

Working Paper: May 2021

The National Front and the BNP in Leicester and Leicestershire.

A working paper collating all the election results of the National Front and the British National Party from 1970 to 2019. The National Front first stood candidates on anti-immigration and anti-Europe policies locally in the 1970 General Election and the City Council elections in 1972. The last BNP candidate stood in the general election of 2017 on the same policies.

Search Terms; Immigration, Racism, National Front, British National Party, EEC, EU, Kenyan Asians, Ugandan Asians, AIMS Anti-Immigration Society; Unity Against Racism.

For further details contact.

Dr. Liam McCarthy,
Honorary Fellow,
HYPIR,
University of Leicester.

Email: lm497@leicester.ac.uk

The National Front and the BNP in Leicester and Leicestershire.

In the twenty first century Leicester has a hard-won reputation as a harmonious city with positive race relations and strong social cohesion.¹ However, this status took a knock during the Covid 19 pandemic and the local Leicester lockdown with constant low-level attempts to attribute blame for the spread of the disease in the city to sweat-shop factory owners and ethnic minority communities.² The re-emergence of this latent racism has its roots in the rapid growth of South Asian communities in the city in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1972 during the Uganda Asian crisis Leicester was regarded in the national press as ‘the most racist city’ in Britain.³ This paper will analyse the rise of extreme right wing political parties and campaign groups in Leicester in the context of the impact of immigration to show how they both grew and declined rapidly.

The reaction to immigration in Leicester

In the 1950s the numbers of immigrants to Leicester seemed small in comparison to other areas of the country, yet the local press continually gave prominence to the views of Cyril Osborne MP for Louth and a JP in Leicestershire. For example in 1955 Osborne wrote about immigration on the front page of the Leicester Chronicle;

‘Last year 10,000 Jamaicans immigrated to this country. This year there will be even more unless it is stopped. I want it stopped. This is a white man’s country and I want it to remain so’.⁴

¹ J. Herbert, *Negotiating Boundaries in the City: Migration, Ethnicity, and Gender in Britain*, (Ashgate; Aldershot, 2008), p.2.

² See, B. Choudhury, ‘Don’t Blame Asians for Lockdown’, *Eastern Eye*, 8 July 2010, p.4, and A. Day, Racists are using the Leicester lockdown to spread lies about its Asian communities, Huff Post, 2 July 2020, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/leicester-lockdown-racists-blaming-asian-ethnic-minority-bame_uk_5efcb472c5b6acab2849fc62?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x1LmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAKotoSYLkREeyTY-EoJ0jjM4qH1msem4cZaBHit0Cdr2JEqO-myumUpV6lcqUYbYDkyhsRKZgEvPO1v1TJ9GW0pIVxKVELvcDIKWI7ITMtpAi0ugHKc44lxudVGvXmh bE6T5tiFksCdBU94SJ2auJsl4V1NbnCPyGagN4dsvMOY (Accessed 9 November 2020).

³ V. Marett, *Immigrants Settling in the City*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989), p. 54.

⁴ L. Chessum, *From Immigrants to Ethnic Minority: Making Black Community in Britain*, (Routledge: London, 2000), p.75.

This type of coverage was typical of the British press which saw immigrants as ‘a problem’ and told the story of immigration through a white lens.⁵ In turn British journalism spoke to a deep prejudice around race which by the mid 1960s began to show up in attitude surveys.⁶

In Leicester immigration fundamentally and permanently changed the demographics and character of the city. The arrival of Ugandan Asians in 1972 was perhaps the pivotal moment for local politicians and the media. There is unequivocal condemnation in the historiography of the Labour controlled City Council, which placed an advert in the *Ugandan Argus* advising Asians not to come to Leicester. There is equal condemnation in local studies of the news coverage in the *Leicester Mercury*; Joanna Herbert points to studies of ‘the racist local press’ and stories about ‘minority ethnic groups as a problem’.⁷ Judith Vidal-Hall writes of ‘inflammatory headlines speaking of disaster in the influential *Leicester Mercury*’.⁸ Barry Troyna and Robin Ward go further, suggesting that local opinion leaders in Leicester, such as City Councillors, Trade Union leaders and local journalists were responsible in part for legitimizing racist attitudes among the local population.⁹ This was especially so in the febrile atmosphere of 1972 in which the local Labour MP for Leicester East, Tom Bradley, suggested his constituents were “obsessed” with the question of immigration.¹⁰

In an attempt to pull together reliable data on ethnicity in Leicester, the City Council carried out its own survey in 1983 which recorded 71,700 people, a quarter of the population, were from ethnic minority communities¹¹. This gave an indication of how the ethnic communities in the cities had grown since the early 1960s. The 1991 census was the first to ask participants about their ethnicity and in Leicester the results showed that the BAME proportion of the population had risen to 28.5 percent, some 77,900. Eight out of ten people from these ethnic minority communities were of South Asian heritage, including immigrants from African states such as Kenya, Zambia and Tanzania in the mid 1960s, to Uganda and

⁵ See C. Husband, (Ed.), White Britain, *Black Media: A Critical Look at the Role of the Media in Race Relations Today*, (Arrow: London, 1974).

⁶ C. S. Hill, *How Colour Prejudiced in Britain?*, (Gollancz: London, 1965).

⁷ J. Herbert, *Negotiating Boundaries in the City: Migration, Ethnicity and Gender in Britain* (London, 2008), pp. 28-29.

⁸ J. Vidal-Hall, ‘Leicester: City of Migration’, *Index on Censorship*, Vol. 32, No. 2, (2003), p. 136. (Pp.132-141).

⁹ B. Troyna and R. Ward, ‘Racial antipathy and local opinion leaders’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 9. No. 3, 1981, p. 465.

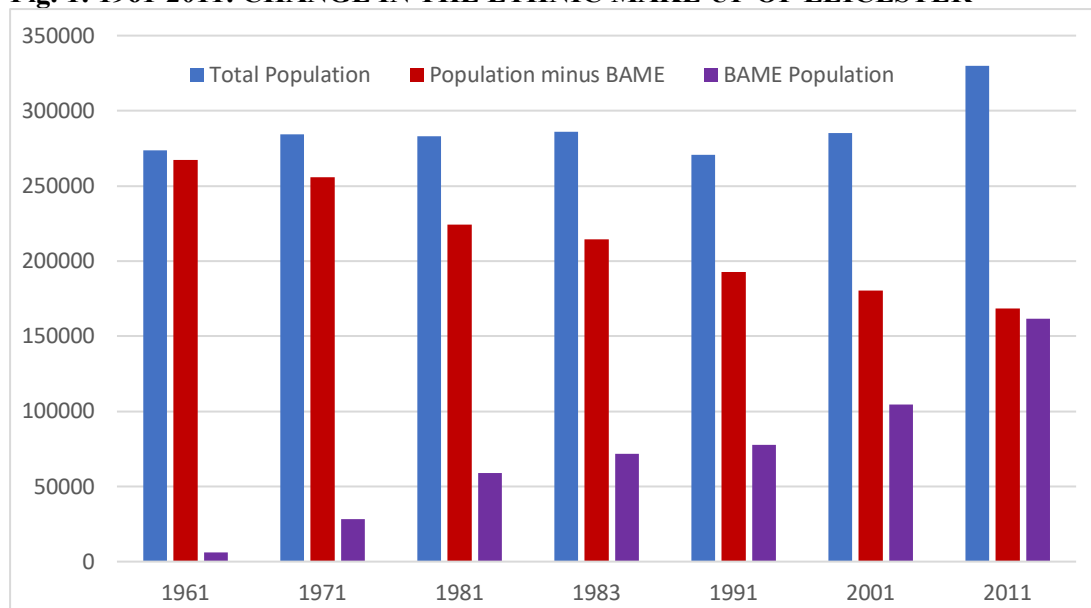
¹⁰ M. Walker, *The National Front* (London, 1977), p.169.

¹¹ Leicester City Council, *The Survey of Leicester*, (Leicester City Council; Leicester, 1983)

Malawi in the early 1970s. The size of the Asian population in Leicester led to a ‘chain migration’ effect from within Britain and the Indian sub-Continent as the communities continued to grow and more people were attracted to join relatives. Over time the mix in the Asian communities has changed but those of ‘Indian’ heritage still account for two thirds of the Asian population of the city and the influence of the East African Asian business community remains strong.

The flip side of the growth in the BAME communities in Leicester was a fall in the ‘white’ population of the city, which between 1961 and 1991 fell by 73,968 (27.6 per cent) as people moved to the expanding outer suburbs administratively located in the county. It might be wrong to characterise all of this fall in the white population as ‘white flight’; Leicester is a geographically tight city in the centre of the county bordered by suburbs, such as Birstall, Thurmaston, Oadby, Wigston and Blaby where the majority of new private house building took place from the 1960s to the 1990s.

Fig. 1: 1961-2011: CHANGE IN THE ETHNIC MAKE UP OF LEICESTER



Sources: ONS; CRE; Leicester Council for Community Relations; Leicester City Council.

Most new arrivals in the 1960s and 1970s concentrated in Highfields and Belgrave as they re-established their family and community life, but the majority of Leicester witnessed demographic change.¹² The magnitude of the change is evident in the make-up of its twenty-

¹² See. P. Virdee, ‘From the Belgrave Road to the Golden Mile: The transformation of Asians in Leicester’, (2006), Working Paper WBAC 006, <https://www.leeds.ac.uk/writingbritishasiancities/assets/papers/WBAC006.pdf> (Accessed 20 May 2019).

eight electoral wards, by 1991 twenty-two wards had ethnic minority populations above the national average for England. In seven of these wards there was a BAME population of more than fifty percent and in three of them it was over seventy five percent. Just six wards had BAME populations that were below the national average; and all were white working-class local authority estates on the fringes of the city. This trend was later described by Ted Cante in his 2001 Community Cohesion report drawn up to examine the causes of rioting in northern towns as a process of communities living ‘parallel lives’.¹³

Immigration – a local political response.

It was the growing Asian community in the city that fired up new political groups from as early as 1968, in particular influenced by Enoch Powell and his so called ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech. The Anti-Immigration Society – AIMS – was set up in March 1968 and recruited members via a full page advertisement in the *Leicester Mercury* in May, after Powell’s made his speech.¹⁴ The advert included a request for funds and key among its policies was an immediate halt to immigration and a phased repatriation of ‘all immigrants to their country of origin’.¹⁵ Countering AIMS was the Inter Racial Solidarity Campaign (IRSC) which was formed in 1969 and during the 1970s ‘combatted the National Front and other fascist groups’ and ‘leafleted every Leicester home’.¹⁶ The right wing British Movement was set up in the Midlands in 1968 but was particularly active in Leicester. Ray Hill the Leicester Branch Secretary told the *Leicester Mercury* in 1969;

Members of the British Movement plan to distribute 10,000 of their own news sheet, ‘Black and White News’, in Leicester during the next month.¹⁷

Many local organisations were set up and folded in short order, as illustrated by the *Send Them Back* campaign which lasted just three months in the spring of 1971. Set up in a flat in an upmarket area of the city the campaign distributed stickers with the words ‘Send Them Back’ across the country. As with AIMS this campaign focussed on repatriation;

¹³ T. Kushner, *The Battle of Britishness: Migrant Journeys, 1685 to the Present Day*, (Manchester University Press; Manchester, 2012), p. 19.

¹⁴ C. T. Husbands, *Racial Exclusionism and the City: The Urban Support of the National Front* (Routledge; London, 1983), p. 90.

¹⁵ AIMS Advert, *Leicester Mercury*, 6 May 1968, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Equality*, IRSC Newsletter March 1990, ROLL&R, Periodicals, E.

¹⁷ UoL Special Collections, LMA 2/3/B Box 21, Black and White Leaflet, *Leicester Mercury*, 20 October 1969, *Leicester Mercury* Archive.

The issue is urgent. The immigrants are still, in all senses of word, aliens in our community. It is not enough to stem the flood. We must turn the tide.¹⁸

By 1972 marching by rival groups such as the National Front and the Inter Racial Solidarity Campaign were high on the news agenda – and adding to racial tension in the city. An anti-immigration march in September attracted 600 people according the *Mercury*, with 5000 marching against racism in an IRSC march in October.¹⁹ An Enoch Powell Support Group (EPSG) was formed in Leicester in 1972 and together with AIMS and the National Front began to stand candidates in local city council elections. In 1973 the EPSG and the National Front stood candidates locally with 23 NF and 2 EPSG candidates achieving a combined 19,023 votes – a 10.5 percentage share. The arrival in the city of Ugandan Asians in 1972 was used by these right-wing groups to champion their policies to end coloured immigration and start repatriation – and they began to have a significant impact in the city.

BBC Radio Leicester had reporters at the Labour and Conservative Party Conferences of August 1972 in which the subject of Ugandan Asians featured heavily. The reporter at the Labour Party Conference in Blackpool told listeners about the emergency session addressed by Harold Wilson which called for ‘the widest possible distribution of the Asians’ and offered the City Council Leader Alderman Ted Marston an opportunity to respond to criticism of the Councils’ advert in the *Ugandan Argus*. Marston told BBC Radio Leicester;

‘We were trying to help the Uganda people who are coming into our country, we didn’t want them to come to overcrowded conditions. We wanted them to come and enjoy the towns where there is more occupation and better conditions than there are in Leicester at the present time.’²⁰

A week later in a programme recorded at the Conservative Party Conference, also in Blackpool, the Ugandan Asian matter was again addressed by local delegates. Sir John Farr the Conservative MP for Harborough told BBC Radio Leicester;

‘In my view they are not naturally adapted to Britain in any way. They may well feel homesick after we have spent a lot of money trying to settle them here. They should have been encouraged to return to Asia’.

¹⁸ UoL Special Collections, *Leicester Mercury* Archive, LMA 2/3/B Box 21, Send Them Back Folds After Only Three Months, *Leicester Mercury*, 11 August 1971.

¹⁹ UoL Special Collections, *Leicester Mercury* Archive, LMA 2/3/D Demonstrations 1969-86. Anti-Immigration March, 11 September 1972 & 5,000 March in Demo Against Racism, 23 October 1972,

²⁰ BBC Radio Leicester, In Perspective ‘Labour Party Conference 1972’, broadcast 7 October 1972, (ROLL&R, RL1719).

The chairman of Harborough Young Conservatives, Anthony Reed Herbert went further;

‘I think definitely the answer should have been no. The United Kingdom should not have to absorb any further immigrant influx and to ask us to do so is only to exacerbate an already tense and uncertain situation’.²¹

Reed Herbert was to defect to the National Front in Leicester within weeks of the conference and go on to energize its campaigning. The response of the City Council to the Ugandan expulsion sparked off a period of infighting within the Labour group and a new, younger left-wing caucus began to take control of the group after the 1973 local elections to promote a multi-cultural agenda.²² In 1973 the Leicester Council for Community Relations organised a survey in the north of the city to try to analyse race relations and the rumours spread by various anti-immigration groups, it found that;

People expressed resentment ‘that money could always be found to help Asians’. Immigrants impeded their children’s education. Statistics were requested about the number of coloured immigrants on waiting lists for hospital treatment compared to white people. Too many immigrants had created a shortage of houses and pushed up prices. Generally, people associated Indians and Pakistanis with people who have run away to an easier life in Britain.²³

During the 1970s the city went through a period of industrial retrenchment and immigrants were a common target as unemployment rose. Two industrial disputes, at Mansfield Hosiery Mills and Imperial Typewriters brought institutional racism in the workplace into sharp focus as Trade Unions failed to support the grievances of Asian workers who were denied promotion and paid less than their white colleagues.²⁴ The Imperial strike provided the growing National Front in the city with an opportunity to target the white workers with their brand of right-wing policies – focusing on repatriation of immigrants. Today the strike is remembered as a turning point in political activism in the city with local groups such as the Inter-Racial Solitary Campaign joining counter marches with the strikers against the National Front.²⁵ The strike

²¹ BBC Radio Leicester, In Perspective ‘Conservative Party Conference 1972’, broadcast 12 October 1972, (ROLL&R, RL1720).

²² F. Eames, ‘ITV and the 1972 Ugandan Migration’, *Media History*, (2009), 15:4, p. 455.

²³ A Collection of Fears and Rumours in the Northern area of Leicester, Leicester Council for Community Relations, 2 May 1973, (ROLL&R, DE 2383/2).

²⁴ See; J. Wrench, *Unequal Comrades: Trade Unions, Equal Opportunity and Racism, Policy Papers in Ethnic Relations No. 5*, University of Warwick.

²⁵ BBC, Imperial Typewriter Strike recalls ‘shameful’ union, BBC News, 15 June 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-48586737> (Accessed 17 August 2019).

was a microcosm of race relations in the city at this time which Troyna and Ward have characterised as a period of ‘racial antipathy’.²⁶ It marked a failure by the local press and radio to recognise that Leicester had become a multi-cultural city, with a fifth of the population not seeing the world through a ‘white’ lens.

The Electoral Record of the National Front in Leicester

The National Front was never a threat to the existing main parties at general elections in the 1970s – despite the national coverage it attracted. It rarely stood candidates in the county and as can be seen from Table 1 its highpoint was in the two elections of 1974 – shortly after the arrival of the Ugandan Asians in Leicester.

**Table 1: THE NF IN GENERAL ELECTIONS 1970-1979.
VOTES CAST IN NUMBERS (& PERCENTAGES) IN LEICESTER AND LEICESTERSHIRE.**

	1970	1974 (Feb)	1974 (Oct)	1979
Leicester East	-	3,662 (7.4)	2,967 (6.4)	1,385 (2.7)
Leicester South	-	1,639 (2.9)	2,072 (4.1)	940 (1.8)
Leicester West	-	2,579 (5.3)	2,253 (5.1)	1,308 (2.7)
Leicester South West	749 (2.34)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Blaby	-	-	-	2,856 (3.6)
Bosworth	-	-	-	682 (0.9)
Charnwood	-	-	-	-
Harborough	-	-	-	1,002 (1.8)
Loughborough	-	-	1,215 (2.2)	484 (0.8)
Melton & Rutland	-	-	-	-
NW Leic.	-	-	-	-
Total Votes	749	7,880	8,507	8,657

The real strength of the party was in elections to the City Council, and thanks to the reorganisation of local government under Edward Heath there were elections in five years in the 1970s. The defection of Anthony Reed Herbert, a former Chairman of the South Leicestershire Conservatives, to the National Front in 1972 was a key driver in the rise of the party in local elections. As a local solicitor Reed Herbert brought organisation, competent PR skills and a veneer of respectability to the party and he went on to join the National Front national leadership later in the decade. As can be seen in Table 2 Reed Herbert increased the number of candidates fielded by the NF in city elections in which the party peaked in 1976 receiving nearly one fifth of the vote (18.3 percent) and nearly winning seats on the council.

Table 2: NATIONAL FRONT CANDIDATES, VOTES AND SHARE.

²⁶ B. Troyna & R. Ward, Racial Antipathy and local opinion leaders: a tale of two cities, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 9.3, 1981, pp. 454-466.

LOCAL ELECTIONS IN LEICESTER IN THE 1970S.

Year	Election	NF Vote	Turnout	Candidates	NF Share (%)
1972	City Borough	2393	N/A	6	3.10
1973	County Council (City Seats)	11481	32.2%	17	8.00
1973	City District	17843	40.0%	25	9.80
1976	City District	44753	42.7%	48	18.30
1977	County Council (City Seats)	23424	41.8%	26	15.09
1979	City District	19725	73.1%	48	4.89

Sources: Leicester Mercury Election Results Pages; Rallings & Thrasher²⁷.

The raw data suggests the NF gained almost 45,000 votes in 1976, but these were multi-member wards, and the data masks the fact that in each of the wards each voter had three votes to cast in favour of their favourite candidates. This would place the number of NF voters at a minimum of 15,000, but this is still far in excess of the votes received in the general elections. Table 3 shows how effective the NF was in tempting voters across the city with performances in wards around Belgrave Road including Abbey, Belgrave, Charnwood and Latimer, showing the strongest performance.

Table 3: NATIONAL FRONT LOCAL ELECTION PERFORMANCE
Share of the vote by number of wards.

NF Share	1972 Borough	1973 City District	1973 County	1976 City District	1977 County	1979 City District
30% +				1		
20-30%		2		6		
10-20%	1	6	4	7	13	
5-10%	5		7	2	3	8
Under 5%		2	5			8
Wards Contested	6	10	16	16	16	16
Best Ward % Share	Belgrave 11.1	Charnwood 26.4	Latimer 14.1	Abbey 30.7	Latimer 19.8	Latimer 8.2

Source: Analysis of Leicester Mercury Election Archives

For Reed Herbert 1976 proved to be the critical year.

‘If you can pick a point where the whole National Front project, and the anti-National Front project pivoted and turned, that was the point’²⁸

²⁷ C. Rallings & M. Thrasher, *Local Elections in Britain; A Statistical Digest* (Plymouth, 2003), pp. 276-277.

²⁸ Anthony Reed Herbert, (b. 7 March 1948), interview with author, 9 March 2013. Location withheld at the request of the interviewee.

In the run up to the elections of 1977, contrasting the AIMS advert in 1968, the Unity Against Racism campaign took out its own full-page advert in the *Leicester Mercury*. Showing its support for ‘the campaign to achieve racial harmony’ the advert included the signatures of over 500 local people from the political figures to sports stars and notably the Station Manager of BBC Radio Leicester.

The 1980s and beyond.

In Leicester the National Front was effectively finished as a political force after the 1979 general election. Nationally the leadership of the party split with Martin Webster staying and John Tyndale forming a new British National Party. The NF performance at the 1979 election was not helped by national media coverage of the Nazi past of both Webster and Tyndale, an edition of *World in Action* tilted ‘The Nazi Party’ and broadcast in 1978 is a typical example.²⁹ Anthony Reed Herbert, the Leicester branch organiser and member of the NF central board told me in an interview in 2013 that the Fascist and anti-Semitic views held by both Webster and Tyndale became increasingly problematic in the late 1970s;

‘Unfortunately, this was a symptom of a major problem that the Front had – which was its leadership. It was an embarrassment, specifically John Tyndale and Martin Webster. Webster wasn’t a dyed in the wool Nazi, in the admiring Hitler sense ... Tyndale certainly was, there’s no question of that and that was a great embarrassment’.³⁰

Reed Herbert formed his own breakaway from the National Front after the 1979 general election. He led the new British Democratic Party until it folded in 1982 after a bizarre story around ‘gun-running’ in a sting by the ITV programme *World in Action*. No police charges were ever brought, and Reed Herbert left politics to pursue a different career elsewhere in the European Union.

After 1979 the electoral fortunes of the NF/BNP in Leicester and Leicestershire never came close to the heights of the 1976 City Council elections in Leicester. The NF only contested Blaby in the 1983 general election with the BNP putting forward candidates 25 times in general elections up to 2017. Only in the 2010 election in Leicester West, Blaby, Charnwood and North West Leicester were any deposits saved as candidates achieved over five percent of the poll.

²⁹ ITV Television, *World in Action*, ‘The Nazi Party’, broadcast 3 July 1978, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x31fh5b>, (Accessed 11 November 2020).

³⁰ Reed Herbert, (Ibid.).

THE NF/BNP IN GENERAL ELECTIONS 1983-2019.**VOTES CAST IN NUMBERS (& PERCENTAGES) IN LEICESTER AND LEICESTERSHIRE.**

	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015	2017	2019
Leicester East	459 (0.9)	-	-	-	772 (1.9)	-	1,700 (3.5)	-	-	-
Leicester South	280 (0.6)	-	-	-	-	-	1,418 (3.0)	-	-	-
Leicester West	469 (1.01)	-	-	-	-	-	2,158 (6.0)	-	-	-
Blaby	568 (1.0)	-	521 (0.8)	523 (1.0)	1,704 (3.5)	-	2,721 (5.0)	-	-	-
Bosworth	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,458 (4.5)	-	-	-
Charnwood	-	-	-	525 (0.9)	-	1,737 (3.4)	3,116 (5.8)	489 (0.9)	332 (0.6)	-
Harborough	280 (0.5)	-	-	-	-	-	1,715 (3.1)	-	-	-
Loughborough	228 (0.4)	-	-	-	-	-	3,396 (6.5)	-	-	-
Melton & Rutland	-	-	-	-	-	-	1757 (3.2)	-	-	-
NW Leic.	-	-	-	-	-	1,474 (3.1)	3,396 (6.5)	-	-	-
Total Votes	2,284	-	521	1,048	2,476	3,211	23,835	489	332	-

Source: Leicester Mercury Results Pages.

Between 1983 and 2005 the BNP was nothing more than a fringe party, however it did receive some attention in the press; *The Guardian* describing the village of East Goscote some ten miles from Leicester as the ‘suburban bedrock’ of the party³¹. In the 2010 general election BNP candidates contested every seat in Leicester and Leicestershire and recorded almost 25,000 votes. This represented the final hurrah for the party as its vote was snuffed out by the electoral rise of UKIP fighting on policies around immigration and the European Union – both issues on which the BNP had campaigned. Without the far right / fascist baggage of the NF and the BNP, UKIP was able to record 71,728 votes in 2015 in Leicestershire, coming second in Rutland and Melton, fourth in Bosworth and third in each of the other 8 constituencies.³²

Were the NF policies out of the mainstream?

³¹ P. Walker, Sleepy Suburban Bedrock of BNP Support – 10 miles from Leicester, *The Guardian*, 20 October 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/oct/20/bnp-heartlands-leicestershire-east-goscote>, (Accessed 11 November 2020).

³² BBC Election 2010 Results, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2015/results>, (accessed 11 November 2020).

It is too simple to look at the policies of the National Front in the 1970s and surmise that in the end the NF brand of politics won, whereas the party merely aggregated policies that were included in the election manifestos of the major political parties. National Front election leaflets at the time highlight leaving the EEC, ending immigration, repatriating immigrants to their own countries, focussing welfare on Britons first and ending foreign aid. Both the Labour and Conservative parties blew hot and cold on Europe, both had also introduced immigration and citizenship legislation in throughout this period in an attempt to stop ‘mass’ immigration. The 1966 Tory manifesto argued for the drawing up of a register of dependants of immigrants already here so a finite number of new immigrants could be established. The 1964 Labour manifesto promises less immigration as the party accepted it must return strict immigration control. Repatriation was a common theme in Tory manifestos and this policy was reflected in a 1969 survey of attitudes to immigration of MPs which revealed that 38% of Conservative and 6% of Labour MPs wanted a ‘complete halt to all coloured immigration, and to encourage the repatriation of coloured persons now living here’, a policy adopted by the National Front.³³ Manifestos are written in part to drive favourable press coverage and there is no doubt that the British press has something of a fetish around immigration which is still visible today in coverage of Brexit and asylum.

A Changing Local Media in Leicester: Super-serving ‘New Consumers’.

In Leicester the local media began to change the coverage around immigration to the city in the later 1970s. It became evident that as ethnic minorities accounted for almost one third of the population that commercial success for local media – and the public service requirements of the BBC – meant a need for engagement with these growing communities. By 1989 a new BBC Midlands Asian Network based at BBC Radio Leicester became the latest part of a trio of services provided by the BBC, ILR and the *Leicester Mercury*. Nowhere else in Britain were Asian communities so targeted by the local media. Asian ‘consumers’, for this is what they had become, representing less than seven per cent of the UK Asian population were receiving 32 hours of programming a week from BBC Radio Leicester, 28 hours a week from GEM AM through the *Sabras* programmes and on six days a week a daily *Asia Edition* of the *Leicester Mercury*. Both radio services stemmed directly from the decision in 1976 at BBC Radio Leicester to launch a daily Asian programme and ultimately drove the *Leicester*

³³ A. M. Messina, ‘Race and Party Competition in Britain: Policy Formation in the Post-Consensus Period’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (1985), p. 426. (423-436)

Mercury to offer the daily *Asia Edition* from 1988 as a way of feeding new readers and advertisers to the paper – exactly the model set out by Owen Bentley fifteen years earlier. Commercially, in the present day this would be seen as ILR and the *Leicester Mercury* embarking on a ‘diaspora marketing strategy’ something that is the subject of academic study examining how South Asian communities move between their Asian and British identities offering different marketing opportunities.³⁴ For the BBC, as a public service body, the terms of the BBC Charter lay out its obligation to serve all communities. In Leicester in the 1980s the new Asian media offerings were a case of editors and station managers coming to terms with their changing editorial areas.

Conclusion.

There is little doubt that Leicester had a problem with racism in the 1960s and 1970s which allowed extreme right-wing parties and groups to gain traction in the city. The coverage by the local media of immigration, notably the *Leicester Mercury* but including BBC Radio Leicester before 1976 can be seen as part of the problem. They were not alone, the dominant feature of British journalism in this period was the view of ‘the immigrants’ as ‘the problem’. After the ‘fright’ of the National Front receiving nearly one fifth of the vote in the City Council election of 1976 the *Leicester Mercury* and BBC Radio Leicester both under new editorships began to redress the balance in their coverage. Groups such as Unity Against Racism and a new left caucus in the local Labour party began to turn the tide against racism in the city. As for the National Front and latterly the British National Party they were never a real electoral threat on the national stage while locally their influence peaked in 1976. However, in the 1970s the threat from the National Front seemed real, a pattern revisited through the BNP in the 2000s. The NF election leaflet pushed through letterboxes in Leicester in the 1979 general election called on voters to ‘Make Britain Great Again’ and offered policies including Britain’s exit from the Common Market (EU), ending immigration, stopping foreign aid and putting Britons first in jobs and housing.³⁵ In 2020 one should not be tempted to ask if the National Front won but to recognise that there was a remorseless move to the right in these issues by the major parties.

³⁴ B. L., Dey, J. M. T. Balmer, A. Pandit, M. Saren & B. Binsardi, ‘A quadripartite approach to analysing young British South Asian adults’ dual cultural identity, *Journal of Marketing Management*, (2017), 33:9-10, pp. 789-816.

³⁵ National Front Election Leaflet, Marett Boxes, DE 6314, Box 30, Politics. LL&R Record Office.