

# MANY SHADES OF WHITE NATIONALISM

*Many Shades of Black*

*Inside Britain's Far Right*

John Bean

London: New Millennium, 1999

*Reviewed by Andrew Redmond*

"There's a country; you don't live there  
But one day you would like to."

— Morrissey<sup>1</sup>

John Bean's *Many Shades of Black* chronicles a lifetime of struggle on behalf of white freedom. Bean's efforts were often futile, but always brave and often heroic. Yet he persevered and helped lay the foundations for a coherent national resistance movement which is only now coming into its own in the form of the British National Party. Bean has seen the step by step transformation of the white world, and did what he could to slow, halt, and we hope reverse the decline. *Many Shades of Black* assesses what Bean did, why he did it, and what he wishes he had done differently. This memoir is always candid and often humorous. It is also valuable for understanding the wide diversity of opinions within the broadly-defined nationalist movement, not only about what an ideal Britain would look like but also about how to make it a reality.

The "black" of Bean's title refers to the black shirts of Benito Mussolini's Fascist movement. The "many shades" refers to the essential diversity of nationalist movements, rooted as they were in differences of blood and soil, borders and language, history and tradition. A cosmopolitan fascism, like an internationalist nationalism, is a contradiction in terms. In Bean's words:

[I]n any country where there existed a movement based on na-

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<sup>1</sup> Morrissey, "The National Front Disco," *Your Arsenal* (Reprise Records, 1992).

tionalist beliefs, active opposition to Communism, and support for the authority of the state, such a movement would be called fascist. However, there would be quite marked differences between it and a similarly named movement in another country. Witness the difference between Salazar's Portugal, Franco's Spain, Peron's Argentina, and Mussolini's Italy. (p. 91)

Just as fascism proved to be a diverse phenomenon wherever it gained power, the "fascist" movements that were *not* successful gaining power – attracting as they did large numbers of individualist True Believers unbound by any state structure – proved even more diverse and, as Bean records, chaotic.

John Bean was born in 1927. His first serious political engagement was with the Union Movement of Sir Oswald Mosley (1896–1980). In 1932, Mosley founded the British Union of Fascists. Ignoring Il Duce's particularist dictum that "Fascism is not for export,"<sup>2</sup> Mosley sought to duplicate not just Mussolini's policies, but his imagery as well. Critics saw something "un-English" about uniformed nationalism, as Adrian Davies discusses in his excellent review of *Many Shades of Black*:

Mosley's decision to ape the continental dictators by dressing his followers (against Mussolini's advice) in a uniform which was a cross between that of a concentration camp guard and a bus conductor achieved the remarkable feat of making the BUF appear simultaneously sinister and ridiculous, a triumph which Mosley's own pale imitators have since equaled, and even surpassed.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly the BUF had a basis in contemporary British realities, a basis its foreign packaging only obscured. At the height of the Great Depression most Western governments were taking radical measures to cope with the crisis, and Mosley's calls for radical reform at the expense of the "Old Gang" resonated with many. In fact, Mosley rallied enormous amounts of popular support.

Even after Britain declared war on Germany in 1939 Mosley was

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<sup>2</sup> Mussolini said that "Fascism is not for export" in March of 1928. See Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 463.

<sup>3</sup> Adrian Davies, "The 'Extreme Right': Why it Failed," <http://www.freedompartyuk.net/public/articles/extremeright.html>.

able to draw "the type of patriot who had attacked Ramsay MacDonald, and before him Lloyd George,"<sup>4</sup> who listened to him with respect and offered their support. In the film of one such rally, "[t]he street is packed with people, and at the end of his speech [Mosley] asks them to lift up their arms 'for peace.' A forest of arms goes up."<sup>5</sup> The BUF was shut down in 1940, and Mosley, derided as "Britain's Quisling," spent most of the Second World War in detention as an "enemy of the state," on the false charge that he would have welcomed a German occupation.

After the war, Mosley, never one to shirk from what he considered to be his historical duty, defiantly re-launched his political career. With wartime rationing still in effect and vast swathes of cities still in rubble from the German Blitz and buzz bombs, with the memory of the dead still fresh in the minds of the nation, and well-organized Stalinist opponents still profiting from the official Establishment ardor for Uncle Joe, Mosley's return was an act of courage that bordered on recklessness. It also says a lot about John Bean's courage that he was willing to openly align himself with Mosley when he did.

Mosley's new Union Movement renounced British nationalism in favor of the ideal of "Europe a Nation," a pan-European ideology that presaged the European Union. The Union Movement proved surprisingly popular with Mosley's old working class base. For the rest of his life, Mosley was revered in the East End of London, which had borne the brunt of the Blitz. Sunny days in Cockney parlance were called "Mosley weather," in homage to the conditions that seemed to prevail whenever Mosley held outdoor rallies.

Bean's first lesson about politics on the "fringe" – no matter how little the "fringe" label is really deserved – was that it attracts True Believers, some of whom, like John Bean, are perfectly reasonable, honest to a fault, and courageous. But, as anyone with any experience of white nationalism knows all too well, it also attracts less sterling elements for reasons other than selfless commitment to a cause.

In the days before television, let alone the internet, public marches were the main means for politically isolated groups to engage the public, show their strength, and make the news. The dissemination of the news was dominated by the BBC<sup>6</sup> and the national daily newspapers,

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<sup>4</sup> Diana Mitford Mosley, *A Life of Contrasts* (New York: Times Books, 1977), 162.

<sup>5</sup> *A Life of Contrasts*, 161

<sup>6</sup> Oswald Mosley was effectively banned by the BBC from 1934 until 1968. "It

all of them controlled by a hostile establishment. But for Bean such marches were often more ridiculous than effective. "It is not my intention to mock those of us who are so unfortunate as to have defective or crippled limbs, but Union Movement seemed to attract such people out of all proportion to their numbers," he says in discussing Mosley demonstrations: "In fact the general appearance of Mosley's supporters on the march was not a band of six foot broad shouldered thugs, as the general public seemed to visualize, but a rather drab looking crowd of vacant faced nondescript men and women, although not without courage" (pp. 67-68).

Mosley's return to politics drew a mild response from the Establishment, which put the UM under surveillance by the political police. But the "street" opposition of Communists and Jewish groups was even more extreme than in the prewar period. Bean details the efforts of Jewish terrorist gangs like the 43 Group and later the 62 Group, with slogans such as "we're not here to kill, we're here to maim,"<sup>7</sup> to intimidate nationalist dissidents into silence.

Bean recounts many run-ins with such thugs, encounters that occasionally descended into farce. On one occasion Bean was trapped in a van at a stoplight with a handful of his fellow Mosleyites as a gang of "forty or fifty Jews . . . gathered. . . . On sighting us they made a spontaneous rush for the van . . . [b]ut instead of tipping it over as we expected, they just halted in their tracks, shouting 'Come out and fight, you Fascist bastards.'" The standoff ended when the light changed and the Mosley crew drove off, to the relief of the Jews who then put on a "show of bravado; two of them taking off their jackets and dramatically throwing them to the ground, then running after the van, which they knew they could no longer catch" (pp. 68-69).

This kind of buffoonery seemed to mark the political trajectory of Union Movement's activities as a whole. The atmosphere of violence actually drew hard men and adventurers to Mosley's ranks, becoming a key element in the movement's self-identity. As Bean points out,

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was not until 1968, and after he had brought an action in the High Court, that he, like every other politician, was able to speak for himself on the wireless and television controlled by the BBC, although he had throughout been the subject of frequent comment by other people, and wildly hostile comment at that" (*A Life of Contrasts*, 137).

<sup>7</sup> See the important SIS Report, *Searchlight: Political Violence and Terrorism*, 2008, <http://isupporttheresistance.blogspot.com/2008/12/searchlight-political-violence-and.html>.

when Communist and Jewish violence began to slack off, the leadership seemed to seek it out.

This lack of positive direction, as well as the increasing identification of many UM speakers and writers with the defeated, and widely loathed National Socialist experiment, led Bean to drop out. He believed that the UM lacked the ability to capture the loyalty of the kinds and numbers of people needed to create real social change. Bean relates an incident towards the end of his Mosleyite career that highlights the frustration he was clearly feeling. He and his comrades constructed an elaborate smoke bomb that succeeded in ruining a Communist march. While nationalists would be jailed on "terrorism" charges if they attempted anything so bold today, the stunt was essentially an elaborate schoolboy prank that had more to do with bonding inside the organization than with reaching out to the British people.

Having had his fill of Mosley, Bean took a road traveled by many a disillusioned idealist: he joined the Conservative Party, a sojourn in the "mainstream" that lasted all of two months:

I have been told that I should not have been so impatient but should have stayed with the Tories. This assumes that I would have been able to forget, or suppress, all my radical viewpoints, and accept the reactionary right dogma of the Tories, particularly in relation to trade unionism and general matters affecting the working man. I had joined the Conservative Party because it was more of a home for patriots and nationalists, but in certain circumstances I would have been more at home in the Labour Party. (p. 93)

Bean then aligned himself with the League of Empire Loyalists (LEL), a pressure group led by A. K. Chesterton, formerly an editor for Mosley in the 1930s and the cousin of the famous writer G. K. Chesterton. But where Mosley had, in theory, looked to the future of a united Europe, the LEL chased history's coattails, decrying the loss of Britain's empire which had begun with the end of the Second World War and which was officially embraced by the Establishment with Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's "Wind of Change" speech in 1960.

Home to a wide variety of disillusioned Tories, the LEL pulled off a series of courageous and hilarious public stunts lampooning the Establishment years before the Marxoid Yippies would attempt far tamer pranks in the United States with a much smaller popular base

and the help of an enabling media. Bean apparently had a lot of fun, but ultimately left, disillusioned by the inability of Chesterton and his LEL to adapt to irrevocably altered historical circumstances: the British Empire was gone forever, while part of the consequence of its existence, the influx of immigrants from the "Coloured Dominions," went unchecked.

Bean then joined the first of the organizations he was able to directly influence, the National Labour Party. Around the same time, he began close collaboration with Andrew Fountaine, a landed aristocrat from an old Norman family with both a strong commitment to nationalism and some blue-blood idiosyncrasies. "[A]t seventeen he drove an ambulance for the Abyssinians, who were under attack by Mussolini . . . Eighteen months later he was fighting for General Franco's forces in the Spanish Civil War" (p. 123). Fountaine's relationship with Bean was a strong personal one which lasted to the end of Fountaine's life in 1997, and Bean's references to Fountaine touch on an often neglected aspect of idealistic activism: the close personal bonds forged in the midst of struggle.

Bean is also frank about how his politics affected other aspects of his personal life. His regret is palpable when he mentions his absences from his family, such as when he missed his wife's triumphs at various beauty contests as he sat at barely-remembered political meetings.

The National Labour Party would soon merge with the White Defense League to form the "first" British National Party in 1960. The current BNP began in 1982 after the organization's main figure, John Tyndall, emerged from a circuitous route through the National Front, which was founded in 1967 by a merger of Bean's BNP, in which Tyndall had been active, and other groups, such as the LEL. The first NF leader was the LEL's A. K. Chesterton. Bean's own political life intersected Tyndall's at various important points as both an opponent and an ally.

Bean relates a typically humorous anecdote from 1961, which contrasts his vision of British nationalism with the "hard line" represented by Tyndall and Tyndall's then ally, the avowed National Socialist Colin Jordan. The troika formed the leadership of the first British National Party, which Bean would eventually merge with other factions into the National Front in 1967. The brutal physical opposition directed against nationalism was beginning to spread beyond the ethnic Jewish fringe as Marxist formations that would soon become part of the New Left attracted new followers who were caught up in

the general cultural ferment of the 1960s, ushering in an epoch of mass political violence against dissidents not seen since Mosley's heyday.

Given Jordan's National Socialism, as well as the history of militant "street" nationalism in the UK, it was not surprising that a new, uniformed "defense" organization was formed to protect the BNP, along the lines of the militant bus conductors cited by Adrian Davies. With members clad "in grey shirts, Sam Browne belts, and jackboots" (p. 147), it was called Spearhead. The book's cover bears a photograph of one of Spearhead's demonstrations: a torchlight parade complete with flags, armbands, and a drum corps. The parade received the support of "[u]p to fifty members of the public [who] joined in en route . . ." (p. 147).

One of Bean's admitted weaknesses comes through in his account of the Spearhead, namely his reluctant willingness to compromise his own ideas in the cause of "unity":

At this period concern started to be expressed to me by several senior members over new trends in the Spearhead . . . which bore more resemblance to the views of the Third Reich than the original BNP. Initially I had tried to ignore the Spearhead, perhaps hoping it would fold up. (p. 147).

But the same senior members kept "urging me to take action on the danger presented by the Spearhead of not only infringing the Public Order Act on uniforms but giving the public the impression that we were aping Mosley's pre-war Blackshirts. This was why the Public Order Act was on the statute books" (p. 148).

Sure enough, not long afterwards, when Tyndall and Jordan left Bean's BNP to form the National Socialist Movement,<sup>8</sup> both were charged with Public Order Act offenses for their Spearhead activities and jailed.<sup>9</sup> The BNP was not caught up in the prosecution because Andrew Fountaine had expelled the pair. But the damage was done, and it was extensive. For the rest of Tyndall's life, the mainstream media republished a photograph of him in his Spearhead uniform

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<sup>8</sup> The National Socialist Movement was later renamed the British Movement, which became the main rival of the National Front, the "moderate" nationalist coalition which absorbed Bean's BNP.

<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 37–38.

whenever whatever group Tyndall was leading at the time appeared to be on the brink of a breakthrough.<sup>10</sup>

When *Many Shades of Black* was published in 1999, the BNP was the largest political grouping on what Bean calls the “radical right.” The party was about to undergo an enormous change, when Nick Griffin challenged and prevailed against John Tyndall for the party’s leadership. The change in leadership was certainly generational; Tyndall was in his mid sixties while Griffin was just forty. But it also signaled a thoroughgoing shift in the BNP’s political orientation, both ideologically and strategically, seeming to draw on many of the lessons Bean outlined in *Many Shades of Black*.

Even more so than Bean, John Tyndall endured the harshness of the political wilderness, being unable to engage the British public largely because objective political realities were unfavorable throughout most of his life. During Tyndall’s tenure as leader, only one BNP hopeful was elected. Derek Beackon won a seat in Tower Hamlets,<sup>11</sup> part of London’s East End, which had been an enclave of nationalist support since Mosley’s day.

After a decade of Griffin at the helm, the BNP has scores of elected government officials. It is an organization the Establishment has to take seriously. While Griffin is unquestionably charismatic and intelligent, a large part of his success is due to changes in objective circumstances and his willingness to make the most of them. Third World immigration into the UK is at invasion levels, with lax “asylum seeker” laws making the realities of “enriched,” multicultural life apparent even in affluent, once sheltered white areas.

The BNP’s job has been made much easier by the behavior of many of these “new Britons,” especially the spectacular Islamist terrorist

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<sup>10</sup> “Spearhead” became the name of Tyndall’s monthly magazine, which he published from 1964 until his death in 2005. *Spearhead* had a great deal of influence within the nationalist movement, and served as the house organ for various groups with which Tyndall was affiliated.

<sup>11</sup> An important source on the failure of nationalism in the East End is a video program called *East Ended* from the BNP’s multimedia arm, BNPTv, available online: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4910936896288149667&ei=OKaESablDZy4qAOv9cjoCg&q=east+ended+&hl=en>. Presented by Eddy Butler, the program examines, in part, how nationalists failed to address the real problems of white East Enders while immigrants demographically transformed the area. The Beackon campaign was the last hurrah of organized white nationalism in an area now ethnically cleansed by “white flight.”

attacks of July 7, 2005, carried out by British-born Muslims. Griffin had predicted just such an event, giving him a credibility with much of the white public that only increased when he beat the government in two successive thought crimes trials in 2005 and 2006. The trials were seen as a government attempt to behead the BNP just as it began to consolidate its breakout from the political sidelines.

Indeed, the prosecution itself was engineered by the BBC and the "antifascist" Searchlight<sup>12</sup> organization after a reporter "infiltrated" the BNP and secretly taped various politically incorrect statements.<sup>13</sup> Tyndall himself was charged along with Griffin and a subordinate, and the pressure of the case may have led to Tyndall's death at age 71, days before the trial.

Even the Tower Hamlets win under Tyndall's aegis has been seen as the result of the "modernizing" influences Griffin later came to represent; Beackon's campaign was coordinated by Eddy Butler, a key Griffin ally in the leadership challenge and the BNP's "election guru."

John Bean, who decided to pursue his neglected career after the National Front was founded, ended over two decades of political inactivity after Nick Griffin took the helm of the BNP, joining the party and standing as a candidate in the 2004 European parliamentary elections. Griffin put Bean's writing and analytical skills to use by naming him editor of *Identity*, the party's glossy monthly magazine,<sup>14</sup> and Bean also writes an occasional column<sup>15</sup> for the BNP website as well as articles for British Pride,<sup>16</sup> the party's history site.

Bean relates many vivid and entertaining stories of the kinds of odd individuals and dysfunctional organizations that make far right politics unfailingly interesting. He has an Englishman's eye for eccentricity. But the overall effect is inspiring. For all their foibles, these are people of

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<sup>12</sup> Searchlight, led by Gerry Gable, is a private organization which receives subsidies from the British government. Its main activity seems to be to harass people whose political views it dislikes.

<sup>13</sup> For example, one charge against Griffin was that he called Islam "a wicked faith." Such a statement would be perfectly legal in the United States, but was alleged to be illegal under the UK's racial "hate speech" laws. Griffin's argument that Muslims could not be "racially vilified" because they come from all races prevailed, which led to a new law to ban "religious vilification."

<sup>14</sup> <http://bnp.org.uk/identity-magazine/>.

<sup>15</sup> <http://bnp.org.uk/category/columnists/john-bean/>. The site is the most popular political party site in the United Kingdom.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.britishpride.org>.

courage and commitment. And they were *right*. For example, Mosley's idea of "Europe a Nation" was remarkably prescient, and had it been followed, the EU would be working for the preservation rather than the destruction of the white race in Europe. Similarly, the white nationalists of postwar Britain foresaw the effects of non-white immigration and globalism decades ago.

Unfortunately for them and the world, they were unable to communicate their message effectively and turn it into real political power. The opposition was too strong and their audience too small. Much of Bean's political life was spent carrying the torch of white nationalism through the postwar wilderness years, until the effects of multiculturalism and Third World immigration created a natural constituency for white nationalism in Britain.

*Many Shades of Black* is a powerful and fascinating document. I hope John Bean will have it reprinted, with new chapters on nationalism's remarkable progress in the United Kingdom in the decade since it was published.

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