

Death of far-right infiltrator Ray Hill, who engineered splits among bigoted parties

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By Toby Porter

News

Colleagues mourn Leicester-born anti-racism campaigner who disrupted xenophobic parties and was possibly the only non-Jewish Honorary Life Member of Union of Jewish Students



Ray Hill at launch of British National Party manifesto 1983

An anti-fascist campaigner who infiltrated far-right groups – even heading one to split the extremist vote – has died.

Ray Hill, originally from Lancashire, joined the South African National Front but recanted his views – and was then so successful in his undercover work, he came to lead the group.

He protested about the policies and campaigned against the BNP and Combat 18 on the streets of East London.

He also worked to undermine the first ever BNP Councillor Derek Beacon, after his short-lived 1993 election in Tower Hamlets Millwall Ward.

Hill also staged rallies outside the plush home of Holocaust denier David Irving and campaigned around the country to stymie any shoots of far-right electoral success.

Born in Ashton-under-Lyme, Manchester, in 1939, in his early years Hill dabbled in far-right politics, joining the Anti-Immigration Movement soon after he got married, then Colin Jordan's British Movement. Whilst working in South Africa and engaging with the local Jewish community he recanted his views.

But then he infiltrated the South African National Front, rising through its ranks to become its leader. After returning to the UK he went on to infiltrate the British Movement, rising to leading roles within it. In one of his boldest and most audacious moves as an infiltrator, Ray became one of the founders of the BNP.

At the 1983 general election he contested Leicester West for the BNP, receiving 469 votes.

But he was a mole for Searchlight anti-fascist magazine – he helped create the BNP to create discord and disarray in the UK far-right around the issue of participation in electoral politics.

Hill eventually revealed himself as an infiltrator, publishing his account "The Other Face of Terror" and made a seminal Channel 4 documentary exposing how the UK far-right had become a fully fledged criminal conspiracy with international links to terrorist groups.

He was called as a witness before the European Parliament's Commission on Racism and Xenophobia, detailing a neo-Nazi underground a system to hide far-right fugitives.

But he was to find out the cost of his actions. His home was fire bombed. He had to live in hiding.

But he forged a strong partnership with Jewish students who were, at the time, fighting the attempts of the far-right to gain a foothold on UK campuses. He undertook countless speaking engagements with Union of Jewish Students and NUS – and would talk to students in the bar afterwards, recounting stories from his time as a mole inside the far-right. Hill also became the first and possibly the only non-Jewish Honorary Life Member of UJS

He was one of the first to call out the problem of growing Islamist antisemitism. He took a strong stance against the growth of Louis Farrakhan-inspired Black Nationalism when it tried to establish itself in the UK during the mid-90s.

Community Security Trust policy director Dave Rich said: "Ray Hill was one of the most effective, and bravest, of anti-fascist moles who did untold damage to the far right in this country. He also educated generations of anti-fascists and was an inspiring speaker at many

Jewish student and youth events. Ray understood as well as anyone the vicious antisemitism that lay at the heart of Britain's far right and he will be sadly missed by all of us who knew him."

Hertsmere Labour group leader Jeremy Newmark said: "For many of us who had the privilege of working with Ray Hill and calling him a friend, his passing will bring back memories of anti-fascist campaigns of the past.

"Ray dedicated the latter part of his life to opposing the far right.

"Ray became one of the founders of the BNP to create discord and disarray in the UK far-right around the issue of participation in electoral politics. With hindsight, this almost certainly played a seminal role in ensuring that the UK far-right never managed to come even near to emulating the electoral success of their counterparts elsewhere in Europe.

"A former army boxer and accomplished street fighter, Ray could never be described as anything but an 'old-school anti-fascist'. His understanding of the shifting nature of extremism in the UK was far from simplistic. He was years ahead of his time.

"When speaking to student union leaders, Ray's blunt attitude to those who used anti-Zionism as a cover for antisemitism had a huge impact upon many who went on to national politics after their NUS days. It also led to opposition from the far-left to an ultimately successful bid from the Union of Jewish Students to nominate Ray for Honorary Life Membership of NUS.

"Ray always had a clear message for mainstream political parties – which I'm not sure they ever fully embraced. In his classically gruff Lancashire accent he would opine that to defeat political extremism by 'asking turkeys to vote for Christmas' was a 'hiding to nothing'. Underlying that slogan was his core belief, influenced by his time inside the far-right, that the most effective way to draw young, white, impoverished working class people away from extremism was to provide them with mainstream political homes that delivered inspiring leadership, genuine aspiration and equal opportunity to hope.

"Ray's legacy upon the fight against fascism will continue to endure for generations to come. It will also continue for so many of us for whom Ray Hill was a formative influence on our activism and politics."