

The politics of the Right: a review article

When it was made, *Socialist Register's** decision to devote its 2016 issue to the far Right was prescient; when published late last year it was more than timely. Now, both it and this review are in danger of being overtaken by the phenomenon they're describing. If the far Right was on the march in 2015, its progress is even more alarmingly visible now. Already this year far-right anti-immigration parties have made significant and unexpected gains in Slovakia and Germany and Austria's post-fascist Freedom Party came within a whisker of winning the presidency. A street movement led by a hedge-fund manager has sought to overthrow the left wing Brazilian President, Donald Trump has pulled the Republican Party dramatically rightwards and the British EU referendum campaign has given a platform to anti-immigrant xenophobia. Following Hungary's example, Poland's new Law and Justice government has set about restraining the media and compromising the independence of the judiciary. And a new ideological fault-line – between xenophobic but welfarist populism and the liberal and neoliberal globalised elite – is solidifying across Europe.

Edited by Leo Panitch and Greg Albo, *The Politics of the Right* maps the rise of neo-fascist, anti-immigration and socially conservative populist movements

**The Politics of the Right: Socialist Register 2016*, edited by Leo Panitch and Greg Albo (London: Merlin Press, 2015), 381 pp., Paperback £16.95.

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since the financial crash of 2008, seeking to define their ideology, assess their prospects and place them within a context of rapid political fragmentation. Global in scope, there are helpful articles on the right wing forces in power and opposition in India, central and southern Africa, Brazil, Israel, North America and Japan. But the core of the book is about Europe. And although their answers vary, contributors ask the same set of questions.

The first is, what relationship does the current upsurge bear to the fascisms of the early twentieth century? As the Institute of Race Relations' Liz Fekete points out in a comprehensive *tour d'horizon*, today's far Right does not just consist of the usual fascist, post-fascist and right-populist suspects, but includes patriot movements, counter-jihadism, neoconservatism, and even philo Zionism. The German far Right on its own extends via the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD) and the National Socialist Underground (which carried out at least eleven murders and fourteen armed robberies between 1999 and 2007) via soccer hooligan firms like Cologne Hooligans Against Salafists and the Autonomous Nationalists to various brands of modernised, pseudo respectable right-populists, dubbed either 'Tie' or 'Pinstriped' Nazis (the latter being a media soubriquet for Pegida).

In their chapter on the far Right in France, Michael Löwy and Francis Sitel also distinguish between parties with different legacies. So there are indeed avowedly neo-fascist parties like the Greek Golden Dawn, the German NDP, Hungary's Jobbik and the French National Reconciliation Party. There are also parties whose founders have fascist links, like the French National Front, the Austrian Freedom Party and the Flemish Interest Party. And then there are xenophobic/racist parties without fascist roots in Northern Italy, Switzerland, Denmark, Holland, Norway, Finland and Britain (UKIP). The Swedish Democrats have clear neo-Nazi roots, but have made great efforts to moderate their image; the Italian National Alliance was an unambiguously fascist party which transformed itself sufficiently to participate in government. Other parties that have either been part of government coalitions or held them up are the Italian Northern League, the Danish People's Party, the Dutch Party for Freedom, the Swiss People's Party, the Norwegian Progress Party and the Freedom Parties of Austria and Ukraine (Svoboda). There are also governing parties in eastern Europe without fascist roots but with rabid far-right policies on immigration and social issues, including Poland's Law and Justice Party and Hungary's Civic Alliance (Fidesz).

For Geoff Eley, the question of whether some or all of these groups were or are fascist in a 1930s sense is less important than defining the circumstances under which fascism arose and might again. In sometimes muscle-bound prose ('a concatenation of immediate circumstances defined the conjunctural specificity of the fascist phenomenon'), Eley defines fascism as a coercively nationalist recourse to political violence under conditions of 'governmental paralysis and democratic impasse'. These conditions clearly applied in the Weimar Republic, where – facing a mass left movement on the streets – the Right turned its back on democracy and embraced the fascist alternative. There is of course no communist mass movement currently contesting for power on the streets of Europe, and so the ruling class has no need to turn to fascism for rescue.

This is not to say that fascism has lost its capacity for violence, some of it employed in support of mainstream governments or their agencies. Much of contemporary fascism finds what Fekete calls a 'common rendezvous' in criminality, from pimping and extortion to money laundering, drugs and arms running. Scandinavian Nazis are fighting with battalions formed from the post-fascist Right Sector in Eastern Ukraine (as the same group battles the police in defence of its smuggling operations in the west of the country). At the same time, major trials of rightwing activists in Germany, Spain, Italy and Hungary reveal collusion between far-right vigilantism and state forces, a phenomenon also seen in Greece, where Golden Dawn has performed fascism's traditional paramilitary role of imposing its own version of law and order on rebellious communities.

Doing the state's dirty work is not the only way in which the far Right colludes with mainstream and ruling parties, and they with it. Liz Fekete's contention that the far Right is 'the deformed offshoot of more mainstream right parties and groups' is not universally true, but certainly applies to Britain's UK Independence Party (UKIP). She outlines a persuasive narrative of closer ideological collusion between the far Right and the mainstream, as the post war 'cordon sanitaire' approach to racist rhetoric gradually crumbled in face of popular hostility to immigration. This led (among other things) to denying welfare rights to immigrants on nativist grounds. These moves were encouraged if not inspired by intellectuals in think-tanks and journals, who shifted the anti-immigration argument from race to culture (in Britain, that charge was led by the formerly left, pro-Iraq war belligerenti and *Prospect* magazine's 'post-liberal' former editor David Goodhart). After a brief pause to celebrate the victory of multiculturalism in South Africa, 9/11 allowed the anti-immigrant and anti-multicultural ratchet to be turned up again. Far-right groups are the third largest parliamentary force in Hungary, Norway, France, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Holland and Sweden (as well as winning the popular vote in the 2014 European elections in France and the UK).

Fekete's argument that social democracy's attempts to douse the flames of the far Right has served only to feed them is supported by what has happened – since *The Politics of the Right* was published – in Slovakia. Here the ruling Social-Democratic Party (SMER) sought to pre-empt the far Right by taking an aggressive stand against an 'invasion' of Muslim migrants that would 'overwhelm' a small Christian nation (Prime Minister Robert Fico declaring that he would only take 200 Christian refugees, due to the country's shortage of mosques). Far from buying off the anti-immigration Right, this effort contributed to SMER losing its overall majority in this March's general election, due to the unexpected 8 per cent gained by the neo-fascist People's Party – Our Slovakia (whose skinhead supporters chant Sieg Heil at rallies and whose leader Marian Kotleba used to strut round in a uniform modelled on the Hlinka guard militia of the wartime clerico-fascist Slovak state). The failure to counter anti-Muslim rhetoric in the Visegrad countries (Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic) has led

mainstream politicians like the Czech Deputy Prime Minister Pavel Belobradek to warn of an increasingly 'fascised' society.

Colluding with far-right vigilantism and fanning the flames of far-right rhetoric are not the only ways in which mainstream parties and the governments they lead become complicit in the rise of the far Right. As Liz Fekete argues:

Fascism does not just hatch eggs on the margins of society. It breeds within existing authoritarian structures, within those spaces most shielded from public scrutiny, such as the police and intelligence services.

Hence articles on policing and surveillance. Lesley Wood charts how increasingly pre-emptive policing strategies address the perceived risks to public order of growing economic and social divisions in big cities, sometimes in the benign disguise of community policing, but also consisting of militarised responses to protest, such as infiltration, pre-emptive arrests and kettling.

Ideological and actual collusion with state forces (albeit on the margins) raises the question of what social forces the New Right is speaking for, and whose interests it is serving. In the mid-twentieth century, the answer to that question seemed clear. Fascism was deemed to have offered big business a Faustian pact: hand over political power, and we'll defeat the communist threat. In their preface, Leo Panitch and Greg Albo suggest that the contemporary far Right is even more indulgent towards dominant capital than their interwar forbears:

The classical fascist movements embraced nationalist and protectionist economic policies; it is not at all clear that this is the case today where the radical right targets labour migration while tolerating the internationalization of capital.

This may be (still) true for authoritarian and military regimes operating on the South American model, and for some rightwing leaders like Abe Shinzo of Japan and Narendra Modi of India. But most of the European far Right is moving in the opposite direction. As Fekete points out, much of the new far Right sees neoliberalism as 'positively antithetical to a hierarchical, nationalist, monocultural society with a strong state'. The clear blue water between globalised international capitalism and the politics of national identity has been widening. As Doug Henwood points out, a new political fault-line has been drawn in the USA, as higher-educated progressives – the kind of people who supported the civil rights and anti-war movements in the 1950s and 1960s – gradually abandoned their commitment to economic equality and the welfare state, while retaining their social liberalism on questions of gender, sexuality and civil rights. Thereby, this influential sector formed what cultural theorist Walter Benn Michaels would later call 'the left wing of neoliberalism, socially liberal but fiscally conservative'. While on the other side, in Europe, far-right forces began to brew a heady cocktail of social conservatism and statist economics.

The breaking of the twentieth century alliance between the progressive intelligentsia and the poor (which gave us, among other things, the American New Deal and the European welfare state) created a hole which the far Right is now striving to fill. A politics which combines racial-nationalism with social welfarism is not entirely without precedent – Hitler led the National Socialist *Workers* Party. But while 1930s fascism increasingly abandoned its economic populism, the contemporary far Right has been moving towards distinctly leftwing economic politics and practices, albeit daubed in nationalist colours. Founded in Rome in 2003 as the ‘fascists of the third millennium’, CasaPound campaigns for affordable housing, protests against high rents and advocates squatters’ rights. In the former East Germany, the neo-fascists of the NPD take up jobs in farming and fire-fighting, sit on school boards and provide welfare advice. Even Greece’s Golden Dawn runs blood banks and food kitchens, while beating up leftwing protestors and encouraging employers to hire only Greeks. The programme of Ukraine’s Svoboda (Freedom) Party (formerly the Social-National Party of Ukraine) calls for renationalisation of ‘privatised enterprises whose owners do not fulfil their social, investment and other commitments’. Similarly, Oleh Lyashko Radical Party combines traditional welfare politics with strong nationalist appeal.

Such cocktails of leftwing economics with rightwing social and national policies inform the politics of populist far-right parties in or near to power. Hungary’s ruling Fidesz party (whose leader Victor Orbán proudly defines his politics as ‘illiberal’) combines ultra-nationalist rhetoric with socialist economics, nationalising banks and raising corporate taxes (on 7 January 2016, Tibor Fischer of the *Daily Telegraph* described Orbán as ‘the only European politician to have bled the fat cats of banking and commerce in true Robin Hood style’). Slovakia’s ruling SMER may refuse any but Christian refugees, but its otherwise impeccably social-democratic policies include free train travel for students and pensioners.

Four of the major far-right parties in Europe have moved from resolutely free market economics towards a much more welfarist approach. In the past, Austria’s Freedom Party was in favour of neoliberal policies like raising the retirement age and reducing family subsidies; now it and its unexpectedly successful Presidential candidate Norbert Hofer (who topped the first round poll in April this year) rejects the pension age rise and supports the welfare state. In Holland, Geert Wilders finds himself converted to the minimum wage and workers’ protection against wrongful dismissal. In his chapter, Walter Baier describes how Poland’s Law and Justice Party transformed itself from a traditional to a populist right party, addressing the economically disadvantaged and attacking corruption. As Neal Ascherson argued in the *Guardian* (17 January 2016), Poland’s political map clearly charts the new fault-line, with economic and social liberals dominant in the west, and Law and Justice appealing to those small farmers and working-class families in the east who lost out in the market shock therapy of the ‘90s: ‘Strangely for westerners, this frantically rightwing party is also the party of what remains of the welfare state, standing up for those millions for whom the transition to capitalism has brought only loss and bewilderment.’

One strand of Marine le Pen's strategy to detoxify her father's party is to play down his and its associations with France's collaborationist and fascist past. Another has been to move beyond its roots in the petit-bourgeois Poujardiste movement of the 1950s. With its considerable working- and clerical-class support across an increasingly wide geographical range, the FN can now claim to be the foremost working-class party of France. (In the 2014 European elections the party polled 30 per cent of the 18–35 age group, 43 per cent of which is blue collar.) Hence, the FN has supplemented its traditional anti-gay, anti-immigrant and anti-EU positions with calls for public ownership of certain French industries. Although within a national protectionist framework, this puts the FN to the left of the Socialist Party.

An even more surprising turn to the working class took place across the channel, for similar electoral reasons. UKIP was founded by a London School of Economics lecturer and is currently led by a former City trader of pronounced free-market views (notoriously on the privatisation of the NHS). For many years Nigel Farage's party was seen as 'the Conservative party in exile'. However, in the run-up to the 2015 election, the commentariat consensus shifted: now UKIP was the party of the left-behinds, its supporters older, poorer, maler and whiter than the general population, its main challenge being to Labour. In the 2015 general election, the UKIP vote in many marginal seats was seen as crucial in keeping them Conservative.

In his chapter, Richard Seymour challenges the idea that UKIP is now principally the dissident working-class party. He points out that polls taken after the 2015 general election showed that 43 per cent of UKIP voters had voted Conservative in 2010, as against only 14 per cent for Labour (18 per cent had voted Liberal Democrat). Overall, more Labour voters shifted to the Greens than UKIP. Rather than defecting to UKIP, Labour voters stayed at home.

Seymour's argument has a lot of weight: evidence from before and during the 2015 election indicates that UKIP didn't eat significantly into the Labour loyalist vote (defined as people who voted Labour in 2010). However, what UKIP did do in Labour areas was damaging enough: concentrating the anti-Labour vote and motivating past Labour voters to vote against the party, thereby preventing them from taking marginal seats. Seymour acknowledges that, in places where UKIP did well, it was picking up significant numbers of potential Labour votes, and that even traditional, hard-core 'BNP in blazers' UKIP supporters were 'not necessarily pro-free market, but traditionalist conservatives favouring economic controls'. Thus, 'with all caveats registered, UKIP is a genuinely cross-class party. Its base in the working-class may be exaggerated, but it is large. And at least a minority have voted Labour in the past.' The key defining characteristic of UKIP voters is that, whatever class background they may inhabit, they feel they're on the way down.

Much of UKIP's 'turn to the class' has been about attacking multiculturalism and political correctness, exploiting child-abuse and grooming scandals in working-class constituencies like Rotherham. But in pursuit of the working-class vote UKIP has also campaigned against the anti-welfare bedroom tax and dropped

any suggestion of privatising the NHS. In this sense, it has followed the same trajectory as other right-populists in Poland, Hungary and France.

The emergence of transnational, globalised corporate power, comfortable with the liberal progressive gains of the last twenty-five years and indifferent to national and religious traditions, has created a golden opportunity for an anti-elitist right-populism to occupy territory abandoned by social-democracy. Were a new, left mass movement to emerge, it's possible that global capitalism would call on the populists for support, as they did in the 1930s. But it's hard to see any prospect of that in the immediate future.

Meanwhile, the new fault-line creates dangerous temptations for the Left. One is that, in opposition to the xenophobia and social reaction of the populist Right, it ends up siding, willy-nilly, with the opposing elites. But there is an equal danger in trying to find common ground with the far Right on economic issues. As Bill Fletcher Jr argues (in his chapter on America), you can't extract the right-wing from the populism, and thus render the populism acceptable. This was the essential manoeuvre proposed by Labour's Blue Labour tendency, culminating in its leading exponent Maurice Glasman's proposals that Labour should call for a complete halt to immigration and engage with the English Defence League. The Left should of course stick fast to its economic opposition to global capital, but it should equally guard against abandoning its liberal and democratic principles in support (say) of working-class xenophobia or condoning religiously-justified oppression of minorities (or majorities), whoever they are advocated by. As G. M. Tamas argues:

It is our moral duty to defend persecuted groups regardless of their principles, but this should not mean a 'value-free' approval of each and every principle that might be shared by victims of discrimination, however heinous.

The twentieth-century alliance between social progress and economic justice not only created a popular consensus for social reform over issues of gender, sexuality and race but also made personal and political liberation central to the Left's project. In a concluding chapter on Greece, Andreas Karitzis argues that the Left is currently confronting a dominant and brutal system with a 'dominated, fragmented and feeble conception of emancipation'. Traditional representative democracy is a crucial dimension of a mature society, but it is not the whole of it. There are other places in society for emancipation to take place.

This argument is complemented by Walter Baier, who argues for the Left breaking the nexus between political liberalism and neoliberalism, so that 'liberalism's demands become part of a new emancipatory project, which Michel Brie has called a "centre-bottom alliance"' (as opposed, of course, to the alliance between the squeezed middle and the super-rich which brought the British Conservatives to power in the 2015 general election). Supporters of greater equality and economic justice need particularly to support those civil-society movements which oppose

authoritarian state practices, in order to build – or rebuild – ‘a bridge between political liberalism and the emancipatory ideals of the left’.

DAVID EDGAR

Racism: a critical analysis

By MIKE COLE (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 272 pp., Paper, £19.99.

With Pegida, the German anti-immigrant party, opening a UK branch in 2016 and refugees drowning in the Mediterranean, the need for an analysis of racism that is both supple enough to capture its many manifestations, and yet able to identify its persistent features, is as pressing as ever. Mike Cole’s book tackles the task with energy and a formidable wealth of information. After a brief introduction setting out his neo-Marxist approach, Cole provides three hefty chapters exploring in detail racist politics in three countries: the UK, the US and Australia. There is impressive range and depth in these case studies. Indeed, the book can be recommended simply as a resource for anyone seeking a concise survey of racist politics over the last twenty years or so.

Cole has more in his sights, though, than a detailed account of the many forms of racism that have characterised recent international politics. He wants to elaborate and advocate a neo-Marxist approach to the understanding of racism. The distinctive feature of this approach is the attempt to combine the historical materialism of classical Marxism – with its emphasis on the key role of relations of production in the shaping of the political, legal and cultural topography of a society – with ideas from later Marxists. In particular, Gramsci’s ideas about hegemony and ‘common sense’, combined with Althusser’s notion of interpellation, give Cole’s Marxism a contemporary cutting edge.

Equipped with these tools, Cole is able to craft a distinctively critical take on current views about racism and what should be done about it. The obvious benefit of Cole’s rebooted Marxism is its capacity for analysing racism within the context of political economy. Throughout the three case studies which form the substantive part of the book, he demonstrates the merits of this way of looking at things, connecting hostility towards refugees, the growth of far-right politics in Europe, the rise of Islamophobia, and the killing and incarceration of African Americans in the US with the crises of international capitalism. This is not simply a theoretical task for Cole. He wants to identify the new forms of solidarity made possible by a neo-Marxist understanding. His dissatisfaction with some fashionable alternative approaches to analysing and responding to racism, such as intersectionality and ‘super-diversity’, stem from his claim that they encourage limited forms of politics.

Cole sees the biggest threat to neo-Marxism, though, as Critical Race Theory (CRT). He provides a brisk critique in his Introduction. His chief objections – that