as perceived by some whites) for such benefits as welfare payments, or even in those parts of the housing market where demand is not noticeably concentrated in particular spatial locations.

1976: a peak

However, one can find some exceptional instances where territorial processes of a very local origin may have been more significant than usual. The widely quoted ones (the District Council elections in Leicester and the NF's campaigns in the parliamentary by-elections at Rotherham and Thurrock) all come from 1976. This was a year of maximum mass support for the NF that started after dramatic successes in the May District Council elections, which occurred at precisely the time of a media blitz, complete with the grossest racist innuendoes, on the handling by the West Sussex Department of Social Services of a homeless family of Malawi Asians who had recently arrived at Gatwick Airport. The momentum of these events and of the May local election successes was clearly maintained throughout the ensuing summer and into early 1977, when the NF managed (sometimes also with the National Party) some quite dramatic Borough Council by-election successes in parts of London (in Barnet, Enfield, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest and Wandsworth). If one examines the spatial variation in the NF vote in local elections from 1976 to 1979 within those chief where the consistent presence of a city-wide slate of candidates permits a fully valid comparison, the earlier cases tend to show the greatest spatial concentration in NF support. This is true ward-by-ward in Leicester (comparing 1976 with 1977 and 1979), in Bradford (comparing 1976 with 1977 and 1978) and in Wolverhampton (1977 with 1978 and 1979), suggesting both that the territorial factor in NF support retreated as overall support for the party declined

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159, and Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 198, 218.

¹¹ This viewpoint is elaborated in Husbands, "The 'threat' hypothesis ...", pp. 147-74.

and also that such a component was particularly stimulated by the earlier racially sensitive climate.

The Decline Over Time

The issue of why NF vote support has declined over time and the implication of this for the wider political system can both be addressed if one analyses some of the party's General Election performances of May 3 with a greater attention to variations in the pattern of this decline in those seats fought in both October 1974 and May 1979. Of special interest is the matter of who were the recipients of its earlier support. There are *a priori* reasons as well as much other evidence to suspect that the NF's decline contributed—albeit marginally because of the initial small size of the earlier NF vote—to the Conservative victory, and one can isolate certain types of constituency where it is reasonable to suggest that the Conservatives received much of this vote.¹²

If, for example, one examines the 12 Inner London or the 11 West Midlands constituencies where the NF ran in both 1974 and 1979, there is a strong correlation—one that survives controls for possible confounding variables—between the absolute percentages of NF loss and those of Conservative gain. However, one must mention that, although these relationships hold among Inner London and West Midlands urban seats, they are not always to be found among other groups of usually more Conservative seats where the NF fought on both occasions. There have been a few instances, usually but not always in lesser NF strongholds, where the earlier vote did not go straight to the Conservatives. Indeed, much of the dramatic decline in NF support in Bradford's District Council elections between 1976 and 1978 has been attributed to numerous one-time NF voters returning to Labour after a successful local anti-NF campaign.¹³

Two Factors

However, in most urban situations with relatively high 1974 NF support it is still plausible to suggest that the NF's failure is attributable to two particular factors: firstly and most importantly, the successful and relatively unobtrusive co-optation by the Conservatives of the NF's major theme of race and immigration, a co-optation made all the easier by the fact that most of the electorate always saw the Conservatives as the likely winners of the General Election; and secondly, closely related, the purpose-

¹² It must be pointed out that inferences from aggregate, constituency-level data can legitimately be made only under some rigorous statistical assumptions and this caveat should in fairness be borne in mind when assessing some of what follows.

¹³ [Bradford] *Telegraph & Argus*, May 5, 1978, p. 8.

lessness of giving a general-election vote to the National Front in the present electoral system when such a vote may with similar motivation but rather greater political impact be awarded to the Conservative Party. The NF has therefore been hurt by tactical racist voting and the effects of this have undoubtedly become one element in the political syndrome of Thatcherism, as the Conservative Party itself has shifted towards an explicit adoption of NF orientations.

The assertion of the Conservative appeal in the General Election among former NF voters is consistent with other aspects of the elections held on May 3. Thus, in the District Council election contests on the same day numerous voters in, for example, Birmingham and Leicester, were willing to engage in what might be termed *panachage*-voting, that is, voting for a major party (usually Conservative) in the general election and for the NF candidate in the corresponding local contest. Furthermore, higher levels of NF vote-support continue to be found where there are no minor-party candidacies, particularly no Liberal candidate.¹⁴ In past comment on NF support much has been made of the apparent mutual substitutability of some NF and some Liberal voting, a substitutability that was supposedly revealed by this particular predictor of NF support. This predictive relationship purportedly sustained the argument that the NF vote contained a large component of mere protest voters who lacked any deeply ingrained racist motivation. Any decline in the relationship between the absence of a Liberal and the higher level of NF support in a particular contest would therefore corroborate the view that the party's decline in mass support is to be explained by the erosion of much of an earlier protest component. However, the evidence for a decline in the relationship of Liberal absence and higher NF support is at best ambiguous, which suggests that the NF vote has always been and remains much more race-motivated than is conceded by depictions of it as mere protest voting. The party's electoral decline is not then to be explained by a growing awareness within that body of its earlier supporters who comprised its supposed protest component that the NF is a more risky vehicle for such voting than, say, the Liberals. Instead, as the Conservative Party has shifted, there has developed an increasing perception that this is the more appropriate recipient for a race-motivated vote and this perception has taken root relatively uniformly among all the types of NF voter who were to be found among the party's support in its halcyon days of 1976 and early 1977.

¹⁴ See, for example, C. T. Husbands, "The National Front: a response to crisis?", *New Society*, May 15, 1975, pp. 403-5.

The racially charged political climate of 1976, which undoubtedly produced much spontaneous NF voting in local elections and by-elections of that year, has moderated but the sentiments upon which it drew may well have settled down within the Conservative Party's vote in a more long-term and rational calculation of personal advantage.

The Role of Anti-Fascist Activities

If this is true, it obliges all anti-fascists accurately to analyse the effects of their activities against the NF during the last several years. It must be strongly emphasised that I do not imply by this statement any belittlement or criticism but rather the need to bring a full analytic approach to the vital task of understanding in what precise respects the activities of anti-fascists—particularly of course the Anti-Nazi League because of the national publicity about its activities—have produced definite results and in what spheres the effects are less easy to assess.

The fall in mass NF support from the extraordinary levels it was able to achieve in the special circumstances of 1976 might well have happened anyway, even if perhaps less quickly. It would never have been easy in a two-party system for a new party without deep historical resonances within the mass electorate to maintain such momentum. The view that such support may well have converted to the Conservatives with its racist motivation relatively unimpaired is consistent with available survey evidence. One study has shown, for example, that a larger proportion of Conservative than of Labour inner-city white voters would have been detached by the NF in the May General Election if the political climate had been propitious to the Front rather than the Conservatives.¹⁵ As most of the ANL's protagonists well realise, the League may have successfully denigrated the NF but it has scarcely scratched the surface of native racist sentiment.

In assessing this perhaps controversial assertion it should be recalled that the most successful and publicised ANL activities against the NF began only in late 1977 and early 1978, whereas those who had examined the appropriate election results had already noted substantial declines in NF vote-support in the May 1977 County Council elections compared with the District Council results of the previous year.¹⁶ The May 1977 Greater London Council elections, when the NF averaged 5.1 per cent of votes cast in 91 constituencies fought out of 92, were the supposed catalyst to the formation

¹⁵ C. T. Husbands and J. England, "Will Thatcher lose the racist vote?", *New Statesman*, April 20, 1979, pp. 542-4.

¹⁶ C. T. Husbands, "The National Front Becalmed?", *Wiener Library Bulletin* (1977), pp. 74-9.

of the ANL but there can be no doubt that the NF performance overall would have been much higher in the previous year if there had been a full set of GLC or Borough Council elections then; the results of several Borough Council by-elections that were held in London in 1976 and early 1977 provide ample testimony to that.

The ANL's campaign against the NF has been successful, as various pieces of more or less systematic evidence show, in diffusing the NF's Nazi image throughout the wider public. Moreover, Granada Television's *World in Action* expose of the NF broadcast on July 3, 1978 was also significant in diffusing knowledge about the violence of the NF as an organisation. However, it remains difficult to pinpoint precisely how this more accurate image of the NF has contributed to its decline. In a study conducted by the author numerous one-time NF voters do mention this as a factor in their discontinued support of the party but one suspects that many of them are merely offering a more socially acceptable reason to excuse their one-time "lapse" into NF voting. A more direct reason for the NF's decline is its failure in the eyes of many of its former supporters to deliver what it genuinely seemed to them to be promising that it could. For it is hard to escape the conclusion that—in the racially tense climate of two and three years ago—many NF voters were confused enough to think that in some almost magical way their support for the NF would somehow remove black settlement from their neighbourhoods and the perceived attendant pressures on local jobs and housing. While an aura of extremism, violence and failure is clearly detrimental to the NF's future electoral credibility and viability, it does nothing to touch the extent of domestic racism.

One of the great achievements of the ANL has been the co-ordination of anti-NF activity among sections of youth, particularly through the Carnivals. Though these were perhaps viewed with scepticism and ambivalence by much of the non-participating public, they have diffused and legitimated anti-racist activism far more widely and successfully than almost any other medium could have done. Equally telling and effective has been the ability of the ANL to co-ordinate successful opposition to certain localised instances of racist vigilantism, the most famous example of which has of course been the violence against Asians in London's Brick Lane area.

Repercussions on Race and Immigration Policy

If many ex-NF voters have now turned to the Conservative Party, there may well be unsavoury consequences in the areas of race and immigration policy. In her explicit bid for this support in her notorious "swamping" speech and by other induce-

ments Mrs. Thatcher may have offered a hostage to fortune. She may be expected to introduce some dramatic and significant policy on race and immigration, or at least a gesture, if she is to show that she is willing to "deliver" on the issue. As long as the economy retains a certain stability, the pressure upon her to do this is mitigated,¹⁷ but a deterioration of the economic situation, particularly if exacerbated by the monetarist retrenchment of the public sector, could force her hand. She might then see a choice between losing this race-based constituency back to the NF and commitment to a more repressive policy on race that is based on more or less subtle inducements to repatriation, a practice that some on the Left¹⁸ see as already operating and one for which France and the Federal Republic of Germany—countries with a brutally functional attitude in the public and the government toward their migrant labour forces—provide models. The implementation of the scheme to prepare a list of immigrants' dependants is already a certainty.

The Future of the NF

Even so, an excessively materialist perspective on the possibility of an NF resurgence during the lifetime of the Conservative Government may be inappropriate, even if the economic circumstances do assume the earlier propitiousness of 1976, since it ignores the relevance of the sorts of political factors discussed in a previous section. So-called "flash" parties—as some political scientists call them and of which the French Poujadist movement is the classic example, parties like the NF that lack the sort of deep historical roots in the electorate held by the Italian MSI—are likely victims of a "semi-souffle" phenomenon. That is, they may rise once, as did the NF in 1972 and 1973 during the Uganda Asians affair, and then collapse; they may perhaps rise again, as the NF was able to do in 1976 and early 1977. However, there is a limit to this pattern of ups and downs, since such a party eventually loses electoral credibility if its one-time supporters themselves come to regard it as a failure, as seems to be the case with the NF since its most recent decline. A successor movement to the NF does not

¹⁷ One should point out that, even if longer-term economic prospects have scarcely improved since 1976, shorter-term ones may have done and there is evidence from polling data of slightly lesser degrees of public pessimism about personal and national economic prospects than was true three years ago. The peak of NF support was in a period of considerable mass misgiving about the economy, when the general index of retail prices was rising faster than basic weekly wage rates for manual workers in all industries.

¹⁸ A. Sivanandan, "From immigration control to 'induced repatriation'", Institute of Race Relations pamphlet.

appear a likely outcome in the short term but, if ex-NF Conservatives do become disgruntled, this is one longer-term possibility. A new Enoch Powell, even if not Enoch Powell himself, or an English Mogens Glistrup, who established the Danish Progress Party—such a leader could reactivate those material dynamics that produced the earlier levels of NF support and that continue to have a structural existence.

The NF itself will doubtless retrench into localised areas where it still retains some modest support within the electorate. Its interest in elections *per se* will almost certainly diminish, but its potential for serious harm by implicitly or explicitly encouraging various types of vigilantism by white youths against black people in the competitive context of the inner city remains serious.¹⁹

As an organisation the NF faces division and schism; its current internal turmoil is based on differences about doctrine and strategy amid mutual recriminations about the election disaster. However, the argument does seem to be focusing on the

hindrance to any future recovery of the party of Tyndall as Chairman and Webster as National Activities Organiser. There may be a replay of the split of 1975 and early 1976 that produced the short-lived National Party. Tyndall and Webster survived that because they managed to retain control of much of the party machinery and, more important, because they retained the organisational name whose widespread recognition within the electorate during a period of greatly increased public sensitivity to race and immigration gave them a large advantage over the break-away group. However, political circumstances have changed since 1976. Successful survival if a further split occurs may be more than they can manage.

¹⁹ Examples of harassment and vigilantism are documented in Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council, *Blood on the Streets: A Report by Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council on Racial Attacks in East London* (September 1978).