



# THE ENGLISH DEFENCE LEAGUE:

**CHALLENGING OUR COUNTRY  
AND OUR VALUES OF SOCIAL  
INCLUSION, FAIRNESS  
AND EQUALITY**

**Professor Nigel Copsey**  
on behalf of



**FAITH MATTERS**  
[www.faith-matters.org](http://www.faith-matters.org)

# **THE ENGLISH DEFENCE LEAGUE: CHALLENGING OUR COUNTRY AND OUR VALUES OF SOCIAL INCLUSION, FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY**

by

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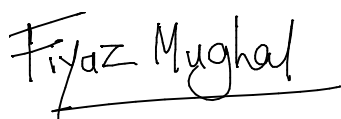
# Foreword

This report focuses on the English Defence League (EDL) and asks whether the organisation *poses a threat to our country and our values of social inclusion, fairness and equality.*

This report demonstrates clearly that the English Defence League does not represent the values which underpin our communities and our country: respect for our fellow citizens, respect for difference, and ensuring the safety and peace of communities and local areas. On the contrary, actions by the EDL have led to fear within communities and a sense that they are ‘under siege’ and under the media and national ‘spotlight’. Many within these communities feel that the peace and tranquillity which they deserve has been broken up by the EDL, whose main aim is to increase tension, raise hate and increase community division by the use of intimidating tactics.

These are not the actions of a group ‘working against extremism’. These are the actions of extremists in their own right, masquerading as a grass roots social force, supposedly bringing their brand of community resilience against ‘Muslim extremism’. It is essential to inoculate communities against the toxins that are being injected into these areas by the EDL and other extremist groups like Al-Muhajiroun. Letting these groups go unchecked destroys what we stand for and damages our image globally.

This report has been put together in partnership with Professor Nigel Copsey and we hope that it activates social action against those who seek to divide our communities. These organisations have no place in our modern and dynamic society and should be consigned to where they belong: *out of the mainstream and away from any points of influence.*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fiyaz Mughal". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

*Fiyaz Mughal OBE – Founder and Director (Faith Matters)*

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# Executive summary

1. The EDL is not the ‘street-fighting’ wing of the BNP. It did not emerge from the established far right but from several ultra-patriotic ‘anti-Jihadist’ groups with origins in the football casual subculture.
2. Even so, the EDL has definite links to the far right, particularly the BNP. Yet despite the fact that the EDL continues to play host to a variety of right-extremists, we should not view it simply through the prism of the established far right. Unlike the BNP (or the NF), the EDL is not driven by a fascist or neo-fascist ideological end-goal.
3. The EDL is best understood as an Islamophobic, new social movement, born of a particularly unattractive and intolerant strand of English nationalism. It is symptomatic of an English identity crisis, drawing on native English ‘identity’ as its principal weapon against an ‘alien’ Islam identity.
4. In order to understand the true nature of the EDL, we need to focus closely on the nature of its principal financier, strategist and tactician, Alan Lake.
5. Lake views the EDL as a ‘dirty’ instrument in a cultural war – a ‘clash of civilisations’ – between Islam and the West. The EDL baits the trap by inciting opponents, especially young Muslims, to react violently to its confrontational marches and demonstrations. The upshot, the EDL hopes, is that ‘cumulative radicalisation’ on the streets will force the Government into illiberal action against Britain’s resident Muslims. When countering the EDL it is therefore essential that opponents, and particularly young Muslims, are not lured into violent over-reaction.
6. The EDL’s ‘foot soldiers’ are a loose coalition of hardcore football hooligans, far-right extremists, and politically unsophisticated white working-class youth. Although the EDL strongly denies that it is racist – it projects itself as a defender of democratic freedoms from ‘Islamic fascism’ - it is hard to escape the racism that permeates the ranks. This racism is not so much ‘old-school’ racism based on skin colour, but rather ‘selective racism’ - a cultural racism directed at all (and not just militant) Muslims (‘Pakis’).
7. True to the spirit of ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’, the EDL’s strategy is also to reach out to ‘floating groups’, such as ethnic communities that share historical angst against Muslims, be that Sikhs or Jews. These communities need to be vigilant against the EDL’s attempts at cynical manipulation.
8. The EDL is a child of the *Facebook* revolution. Through *Facebook* it has built momentum quickly amongst a loosely organised ‘social network’ of supporters. The EDL has no official, card-carrying membership as such, and yet through its social networking activity, the EDL is able to mobilise several thousand supporters onto the streets.
9. The EDL is not as insular as it may seem. It is part of a much broader international ‘counter-Jihad movement’. It has established links with like-minded groups in continental Europe and with right-wing conservatives in North America, most recently, the anti-Islamic wing of the American Tea Party movement.
10. The future trajectory of the EDL is uncertain. As a loose and sometimes chaotic organisation, the EDL might yet run out of steam, especially if it is unable to satisfy the hardcore element with sufficient opportunities for physical confrontation. Alternatively, buoyed up by support from the US and elsewhere in Europe, it could well prosper. It certainly has the potential to be a potent ‘lightning rod’, attracting

hostility towards Muslims in the event of a repeat of 9/11 or 7/7, or in the event of confrontation on the streets resulting in serious injury or death. In an age of economic austerity there is a real possibility that resentment towards Muslims could intensify. For these reasons, the threat that the EDL currently poses to our country, our values and our communities, should not be taken lightly.

**Methodology:** the research for this report draws on electronic sources, newspapers, and some limited secondary sources. All electronic sources were accessed in the period 1 September – 19 October 2010. Given the time allocation, it was not possible to conduct any interviews with EDL leading activists or supporters.

# 1. Origins and formation of the English Defence League

## Background

- 1.1. The English Defence League (EDL) was formed on 27 June 2009.<sup>1</sup> Its formation coincided with an attempt to stage an impromptu demonstration outside the East London mosque in Whitechapel. Due to a heavy police presence – the suspicion was that it was a police ‘sting’ operation – the protest was prevented from going ahead. Nonetheless, before their detention by police and eventual dispersal, a group of around 40 males, including a group from Luton, paraded through Whitechapel market - a predominantly Asian market - singing ‘*Rule Britannia*’. A week later, the EDL picketed a ‘Life under Shariah Law’ road show which was organised by Anjem Choudary, and his now proscribed Islam4UK organisation, in Wood Green, north London.
- 1.2. The immediate stimulus for the formation of the EDL came not from events in London, but from events in the Bedfordshire town of Luton, where there had been simmering tensions between the Muslim and white communities for a number of years. There are 184,000 people living in Luton, and just under 30,000 (18%) are Muslim. In October 2001 it was reported that three young men from the town had joined the Taliban in Afghanistan. The police warned of possible reprisal attacks on Asian shops and homes by members of the local ‘firm’ of Luton Town football supporters, the MIGS (Men-in-Gear). The leader of the MIGs was Tommy Robinson, a pseudonym later chosen by the current joint leader of the EDL (see 2.9).
- 1.3. After 9/11, Luton had witnessed a number of police anti-terror raids. In 2005 the *Daily Mail* labelled the Bury Park area of the town ‘Al Qaeda St’ and claimed that it had become a primary recruiting ground for Islamists.<sup>2</sup> One of the Islamists convicted of attempting to bomb the Bluewater shopping centre in Essex in 2007 was from Luton. The Bedfordshire town had developed a reputation as a ‘hotbed’ of Islamic radicalism.
- 1.4. The immediate spark for the formation of the EDL was the hostile reception given to returning soldiers in Luton by a local group of Islamists from the al-Muhajiroun offshoot, Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah.<sup>3</sup> For several years, this small group, led by Sayful Islam, had set up a stall in the town centre. On 10 March 2009 a

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief period the EDL was known as the English and Welsh Defence League (EWDL).

<sup>2</sup> See *Luton Today*, 25 July 2005. The term ‘Islamist’ refers to those who seek to establish a pure Islamic society. Islamism constitutes an ideological framework that holds that Islam is not only a religion but also a political ideology. It might be further defined as a militant, anti-democratic ideology whose end-goal is a global caliphate system of governance.

<sup>3</sup> See *Daily Telegraph*, 12 March 2009.



homecoming parade to mark the end of a six-month tour in Iraq by troops from the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment, also known as the ‘Poachers’, occasioned a protest by Sayful Islam’s group. When the group, numbering perhaps 20 at most, hurled abuse at the troops and held up inflammatory banners and placards reading ‘baby killers’, and ‘butchers’, the crowd turned on them. Five of the Muslim protestors were convicted of public order offences. Kevin Carroll, one of the founders of the EDL, and Bryan Kelso, were also charged with public order offences.

- 1.5. This episode, which attracted national media attention, prompted a former member of the Royal Anglian Regiment, James Yeomans, to call a ‘Respect our Troops’ march in Luton. In anticipation of this march, scheduled for 28 March 2009, Paul ‘Lionheart’ Ray, a local anti-Islamist blogger, set up a support group on the social networking site, *Facebook*. To publicise the demonstration Ray contacted various groups outside Luton. Amongst the groups he contacted were March for England (MfE) - an organisation that counted Ray as a member - and the Welsh Defence League (WDL). When anti-fascist campaigners drew this to the attention of Yeomans, he pulled the event, fearing that far-right extremists were intent on hijacking it.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.6. The origins of the EDL do not lie in the established or traditional far right (BNP, NF) but in several pre-existing, ultra-patriotic ‘anti-Jihadist’ organisations that have evolved from within the football casual subculture over recent years. These groups, such as March for England, were early prototypes for the EDL.
- 1.7. Like the EDL, although ultra-patriotic, MfE rejects any association with the far right: “We are not racists, we just don’t want Britain turned into an Islamic state,” its organiser, Dave Smeeton declared. Drawing support from former soldiers and football supporters, MfE is apparently run by a committee of 12 and has counted more than 400 members.<sup>5</sup> Allied to MfE is the United British Alliance (UBA). The UBA wants to ‘raise peoples (sic) awareness of the rising threat within our towns and cities from Islamic extremists’.<sup>6</sup> In 2004 the UBA protested against the radical Islamic cleric Abu Hamza outside London’s Finsbury Park mosque.<sup>7</sup> Like MfE, the UBA draws its support from various football ‘firms’. The same is true for the Welsh Defence League. The WDL was originally based around a ‘firm’ of Cardiff City supporters. Its leading figure is convicted football hooligan Jeff Marsh. According to Marsh, the Welsh Defence League name was first thought up by “some of the Welsh Valleys lads” and later adopted by the movement in England as the English Defence League.<sup>8</sup> The name ‘British Defence League’ was considered only for it to be rejected as it was too much like the BNP.<sup>9</sup>
- 1.8. Following the cancellation of the 28 March demonstration in Luton, and working in conjunction with Dave Smeeton from MfE, Paul Ray sought permission to hold a St. George’s Day parade through Luton town centre. In Ray’s letter to the

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<sup>4</sup> See *Luton & Dunstable Herald and Post*, 26 March 2009.

<sup>5</sup> See *Daily Mail*, 30 May 2009.

<sup>6</sup> <http://uba.awardspace.co.uk/ouraims.html>

<sup>7</sup> See *The Independent*, 5 June 2004.

<sup>8</sup> See Jeff Marsh, *From Seaside to Casuals United: The Rise of the Defence Leagues* (2010).

<sup>9</sup> [http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL\\_The\\_Forum/topic/3814625/1/](http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL_The_Forum/topic/3814625/1/)

Divisional Commander for Luton police, he warned that if the “silent majority” were not granted permission to march, then they would “have no other choice but to protest illegally”.<sup>10</sup> When Ray’s request for a St. George’s Day parade was refused – Ray was under investigation by the CPS for inciting racial hatred with articles published on his blog - an unofficial protest under the ‘United People of Luton’ (UPL) banner was held on 13 April. This protest, by 150 people wanting to ‘reclaim their streets from Muslim fanatics’, was broken up by police. Following the dispersal of the protest six people were arrested.

- 1.9. Further developments in Luton saw an Islamic Centre, believed to be used by Sayful Islam, firebombed in a midnight attack. No one was injured.
- 1.10. MfE then approached Luton Council seeking permission for a second demonstration. The plan was to hand in a petition to the town hall on 24 May 2009 demanding that Sayful Islam be banned from the town centre. Permission for the demonstration was granted, but MfE subsequently pulled-out as the official organiser. Even so, an unofficial march still went ahead under the UPL banner.
- 1.11. On its ‘Ban the Terrorists’ *Facebook* page, which had over 1,500 fans, the UPL claimed that this demonstration had, “no political links and is not related to any right wing organisations. This is a UPL demonstration – United People of Luton”. MfE’s Smeeton, who had been posting as ‘Pompey Dave’ on this site, and some 20 MfE associates still turned up on 24 May. Whilst Smeeton’s contingent held a peaceful march to Luton Town Hall, a much larger group, numbering up to 500, broke away from the form-up point of the march and caused mayhem through the town centre. Nine people were arrested. Several UPL demonstrators wore balaclavas, and some wore masks depicting a horned face of Sayful Islam. An Asian man was assaulted, three car windscreens were smashed and the window of a take-away restaurant was broken.<sup>11</sup>
- 1.12. It was in the wake of this demonstration that the EDL was formed. As Paul Ray tells it, “The original EDL was instigated by myself coming together with members of UPL (United People of Luton) and other anti-Jihad activists around the country who finally had enough of the danger posed to our local communities and the country as a whole.”<sup>12</sup>
- 1.13. By this time Smeeton had distanced MfE from the EDL, claiming that MfE was a more ‘family friendly’ organisation. EDL’s Ray sought alliances elsewhere, and now associated the EDL with Casuals United (CU), a new group established by Jeff Marsh. The aim of CU was to put sectarian differences between rival football ‘firms’ to one side and unite behind the EDL (and WDL). As one EDL spokesman explained, “Casuals United are gathering football supporters to support the cause”,<sup>13</sup> or as CU’s website describe it, “Uniting the UK’s Football Tribes against the Jihadists”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Letter from Paul Ray to Chief Superintendent Andy Frost.

<sup>11</sup> *Daily Mail*, 2 June 2009.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.familysecuritymatters.org>

<sup>13</sup> *The Guardian*, 11 August 2009.

<sup>14</sup> See Casuals United website: <http://casualsunited.webs.com/>

- 1.14. It is important to understand the selective racism of these football firms. Many who are part of these firms have now accepted the presence of black football players, and football firms that contain black members, such as the Birmingham Zulus, command respect. Nonetheless, many casuals still harbour racist attitudes towards Asians who are often, regardless of where they are from, be it India, Sri Lanka, or Bangladesh, all lumped together as ‘Pakis’. Hence the football chant: ‘I’d rather be a Paki than a...’<sup>15</sup>
- 1.15. The founding of the EDL represents a type of interaction that political scientist Roger Eatwell has usefully described as ‘cumulative extremism’, that is to say, a process by which one type of extremism (Islamist) can spark off another type of extremism.<sup>16</sup> In the case of the EDL, as we have seen, it was the actions of a small group of Islamists that provided the immediate trigger and it occurred within a local context of communal polarisation.
- 1.16. When launched, the EDL’s aim was to force the Government to get Islamic extremists ‘off the streets’. It did not consider itself a political party or even an embryonic political party, but a grassroots single-issue movement. The EDL is best understood as a right-wing *social movement*, that deploys mass mobilisation, or the threat of mass mobilisation, as its prime source of influence.
- 1.17. As a social movement, the EDL claims to be concerned primarily with defending England’s traditional national and cultural identity against what it sees as the demonic threat of Islam. What the EDL therefore represents, as we shall see, is a deeply *Islamophobic*<sup>17</sup> new social movement. It is an ‘identitarian’ movement born of a particularly visceral and ugly type of English nationalism, which deploys native English ‘identity’ as its principal weapon against ‘alien’ Islam.

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<sup>15</sup> Witness the offensive hooligan chants of ‘I’d rather be a Paki than a Turk’ and ‘Die, Muslim, Die’ at an England World Cup Qualifier in 2003.

<sup>16</sup> See R. Eatwell, ‘Community Cohesion and Cumulative Extremism in Contemporary Britain’, *Political Quarterly*, 77, 2, 2006: 204-16.

<sup>17</sup> In 1997 the Runnymede Trust identified eight components to their widely accepted definition of Islamophobia. These are:

1. Islam is seen a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change.
2. Islam is seen as ‘separate’ and ‘other’. It does not have values in common with other cultures, is not affected by them and does not influence them.
3. Islam is seen as inferior to the West. It is seen as barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist.
4. Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism and engaged in a ‘clash of civilisations’.
5. Islam is seen as a political ideology and is used for political or military advantage.
6. Criticisms made of the West by Islam are rejected out of hand.
7. Hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.
8. Anti-Muslim hostility is seen as natural or normal.

## 2. Links to the Far Right

- 2.1. From the start, the EDL denied any links to far-right organisations. One placard at an early EDL demonstration in Birmingham on 8 August 2009 read: ‘We are not the BNP and we are not racist’. Also, from early on in its existence, members of the EDL could be seen brandishing an Israeli flag. In October 2009 the EDL responded to claims that it was fascist and racist by burning a swastika flag in an empty warehouse in Luton in a publicity stunt that was screened on the BBC’s *Newsnight*.
- 2.2. But it is clear that from its very inception the UPL/EDL attracted the interest of far-right activists. Peter Fehr, the BNP’s Luton organiser, urged BNP supporters to attend the UPL demonstration on 13 April but asked supporters ‘not to wear any BNP badges if you plan on going to this event’.<sup>18</sup> Apparently assisting Ray in organising this protest was Dunstable BNP activist, Laurence Jones.<sup>19</sup> Chris Mitchell, a Young BNP Bedfordshire organiser, was also reportedly present on the demonstration. Ten members of the NF, including NF chairman Tom Holmes, apparently attended but they were seemingly unimpressed by one placard that read: ‘NF Go to Hell’.<sup>20</sup>
- 2.3. Chris Renton, a BNP activist from Weston-super-Mare, had also turned up at the UPL’s 24 May demonstration. Renton would go on to assume a leading position in the EDL, responsible for running the EDL website (where he posted online as ‘John Sheridan’). Davy Cooling, administrator of the EDL’s Luton *Facebook* site was also said to be a BNP member.<sup>21</sup>
- 2.4. Renton’s involvement with the EDL was acknowledged by Ray in a radio interview (*TalkSPORT*, 6 July 2009). When invited to respond, Ray offered the rather lame defence that “people’s political views are their own affair”.<sup>22</sup> Ray had been interviewed following an EDL-CU protest against Anjem Choudary in Birmingham on 4 July 2009. At this protest, Mike Heaton (aka ‘Wigan Mike’) from the neo-Nazi British Freedom Fighters, had honoured the EDL with his presence.<sup>23</sup>
- 2.5. Ray had previously expressed ‘qualified support’ for the BNP on his blog. Before founding the EDL, Ray had established links with US ‘counter-jihadists’, such as the Zionist blogger Pamela Geller, now an influential figure within the anti-Islamic wing of the American Tea Party movement. According to Geller, she

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<sup>18</sup> See <http://threecountiesunity.blogspot.com/2009/04/lionheart-held-at-bay.html>

<sup>19</sup> See <http://threecountiesunity.blogspot.com/2009/04/march-for-divise-st-georges-day-gathers.html>.

<sup>20</sup> See <http://threecountiesunity.blogspot.com/2009/04/luton-bank-holiday-monday.html>

<sup>21</sup> *The Guardian*, 12 September 2009.

<sup>22</sup> See <http://lionheartuk.blogspot.com/2009/08/edl-talksport-radio-interview.html>

<sup>23</sup> On Heaton, aka ‘Wigan Mike’, see *Daily Telegraph*, 11 June 2010.

broke with Ray in 2007 when “he tried to strong-arm me to support the BNP”.<sup>24</sup> Later, in response to an Easter message in 2009 in which Nick Griffin claimed to be upholding the spirit of the Crusades, Ray had declared that the BNP were “the only ones willing to defend and uphold Christianity in this country”.<sup>25</sup> Rather bizarrely, Ray hoped that some divine intervention by God might direct Griffin and the BNP towards a non-racist form of nationalism.

- 2.6. Following this radio interview, and in the run up to a planned demonstration in Birmingham on 8 August 2009, Ray claimed that the BNP’s Chris Renton, in alliance with Jeff Marsh of Casuals United, had “hijacked the movement”. Already the EDL boasted over 300 active supporters, with the strongest support coming from Luton, Portsmouth, and WDL contingents from Cardiff and Swansea.<sup>26</sup> “Anyone with the slightest bit of knowledge about neo-Nazis”, Ray explained, “knows the meaning of 8/8 which is why I pulled out of any active participation” (in the Birmingham demonstration). The significance of 8/8 being the eighth letter of the alphabet: HH, Heil Hitler.
- 2.7. According to Ray, “It was a pivotal moment, not just for me pulling out but the movement as a whole because going out onto the streets in protest on 8/8 was always going to bring Nazis onto the streets, which it did. Photos of EDL Nazis are all across the internet now, with the EDL now branded a neo-Nazi movement because of this. I advised the leadership group not to go out onto the streets this day, to postpone it for 1 week which would have sent a clear message to everyone... but those calls went unheeded, and the rest is history.”
- 2.8. Ray nonetheless insisted that, “the EDL in most part is not a Nazi movement, I know the majority of the core leadership are not neo-Nazis, and most of the membership are not but the general public don’t know, and when they see what they see on the internet and through the media, its hard getting away from the fact of what it looks like, so 8/8 was a PR disaster of the very worst kind.... I chose to stay silent for the sake of the EDL movement as a whole in the hope that the core leadership would do the right thing but they refused.”<sup>27</sup>
- 2.9. Emerging from this dispute as *de facto* EDL leader was ‘Tommy Robinson’. Following the EDL-CU demonstration in Birmingham on 8 August 2009, at which 35 people were arrested, ‘Robinson’, who kept his identity secret, dismissed claims that the EDL was linked to the BNP.<sup>28</sup> Ray, meanwhile, set up his own EDL division, under its own leadership structure, entitled the ‘St. George’ division. In March 2010 Ray pulled this division from the EDL entirely. Always more of a ‘keyboard warrior’ than a street-activist, Ray now lives abroad after apparently receiving death threats from a Muslim gang.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See [http://atlasshrugs2000.typepad.com/atlas\\_shrugs/2010/03/uk-violence-erupts-fascists-uaf-and-muslims-descend-on-patriots-edl-and-police.html](http://atlasshrugs2000.typepad.com/atlas_shrugs/2010/03/uk-violence-erupts-fascists-uaf-and-muslims-descend-on-patriots-edl-and-police.html)

<sup>25</sup> See <http://lionheartuk.blogspot.com/2009/04/st-georges-day-in-luton.html?showComment=1239573360000#c6986844604009678550>

<sup>26</sup> *The Guardian*, 11 August 2009.

<sup>27</sup> See <http://lionheartuk.blogspot.com/2010/03/infiltration-of-edl.html>

<sup>28</sup> See *Birmingham Mail*, 11 August 2009.

<sup>29</sup> See <http://lionheartuk.blogspot.com/2010/03/infiltration-of-edl.html>

- 2.10. The partially uncovered face of ‘Robinson’, who always wore a mask and ‘hoodie’ at EDL demonstrations, was photographed for the first time in April 2010 by the *Sunday Mercury* newspaper.<sup>30</sup> Then in June 2010 the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* revealed that ‘Tommy Robinson’ was Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, a former BNP member, who had served a 12 months prison sentence for assaulting an off-duty police officer. To muddy the waters further still, in a Channel 4 interview in August 2010, ‘Robinson’ revealed that he was not Yaxley-Lennon but Paul Harris. An embittered Ray, who was not taken in by his claim to be ‘Paul Harris’, called on EDL members to send a clear message to the leadership that they did not endorse any links with the BNP.<sup>31</sup>
- 2.11. Already, in September 2009, responding to claims that the EDL was a BNP front, the former national organiser of the BNP, Eddy Butler, issued a formal statement proscribing the EDL: “The reasons for this proscription are that the English Defence League, through its activities, brings nationalist and patriotic politics into disrepute. If the English Defence League is not instigated by and its activities are not encouraged by the state (which it quite possibly is), then the track record of this organisation shows that it is run by people who will only bring discredit and probable arrest for anyone who attends its events. The British National Party does not wish to be associated with the English Defence League in any way whatsoever.”<sup>32</sup> For BNP leader Nick Griffin, the EDL constitutes a Zionist false flag operation.
- 2.12. So that it might cultivate respectability, and also neutralise anti-fascist opposition, the BNP had de-commissioned ‘boots and fists’ by the late 1990s and turned its back on 1970s-style street demonstrations.<sup>33</sup> However, for some BNP members and supporters, the promise of street agitation by the EDL fills a void left by the BNP’s abandonment of the streets. And despite the BNP’s proscription, its members continue to be spotted attending EDL demonstrations. They reportedly include the BNP’s Merseyside Secretary, Karen Otty, former BNP parliamentary candidate Alan Spence, Wakefield BNP organiser John Aveyard, Swansea BNP organiser Sion Owens, and Stuart Bates and Michael Fritz, both members of the BNP’s West Midlands security team.<sup>34</sup> But it would be wrong to see the EDL simply as the street-fighting wing of the BNP. In the run up to the EDL demonstration in Bradford, Nick Griffin released an official statement reminding BNP members that “the EDL was declared a proscribed organisation back in September last year, so to attend or to encourage attendance at any activities is a disciplinary offence”.<sup>35</sup> In spite of this, it is worth noting that no BNP members appear to have yet been disciplined.

<sup>30</sup> See *Sunday Mercury*, 18 April 2010.

<sup>31</sup> See <http://bradfordprotest.blogspot.com/2010/08/paul-ray-reply-to-alias-tommy-robinson.html>

<sup>32</sup> See <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/bnp-leader-reminds-bnp-supporters-edl-proscribed>

<sup>33</sup> On the recent evolution of the Britain’s anti-fascist movement, see N. Copsey, ‘From Direct Action to Community Action: The Changing Dynamics of Anti-Fascist Opposition’, in N. Copsey and G. Macklin (eds) *The British National Party: Contemporary Perspectives* (Routledge, forthcoming).

<sup>34</sup> See <http://www.vote-no-to-bnp.org.uk/2010/04/bnp-liverpool-secretary-attends-westminster-edl-demonstration.html> Also see *Searchlight*, no. 424, October 2010, pp. 12-12.

<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/bnp-leader-reminds-bnp-supporters-edl-proscribed>

- 2.13. Whilst there can be little doubt that the EDL has functioned (and continues to function) as a host for right-wing extremists of various hues<sup>36</sup> (including BNP members and supporters), we should avoid viewing it simply through the prism of the established far right. Indeed, it is important to note that the principal strategist that emerged as being behind the EDL was entirely unconnected with the BNP (or for that matter, other established far-right organisations, such as the NF).
- 2.14. In September 2009, Alan Lake, a millionaire IT consultant from north London, came forward as a key figure working behind the scenes for the EDL. It was Ray who had brought Lake and his contacts into the EDL.<sup>37</sup> “We are catching the baby at the start of gestation”, Lake revealed.<sup>38</sup> Lake represents the more ‘respectable’, intellectual wing of the EDL. Lake embodies a fiercely pro-Western, anti-Islamic current that has little time for the traditional obsessions of the fascist right, namely race and conspiracy theory. These obsessions, for Lake, constitute ‘displacement activity’ from the real problem: Islam. Lake insisted that a condition of his generous financial support was the EDL distancing itself from the BNP. It has been rumoured (although as yet unsubstantiated) that Lake has bankrolled the EDL to the tune of millions of pounds.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See <http://modernityblog.wordpress.com/2010/09/28/edl-organisers-are-proven-neo-nazis>

<sup>37</sup> See <http://bradfordprotest.blogspot.com/2010/08/paul-ray-reply-to-alias-tommy-robinson.html>. His contacts include ‘Kinana Nadir’ – as yet unidentified.

<sup>38</sup> *The Guardian*, 12 September 2009.

<sup>39</sup> See <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/Businessman-bankrolls-street-army.php>

### 3. Alan Lake: EDL financier and strategist

- 3.1. Alan Lake delivered a presentation entitled ‘4 freedoms worldwide’ at an international seminar held in Malmö, Sweden, on 6 September 2009 which was organised by the right-wing populist Swedish Democrats. The focus of his talk was the threat that Islam supposedly poses to western civilisation. For Lake, there are four fundamental freedoms that western civilisation must defend: free speech, democracy, equality in law and cultural tolerance. For Lake, Islam is antithetical to all four freedoms because in his view it rejects free speech; favours theocracy over democracy; does not recognise equality in law but Sharia law; and finally, is intolerant of other non-Islamic cultures.
- 3.2. For Lake, Islam is not a personal religion; it is not open to personal interpretation. It is an ‘all or nothing’ religion where the word of Allah as revealed through the messenger Mohammed has to be strictly venerated. For Lake, it appears that there is no such thing as a ‘moderate Muslim’: “True Islam is not moderate”. Following this reading, true Islam is by definition *fundamentalist*. Hence Lake opines that: “This concept of a nice, woolly, fluffy, cuddly moderate Muslim that you can embrace and integrate into your society... it’s, it kind of ain’t gonna work out like that because ultimately he’s got to get back to those texts and those texts don’t change and mustn’t be changed.”
- 3.3. Clearly influenced by the writings of people like Robert Spencer<sup>40</sup> (he references Spencer in the introduction to this talk along with the likes of Daniel Pipes<sup>41</sup> and Geert Wilders),<sup>42</sup> Lake argues that it is incumbent on all Muslims to regard Muhammad as the supreme example of human behaviour. Yet, according to Lake, Mohammed was a misogynist, a paedophile, and a torturer. Lake’s take on Islam is that it is fundamentally intolerant and it aspires to dominate the world. In Britain, he maintains, radicalisation of Muslims is on the increase (his reference to “40% radicalisation” would appear to be the 2006 ICM poll which revealed that 4 out of 10 British Muslims support Sharia law. He omits to mention that in the same poll 91 per cent of Muslims said that they remained loyal to Britain). Lake forewarns that if nothing is done to stem this tide, Europe will be Islamic in 40

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<sup>40</sup> American writer Robert Spencer is a bestselling author of a number of books on Islam. He is the director of Jihad Watch, a blog dedicated to raising the alarm about the threat of Islamism. In March 2010 he had no reservations in expressing his support for the EDL: ‘The EDL is standing up to violent thugs from both the Left and the increasingly assertive Islamic communities in Britain and they deserve the support of all free people’, see <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2010/03/>.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel Pipes, like Spencer, is a US writer and political blogger. Pipes maintains that mosques are ‘breeding grounds for militants’.

<sup>42</sup> Geert Wilders is leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom. He created controversy with his 2008 film, *fitna* (meaning division). This film claims that Islam encourages terrorism, anti-Semitism, violence against women, ‘infidels’ and homosexuals. In the 2010 general election his party won 15.5 per cent of the vote and he was invited to serve in the new coalition government. In March 2010 Wilders was hosted by UKIP at the House of Lords.



years. The ‘tipping point’, for Lake, will be 2030 when – he claims - one third of all babies will be Muslim.

- 3.4. Lake’s short-term solution is to apply the law more vigorously “to force them back”. He wants to see laws more forcefully applied against bigamy and female genital mutilation, and calls for a ban on the burkha. He also wants to see immigration laws tightened: “it doesn’t make sense to allow people into the country who are antithetical to your society”. Over the longer-term, he proposes that laws should be upgraded to protect the four fundamental freedoms outlined above and thereby ensure “the protection of Western civilisation”.
- 3.5. It would be wrong to view Lake as a fascist. There is no fascist end-goal here. He is undoubtedly uncompromising in his views on Islam, but Lake is neither a white racial nationalist nor anti-Semite. In fact, even though Lake appears to belong to the Elim Pentecostal Church in west London, and sees Christianity as the foundation stone of Western civilisation, he is widely derided amongst neo-Nazis as a Zionist Jew.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, Lake does seem to possess some disturbing illiberal tendencies. Writing on his website, having predicted that the UK would be divided into Islamic and non-Islamic enclaves in two to three decades, he suggested that “liberal twits” like David Cameron, Nick Clegg and the Archbishop of Canterbury should be sent into the Islamic enclaves. “By forcing these liberal twits into these enclaves we will be sending them to their death, at worst, and at best they and their families will be subjected to all the deprecations, persecution and abuse that non-Muslims currently ‘enjoy’ in countries like Palestine, Iran and Egypt. It will be great to see them executed or tortured to death”.<sup>44</sup> An unguarded moment perhaps, but politically Lake is closer to the likes of UKIP, especially after its recent embrace of anti-Islamic themes, than the BNP. It was reported in May 2010 in the *Guardian* that Lake was toying with the idea of throwing the EDL’s weight behind UKIP. However, a UKIP spokesperson quickly poured cold water on that idea. UKIP would not form any alliance with the EDL or any other ‘extremist’ group.<sup>45</sup> It has been suggested that Lake wants to establish a British version of the American Tea Party movement.<sup>46</sup>
- 3.6. Elsewhere in his Malmö talk, Lake delineated his tactical approach. In the first place, he encouraged the ‘anti-Jihad movement’ to build alliances through extending its cyber-presence. Lake runs his own networking website: 4freedoms.com. This website sits amongst numerous others that populate a growing network of ‘clash of civilisation’ websites across both North America and Europe. At a pan-European level the leading player in this network is Stop Islamisation of Europe (SIOE). This is ‘an alliance of people across Europe with the single aim of preventing Islam becoming the dominant political force in Europe’. It ‘condemns racism as the lowest form of human stupidity, but considers Islamophobia to be the height of common sense’.<sup>47</sup> In September 2009 the EDL

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<sup>43</sup> See <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t710074/>

<sup>44</sup> See [http://www.northern-indymedia.org/system/photo/2010/05/30/653/alan\\_lake\\_s\\_holocaust.png](http://www.northern-indymedia.org/system/photo/2010/05/30/653/alan_lake_s_holocaust.png)

<sup>45</sup> See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/may/28/english-defence-league-protest-bnp>

<sup>46</sup> See *The Observer*, 10 October 2010.

<sup>47</sup> See <http://sioe.wordpress.com/about>. The SIOE was formed in 2007 and originated out of the controversy over the Danish *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons. It staged a demonstration in Brussels on 11 September 2007 and affiliates have been established in at least ten European countries.

supported a SIOE demonstration against an extension of Harrow's central mosque. SIOE organiser in Britain, Stephen Gash, has spoken of his pride in the development of the EDL (and WDL): "I'm delighted that they have started up, they are really trying to get the message across."<sup>48</sup>

- 3.7. Significantly, since 'words are not enough', Lake also called for a parallel physical strategy: "Another strategy we're trying to do in the UK, is reach out to more physical groups like football fans, get them involved... I mean your average intellectual is happy typing on his PC, but we've reached the end of that road. You're not going to get a fat lot more mileage out of that." When interviewed by the *Guardian* in May 2010, Lake added that "These people are not middle-class female teachers... if they continue to be suppressed it will turn nasty in one way or another... We have put bodies on the street, writing letters to the *Times* does not work... If we are going to have a mess that is so much grist to the mill."<sup>49</sup>
- 3.8. As a further recommendation Lake called on anti-Jihadists to co-opt 'floating groups': Sikhs, Jews, gays, women – all those groups that might feel threatened by Islam. In order to do this, it was necessary to keep the focus on shared goals. This helps explain why the EDL presents itself as multi-faith and multi-ethnic and why its programme is kept very simple: "to reverse the trend of Islamic extremism and its promoters... removing sharia law, prohibiting halal slaughter, and banning the burka."<sup>50</sup> It also explains why the EDL accommodates a Jewish division (Israel is defended because it is on the 'frontline of Islamic extremism and jihad'), as well as a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) division. (For more on these 'floating groups' see 4.7- 4.16).
- 3.9. Following his proposal that the EDL should adopt a clearer political position and align itself with UKIP, Lake stopped putting himself forward as an EDL spokesperson.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, it looks as if he is still directing its activities. On his website he identified himself as the organiser of an EDL demonstration in Leicester on 9 October 2010.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/IN+ENGLAND+IN+ENGLAND+MADE+MADE;+FASCIST+WE+REVEAL+THE+'SCOTTISH+...-a0210464370>. Also see *The Independent* 11 September 2009. At this point, SOIE had 2,300 supporters on its *Facebook* page.

<sup>49</sup> See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/may/28/english-defence-league-protest-bnp>

<sup>50</sup> An interview with Trevor Kelway of the EDL, see <http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.com/search?q=trevor+kelway>

<sup>51</sup> See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/may/28/english-defence-league-protest-bnp>

<sup>52</sup> See <http://4freedoms.ning.com/events/edl-leicester-demo>

## 4. Organisation

- 4.1. Lake aside, at the head of the EDL's organisational hierarchy, is its secretive leadership 'team'. As of June 2010 this team comprised 'Tommy Robinson', Trevor Kelway, Jeff Marsh, Jack Smith, Joel Titus<sup>53</sup> and Richard Price.<sup>54</sup> According to 'Tommy Robinson', Chris Renton had left due to 'personal issues'. Even though Renton was involved with the BNP, 'Robinson' revealed that, "We never sacked him or even pushed him out of the EDL."<sup>55</sup> Towards the end of July 2010, following *Searchlight's* exposé, 'Tommy Robinson' named Kevin Carroll<sup>56</sup> (his cousin) as 'joint leader', with the remainder of the leadership team comprising Smith, Marsh and Kelway.<sup>57</sup> Not part of the leadership team as such, but close to the inner circle, are Steve Simmons (Chris Redmond) (Head of EDL Media), Leon McCreery (Head of Security/Deputy National Organiser), John 'Snowy' Shaw (Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Organiser), and the EDL's Sikh 'community relations' spokesperson, Guramit (Amit) Singh.
- 4.2. The EDL is organised through a combination of both area-based divisions and specialist divisions (e.g. EDL Youth, Jewish Division, Disabled Division, Women's Division, Soldiers Division, and so on). The area-based divisions are grouped according to region: North West, North East, East Midlands, West Midlands, East Anglia, South West, South East, South East Central, and Greater London. Particular strongholds of support are the West Midlands, Lancashire, Yorkshire and London. Each region has its own regional organiser (RO). The ROs were established in summer 2010 in order to provide a somewhat fragmented EDL with a tighter organisational structure. The EDL also issued a 'code of conduct' which stipulated that all members must adhere to the correct chain of command: "No member should supersede this chain of command without good reason i.e. their issue is with there (sic) division leader or RO it must be obeyed and respected at all times."
- 4.3. Partnered with the EDL are the Welsh, Scottish, and Ulster Defence Leagues. These Defence Leagues have not been as successful as their English counterpart. A major issue that has frustrated attempts to build larger Defence Leagues in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland has been sectarian divisions. According to a report in the *Sunday Herald* (14 March 2010), Casuals United admitted that it had

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<sup>53</sup> Of mixed race, Joel Titus is head of EDL Youth. Harrow-based Titus was arrested and cautioned following an assault on a photojournalist who was covering a protest outside Harrow mosque.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Price is from the West Midlands. A convicted football hooligan, he was charged with violent disorder arising from disturbances at an EDL demonstration in Aylesbury in May 2010.

<sup>55</sup> See <http://theenglishdefenceleagueextra.blogspot.com/2010/06/edl-leadership-statement-by-tommy.html>

<sup>56</sup> Kevin Carroll signed the nomination papers for a BNP candidate in Farley in Luton. Well-known to local anti-fascists, it is alleged that Carroll was only dissuaded from standing as a BNP candidate at the last minute by his partner.

<sup>57</sup> See [http://www.englishdefenceleague.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=235:statement-from-tommy-robinson-24th-july&catid=42:feature-stories](http://www.englishdefenceleague.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=235:statement-from-tommy-robinson-24th-july&catid=42:feature-stories)

been impossible to unite hooligan ‘firms’ north of the border. One Unite Against Fascism (UAF) spokesperson explained that “The Scottish disease [sectarianism] meant that many football casuals refused to support a right-wing SDL comprising mainly of Rangers fans.”<sup>58</sup> Sectarianism is obviously an issue for the Ulster Defence League which decided against holding any demonstrations in Northern Ireland. As for the Welsh Defence League (which partly re-branded itself to the more chant-friendly Cymru Defence League), there have been divisions between the Cardiff-based Casuals United and the Swansea contingent, some of whom are Combat 18 veterans. At a WDL demonstration in Cardiff in June 2010, English and Welsh football hooligans clashed.<sup>59</sup>

- 4.4. As of October 2010, there were over 90 local divisions listed on the EDL’s website. In July 2010 the EDL claimed 22,000 followers on *Facebook*, although it is worth bearing in mind that the vast majority of these are ‘paper’ supporters - at most the EDL is able to muster a few thousand supporters on to the streets. There is no official membership card, or membership fee/subs as such (there have been calls for official membership cards on the EDL forum). The advantage to the EDL is that in contrast to the BNP there is no membership list which might find itself ‘leaked’ into the public domain. Joining the EDL’s ‘virtual community’ lowers the risk for those (in the minority) who want to engage in its real world activities.
- 4.5. The EDL does not publish its own magazine or newsletter. Rather, communication and the exchange of information is through its website, *Facebook* and through other online platforms. This, of course, carries a whole series of benefits. It is cheap and it is a relatively risk-free way of building networks of like-minded individuals beyond the core leadership. Moreover, it allows the EDL to easily and effectively disseminate its message to a wide audience. The inclusion of video clips from *YouTube*, and other imagery illustrates and continuously reinforces its Islamophobic narrative.
- 4.6. The use of *Facebook* also builds momentum and expectancy ahead of planned events. This raises the potential for violence by building up the event with a period in which levels of anticipation increase and commitment to the cause is reinforced. In both the virtual environment and the real world, group identity and organisational presence is encouraged. A key aspect to this has been its trade in online merchandising. Through its website, the EDL has sold its own branded ‘hoodies’, caps, pin badges, t-shirts, and face masks. However, following internal allegations that the EDL leadership were lining their own pockets, merchandising was momentarily pulled from the website in September 2010.<sup>60</sup>
- 4.7. Operating in tandem with the area-based divisions are the EDL’s specialist divisions. These are not intended to be alternatives to the area-based divisions but are viewed as a way of raising the profile of specific ‘floating groups’ within the organisation. The point is to use them to draw in new recruits from the widest possible constituency – from social groups who would not ordinarily self-

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<sup>58</sup> See <http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/home-news/how-sectarian-hooligans-are-killing-off-scots-far-right-1.101314>

<sup>59</sup> See J. Marsh, *From Seaside to Casuals United: The Rise of the Defence Leagues* (2010).

<sup>60</sup> See [http://www.englishdefenceleague.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=253:so-edl-leadership-are-taking-monies-from-their-members-are-they&Itemid=112](http://www.englishdefenceleague.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=253:so-edl-leadership-are-taking-monies-from-their-members-are-they&Itemid=112)

associate with a street-fighting, 'extreme-right' organisation. A primary objective of these specialist divisions is to disseminate the EDL's message within specific communities/constituencies. Their existence also counters the charge that the EDL is a group of white supremacist, skinhead, boot boys, or the 'BNP in disguise'.

- 4.8. The first of the EDL's specialist divisions was its Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Division, which was established in March 2010. Since September 2009 the EDL had been talking about the need to defend gay people from Sharia law. According to the CU website, "The LGBT Division was set up when it was recognized that there were individual gay people attending demos, but they were not united as a group within EDL. The Division was intended to enable gay people to focus on working together to further the EDL across the regions of Britain."<sup>61</sup> SIOE in Denmark has attracted significant support from the Danish gay community and so such a development is not without precedent. As of October 2010 the EDL's LGBT division had 116 followers on *Facebook*.
- 4.9. The EDL's Jewish division was launched shortly afterwards in May 2010. The leader of the LGBT division suggested the idea after meeting with some Jewish EDL activists: "And I told them that the best thing to do was to stop being on the periphery of the demos where no one knew them and they knew no one else. The next day I suggested the Jewish Division to the people I knew higher up the chain than me, and they talked to the leadership, and the Jewish Division met with instant approval from the leadership."<sup>62</sup> The leader of the EDL's Jewish division is Roberta Moore, a Brazilian-born Jew. Moore declared to the Israeli daily newspaper, *Haaretz* (13.7.10) that the purpose of the Jewish Division was to exploit the EDL. "We are anti-Islam, as everyone should be", Moore declares. "Islam is not a religion, but a cult."<sup>63</sup> According to the *Jewish Chronicle* (3 June 2010), the EDL's Jewish division signed-up hundreds of Jews, including a former volunteer with the Board of Deputies' Community Security Trust (CST), Mark Israel. The chief executive of the Board of Deputies, Jon Benjamin, was quick to express his disapproval: "The EDL's supposed 'support' for Israel is empty and duplicitous. It is built on a foundation of Islamophobia and hatred which we reject entirely."<sup>64</sup> A senior US rabbi and Tea Party activist, Rabbi Nachum Shifren, was invited to London to meet with the EDL and spoke at an EDL rally on 24 October 2010 attended by around 300 EDL followers. Shifren has called on Britain's Jews to support the EDL.<sup>65</sup> The EDL's Jewish division numbered 813 followers on *Facebook* in October 2010.
- 4.10. As for other faith groups, the EDL has made some attempt to lure support from Britain's Sikh community. The EDL's 'anti-racist poster boy' is Guramit (Amit) Singh, a British-born Sikh in his late twenties. Nottingham-based Singh claims to have joined the EDL after he was sent an invitation to join a group opposing the EDL's march in the city in December 2009. Singh subsequently 'Googled' the EDL, communicated with several people on their *Facebook* site and on the EDL's

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<sup>61</sup> See <http://casualsunited.wordpress.com/2010/06/>

<sup>62</sup> See [http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL\\_The\\_Forum/topic/3692638/1/](http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL_The_Forum/topic/3692638/1/)

<sup>63</sup> See <http://www.redress.cc/zionism/gutzman20100817>

<sup>64</sup> See <http://thecst.org.uk/blog/?p=1602>.

<sup>65</sup> See *Jerusalem Post*, 11 October 2010.

website forum, and then got involved.<sup>66</sup> No member of the EDL “put a knife to my throat and forced me to join... I marched in Nottingham, spoke with members and knew this was a subject I felt very strongly about and joined.”<sup>67</sup> Eager to counter claims that it was a racist organisation, Singh, who has described Sharia law as “a racist, fascist, paedophilic law”,<sup>68</sup> was quickly adopted by the EDL leadership as their ‘community relations’ spokesperson.

- 4.11. Singh featured in the BBC 3 documentary ‘*Young, British and Angry*’ (first broadcast 12 May 2010), when he delivered a speech at an EDL rally in March 2010 in support of Geert Wilders. Singh ended his vitriolic speech with the cry: “God bless every single person in this country, even the Muslims — you’ll need it for when you’re burning in f-g hell!” Whilst Singh denied that he was prejudiced against moderate Muslims, his *Facebook* profile was peppered with deeply offensive posts against both ordinary Muslims and the Prophet Mohammed. For Singh, Islam is inherently extremist,<sup>69</sup> and Pakistanis are a specific target for his odium. In March 2010 a *News of the World* investigation revealed that whilst amongst a crowd of EDL supporters, Singh had “spat: ‘I f-g hate the Pakis. India needs to go to war with Pakistan’.”<sup>70</sup> Singh also featured in an undercover *Guardian* investigation (28 May 2010) where he revealed the EDL’s plans to ‘hit’ Bradford and Tower Hamlets with anti-Muslim demonstrations in the summer of 2010.
- 4.12. As things stand no more than a handful of Sikhs have been recruited to the EDL cause. A formal Sikh division does not yet exist, but a *Facebook* fan page was launched in August 2010 entitled ‘*Sikhs who support the EDL*’. The idea, as suggested by the organiser of the LGBT division, was to use this group as the platform for launching a Sikh division. The Sikh contact for this group is Ranjit Singh. As well as supporting the mission of the EDL, this group has two other aims: to raise awareness of the EDL within the Sikh community, and to increase awareness to EDL members and other UK citizens, about who Sikhs are. “Too many times Sikhs are seen as Asians and in some cases confused as Muslims. Sikhs have contributed to British and English Culture for many years and have integrated while keeping their values.” Key motifs on this site are the loyalty of Sikhs to the British crown, and alleged attempts by Muslim men to “seduce Sikh girls into Islam”. The narrative of forced conversions by Muslim males occupies a central place in tensions between contemporary Muslim-Sikh communities in Britain.<sup>71</sup>
- 4.13. Allied to this group is a further *Facebook* group, ‘*Sikhs against Sharia*’. This is apparently organised by a young Sikh woman, Sareeta Webra, who has spoken at an EDL rally in Dudley. According to one observer this site is a front for

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<sup>66</sup> See <http://www.thesamosa.co.uk/index.php/news-and-features/society/210-exclusive-f-the-pakis-meet-the-edls-anti-racist-poster-boy.html>

<sup>67</sup> See <http://casualsunited.wordpress.com/2010/01/31/edl-sikh-member-speak-stoke-demo/>.

<sup>68</sup> See *Leicester Mercury*, 7 October 2010.

<sup>69</sup> See <http://www.thesamosa.co.uk/index.php/news-and-features/society/210-exclusive-f-the-pakis-meet-the-edls-anti-racist-poster-boy.html>

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> See G. Singh, ‘The Adab-“Respect” Programme: A Perspective on Muslim-Sikh Relations in the United Kingdom and Causes of Tensions and Mistrust between the two Communities’, London: Faith Matters, p. 35-36.

organisations such as the EDL and SIOE, and while its membership is overwhelmingly white and non-Sikh, the potential for recruitment is all too clear.<sup>72</sup>

- 4.14. A major difficulty (and embarrassment) for the EDL, however, is that many of its racist foot soldiers simply can't tell the difference between a Muslim and a Sikh and so Sikhs are put off from attending EDL demonstrations. At the UPL demonstration in Luton on 24 May 2009, for example, Luton's Sikh mayor was assaulted. As one Sikh EDL supporter explains in an EDL forum posting: "due to media perceptions and yeah some ppl who associate with the edl, there is a certain image attached of not only racism but violence too. tbh, while i am a part of the edl now, it took me a good few months as being careful and taking '1 step at a time' before the commitment was made and admins like mj and steve infidel know this :)))".<sup>73</sup>

From another Sikh who attended an EDL demonstration in Stoke: "What bloody gets on my nerves is the stupid uneducated mainly white youths and white men who will see a sikh with his turban on and think of bin laden or an asian or a terrorist and call him the p word or whatever, it sickens me, these dumbasses dont f\*\*king know what the difference between a sikh and a muslim is."<sup>74</sup>

- 4.15. At present, outside these online forums, little sustained effort has been put into recruitment from other faith groups. In fact it was noticeable that in the approach to the recent EDL demonstration in Leicester, it was Unite Against Fascism, not the EDL, that held a meeting with the local Sikh community.<sup>75</sup> One post to the EDL forum suggested that: "Maybe we should have members going round into sikh and hindu communities and holding meetings and seminars about who we are and what we're about. We could show videos and have q&a time with them. A few leaflet drops in their areas and chatting to the youth on the street will probaly (sic) gain us more support from their community. Unfortunately, at the moment, Unite Against Soap are spreading their bullsh\*t about us and people are believing it. We need to combat this and have our say."<sup>76</sup>

Prior to a EDL demonstration in Newcastle, another post to the EDL forum suggested: "Perhaps the EDL should write to the various local community associations & temples etc of these groups explaining that we are not against them and urging them to attend the EDL demo."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> See <http://www.thesamosa.co.uk/index.php/news-and-features/society/210-exclusive-f-the-pakis-meet-the-edls-anti-racist-poster-boy.html>

<sup>73</sup> See [http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL\\_The\\_Forum/topic/3675856/1/](http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL_The_Forum/topic/3675856/1/)

<sup>74</sup> See

[http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL\\_The\\_Forum/search/?c=1&q=amit+singh&type=post&sort=desc&forum\[\]=-1&s\\_m=8&s\\_d=6&s\\_y=2009&e\\_m=10&e\\_d=5&e\\_y=2010](http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL_The_Forum/search/?c=1&q=amit+singh&type=post&sort=desc&forum[]=-1&s_m=8&s_d=6&s_y=2009&e_m=10&e_d=5&e_y=2010)

<sup>75</sup> See <http://www.leicesteruaf.org/2010/10/03/packed-meeting-at-leicester-gurdwara-resolves-to-oppose-the-edl-on-9-oct/>

<sup>76</sup> See [http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL\\_The\\_Forum/topic/3675856/1/](http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL_The_Forum/topic/3675856/1/)

<sup>77</sup> See

[http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL\\_The\\_Forum/search/?c=1&q=sikh+division&type=post&sort=desc&forum\[\]=-1&s\\_m=8&s\\_d=6&s\\_y=2009&e\\_m=10&e\\_d=5&e\\_y=2010](http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL_The_Forum/search/?c=1&q=sikh+division&type=post&sort=desc&forum[]=-1&s_m=8&s_d=6&s_y=2009&e_m=10&e_d=5&e_y=2010)

- 4.16. If truth be told, the EDL has been slow to engage in face-to-face contact with these communities. But regional organisers, who are supposed to report directly to the leadership team on a monthly basis, are now holding their own meetings and local events. This opens up the possibility that more localised initiatives, such as off-line representations to other faith groups, might occur in the future. Such initiatives might appeal to the EDL's more 'mature' supporters who are less inclined to attend 'away-day' punch-ups. There is certainly no room for complacency.
- 4.17. Although a national organisation, the EDL also views itself as an integral part of the broader international 'counter-Jihad' movement. In April 2010 a small number of EDL supporters attended a pro-Wilders rally outside the Dutch embassy in Berlin organised by the Pax Europa Citizens Movement (BPE).<sup>78</sup> In June 2010 the EDL sent two of its representatives to 'Counter-Jihad 2010', a pan-European conference held in Zurich organised by the anti-Muslim International Civil Liberties Alliance (ICLA).<sup>79</sup> In the wake of this conference, which offered the EDL an opportunity to network with French and German counterparts, 'Tommy Robinson' announced his intention to take the EDL 'global'. The platform for this initiative was a demonstration held at the end of the October 2010 in Amsterdam. The timing of this demonstration coincided with the trial of Geert Wilders on hate speech charges. In the event, the Wilders trial was suspended (Wilders faces up to a year in prison or a fine for calling Islam 'fascist' and for comparing the Koran to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*). Nonetheless, the Amsterdam demonstration saw the launch of a 'European Friendship Initiative', comprised of the EDL and recently formed Defence Leagues from several European countries, including the German, Dutch and French Defence Leagues. In a press release dated 25 October 2010, the European Friendship Initiative announced that SIOE had joined its international coalition. But, it should be noted, Wilders has distanced himself from any association with the EDL: "I only know the group from the newspapers and I have never had any contact with them."<sup>80</sup>
- 4.18. Across the Atlantic, the EDL is associated with 'Stop Islamization of America' (SIOA), the US affiliate to SIOE. Led by Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, the SIOA hosted a rally in New York City on 9 September 2010 against a proposed mosque close to Ground Zero. Geller is reported to be in regular contact with the EDL and is the bridge between the EDL and the Tea Party movement.<sup>81</sup> Geller claims that the EDL is misrepresented by the British media: "There is nothing racist, fascist, or bigoted about the EDL."<sup>82</sup> Several EDL members, including Kevin Carroll, attended the Ground Zero rally, which also featured an appearance by Geert Wilders. However, 'Tommy Robinson' was detained on arrival at JFK

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<sup>78</sup> Led by Willi Schwend and Conny Axel Meier, the BPE defines itself as an independent, non-partisan Civil and Human Rights organisation. 'Our objectives are to protect not only the democratic, free and secular rule of law... but also to struggle for European culture based on the Judeo-Christian traditions, and – especially – on the values of the Enlightenment'. See [http://www.osce.org/documents/odhr/2009/07/38792\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odhr/2009/07/38792_en.pdf)

<sup>79</sup> The ICLA is a project of the US-based Center for Vigilant Freedom (CVF). The CVF was formed in September 2006 and facilitates communications on behalf of the 'counter-Jihad' movement.

<sup>80</sup> [http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2010/10/wilders\\_denounces\\_english\\_defe.php](http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2010/10/wilders_denounces_english_defe.php)

<sup>81</sup> See *The Observer*, 10 October 2010.

<sup>82</sup> See *The Guardian*, 21 August 2010.



airport and was subsequently deported.<sup>83</sup> For Alan Lake, “The benefit of joining with these organizations is logistical and political, but also emotional.”<sup>84</sup>

- 4.19. Organisationally, the EDL represents a new departure. A child of the *Facebook* revolution, it is not an archetypal far-right party or movement. The idea that a white racial nationalist, an NF-style organisation, would have a LGBT or Jewish division is absurd. To put it in the crude words of one white racial nationalist: “The EDL-with its jew flag, nignog members, fag rainbow group, Sikh spokesman and sheeple attendees, are the antithesis of White Nationalism.”<sup>85</sup> As a new social movement the EDL has not been interested in contesting elections or winning power, and beyond its antipathy towards Islam and its virulent patriotism, it has no obvious ideological end-goal. “Our movement,” one EDL spokesperson explained, “is purely set up to pressure whatever government we have in power to deal with this [Islamic] menace.”<sup>86</sup> On one level, as we have seen, it sits within an array of anti-Islamic, pro-Western ‘clash of civilisation’ organisations that have developed in Western Europe and North America. On another level, as we shall see, it defines itself by its protest activities and physical presence on the streets.

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<sup>83</sup> The reason given was that he had incorrectly filled out his entry form.

<sup>84</sup> <http://4freedom.ning.com/group/press/forum/topics/ap-british-antiislam-group>

<sup>85</sup> See <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t737297/>

<sup>86</sup> See <http://theenglishdefenceleagueextra.blogspot.com/2010/03/who-are-edl-exposing-myth-by-edl.html>

## 5. Nature of EDL street protest

- 5.1. The EDL claims that it ‘peacefully protests’ against militant Islam. According to Trevor Kelway, “Unlike the UAF, we don’t want violence and provocation. The aim is for peaceful protest and good community spirit. We want support from the people in the towns where we demonstrate”.<sup>87</sup> Yet for all the laudable words about peaceful protest, many of those within the EDL’s ranks, especially its hooligan element, seek the thrill of violent confrontation. Jason Parkinson, a journalist who has filmed EDL demonstrations, neatly summarises what typically happens on EDL set-piece demonstrations: “If the UAF’s there, they go for the UAF. If the UAF isn’t there they try to break through police lines and head towards a Muslim area. And if they can’t do that, they attack whatever is in front of them, which includes the press.”<sup>88</sup>
- 5.2. Almost certainly, the EDL is spoiling for a backlash from its opponents, preferably from local Asians. Only this, it believes, will force the Government to attend to the Islamic ‘problem’. It follows that without an over-reaction, these demonstrations are a damp squib: the Government will remain unmoved; the EDL will lose its appeal as an outlet for violence; its supporters will lose interest. Whilst Lake maintains that he is opposed to physical confrontation, he describes the merger of the intellectual wing of the EDL with its “hoi polloi” as “the perfect storm coming together”.<sup>89</sup> “This is a dirty, nasty, difficult struggle,” Lake says, “and you have to work with what is available”.<sup>90</sup>
- 5.3. Since the first events in Birmingham between July-September 2009, the EDL has held demonstrations across a number of English towns and cities, including Manchester (10.10.09), Leeds (31.10.09), Nottingham (5.12.09), Stoke-on-Trent (23.1.10), Wootton Bassett (10.1.10), London (5.3.10), Bolton (20.3.10), Dudley (3.4.10; 3.5.10; 17.7.10), Aylesbury (1.5.10), Newcastle-upon-Tyne (29.5.10), Bradford (28.8.10), and Leicester (9.10.10). EDL numbers have increased steadily, reaching a peak of 2,000 (Stoke-on-Trent, Bolton, Dudley) before falling back to 800-1,000 at Newcastle, Bradford and Leicester (see table). The trend over the previous few months suggests declining rates of participation, although it is far too early to say whether the EDL is in decline. In some instances locations are chosen because of local factors, for example, proposed extensions to, or building of mosques (e.g. Dudley), or homecoming parades by soldiers (Nottingham), or simply because they are home to large EDL divisions (e.g. Aylesbury). In other cases, locations are chosen because they are multi-racial areas with significant Muslim communities (e.g. Bradford). North of the border, the SDL has held demonstrations in Glasgow (14.11.09) and Edinburgh (20.2.10), while the WDL has demonstrated in Swansea (17.10.09), Wrexham (21.11.09)

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<sup>87</sup> See <http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.com/search?q=trevor+kelway>

<sup>88</sup> See <http://www.antifascistencyclopedia.com/allposts/right-turn-the-violent-rise-of-the-english-defense-league>

<sup>89</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 2 January 2010.

<sup>90</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 10 October 2009.

and Cardiff (5.6.10). Rates of participation are much lower in Scotland and Wales (and often supplemented by contingents from England), ranging from around 90 (Glasgow, Edinburgh) to 200 (Cardiff) (see table below).

#### EDL-related Protests: April 2009-October 2010

Date	Location	Event	Attendance Estimates (EDL)	Counter-Protests	Arrests (includes non-EDL)
13 April 2009	Luton	UPL	150	Unopposed	6
24 May 2009	Luton	UPL	500	Unopposed	9
27 June 2009	Whitechapel, London	EWDL/UBA	30	Unopposed	None
4 July 2009	Wood Green, London	EWDL	Not known	Unopposed	2
4 July 2009	Birmingham	EWDL-CU	90-100	Unopposed	None
8 August 2009	Birmingham	EDL/WDL/CU	Not Known	Muslim/UAF	35
5 September 2009	Birmingham	EDL	100	Muslim/UAF	90
11 September 2009	Harrow, London	SIOE	Not Known	Muslim/UAF	10
13 September 2009	London	EDL/MfE	10	Unopposed	None

10 October 2009	Manchester	EDL	1500	UAF	40
17 October 2009	Swansea	WDL/C18	60	UAF	Not known
31 October 2009	Leeds	EDL	900	UAF	9
14 November 2009	Glasgow	SDL	80	Scotland United	5
21 November 2009	Wrexham	WDL	120	Wrexham Communities against Racism	4
5 December 2009	Nottingham	EDL	500	Muslim/UAF	16
10 January 2010	Wootton Bassett	EDL	200	Unopposed	None
23 January 2010	Stoke-on-Trent	EDL	2000	UAF/NorScarf	25
20 February 2010	Edinburgh	SDL	90	Scotland United	5
5 March 2010	London	EDL	200	UAF	50
20 March 2010	Bolton	EDL	2000	UAF	74
3 April 2010	Dudley	EDL	2000	UAF	12

27 April 2010	Blackburn	EDL flash demo	27	Unopposed	None
1 May 2010	Aylesbury	EDL	800	UAF	12
3 May 2010	Dudley	EDL flash demo	40	Unopposed	10
29 May 2010	Newcastle	EDL	800	UAF	None
5 June 2010	Cardiff	WDL/EDL	200	UAF/Muslim	4
17 July 2010	Dudley	EDL	500	UAF	21
28 August 2010	Bradford	EDL	1000	UAF	13
11 September 2010	Oldham	EDL flash demo	120	Unopposed	8
12 September 2010	Nuneaton	EDL flash demo	Not known	Muslim	None
9 October 2010	Leicester	EDL	1000	UAF/Muslim	17

- 5.4. In the period July 2009 – August 2010 there were close to 450 reported arrests in connection with EDL (and SDL/WDL) demonstrations. Of those arrested, in some cases (e.g. Stoke-on-Trent) the majority were EDL supporters but in other cases (e.g. Bolton) the majority were from the opposition. The estimated total cost of policing these demonstrations exceeds £3.5 million, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of pounds that local businesses have lost. The police operation at the recent EDL protest in Leicester involved more than 2,000 police officers. It was the largest operation by Leicestershire police in 25 years.
- 5.5. The overwhelming majority of EDL demonstrators are young, white, working-class males (although there are some black faces on demonstrations, women, and older people). Often EDL protestors are unable to define exactly what they are protesting about, not helped by several hours of drinking (and reportedly in some

cases cocaine use) that typically precede these events. The demonstrations are supposedly against ‘militant Islam’ but hostility is all too often directed against *all* Muslims, with aggressive hooligan-style chants such as ‘Allah, Allah... who the f- k is Allah?’ and ‘We all hate Muslims’ a recurrent and disturbing feature.<sup>91</sup> Much of this anti-Islamic sentiment masks selective racism against Asians (‘Pakis’) - a type of racism originating more in perceptions of cultural difference than skin colour. As one observer perceptively puts it: “It is wrong to assume that their members are predominately old school racists, who hate everyone who isn’t white enough. Rather, these racists seem to be more motivated by cultural difference and the manufactured idea of a clash of civilisations. Whilst Britain’s Carribean (sic) migrants are often considered to be acceptably Christian and hedonistic, the much more culturally challenging values of immigrants from South Asia and the Middle East are seen as a threat to be neutered or annihilated.”<sup>92</sup> “Perhaps,” another astute observer has written, “the EDL needs to say ‘Not Racist, Just Selectively Racist’.”<sup>93</sup>

- 5.6. The growth of the EDL is in part rooted in a sense of alienation and disaffection felt by white, working-class youth. A real concern is loss of national and cultural identity (hence the refrain: ‘We want our county back!’) and a determination to preserve traditional ethno-national dominance (Englishness). This sits alongside pessimism about the future – the feeling that Britain has entered a state of terminal decline – and the perception that the white working-class is being denied its proper recognition. Resentment is thus directed towards the Muslim minority who, the EDL believe, benefit from preferential treatment, but yet refuse to adopt traditional (i.e. English/British) culture and values. For many, especially for those who reside in multi-racial areas where communities are fragmented and divided, Muslims represent the most obvious visible symbol of social and cultural transformation.
- 5.7. Resentment is encouraged further still by a prevailing cultural climate in which Islamophobia is socially acceptable. A British Social Attitudes survey (January 2010) revealed that hostility to Muslims and Islam far exceeds antipathy towards any other religious group. EDL support for the armed forces also reflects the popular mood that cheers on those returning from conflict with Islamist combatants overseas. As Mujibil Islam, chair of the youth committee of the Muslim Council of Britain, said: “the foundations for the growth of the EDL have been laid not just by extremists but by countless political speeches and newspaper articles”.<sup>94</sup> The EDL has even found itself promoted in some parts of the national press (see *Daily Star*, 23.9.09; 24.9.09) - something that would be unimaginable for the BNP.
- 5.8. Whilst set-piece demonstrations remain central to its *modus operandi*, the EDL can lay claim to a broader protest repertoire. In May 2010 Leon McCreery and John ‘Snowy’ Shaw were arrested following a rooftop protest at a site earmarked for a new mosque in Dudley. Both were remanded in custody and charged with

<sup>91</sup> See *The Guardian*, 29 May and 28 August 2010.

<sup>92</sup> <http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/2010/08/diary-of-a-domestic-extremist-the-edl-streetfighting-for-the-establishment/>

<sup>93</sup> <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/08/27/spotlight-on-the-edl/>

<sup>94</sup> *The Guardian*, 29 May 2010.

incitement to religious hatred and burglary. Frustrated by the Home Office imposing bans on its marches – the EDL has been forced into static protests – it recently held a series of unannounced ‘flash’ demonstrations. On 11 September 2010 up to 120 EDL supporters congregated in Oldham where they laid a wreath at the War Memorial. Eight people were arrested on public order offences.<sup>95</sup> The following day, a group of EDL supporters descended on Nuneaton for a parade by the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. Rival groups of EDL and local Asians were kept apart by the police who contained the EDL contingent in a pub.<sup>96</sup> The EDL has also targeted opposition meetings. On 9 September 2010, a UAF meeting in Leicester was disrupted by several EDL members. Two people were arrested.<sup>97</sup> On 21 September 2010, 20-30 EDL members attacked a meeting of the Socialist Workers’ Party in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. In the approach to the festive period, it was reported that the EDL was writing to councils warning that if they did not keep the word Christmas in their annual celebrations then their town would be visited by the EDL, and councils would typically incur a bill of £500,000 as a result.

- 5.9. It is hard to escape the conclusion that, on the ground, the EDL is a violent organisation. “At the end of the day we need our army,” Guramit Singh has reportedly said. “It’s nothing to me if they want to have a fight on a weekend basis.”<sup>98</sup> Many that attend its street mobilisations yearn for violent confrontation; many that attend are racist, although not necessarily old-school racist. The dominant characteristic is hostility towards Muslims which is articulated in a deeply offensive and deliberately provocative manner. This provocation is designed to encourage a violent response from opponents, preferably Muslim youth, thereby encouraging further communal polarisation. The ultimate goal is to press the Government into stringent action against not only Islamists but Muslims in general.

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<sup>95</sup> See *Oldham Chronicle*, 13 September 2010.

<sup>96</sup> *Nuneaton Weekly Tribune*, 16 September 2010.

<sup>97</sup> <http://1millionunited.org/blogs/blog/2010/09/11/anti-fascist-meeting-attacked-by-racist-edl/>

<sup>98</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 7 October 2010.

## 6. Responses to the EDL

- 6.1. The emergence of the EDL has drawn a variety of responses. The potential threat to community cohesion from a cycle of provocation and over reaction, was recognised in September 2009 by former Labour Communities Secretary John Denham, who likened the EDL to Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts.<sup>99</sup> Through the investment of £12million into the 'Connecting Communities' programme, Denham's response was to try to target the problem of white working-class resentment that was being exploited by groups like the EDL and BNP.<sup>100</sup>
- 6.2. In accordance with section 13 of the Public Order Act (1986), responsibility for seeking a banning order for an EDL march lies with local police authorities. But neither the police nor Government can ban an assembly (static protest) if one is requested. In Luton, a banning order on EDL marches was imposed for three months from August 2009. But Luton aside, police authorities have generally abstained from seeking banning orders, at least until more recently. In August 2010 West Yorkshire police was granted a ban on an EDL march in Bradford following concerns that it would spark public disorder in a city that had seen serious race riots in 2001. In October 2010 it was announced that Home Secretary Theresa May had also authorised a ban on a proposed EDL march in Leicester following requests from police.<sup>101</sup>
- 6.3. The possibility of an outright ban on the EDL was raised during the general election campaign when David Cameron condemned the EDL as "terrible people", and promised to look into banning groups like the EDL if he were to win the election.<sup>102</sup> The Association of Pakistani Lawyers urged the new coalition Government to ban the EDL for "posing threats to public order and having sinister aims".<sup>103</sup> The reality, however, is that it would be exceptionally difficult to ban the EDL. Unlike Islam4UK, the EDL does not glorify terrorism, and so could not be proscribed under existing counter-terrorism legislation. Besides, if the EDL were banned, other organisations such as SIOE, the UBA, or MfE would surely take its place.
- 6.4. On the streets the EDL's principal antagonist is Unite Against Fascism, for the most part dominated by the Socialist Workers' Party. This has organised counter-protests at most EDL demonstrations. UAF, which is the modern-day equivalent of the 1970s Anti-Nazi League, stereotypes the EDL as 'fascist, racist thugs' (hence their rather repetitive and formulaic chant: 'Fascist scum off our streets'). For UAF, the EDL constitutes an "embryonic pogrom movement" which, it insists, is the direct product of the BNP's electoral breakthrough in 2009 (in

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<sup>99</sup> See *The Independent on Sunday*, 13 September 2009.

<sup>100</sup> <http://www.urbanforum.org.uk/briefings/connecting-communities>

<sup>101</sup> *The Guardian*, 4 October 2010.

<sup>102</sup> *Birmingham Mail*, 6 May 2010.

<sup>103</sup> <http://theasians.co.uk/News173-APL-demands-ban-on-EDL>



reality, there is no such direct causal relationship). There is, it says, “a de facto far right division of labour: the BNP does the electoral politics whilst the EDL intimidates on the streets”.<sup>104</sup> For UAF, the EDL should never go unopposed. Its strategy is to swamp the EDL with force of numbers and thereby demoralise it. What’s more, it says, the EDL is more likely to riot if there is no organised opposition. This seems to miss the point that when EDL events go unopposed, they are more likely to pass off without major incident.

- 6.5. Within the anti-fascist camp there is some variation of approach. Small groups or *groupuscules* of militant anti-fascists stress the need for direct physical confrontation, whereas UAF’s official line is that protest should be peaceful. It has blamed arrests of UAF members, including its own joint secretary Weyman Bennett, on heavy-handed policing.<sup>105</sup> Adopting a critical position towards UAF, the *Searchlight*-backed Hope not Hate (HnH) campaign, which collected over 10,000 signatures in Bradford calling for a ban on the EDL’s proposed march in the city, holds that, “Demonstrations and pickets have their place but they should be a tactic not dogmatic rule.” The key, for HnH, is to engage with local communities and listen to what they want rather than simply “imposing a strategy from outside”.<sup>106</sup>
- 6.6. Needless to say, the response of Muslim youth is a critical factor in the equation. In some cases young Muslims have attached themselves to UAF counter-protests. In Birmingham, for example, they were encouraged to do so by Muhammad Naseem, the head of Birmingham Central Mosque. Against advice from the police, Naseem urged Muslims to confront the EDL protest in Birmingham on 5 September 2009.<sup>107</sup> One eye-witness described how, “We suddenly saw what seemed to be about 200 Asian men running down the street, throwing bricks... We were so scared, we feared for our lives and had to run into the café so we wouldn’t get hurt.”<sup>108</sup> At other times, prominent members of Muslim communities have advised people to stay away, and have been able to keep their youngsters off the streets.<sup>109</sup> Prior to the recent EDL demonstration in Leicester, the Federation of Muslim Organisations declared that, “Our strong advice is that people stay away from the EDL protest and any counter demonstration and rallies that may take place in the city.”<sup>110</sup> Of particular concern were plans by the Muslim Defence League (MDL) to stage a counter-protest, a group that had previously given its support to UAF counter-demonstrations.
- 6.7. The MDL was formed in January 2010.<sup>111</sup> It had a specific remit of opposing Islamophobia and countering misinformation about Islam.<sup>112</sup> Confusingly, it divided into two *Facebook* groups: ‘*Muslim Defence League: United We Stand*,

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<sup>104</sup> <http://uaf.org.uk/2010/08/why-it-is-right-to-peacefully-oppose-the-edl-in-bradford/>

<sup>105</sup> Bennett was arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit violent disorder following an EDL demonstration in Bolton in March 2010. Conspiracy to riot charges against Bennett were later dropped.

<sup>106</sup> *Searchlight*, no. 423, September 2010, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> *The Times*, 7 September 2009.

<sup>108</sup> *Daily Mail*, 7 September 2009.

<sup>109</sup> See *Nottingham Evening Post*, 3 December 2009.

<sup>110</sup> <http://www.fmo.org.uk/>

<sup>111</sup> There had been a previous attempt to establish a Muslim Defence League in 2006 led by Islamic hip-hopper, Aki Nawaz.

<sup>112</sup> <http://www.mpacuk.org/story/300710/guest-post-muslim-defence-league.html>

*Divided We Fall*, which is closely allied to UAF, and the ‘*Muslim Defence League*’. The latter defines itself as “a peaceful movement primarily focused on countering the very anti-Islamic English Defence League. We will do this in two main ways: 1. Mobilise local communities to rise against the EDL (peacefully) and join other similar organisations. 2. Disseminate the right information via the internet (and other means) for the mass public.”<sup>113</sup> At the time of writing, the former group had 4,800 followers on *Facebook*, with the latter having close to 11,000 followers. Significantly, by insisting on the need to protest against the EDL, the MDL, in whatever guise, represents an uncomfortable development for Muslim community leaders wanting to project an image of their community as law-abiding and peaceful.

### **Responding to the EDL: Recommendations**

- 6.8. Freedom of assembly is a fundamental right of democratic society. But as we have seen, the point of EDL street protests is to threaten, intimidate and provoke violent confrontation, preferably with Muslims. It is therefore vital that opponents do not react in the ways that the EDL wants them to react. In other words, opponents should not rise to the bait. As one observer has written, “the clumsy application of a ‘militant’ or physical response is likely to be counter-productive. If the EDL win on the street, this will heavily contribute to its glamour. Socialist Workers Party students playing at being street fighters behind police lines or Muslim kids playing up to a script of extremist youth – this will only feed the EDL narrative.”<sup>114</sup> The obvious danger is that if anyone is seriously injured or even killed as a result of EDL protest/counter-protest, the potential for radicalisation on both sides – ‘cumulative radicalisation’ – will increase significantly. Deny the EDL the ‘oxygen of publicity’ by minimising the potential for violent confrontation, and the chances are that the EDL will lose its standing, glamour, credibility and interest amongst the hardcore hooligan element.
- 6.9. When plans for EDL marches are announced, anti-fascist organisations and faith-based community groups should focus their efforts not on organising counter-mobilisations but on building pressure for these marches to be banned. Local councils and local police forces should be open to their representations. When it comes to EDL protest, the Home Office should be receptive to applications for banning orders. It should also seek to apply legislation against incitement to religious hatred wherever possible. The Government needs to send out a clear political message that the EDL represents a serious and unacceptable threat to our country’s social cohesion.
- 6.10. Where the EDL is forced into static protests, these protests can be more easily (although not always) contained by police. The location, limits on the maximum number attending and the duration of the static assembly can all be set by police under Section 14 of the Public Order Act. It should be a matter of course that tight restrictions are put in place on EDL static assemblies which, with regard to their

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<sup>113</sup> <http://www.mdlhq.org/>

<sup>114</sup> See <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/atw.php?id=187>.

timing, might also limit the aggravating effects of alcohol consumption. When an assembly fails to comply with conditions imposed, arrests of the organiser(s) should be made. Banning static protests altogether could fall foul of article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights which protects the right to freedom of assembly. Such a ban might radicalise the EDL, and in any case, it could be used to silence more ‘legitimate’ protest in other contexts.

- 6.11. The announcement of an EDL protest offers Muslims an opportunity to show that they are a law-abiding and peaceful community. They should resist the temptation to mobilise against the EDL. In the weeks leading up to an EDL protest, the police should continue their practice of visiting community groups, mosques, youth centres and so on, encouraging young Muslims to stay at home. The *quid pro quo* is that police should always ensure that Muslim communities are fully protected against possible EDL incursions.
- 6.12. Spontaneous EDL protest obviously presents more of a challenge. The focus here must be on co-ordinated intelligence gathering by specialist police units, such as the National Public Order Intelligence Unit and its Confidential Intelligence Unit. These units should not dismiss the threat from the EDL simply because it claims to be a peaceful organisation.
- 6.13. But countering the EDL is not just about public order and how best to minimise the threat to social cohesion arising from such protest. It is also about adopting a more pro-active stance that challenges hostile attitudes towards Muslim minorities, not only amongst the majority white population, but also amongst other faith-based minority groups which the EDL is seeking to manipulate cynically. Community and faith-based organisations tend to be the most trusted, and should take the lead in developing projects that support inter-faith activities and strengthen relationships between communities. Promoting understanding and tolerance of different cultures amongst young people is essential. Above all, such social projects need to re-engage disaffected white working-class youth.
- 6.14. Countering the EDL online is also a possibility. This might involve *Facebook* groups challenging the myths and half-truths peddled by groups such as the EDL. A worthy example of this type of approach is the one adopted by United Shades of Britain.<sup>115</sup> *Facebook*'s code of conduct prohibits ‘derogatory, demeaning, malicious, defamatory, abusive, offensive or hateful’ material.<sup>116</sup> An appeal might therefore be made to *Facebook* requesting that accounts, services and applications be suspended or denied to EDL groups. As we have seen, *Facebook* is a critical forum for the EDL and opponents need to think imaginatively about how they might counter, frustrate and disrupt its online activity.

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<sup>115</sup> See <http://www.unitedshades.org.uk/home.aspx>

<sup>116</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/codeofconduct.php>

## 7. Future trajectories

- 7.1. It is, of course, impossible to predict how the EDL will develop in the near future. But with the BNP currently in some turmoil, Labour's Jon Cruddas was surely right to assert that the more serious threat to community cohesion at the moment comes not from the BNP but from the EDL.<sup>117</sup> What, then, are the most likely future scenarios?
- 7.2. The optimistic scenario is that the EDL simply runs out of steam. If the leadership is unable to satisfy the EDL's foot soldiers with sufficient opportunities for a 'punch-up', its reputation as a street-fighting force could nose-dive. The leadership is not the most stable; internal squabbles are common; the movement remains a loose, and somewhat disjointed coalition of football hooligans, angry but politically unsophisticated youth, and far-right extremists. Research carried out on a very small sample of EDL supporters reveals that whilst half could be described as 'bellicose nationalists on the fringes of the far right', the rest were 'ordinary people who had voted for all the major parties in the past'.<sup>118</sup> Beyond their antagonism towards Islam, there is no ideology that binds this ragbag coalition together. This renders it more susceptible to fracture, and wholesale disengagement from the less politically driven who are more inclined to drift away if or when EDL demonstrations flop. There might also come a point where the EDL simply exhausts the potential locations for its demonstrations. Future demonstrations are planned for Preston (27.11.10), Nuneaton (27.11.10), Peterborough (11.12.10), and 'back to where it all began', Luton, in early February 2011.
- 7.3. Another scenario is for the established far right to hijack the EDL, especially given the internal strife that is currently consuming the BNP. This is unlikely, however. For a start, opinion on the far right remains divided. Admittedly there are those that long for the halcyon days of the 1970s' NF, but many white racial nationalists are unimpressed by the EDL, and urge their peers not to be taken in by this 'Zionist conspiracy'. A capture of the EDL by the fascist right would undermine links with the more respectable international 'counter-jihad' movement and would not be welcomed by the EDL's principal backer, Alan Lake. What's more, the politically unsophisticated might well balk at following a white racial nationalist movement (not to mention the EDL's 'floating groups').
- 7.4. The more pessimistic scenario is for the EDL to grow in strength and influence, bankrolled not only by Lake but also by the anti-Islamic wing of the American Tea Party movement. The EDL might, as a consequence of its growing links with the wider 'counter-Jihad' movement, try to enter the political arena. This would presumably require a Wilders-type populist as leader, but it is difficult to see such a figure emerging from the current leadership. Meanwhile, on the streets, were Muslim youth and opponents to react to EDL provocation with increasing

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<sup>117</sup> *The Observer*, 10 October 2010.

<sup>118</sup> See *Leicester Mercury*, 7 October 2010.

violence, the consequences for the future of community relations in Britain could be serious. Should a repeat of 7/7 happen in the near future, the existence of the EDL as a credible organisation would be a potent lightning rod for physical retaliation against Muslims. Ominously, more localised activity by the EDL introduces a new and worrying dynamic. Should the EDL adopt increasingly intimidating tactics against local Muslim communities and opposition groups, it will become even more difficult to avoid a downward spiral of violence that will not only feed the EDL's toxic narrative but also radicalise Muslim communities, encouraging deeper divisions within our communities. A further aggravating factor is economic austerity and the possibility that this could intensify resentment towards Muslims. When it comes to the level of threat that the EDL currently poses to our country, our communities and our values, there is certainly no room for complacency.



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