The National Front (NF) was formed during a series of negotiations in the winter of 1966–7 between the leaders of three small parties and pressure groups: the League of Empire Loyalists, the British National Party, and the Racial Preservation Society. In the following year it absorbed into its thin ranks another party, the Greater Britain Movement. The NF came into official being on 7 February 1967, and it claimed 2500 members. On paper, this was a reasonable figure. In fact, active (and subscribing) members were fewer than 1200.

Of the groups which made up the NF, the League of Empire Loyalists was less a party than a right-wing Conservative pressure group held together by its charismatic leader, the first chairman of the NF, A. K. Chesterton. Chesterton had been a Fascist under Sir Oswald Mosley in the 1930s, editing the Fascist party journal, The Blackshirt. Chesterton’s view of the world was shaped by his theory of a vast Zionist conspiracy, joining together Wall Street capitalism and Moscow Communism. He believed these were both the work of Jews, whose object was to overthrow the British Empire and achieve world domination. This theory still underpins the ideology of the NF. But Chesterton’s own gifts as a writer and propagandist made him into a rallying point during the 1950s for many right-wing Conservatives who objected to the liberal conservatism of party leaders like Macmillan and Butler. Chesterton’s staunch defence of the British Empire, and his hostility to the Welfare State, attracted traditional Conservatives, while his Fascist credentials and his conspiracy theory attracted...
a number of young National Socialists, who could, in post-war Britain, find little other outlet for their politics.

Another of the British groups which made up the NF was the British National Party (BNP). It had been formed in February 1960, in the wake of the race riots in Notting Hill. Its leaders were two graduates of Chesterton’s League of Empire Loyalists: John Bean and John Tyndall. They were joined by Colin Jordan, who had formed the frankly Nazi ‘White Defence League’ during the riots. The BNP later split, with Jordan and Tyndall going on to found the tiny National Socialist Movement, whose paramilitary activities won them prison sentences. Bean’s BNP developed into a more conventional political group. Based mainly in areas of high immigration, it stood in elections as the defender of white communities and white property values. In Southall in 1964 Bean won 9 per cent of the vote. During the same election, in Birmingham Smethwick, the official Conservative candidate Peter Griffith won the hitherto safe Labour seat, against the national trend, in a campaign which was marked by the slogan ‘If you want a nigger for a neighbour; vote Labour’.

The final group which combined with the others to form the NF was the Racial Preservation Society. It was a well financed blanket organisation for a number of anti-immigration bodies in the Midlands and the South-East which sprang up in the wake of the Smethwick election. It believed in white racial superiority, and, like the League of Empire Loyalists and the British National Party, was bitterly anti-Communist and more discreetly anti-Semitic.

The coalition of these movements into the National Front was prompted partly by the declaration of UDI in Rhodesia. This was seen as marking the final British abandonment of the Empire and the white kith and kin in Rhodesia. Other factors leading to the coalition were the financial insecurity of the LEL and BNP, the crushing Labour victory in the 1966 general election, and the emergence of a bi-partisan Labour–Conservative policy on coloured immigration. That policy, of increasingly severe controls on the numbers of immigrants, with mild legislation against racial discrimination in Britain, was undermined by the solitary campaign of a Conservative Shadow Minister, Enoch Powell, against coloured immigration.

The National Front remained a tiny sect, trying, in the words of Martin Webster, now the NF national organiser, ‘to kick our way into the headlines’, but to little effect. The political backgrounds of men like Tyndall and Webster, and the often published photographs of