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**#hitlerwasright: National Action and National Socialism for the 21st Century****By: Dr Paul Jackson<sup>1</sup>****Abstract**

This article examines the new neo-Nazi organisation National Action. It begins with a brief overview of the group, from its formation in 2013 to its latest activism at the end of 2014. It then develops three analytical concepts to explore the nature of the group in greater depth. It firstly presents National Action as a neo-Nazi groupuscule operating within a wider milieu of extreme right organisations in the UK, some of this it has developed working relationships with, others it rejects as inauthentic. Secondly, it analyses the transnational dynamics of the group, revealing its engagement with groups outside of Britain. Finally, it examines how the group historicises its activity, linking the contemporary situation with the history of interwar fascism, especially Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. It concludes that, at the present moment, National Action poses limited risks to the public, however this could change over time given its extremist ideology and its links to international organisations.

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## Introduction

Log on to National Action's website – [www.national-action.info](http://www.national-action.info) – in December 2014 and you are greeted by a piece of embedded video, hosted by YouTube. Once clicked, it plays the first 30 seconds of the Beach Boys song 'Heroes and Villains', which accompanies a short montage of video featuring stylised graphics and striking images from National Action demonstrations in 2014, along with phrases such as 'Terror Machine' and 'Believe – Fight – Obey'. It also reproduces images of an exposé of the group by the *Mirror* newspaper, to evoke the sense of National Action as an impactful, extremist organisation. Such an incongruous piece of media is an arresting example of National Action's self-declared new style for fascist activism in the UK. To give another example, in the autumn of 2014, one of its activists, Garron Helm, became a minor extreme-right internet hero, after posting an anti-Semitic message on Twitter directed towards a British Jewish MP, Luciana Berger. He used the hashtag 'hitlerwasright' to help disseminate the posting, which even allowed him to connect with an international audience. Helm was arrested and eventually given a four-week prison sentence, becoming a minor cause célèbre on Twitter in the process. Such combination of new media tools and old Nazi messages highlights the complexity with assessing National Action. Though formed recently, in 2013, they cannot simply be framed simply as 'new'. Their context is both contemporary and historical, and National Action activism blurs older extreme right traditions with novel styles and techniques.

This article seeks to give a contextual overview of this new group, one openly identifying as National Socialist. It will draw on the approach of viewing the extreme right milieu as a groupuscular movement, to help place National Action in wider networks of patriotic and nationalist organisations that have developed in Britain and internationally. As we will see, it views some broadly similar groups as cognate and compatible, while others are deemed to be inauthentic forms of nationalism. This analysis will also assess the ideological dynamics of the group, and explore how it engages with a tradition of extreme right activism that has 'accumulated' over time in the UK, grounding its contemporary activity in a range of historical reference points, from the social credit movement, to Arnold Leese to Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. As such, National Action represents a notable break with groups such as the English Defence League, which have denied associations with such an intergenerational fascist legacy.

## National Action: From Formation to December 2014

Before exploring the ideology of National Action, it is important to give a sense of the small-scale nature of the organisation, as well as its timeline. In terms of lifespan, National Action first began developing its web presence in the summer of 2013; its first blog post is dated August 2013. A document hosted on its website, *National Action: Year Review*, it claims that the group started to make an impact from 2014. The activism of key figures in the

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group can be traced before 2013 too. National Action itself can be described as a successor to an earlier micro-grouping, the Integralist Party of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, also calling itself the Greenshirts, as both have been animated largely through the energies of Benjamin Raymond. Raymond has also had links to the American Renaissance Party. Another of National Action's activists, Alex Davies, was a member of the Young British National Party. In a 2014 interview on the Voice of Albion podcast (which are typically hour long interviews by former British National Party activist Paul Hickman, hosted on the website [www.renegadebroadcasting.com](http://www.renegadebroadcasting.com)), Davies described how he found the Young British National Party a restrictive organisation, one that failed to develop a satisfactory militant strategy. So, like other micro-groupings breaking away from the larger BNP, such as Combat 18 in the 1990s, we should recognise that the British National Party has played a role in developing this more radical splinter. Yet unlike Combat 18, here we do not see the issue of violent football firm networks playing a role in developing the group's activist base.

As well as its recent formation, it is also important to highlight National Action's essentially small-scale dynamics. The group's own literature typically claims activist numbers in the tens, rather than the hundreds. To give some examples, at a conference in August 2014, 35 people attended, some of which were connected to other groups, such as the British Movement and Western Spring. A few months earlier, a demonstration in London following the death of Nelson Mandela saw a turnout of approximately 25. In sum, National Action is not a large-scale group, or one that is growing and making a wider impact in the same manner as, say, the English Defence League did between 2009 and 2010. National Action activities have included stunts, street demonstrations, and online campaigns, such as the one described in the introduction. To give more detail on the numbers and types of activity developed by National Action, we can also note its *National Action: Year Review* document detailed some highlights as follows (National Action Homepage, 2014):

- September 2013 – National Action publishes website and strategy document that outlines its objectives, plans and ideas.
- 23.11.2013 – 3 activists carry out NA's first action – a banner drop in Birmingham.
- 30.01.2014 – 11 attend demonstration against halal in Coventry.
- 01.03.2014 – 13 demonstration in solidarity with Right Sector – Ukrainian Embassy.
- 15.03.2014 – Banner Drop in Birmingham.
- 19.04.2014 – 25 Demonstration against the Boer Genocide - South African embassy. In a spontaneous move we took parliament square unopposed 'desecrating' the statue of Nelson Mandella [sic].

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- 07.06.2014 – 27 local activists demonstrate in Liverpool city centre unopposed
  - 09.08.2014 – 35 Attend event hosted by National Action Meeting with speakers from British Movement, Sigurd, and Western Spring.

From this list, we can also see some key issues emerge, including anti-Muslim sentiments, solidarity with Ukrainian nationalists, the development of a white genocide theme, and finally the willingness to link up with other groups, underscoring a transnational dimension to its ambitions too.

It is also important to emphasise the way the group targets students and universities too. Its intrusion of campuses began in January 2014, when National Action activists disrupted a seminar held at Warwick University led by Professor Alex Callinicos, an academic based at Kings College London and also active in the Socialist Workers Party. This helped the group become noticed as a potential threat to university campuses, and since then National Action has developed other campus campaigns, including putting up posters and stickers at various London universities in July 2014, developing a presence at Leeds University in September 2014, and demonstrating at both Coventry University and Warwick University at the end of September 2014. Such events are reported by the group both on its website, and on related YouTube videos. Other demonstrations also often lead to the creation of YouTube films, some of which are given provocative titles too. For example, the film for a demonstration held in Leeds from September 2014 was titled 'National Action March on Leeds - commit an absolute shoah'. In this and other videos by the group, one finds footage of demos combined with anarchic graphics, and high tempo music, to add a sense of energy to what seem, ultimately, to be limited, small-scale demonstrations.

The attempt to attract the attention of young people, and especially students, via its activities is also notable. The student profile of the group is underscored through the backgrounds of some of its activists: Alex Davies was a student at Warwick University until 2014, but did not complete his studies; Benjamin Raymond was a former University of Essex student who graduated with a degree in politics. Garron Helm talked of being a college student in interviews following his release from prison. In National Action media, such as his Voice of Albion podcast, Davies has also stressed the group is made up of a combination of workers and students – and, as far as one can tell from limited data, this seems an accurate approximation of its support base.

### **Conceptualising Extremist Groups**

Following on from this overview, we can conclude that National Action is best described as a small, neo-Nazi groupuscule. In recent years, this term has been used by Fabien Virchow (2004), Roger Griffin (2003) and Jeffrey Bale (2002), among others, to describe such tiny, often neo-Nazi groupings, of the type that seem to typify the history of post-war fascism.

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Griffin's approach suggests that we should not treat these groups as failed political parties, but as something unique. Often they do not aspire to become a mass organisation, which helps explain the lack of a wider support base. To comment on their small scale as an inherent indication of their political failure misses the point: groupuscules often view developing a sense of authenticity and commitment among a small band of activists as a core aim. Griffin's analysis of more extreme neo-fascist groupuscules also stresses that the significance of such movements lies not in their individual existence, but in their collective nature, each individual group helping to generate a wider 'groupuscular' dynamic. Such groupuscules do not operate in a vacuum either, but collectively establish a milieu with reference points that stretch out internationally, and also into the past too. Bale, meanwhile, describes groupuscules as ambiguous, tiny groups trying to develop a range of qualities, blending elements of:

mass parties (in terms of their emphasis on ideology, their use of militants, their concern for the popular factor and their claim to represent excluded political and social elements); pressure groups (as regards their overt and covert lobbying activities, their infiltration of other organizations and exploitation of dual membership and their application of pressure by means of violence); terrorist organizations (with respect to their insularity and their semi-clandestine and sectarian nature); and armies (in terms of their emphasis on discipline, maintenance of hierarchies and their penchant for training and paramilitary activities).

Similarly, Virchow's analysis of the highly fragmentary nature of neo-Nazi activism in Germany draws out the varied nature of discrete groups. His work also helps to establish the relevance of this concept for understanding the complex, marginalised nature of extreme right milieus.

A similar term that is useful for conceptualising this type of marginalised context is a 'cultic milieu', developed by Jeffrey Kaplan among others (Kaplan and Lowe, 2002). Kaplan uses this term to again identify how a variety of discrete neo-Nazi groups can, collectively, generate a wider culture, one that appears greater than the sum of its parts to adherents. From his analysis we also see the identification of a milieu defined by a culture of self-mythologizing, steeped in a sense of mission, and ostensibly offering its followers deeper truths that are seemingly being ignored by the masses of society. Building on these concepts, I have also recently developed the term 'accumulative extremism' to help draw attention to the historical dimension here: such discrete groupuscules operate within a wider set of perceived traditions of activity, deemed to stretch back into past generations too. By selectively identifying with past activity, and evoking the sense of operating within an inter-generational struggle, such neo-Nazi groupuscules also legitimise claims to be significant

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actors, even if they are small-scale operations in the present day. By evoking a sense of a past for the movement, one replete with martyrs and steeped in a long-term battle between an 'us' and a 'them', a wider movement can be imagined, helping to give validity and relevance to contemporary political extremism. Identification of a wider 'history' offers activists important lessons, pointing to successes, failures and wrong paths, as well as presenting a wider range of heroes and martyrs for the cause (Jackson, 2014).

Finally, in the emerging analysis of the extreme right, it is also clear that mapping and understanding the transnational relationships that such groupuscules develop is crucial to assessing the dynamics of this clandestine world. Andrea Mammone (2002) in particular has highlighted the importance of this field for analysis, and we can see elements of transnationalism within National Action's story to date too. With these themes in mind – groupuscular dynamics, transnationalism, and accumulative extremism – the following three sections will use these related terms to help parse the dynamics of National Action.

### **National Action's Groupuscular Dynamic**

As we can see, National Action has not emerged in a vacuum. Its roots are in a wider set of neo-Nazi and extreme right activities in Britain, and its key activists were politicised before joining the group. Understanding its place within the wider cultures of the British far right is important. In general terms, the wider anti-establishment right in Britain has become a highly complex environment from the later 2000s, especially with the growth and impact of the English Defence League from 2009 (Hitchens and Brun, 2013). Such developments have led to some interesting tensions developing between discrete groups. The EDL's distinct profile, one steeped in a public rejection of neo-Nazism and anti-Semitism, has created antagonisms with the older neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic style of activism, located largely in the British National Party and a range of fragmented groups (e.g. Blood & Honour, National Front, British Movement, British People's Party among others). So the EDL's newer, anti-Muslim, 'Counter-Jihad' culture has led to new lines of division developing. Such dividing lines also offer opportunities for neo-Nazi inspired activists to set out the parameters of their ideologies too, and we can see that National Action play with negatives attitude towards EDL activity to help legitimise their own organisation.

How can we appreciate these tensions? One approach is to explore the ways the groups interact, such as at flashpoints where they are likely to encounter each other. One such flashpoint developed in 2014: one of the key themes to have enraged many extreme right groups, both neo-Nazi and 'Counter-Jihad', in the UK was a report published in August 2014 that detailed how local authorities in Rotherham had acted in an ineffective manner when tackling the sexual abuse of children from elements within Pakistani heritage communities, at times even ignoring evidence of such activity. Once this issue was made public knowledge, many groups, especially from the far and extreme right, seized upon such

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an example of the state's failure in order to ground various anti-Muslim and anti-establishment concerns. Such groups developed joint protests, leading to conflict when they met. To give an example, National Action took part in a demonstration featuring multiple groups in September 2014. Its website hosted a report on the behaviours of other nationalist groups, as well as its own activists, which included the following statements (National Action Homepage, 2014):

Board train from Sheffield Train Station to go to Rotherham. Observations – Upon entering the train there was a group of around 30 EDL, 4 specific groups of them. All drinking alcohol, a distinct smell of damp cigarettes and BO. Their conversation including the discussion of whether females fart or not, whilst one man barely could stand ...

There was singing, chanting, a lot of drunkenness around us. There was one National Front man who was very drunk, severely obese who was stuttering around, slurring his words ...

... there was also a bit of a confrontation between drunk EDL carrying an Israel flag and NF. It amounted to nothing more than an exchange of words and angry talk. All of the NA guys were chanting 'White Power' I don't know if the EDL recieved this well [sic].

From such statements, we see how National Action has characterised the EDL as essentially comprised of drunks, as too were older National Front activists. We also see the latter are in conflict with EDL over the former's lack of overt anti-Semitism, a criticism shared by National Action. As the report on the demonstration continued, the EDL were deemed to be Jewish too, for example as follows: 'The EDL Jew was in full Jew-Mode yelling at the pigs to arrest us for saluting because its "Illegal"'. The groupuscular approach should not lead us to conclude that all far right groups will agree with each other. As we can see, they do not.

While National Action rejects groups such as the EDL as 'bad' nationalists, others, including the National Front, are deemed 'good' nationalists, even if some of them are also criticised for their attitudes towards alcohol. The dividing line here is open support for white nationalism and anti-Semitism. The tone is conveyed by one of National Action's slogans, 'Step It Up White Man', a direct contrast to the EDL's claim to oppose racism. It is also set out explicitly on the group's website, for example as follows (National Action Homepage, 2014):

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Educated readers will agree that there is no legitimate reason to not be a racist or an anti-semitic in 2014. Race – isn't even up for debate, the battlefield today is race with two teams 'racist' and 'anti-racist', there are no neutrals allowed. Weakness on the Jewish question is simply unforgivable, ignorance is inexcusable, the Jew has a name and it glares you in the face when discussing any world problems. An aphorism of the National Front founder AK Chesterton was 'if they don't name the Jew, their message isn't true' – If you don't – ever – then we are dealing with more than just active self censorship – this is a hole in the thought process. It is holes like this that comprise 'fake' nationalism.

For National Action, open anti-Semitism is the ultimate marker of being a good, authentic nationalist. We find this theme drawn out in their critical discussions of populist political parties too. The United Kingdom Independence Party, for example, has been described by the group as a 'kosher' party.

Within this narrow context of identifying only with overtly anti-Semitic groups, there are nevertheless a variety of other groupuscules that National Action will work with. In his Voice of Albion podcast, Alex Davies talked extensively about working with other groups that, like them, openly endorse anti-Semitic and National Socialist themes. Here, Davies talked of the need to put ideas before discrete organisations, as the cause was more important than individual egos. He also listed the British Movement, National Front, and also the British People's Party as organisations that he identified with. Moreover, he claimed to be a member of the British Movement, and stated that he was willing to work with veterans of British neo-Nazism such as Richard Edmonds. He also set out how he admired the earlier, more openly extreme form of the BNP under John Tyndall, as he put it 'before they got rid of compulsory repatriation'. Contrastingly, he took issue with the contemporary leadership of the party, cited as a reason why it has failed to develop an authentic British nationalism.

In terms of the British Movement's attitude to National Action, we see the willingness to work together reciprocated. Online material produced by the British Movement's key activist, Steve Frost, has talked positively about National Action's role within a wider white nationalist milieu, aligned to ideals such as David Lane's 14 Words (National Action Homepage, 2014). In a recorded speech placed on National Action's website, Frost has highlighted how different organisations play different roles within the wider neo-Nazi milieu. While groups such as British Movement were developing a range of activities, even including a National Socialist family-friendly summer camp called the Sunwheel Festival, National Action was to focus on flash demos and street action – the 'sharp end' of building a grassroots movement, as Frost put it. So we can see from such



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descriptions both the specific role for National Action and the way one groupuscule fits into a wider context.

Davies has talked about the importance of regular gatherings of minds. This included the London Forum, where ‘speakers from all across the world ... top intellectuals in the nationalist movement ... from all different tendencies’ were present. He has also described positively Blood & Honour gigs, characterised as a place to meet like-minded people; he even gave an example of meeting a Polish activist at a recent concert. Notably, Davies was of discrete groups a speaker at another forum for the wider British neo-Nazi movement, the 9th John Tyndall Memorial Event held in October 2014. As set out in *Heritage and Destiny* magazine’s webpage reporting on the event (Heritage and Destiny Homepage, 2014):

Among the organizations represented at this year’s memorial were (in alphabetical order): A.K. Chesterton Trust, Blood & Honour, British Movement, British Democratic Party, British National Party, Church of the Creator, Heretical Press, National Action, National Front, New British Union, Northern Patriotic Front and Telling Films...

Such clear lists present us with the groupuscular nature of the movement. Such events feature representatives from a variety of organisations that each develop a broadly cognate political agenda, yet also give themselves a discrete identity too.

Aside from these connections with older elements the wider British neo-Nazi milieu, we can see National Action supporting other new developments in the British extreme right too. For example, the white nationalist website [www.westernspring.co.uk](http://www.westernspring.co.uk), run by a former BNP organiser Larry Nunn, using the pseudonym Max Musson, has reported positively on National Action demonstrations online, and currently his Western Spring website includes a link to the group. Another link between National Action and a wider neo-Nazi inspired culture is with Ashley Bell, who also uses the pseudonym Tommy Johnson. Bell has links with the National Socialist ‘straight edge movement’, which has promoted a highly ascetic form of National Socialist activism, eschewing drugs and alcohol – a notable contrast to how National Action describes the followers of the English Defence League. National Action has also promoted the White Independent Nation movement, an embryonic British organisation attempting to develop white only enclaves in the UK. It also has had reported links with the North West Infidels, a neo-Nazi splinter from the EDL, as well as another patriotic group, the South East Alliance. Ultimately, the levels to which National Action are deeply involved with these wider strands of extreme right ethno-nationalism in the UK are difficult to assess, given the clandestine nature of the movement as a whole. What is clear, though, is that National Action is attempting to embed itself within a wider network of activists. The groupuscule is trying to carve out a distinct profile for itself, framing its

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activities as provocative and extreme, yet it is also doing so by engaging with a wider community of National Socialists in the UK. Given the variety of movements it feels in solidarity with, this also raises the question of how it seeks to develop a distinct sense of identity too.

We saw earlier that open anti-Semitism is one of its key dividing lines used by the group to distinguish National Action from other extreme right groups. One of its strategies for differentiating itself within the wider neo-Nazi and openly anti-Semitic milieu is by developing a unique sense of style. National Action literature often criticises other forms of British extreme right politics for failing to develop an exciting aesthetic style that attracts a new generation to openly fascist politics. For example, it has stated that Mosley's interwar fascists wore uniforms that, in their historic context, offered a positive sense of style for BUF activists. Uniforms of this type were no longer appropriate, and times have changed – yet contemporary activists still needed to develop a new sense of style. So National Action has attempted to turn its extreme politics into a new 'look', to distinguish it from other components of the British neo-Nazi milieu. The video described in the introduction to this article gave an example of this bid to create a distinct brand identity. We find this issue expressed in the document *National Action: Strategy and Promotion*, which has described this need to develop a distinct 'look' as follows (National Action Homepage, 2014):

Part of raising the social status of nationalism is going to be providing a look – a style that is fashionable, but we own and is associated with us. Ideally this has to be for an urban environment – we need respect.

Developing this look has always been a balancing act between awkward overdressing, and pub slob. We need some kind of happy medium that kind of transcends the two. Right now our name is to somehow become chic – we have a limited audience, but we want them to have something they can wear which doesn't embarrass them, but makes them feel proud to represent.

This document also commented on the need to draw out a radicalised attitude among activists, using this new sense of style to achieve this aim. Such a distinct visual appearance, steeped in overt militancy, needed to be incorporated into a range of propaganda materials too. This new militant tenor has also been described as follows (National Action Homepage, 2014):

Traditionally propaganda has been always softcore so as to not alienate the organisation from the public – but the only people who it actively reaches are going to be the softcore do-nothings. Hardcore propaganda suits our organisation because it will reach the hardcore activists, the people who we need to make this succeed.

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This strategy would help to draw the attention of young people, who, it goes on to claim, are considered as being likely to look positively towards fascism as an ideology of ‘hope’. As the document continued (National Action Homepage, 2014):

The mask has fallen from the face of fascism, and the kids like it – it’s a human face that offers them hope. It is a friendly face that doesn’t alienate with its arrogance, but also has no respect for the cancer of the world – the youth have finally found a true friend in the spectre of National Socialism ... only a storm of flowing passion will save our people.

The unique selling point for National Action, then, is its combination of a novel appearance with older neo-Nazi politics. This is being used to create a new youth movement engaged in stunts and provocative demonstrations, while also operating as a part of the wider neo-Nazi scene.

### **National Action Transnational Identification**

To help develop this new style for contemporary fascist activism, National Action has pointed to examples drawn from outside the UK, and its various international references are important to draw out too. In 2013, its early materials suggested the need to look to Russia as an exemplar, and it continues to idealise Russian neo-Nazis. In the following extract we can also see a positive attitude towards the Russian state, while complementing the Russian neo-Nazi movement for developing a new aesthetic (National Action Homepage, 2014):

When it comes to innovation Britain can certainly learn a lot looking abroad, and this is best illustrated with examples from Russia where nationalism has been a constant aspect of the post communist state, and has since really flowered in a lot of interesting ways which are not so true or successful in the rest of mainland Europe. Principally Russian far right specialises in soft influence – there is no strong neo-fascist party, but there is a regime that is responsive to a culture of which Neo-Nazism is a part.

This discussion identified in particular the aesthetic developed by the Russian clothing company White Rex, described as ‘a MMA (Mixed Martial Arts) sports club and Clothing brand’. The document praised White Rex as it ‘recently found the work of a fascist “style” artist who has been responsible for their designs since.’ Needless to say, National Action believes that British activists should look to imitate such an approach. Drawing on these international cultural reference points, National Action also contrasted exciting visuals from

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abroad with the rather dull graphical style of the BNP, among other British groups criticised in such documents.

As well as aesthetics, transnational elements to National Action can be seen developing in other ways too. Since 2013, it has taken an interest in European extreme right politics, and unsurprisingly we see a number of extremist parties talked about positively, as inspirations, in various National Action documents. In particular, Greece's Golden Dawn, Hungary's Jobbik, Russian neo-Nazis and even Ukraine's Right Sector, are all identified as contemporary references for National Action. Nevertheless, its materials note that there are some important differences between the political situations found in places like Greece and the Ukraine, which have both experienced forms of elemental crisis, when compared to the more stable conditions in England. Such stable conditions hamper National Action's growth, it claims, and so the group sees itself as one that will become more relevant in a time of national crisis.

From late 2013 into spring of 2014, National Action's website also featured some lengthy analysis of the crisis in Ukraine. This presented Ukrainian nationalists gathered around Right Sector as inspirational figures fending off the advances dealt by Putin's Russia. This contrasted with the more positive description of the Russian state, written before the crisis began to unfold, cited at the beginning of this section. Russia, we learn from some of these later extended discussions from 2014, can be seen as a regime embracing what are deemed anti-nationalist ideas, such as pluralism and difference, and even promoting multiculturalism, and Putin should be regarded as antagonistic towards genuine nationalists in the Russian federation. So, as we explore in more detail these commentaries on international reference points, developed by the group to date, we can see they are not static and can change over time.

The theme of transnationalism has developed in some of National Action's most recent networking activities too. In August 2014, its members took part in an international camp dubbed the Sigurd Outlaw Camp, held in the Brecon Beacons in Wales. ('Sigurd' was the pseudonym used by Anders Breivik.) *Searchlight* magazine highlights several key points connected to this development. International figures involved with this event included Denis Nitikin, owner of the White Rex clothing brand, and also an international guest speaker at the London Forum. Another attendee at the Sigurd Outlaw Camp was Matt Tait, a former BNP activist with a violent past who is also linked to wider transnational networking funded, in part, by the American millionaire activist Richard Spencer (Gable, 2014). Moreover, a further camp, formally dubbed as a 'mixed martial arts' gathering, is planned for January 2015, and is currently promoted by Western Spring and National Action websites.

Finally, we can see National Action's embryonic transnational links develop with the case of Garron Helm too. Following his release, he also recorded a Voice of Albion

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podcast. In Helm's interview, he discussed various elements of his case, including the Twitter campaign that developed to support him. The podcast also featured two callers, both from America, highlighting how news of Helm's case had reached US activists via social media. Discussion revolved around comparisons with British and American activism. One American caller from Arizona lamented the poor state of the movement in America, and described Helm as a 'hero'. The American activist also contrasted the vitality found in National Action with current level of American activism, which he deemed to be poor. Helm's response commented on America's right to bear arms, and he highlighted that, as US activists were already armed, they needed to take the lead and begin the rising as British activists could not do this. Following on from this, another caller from America, based in Southern California, expressed the need to develop new organisations, and talked up a relatively new outfit he was linked to, the White Advocacy Movement. This was described as an example of an emergent group in America that was trying to develop a novel form of white supremacist activism. Though again ultimately very small-scale, Helm's case, and such an international response to it, has drawn out the links that exist between British and American neo-Nazi cultures too. These links are not new, and have been developed since the end of the Second World War (Jackson, 2014).

### **National Action and 'Accumulative Extremism'**

It is likely that Helm would have had at least some sense of this longer tradition of Anglo-American activism, as we can see strong identification with the history of fascism in many National Action materials too. While recent groups such as the English Defence League have sought to reject associations with the history of fascism, with National Action we find a strong identification with the politics of Adolf Hitler, as well as British fascists such as Oswald Mosley and Arnold Leese. This evocation of a fascist tradition in the UK in particular, to historicise contemporary activism, offers an example of a process of 'accumulative extremism', or the evocation of a selective identification with the past, used to give a new generation a deeper sense of legitimacy.

Indicative of an ideology engaged with the history of fascism, the 2013 document *National Action: Strategy and Promotion* included references to the theory of social credit as a way to develop a new type of economy. The social credit theory, first developed in 1919, has had a complex association with fascists in Britain in previous generations (Thurlow, 1998), and it is a clear marker of National Action's interests in the intellectual history of British fascism to see it emerge in a pamphlet published in 2013. Linking this new interest in social credit with the recent economic crisis, this document continued as follows (National Action Homepage, 2014):

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Because our fundamental problem is a lack of credit in the public sphere, we believe this is best explained by the Social Credit idea. Developed in this country by C.H Douglas and Arthur Kitson, this school of economics was developed specifically so the public could understand it and fight with it, and today its application remains just as relevant in explaining every aspect of the debt slavery system we live under, and refuting received wisdom.

Building on this interest in older fascist reference points, National Action's most comprehensive ideological statement to date, a 44 page document called *Attack*, uploaded to its website in August 2014, highlighted the way a British tradition of fascist activism is central to the group's identity. For example, it described how BUF activists held Mosley in awe, a commitment to a 'higher' cause that *Attack* stressed current activism need to cultivate too. By connecting with the history of fascism, the current generation could become inspired by those who have fought in the past for the cause. As document stressed this theme (National Action Homepage, 2014):

Know that you are part of a line of nationalism that goes back to the generation of the great war, and you have the victories and defeats of a century to learn from. Really get to know the history and the literature.

Such statements, urging followers to imbue their activities with a sense of historic significance, are important. They help to establish a cultic milieu for activism to develop within, one marked by a sense of an ostensible 'higher' cause.

*Attack* is a useful document to explore National Action aspirations in other ways too. It evoked the urgent mood the group steeped itself in, a trope found throughout the text. A typical example of this rhetoric of urgency was as follows: 'We are done mincing our words, now we need something that flames the blood and fans the honour. Now is the time to put things right.' *Attack* also set out how National Action perceived the relationship between their activities, and wider society. Again, this is worth citing directly, to convey the tenor of the document as well as its arguments (National Action Homepage, 2014):

We must accept that the people will never openly support a fascist movement, if for no other reason than mass movements in general are a lie because even when the masses themselves do rise up they were never full members of the original group that instigated it – people are passive, and active participation requires an active mind. World history is made by minorities that have come to embody the will and determination of the people as a whole to the extent that they at least do not face opposition in the seizure of power. The majority of humanity, especially White humanity, is timid – though it has longings, hopes, and dreams they look to leaders.

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Understanding that the masses cannot be appealed to – the movement must understand that it will be feared throughout its existence right up until the moment it achieves its aim of taking power, and its doctrines form the basis of the new State – then, and only then, will the people be truly won over.

Here we see how National Action's discourse on the one hand expects the movement to be marginalised, yet on the other does hold out the hope of achieving its political aims. These, ultimately, are nothing less than a revolution overthrowing the liberal democratic order and putting in place policies to somehow redeem the white race. Yet as is often the case with neo-Nazism, details of this goal are left hazy.

With this generalised sense of attacking a weakened and decadent society, we find many extreme right keywords used in the materials too. The term 'cultural Marxism' was used to decry contemporary academia, while the phrase 'political soldier' was also deployed to style the type of activity the group ought to idealise. Finally, we see critique of the New Right too. *Attack* criticised those within the movement who played around with ideas, but did not engage in real-world activity, for example at one point declaring of such figures: 'YOU ARE NOT JULIUS EVOLA'. We also see a description of the type of person the group wants to attract: 'We do not need "intellectuals", what we need are brutes who can form the lines hard. Moral men who can rise above fear so they can both take and dish out punishment.' Again the idealisation of a violent man-of-action theme is clear. To help evoke the idea of a revolutionary vanguard, we even find passages in *Attack* commenting on the history of the Russian Revolution, and the lessons to be learned from Lenin's attacks on the more moderate Mensheviks – the latter also deemed essentially Jewish. Such analysis of the Russian Revolution had a purpose: it highlighted how Bolsheviks were successful revolutionaries despite extreme state persecution. They were victorious as they operated as an elite movement – one where ideological purity was maintained. Though no respecters of Lenin's ideology, the document highlights the value of his tactics.

Clearly politicised history was developed in other ways too. To help evoke the sense of National Action activists being able to take the form of fascist superman, we find the history of the BUF discussed in some depth. Interwar British fascism offered a variety of reference points to think highly of the fascist movement. Again to quote from *Attack* at length to convey the tone here (National Action Homepage, 2014):

If you ask the question of where we need to look for the most practical examples of what we can learn from and apply to ourselves today, British Union was the most significant – no other political movements even compare when you really look at the history. Not only was this movement the closest we ever came to a genuine people's rebellion, but it was one based on great ideals.

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The text also focused a lot of attention on framing the BUF of the later 1930s as a pacifist movement, before then decrying the wartime experiences of British fascists who were interned by the British state. This reading of the past styled interned British fascists, and Oswald Mosley in particular, as mythic heroes of the movement. Conjuring a sense of the richness of BUF culture, we also find positive comment on a variety of notable figures linked to the BUF in its heyday, including artists such as Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound; industrial leaders such as William Morris; and writers and activists such as J. F. C. Fuller. We also find William Joyce, a.k.a Lord Haw Haw, positively discussed too. The text went on to develop the post-war period. Wilfully rejecting acknowledging the failures here, Mosley's decline into obscurity was still portrayed as a victory of sorts, while Enoch Powell and the National Front were also discussed, to help link the inter-war past to more recent issues. The core conclusion drawn was that there has always been a powerful tradition of fascism in Britain, described as follows: 'What is so impressive is that time and again we have seen the ability of British Fascism to adapt and survive in the face of great change and under brutal conditions that made it practically Darwinian.' As a history of British fascism, this is wildly inaccurate, but the purpose of this discourse is to offer a powerful evocation of the past, to historicise a contemporary movement.

Wilfully playing around with the past, blurring fact with fantasy, is nothing new among fascists. Roger Griffin's (2007) work on the ideological dynamics of fascism highlights that the ideas fascists are inclined to include in their worldviews are eclectic, and the ideology is also highly syncretic. Similarly, George Mosse deployed the term 'scavenger ideology' to evoke the heterogeneous set of ideas found in forms of fascisms. We can see such themes resonate here: National Action is drawing lessons from the social credit movement, the Bolsheviks as well as Mosley. Yet Griffin also uses the term palingenesis to highlight a concern uniting various fascists: the idea that contemporary, liberal democratic society is in the process of a profound collapse, while a fascist ideology offers the chance for a revolutionary new start, and can steer a society to a new and 'purified' future. We can find engagement with this common fascist myth of the collapse of the liberal order, and the rebirth into a new anti-liberal society, throughout National Action's discourse, as the following extract from the end of *Attack* highlights (National Action Homepage, 2014):

Before the end things are going to get a lot worse; we are going to see massive change, more feminism, more third world immigration, more spilt blood, more acts of terrorism, more repression by the government. More guilt, more mental break down, more mind control, as civilization crumbles. It will be a harsh lesson but sometimes you have to go through hell. There will be rebuilding, it will be a complete nightmare, a complete mess, but one day – it will all be ours. It will be beautiful beyond our wildest dreams A thousand years from now, not only is it just going to be the white race, but a super eugenecised version, like an Arno Breker statue.



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The author, or authors, of *Attack* are not identified, but given the prominence of the document on the group's website this is clearly a crucial statement of National Action's thinking. Its somewhat nuanced engagement with the history of fascist groups, and its wide range of reference points, highlights the considered, syncretic nature of the group's openly fascist ideology. As with all forms of fascism, its arguments are riddled with contradictions, and ideas are ultimately being evoked in order to develop an impetus for action.

### **National Action: A Threat or an Irrelevance?**

This article has sought to set out some of the ideological and structural characteristics of National Action, presenting it as a new neo-Nazi groupuscule operating within a much wider, complex milieu. What is most striking about National Action's approach, when compared to other, emergent far right grouping of recent years, such as the EDL, is its identification with the very themes that the 'Counter-Jihad' far right has come to reject: open identification with racism, promotion of white nationalism, development of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, and identification with the legacy of interwar fascism and Nazism. These viewpoints are anathema to the EDL, yet are embraced by National Action, and also used to help carve out its own identity. What is particularly curious here, then, is the blurring of the old and the new. National Action offers a small handful of activists an old set of reference points that are set out in a new, dynamic manner. This is targeted directly at a younger generation, including on university campuses. The aim is to connect young people with an extreme past, and make it seem relevant for the present day. Here, the theme of accumulative extremism helps us see that there is more to the discourse than just an idealisation of the current generation of younger activists. National Action wants to give its activists an alternate history, and encourages followers to identify with fascist past, stretching back several generations.

However, in terms of translating this vision of fascist ideals into activity, we can see a notable gap between the rhetoric of fighting a revolutionary war, and the reality of its campaigns – at least to date. For all the talk of embodying revolutionary activism, its actual impact is more limited. We have seen that it has engaged in military-style training camps, and some media reporting of these events have suggested the presence of firearms too. Yet the majority of National Action activity is not linked to such violence, but rather is characterised by stunts designed to grab media attention: disrupting a seminar by a left wing academic; holding banners on Nelson Mandela's statue in London, shortly after his death; or sending highly offensive Twitter messages, leading to a criminal conviction. This may change, and the ideologies found within the group clearly idealise revolutionary violence. One factor hampering the group may be its awareness of being closely monitored by British police. High profile figures such as Garron Helm have talked publically about being monitored by the state, even before his anti-Semitic Twitter campaign. This again augments

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the underlying theme in their self-presentation: National Action activists like to hype themselves as genuine threats to the state. Yet despite being unwaveringly fascist and National Socialist in political orientation, and idealising violence online, in itself the groupuscule – to date – is in no position to develop its revolutionary agenda, and seems wary of carrying out violent acts too.

Finally, by using the themes of the groupuscular extreme right and transnationalism to explore and contextualise National Action in wider trends, we can recognise that this is merely a single group within a much wider network of activists, located both in the UK and internationally. Some of these links may end up posing greater risks, and such connections could help National Action grow too. The extreme right is not simply a ‘domestic’ phenomenon any more, and is often international in scope. As an embryonic groupuscule, National Action has links to activists in America, Europe and Russia. If it does not wither on the vine, and succeeds in becoming a more a lasting fixture of the British neo-Nazi milieu, it is likely that these transnational links will develop too, which could also affect its seriousness of intent.

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