

# “Tomorrow belongs to US”



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Welcome to the Red, White and Blue Festival, the far right's answer to Glastonbury. Here you can pose with bin Laden, shoot at Blair and dine on iced golliwogs and Union Jack rock. Or you can listen to the speeches: today they may be having a glorified summer fete, but tomorrow the British National Party are “taking back Britain”

asylum seekers”), to pose for pictures with an Osama bin Laden effigy, and to “polish your sniper skills” at a “Terrorist training camp” by firing air rifles at facsimiles of famous politicians (“Blunt Blunkett”, “Blow Away Bush”, “Obliterate Blair – Traitor, Liar and Dictator” read the posters). Or you can just gorge yourself on novelty confections from the cake stand.

“You probably don’t know what they are,” suggests a stallholder affably, as two boys wander past his display of iced golliwogs. “Eh?” one of them responds. “We live with loads of them!”

**AT FIRST SIGHT, THE MUDDY SHOW FIELD OVERLOOKING LANCASHIRE'S RIBBLE VALLEY HAS THE APPEARANCE OF A LOW-KEY VILLAGE FETE.**

A big top sits centre stage, surrounded by stalls, hot-dog vans and children's attractions, including bouncy inflatables and a face-painting area, where a blonde girl is being decorated in the national colours.

The Olympics are underway, but the Union Jacks on children's faces and men's T-shirts here have little to do with events in Athens, and the Cross of St George flags are no throwback to Euro 2004. The 1,000 or so people that have gathered here for the annual Red, White and Blue Festival will not have felt any pride for Britain's silver-medal-winning teenage boxer Amir Khan, or shared the joy at Kelly Holmes' athletics golds. They are members, supporters and families of the far-right British National Party, and have gathered here for an event the party's leader Nick Griffin describes as a cross between “a family gala day and a political rally”. Here, there are opportunities to browse extremist literature decrying the state of the nation (“Britain is full up – no more



Little Briton: a young Red, White and Blue Festival visitor

Warren Bennett, my official "minder" for the day, is a muscular Scot with a friendly demeanour. He also has a documented criminal past including incidents of football hooliganism, and you can find pictures of him giving the Nazi salute on the internet. Whether or not Bennett is here to protect those in attendance at the festival from me, or me from them, is moot. Although no overt attempt is made to stop me interviewing people, it's clear from the body language of those I approach that I am not welcome. Their responses swing from wary and nervous to angry and confrontational. At one stage a group of shaven-headed men in their thirties and forties deliberately slow-walk past, staring at me dispassionately.

I do manage to interview one BNP supporter at the rally, a man in his thirties who would rather remain anonymous. Having told me that he joined the party because "they were taking over around here" and that there was "nothing for us in the area", he says: "I wish the media wouldn't portray us as being racist all the time - we're not. Why don't you ask us about our agricultural policies, for example?"

I ask him what the BNP's agricultural policies are.

"How should I know?" he replies. "Check our website or something."



appeared at the election count wearing a mock gag, in protest against a banning order preventing him from speaking on the platform.

He expected to further strengthen his hold on the leadership this summer with a range of local council and even European Parliamentary seats, but the big vote failed to materialise. The eurosceptics favoured the United Kingdom Independence Party - Robert Kilroy-Silk and Co came third in the election, polling 16 per cent of the votes (more than three times that of the BNP) and gaining 12 seats. "UKIP came from nowhere," says Griffin, who believes conspiratorial forces were at work. "They were boosted by the Labour Party, *The Daily Express's* owner Richard Desmond and Michael Howard from the Tory party all working together against us."

More salt was rubbed into the BNP's wounds in July by BBC documentary *The Secret Agent*. Undercover journalist Jason Gwynne infiltrated the party and showed several members openly boasting of their party-related racially targeted violent activities, and Griffin himself was filmed referring to Islam as a "vicious, wicked faith" that had been "expanded through a handful of cranky lunatics". Subsequently, eight men were arrested in connection with the film, the Association of Chief Police Officers banned its officers from joining the BNP and Barclays Bank closed five of the party's accounts.



1967

As a result of a merger between activists and groups from the British fascist, Nazi and extreme right-wing movements, the **National Front is born**. Under the leadership of John Tyndall, below - who served six months in prison in 1962 for organising a neo-Nazi group - membership of the NF rises to 17,000 by the mid-Seventies.

**A**WAY FROM THE FRIVOLITY AND OUT OF THE AFTERNOON SUN IN A TENT TO ONE SIDE OF THE FAIR, NICK GRIFFIN IS OFFERING FATHERLY ADVICE to an earnest party hopeful as to how best she can best serve the BNP: "Just play the media game," he tells the girl, who is in her mid-teens. "Steer clear of the [Second World] War and don't ever mention anything about Jews."

Griffin's advice is hard-learned. In 1997 he edited an anti-Semitic magazine called *The Rune* for the BNP and published a booklet entitled *Who are the Mindbenders?*, in which he alleged the British public had been brainwashed into accepting a multicultural society by a cabal of Jews who controlled the country's media. Griffin, who had referred to the holocaust as the "Holohoax", was convicted a year later of distributing material likely to incite racial hatred, and received a suspended sentence. During his defence, he said: "I am well aware that the orthodox opinion is that six million Jews were gassed and cremated and turned into lampshades. Orthodox opinion also once held that the world is flat... I have reached the conclusion that the 'extermination' tale is a mixture of Allied wartime propaganda, extremely profitable lie, and latter[day] witch-hysteria."

Ask him now about his beliefs and he betrays no sign of contrition: "I believe, as the law tells me to do, that precisely six million people died in the Holocaust." Any other opinion, he says, could see him locked up. "The French government in its wisdom, and the British government in its wisdom, have signed us up to various laws and has now declared that questioning any verdict of the Nuremberg Tribunal is an offence whereby you can be extradited to France and slung in prison without trial."

After delivering his tutorial, Griffin emerges from the tent with his wife, Jackie, for impromptu photographs with the party faithful. Dressed in a grey suit, yellow shirt and pink tie, and fingering his thick thatch of black hair, the burly 45-year-old cuts a cordial but businesslike figure. After posing for the pictures, he heads off to the beer tent to press flesh, flanked by two guards wearing blue BNP-logo polo shirts, matching combat trousers and earpieces connected to walkie-talkies. Griffin is on a charm offensive.

Three years ago, the BNP leader's star reached its zenith. Having taken over the party from founder John Tyndall - whose legacy included the creation of the BNP's fanatical fascist offshoot, Combat 18 (the numerals refer to the position of Adolf Hitler's initials in the alphabet) - Griffin had overhauled the party's image and policies in an attempt to broaden the party's appeal. The repatriation of the nation's immigrant population remains a central tenet of the BNP's manifesto, albeit one now couched in terms such as "voluntary" and incentivised with "financial backing".

After a summer of racially divisive rioting in Burnley, Bradford and Oldham, 2001 saw the party achieve its best General Election results to date. Griffin polled 16 per cent of the vote in Oldham West and Royton, and