



**By
Nick
Ryan**

THE gear was casual, but the faces were hard, sullen, full of mistrust. Angry-looking tattoos poked out from under smart shirt sleeves. Mobile phones lay in a neat row, next to bottles of Bud and pints of Guinness. The talk, in a melting pot of accents from across London's council estates, was of football "firms", lads and "jobs" (robberies).

"We don't want to live with Africans and Pakis, we want to live with our own people — don't we?" quipped a large, Humpty Dumpty figure with a receding hairline and a dull leer. Covered in a heavy lace of tattoos, Paul David "Charlie" Sargent was a leader not so much by charisma as by force and fear. "They're taking us over," he added in his animated, nasal voice. The solution? "National Socialism." Which was? "Racism," he declared, with a characteristically challenging look, "the easiest politics in the world."

Nearly four years ago, before anyone had ever heard of the name David Copeland, the London nail bomber, I had my first encounter with the leadership of Combat 18 (C18). I got to know the members of the UK's main neo-Nazi gang over many months, as they talked of creating a race war and an "Aryan" homeland out in the heartlands of Essex. These were the sort of views which the twisted Copeland, and an increasing number of other troubled young men, shared.

C18, for example, had been born on a wave of violence during the early Nineties, created by the far Right British National Party (BNP) to protect its meetings against anti-Nazi attacks. Yet it soon proved too violent even for that organisation and was expelled from its ranks. But by the time I got to know it, C18 was also undergoing a violent factional split.

Charlie ended up murdering a supporter from a rival group and, when he was sentenced to life imprisonment for this attack in 1998, his followers left and joined the tiny National Socialist Movement (NSM). Led by his younger brother Steve and a former monk and avowed Satanist called David

Myatt, the NSM called for firebombings and attacks against ethnic minorities.

Copeland, it turned out, had belonged to both the BNP and NSM, and was a serving member of the latter group when arrested. When his bombs exploded, I wondered whether any of the men I had met were somehow involved. I knew that current C18 leader Will Browning masterminded an attempted letterbombing of Olympic swimmer Sharon Davies (who had a black partner) and various opponents in the far Right in 1997. Certainly, C18 has been blamed for everything from Copeland's bombs to vicious attacks on minority victims.

However, the arrest and conviction of Copeland also highlighted another danger. Working alone, he had downloaded two different bomb-making manuals from an Internet cafe near London's Victoria Station and built his own devices. He wasn't operating under "direct orders" nor was he part of a larger, terrorist-style campaign.

What Copeland in fact showed us was the danger of

the loner, the young male who simply doesn't fit into today's increasingly complex world. Searching for identity and belonging, he found it in the far Right. Yet he wasn't tattooed, nor was he a football hooligan. To all intents and purposes, he was "invisible", the classic boy next door.

SOME who study this phenomenon in the US — which has witnessed the growth of the "random killer" for many years — believe this to be a side effect of the trend towards globalisation. Look at the young people who are being cast aside in that environment, at a culture which favours aggressive individualism over community and social wellbeing. There is a general growth of intolerance in our societies, which is not limited to the growth of white nationalism or the far Right. Look at the current asylum debate raging in Europe. Worryingly, this all occurs during one of our most economically prosperous periods. When Hitler rose, the

SIGN OF EVIL: A Nazi flag hung on the wall of killer David Copeland's bedsit



situation was in complete reverse. What is going on?

It is obvious that men such as Copeland are now being funnelled through the reaches of the far Right towards violent hate groups. Copeland had joined the BNP, before becoming disillusioned and moving on to the NSM. Thinking on Copeland, I remembered a conversation with NSM leader Myatt, in a surreal encounter at Malvern railway station. He said at the time that he saw his role as educating and guiding young neo-Nazis. Their raw violence could be harnessed and disciplined for the National Socialist cause, he believed. "I'm trying to raise these people up, to harness their instincts in a productively useful way," he told me.

The Internet has proved a particularly useful tool to these men, as they try and recruit their young followers. Chat rooms, e-mail and many hate sites have been successful in helping to sell otherwise illegal white power music CDs to teenagers in the US, Europe and further afield. In fact, America's most venerable neo-Nazi ideologue, Professor William Pierce, recently paid out \$1 million to acquire the Net-based white power music business Resistance Records. It was also Pierce who wrote *The Turner Diaries*, about a mythical white uprising, which both Copeland and Oklahoma bomber Timothy McVeigh had read and carried with them.

Of course, we don't yet face the catastrophe that arguably looms around the corner in the US, where firearms, for example, are readily available. But increasing numbers of young, white, European men are looking towards US-inspired extremism as the next step forward.

There must be something wrong with a society which produces men such as David Copeland. Sadly, if we don't find the answer, the next generation of boy-next-door killers will soon be on their way.

● Nick Ryan is a freelance writer specialising in the study of extremism. His work on *Combat 18* has won a prize from the International Federation of Journalists.



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