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Posted:  
Oct 10, 2014

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As the far right seems to be enjoying a resurgence across Europe, we ask Mark Hayes, author of [The Ideology of Fascism and the Far Right in Britain](#) (Red Quill Books, 2014) to place this recent electoral success in context and to find out what his research and experience in anti-fascist mobilization has taught him about this resurgence.

**RQ: All across Europe during the current crisis, far right parties seem to be re-emerging in popularity. Is this inevitable? Is the economy somehow a universal trigger? How does the UK differ, if at all, comparatively?**

MH: Clearly the far right in Europe is experiencing something of a resurgence. In many countries right wing populist and even explicitly fascist parties are making political and electoral progress. If, for example, you look at parties such as the National Democratic Party in Germany, the Front National in France, Jobbik Party in Hungary or Golden Dawn in Greece it is clear that they possess not only the capacity to do

reasonably well in elections, they constitute a clear danger to social cohesion in that some of their activities are clearly extra-Parliamentary. In this sense they are, or aspire to be, “movements” in the sense of facilitating broader mobilisation, or at least making a social impact on the ground in local communities. They aren’t just interested in getting well-fed backsides sat on Parliamentary seats. This illustrates not only the scope of their ambition (which appears to have deserted a liberal-left obsessed with the electoral process), it reflects the fact they are taking seriously the social discontent that exists right across Europe. This discontent has been generated, of course, by the economic crisis precipitated by the recent, spectacular financial collapse. The so-called “age of austerity” has led to a severe reduction in public expenditure, cuts in welfare provision, chronic under-investment in public services, and increasing unemployment. Where employment levels have been sustained, it has been by virtue of the rapid expansion of low-wage, temporary and part-time (“flexible”) contracts. In effect



**CITE AS:** Hayes, Mark. 2014. “The Ideology of Fascism and the Far Right in Britain. Red Quill Books Interview Series #2. Interviewed by Red Quill Books. Posted on Oct 10.

the crisis, created by the greed and stupidity of financial (and political) elites, is being paid for by ordinary working class people across Europe, while the employers cynically exploit the crisis for their own purposes. In this context people inevitably seek an explanation for their predicament. While the conventional (liberal) Parliamentary parties offer the same dreary message, the far right offer simplistic solutions by blaming asylum seekers, immigrants and ethnic minorities. To anyone caught in the poverty trap by forces beyond their comprehension, the far right offers a way forward that seems seductively straightforward. All we need to do is expel the foreigners and deal with the trouble-makers. We need to be mindful here that the fascist far right is actually populated by “collectivists” in the sense that they look beyond the austere and sterile individualism of neo-liberal orthodoxy – they, at least in rhetorical terms, are claiming to be able carry everyone (minus the “other”) forward to a better life. They are not socialists, of course, but this kind of rhetoric has a resonance in areas where progressive political aspirations have been seriously attenuated by years of disappointment and broken promises.

As far as Britain is concerned, the primary organisational expression of fascist notions, the BNP, has begun to implode. Nick Griffin, who presided over a period of electoral success at local level, has been expelled from the party for “disunity”. (News of this actually made me laugh as much as when I heard he had been made bankrupt!). His successor, Adam Walker, who from all accounts has had the same

charisma-bypass operation as Griffin, has a major task on his hands to rescue his party from impending oblivion. Consequently it might be argued that Britain is out of step in that explicit fascist parties are not making the same kind of electoral impact now. Of course the fact that the BNP appears to be in a condition of terminal decline would ordinarily be the cause of considerable celebration on the left, and doubtless some academics will continue to crow about the common sense of the British people. However the longer-term signs are not quite so propitious. The real danger here is that the populist far right, in the form of the UK Independence Party will step into breach and make significant progress. All the signs are that, even if they do not get any seats (it is always more difficult in a simple plurality electoral system) they will dramatically increase their level of support in the next General Election. If (when) that happens, the context within which political debate takes place will alter significantly. Immigration, asylum-seekers, inter-ethnic social relations and national identity will all rise to the top of the political agenda. This context makes it much easier for genuinely fascist ideas to gain traction. Organisations like the English Defence League, with its street-based activism, will also inevitably be given significant impetus. Then we are in a more difficult and dangerous situation for the left and there are few signs that they are capable of meeting this challenge. Having said that, the idea that any political situation is “inevitable” is a reflection of how deeply people have assimilated the dominant ethos of neo-liberalism. It is also, in part, a consequence of the lazy scepticism of the

liberal left. Challenging the hegemony of capitalism would appear to me to be a prerequisite for a more civilised, stable and co-operative existence – and I am counting on it.

**RQ: In the wake of the Scottish independence vote there has been much consternation among the Left about nationalism and its connection to fascism. Are nationalist movements like the “Yes” campaign inherently dangerous in this regard? How should the Left view such movements?**

MH: I don't see Scottish nationalism as a threat in the same sense at all. The “yes” campaign was clearly framed in terms of trying to secure control over resources in order to provide more jobs and better social services for ordinary people. That is – it was a political programme that (generally) set its face against the prevailing neo-liberal orthodoxy. Scottish independence contained a plan for European-style Social Democracy – not fascism. There is a common misconception on the left that all nationalisms tend to move in the same direction ideologically speaking. Obviously many of them do, but it is perfectly possible to conceive of a nationalism that is anti-imperialist, pro-democratic and egalitarian. A cursory glance at some of the forces which have, at different times, coalesced around Irish nationalism suggest that progressive politics can emerge from an enlightened national consciousness. The history of anti-imperialist movements more generally would appear to confirm this observation

**RQ: I suppose there have always been immigrants to scapegoat and vilify in the pursuit of advancing fascist demagoguery. What I find interesting of late has been how far right parties are apparently coordinating their efforts internationally – at least in the EU. The recent BNP alliance with Golden Dawn and Nick Griffin's visit to Athens seems to reflect a new phase of coordination and shared vision among the far right. What's different, if anything, about these political alliances compared to those of pre-war Europe?**

MH: I suppose in a way the far right are making a virtue out of a necessity. They engage in the electoral process at a European level, where differential turnout and the desire of some voters to register a protest means they can make an impact. They are thrown together via the EU and make the best of it by facilitating efforts to collaborate. However, most of these populist, proto-fascist or fascist political organisations are irredeemably parochial, xenophobic and aggressive, and genuine cooperation does not sit easily with this. They make coalesce around certain negative themes such as anti-immigration policy, but manufacturing a positive programmatic consensus is quite difficult given they prioritise their own particular conception of the “national interest”. This ideological fact effectively destroyed any chance the pre-war fascists had of international cooperation. Moves, principally by Mussolini, to establish a “fascist international” were inevitably undermined by national and cultural supremacism, and a “co-operative” fascism

which transcends national borders is, in essence, an oxymoron. However, having said that, it might be worth mentioning that Nazi ideology (as a more specific and radical manifestation of fascism which emphasised biological determinism) might have lent itself to more cross-national cooperation. Since it was premised on sociobiology and the supremacy of the Aryan race, there were efforts to co-opt fellow racists from other countries into the Nazi design, although it was always under the tutelage of the German state and subordinate to its interests as interpreted by Hitler. However I think contemporary efforts are inevitably pragmatic and perfunctory because their real interests lay in taking care of their own backyard. Nick Griffin might have enjoyed the company of some of Golden Dawn's uncompromising Hitler-worshipping neo-Nazis, but he would nevertheless have retained a very clear sense of his own superiority as a British (English) racial nationalist. I can well imagine Griffin sharing an ouzo with his Greek hosts, but deep down he would have viewed them as little more than Mediterranean Neanderthals.

**RQ: In *The Ideology of Fascism* you write that a Marxist approach is “indispensable for a comprehensive and satisfactory comprehension of fascism“. Why, specifically, is it that such an approach is so useful to your analysis?**

MH: The Marxist analysis of fascism has been thoroughly marginalised by the ascendancy of academic liberalism. There are some very good reasons for this. The first

Marxist efforts to evaluate fascism in the 1920s and 1930s were dominated by a theoretical economic determinism that became less plausible as the true reality of fascism was actually revealed by the death camps and gas ovens. The notion that big business and finance capital were the key players in the drama that unfolded in Italy and Germany made little sense, especially in the context of the Holocaust. The tendency was therefore, after 1945, to dismiss Marxism as an analytical irrelevance. This dismissal was reinforced, naturally, by the geo-political conflict which became known as the “Cold War” when it suited Western political elites to not only deride Marxism, but to portray Communism as the Siamese twin of fascism – two sides of the same “extremist” coin. However, although events like the Holocaust cannot be explained by reference to the logic of capitalist development, the Marxist interpretation is still important in a critical sense.

Political forces, even though they may acquire a certain relative autonomy and scope for independent action, still emerge from, and exist, in the reality of material circumstances. Economic context remains the critical component in explaining how and why fascism emerges, and who benefits. Fascism still needs to be analysed in terms of its socio-economic function. To dismiss the economic context as a superficial irrelevance is to misinterpret how society actually works (in this sense some Marxists have had a tendency to throw the baby out with the bath water!). The importance of economics needs to be re-established if we are to genuinely evaluate, understand and resist

fascism. I would also make the point that, as I do in the book, even if the early Communists misinterpreted fascism many of them nevertheless died fighting it. Self-satisfied liberal academics eager to denounce Communists from the safety of their University libraries should pay them a little more respect.

**RQ: If you could give some particular guidance to anti-fascist and progressive groups about dealing with the far right both politically and analytically what would it be?**

MH: I think in analytical terms the way to approach fascism should definitely be in terms of evaluating its social function. Historically fascism has gained success as a consequence of a partnership between socio-economic elites anxious to preserve their privileges in a period of economic crisis, and ideological fanatics who (whilst posing a certain threat to those elites) enable them to sustain their system by destroying all semblance of progressive political opposition. This is really part of the essence of understanding fascism – it's not just a familiarisation with key ideas and precepts – it is being aware of precisely how they succeed and why. This is the key to theoretical and practical resistance.

In terms of that “practical” resistance I would not presume to offer advice on how to proceed. Local communities and neighbourhoods are best able to decide on the basis of their own experience. The “one size fits all” approach does not sufficiently acknowledge the specificity of local

circumstances. I would, however, make a couple of observations on the basis of my own experience as a member of AFA and Red Action. When fascists here explicitly adopted a strategy of “controlling the streets” in order to “march and grow” they were met with robust resistance. They were left in absolutely no doubt that if they persisted with this tactic it would be at some considerable cost. I even remember when Combat 18 were flirting with para-military options it was made clear to them that there would be severe consequences (and there were enough members in our organisation who were closely involved with Irish Republicanism to make the threat credible). So I do not believe that backing away from a pro-active fascist organisation intent on aggressive mobilisation is a wise option. Of course fascists who play the Parliamentary game, or pretend to adhere to democratic principles, present a qualitatively different set of problems. Here I believe they need to be met with a political response which not only tries to educate people about the evils of fascist ideology, it needs to stress that the only real solution to the social problems which make fascism attractive is to deal with the economy. A more equitable distribution of resources is the best antidote to fascism. One thing is absolutely certain – ignoring the problem is unlikely to work.

So, if I could borrow (perhaps inappropriately) from the terminology of nuclear deterrence I suppose we could call it a strategy of graduated and flexible response – meeting the challenge of fascism at whatever level they choose, but clear in the knowledge that the only viable means of

destroying it completely is to reconfigure the prevailing economic conditions. Max Horkheimer once famously remarked that anyone who won't talk about capitalism should stay quiet about fascism – the corollary of that is of course that if you want to talk genuine anti-fascism, you have to talk anti-capitalism.

**RQ: Finally, in *The Ideology of Fascism* you chronicle the ebb and flow of the far right in the UK and how this is tied to both particular and wider political and economic developments. What do you see on the horizon for the far right in the UK in the coming decade?**

MH: Of course it is difficult to predict precisely how fascism will develop in Britain, or how it will evolve. Certainly those who adhere explicitly to a fascist ideology are very small in number, but they are unlikely to disappear anytime soon. Fascists have a long and troubled history in Britain, but they have been able to survive in onerous circumstances and have passed on their ideas to successive generations. However this raises a crucial point – I really don't think it is adequate to focus attention entirely on the pathological morons and misfits who inhabit the wilder fringes of far right ideology in Britain. Concentrating on their abject political failure and ineptitude can induce a complacency which is entirely inappropriate. The focus should be on the challenging the socio-economic and political context which might eventually produce a much more receptive environment for fascist ideas further on down the line. For example, if we focus on the growth of

“Islamaphobia”, the systematic erosion of civil liberties, or the expansion of the “security” agenda as a consequence of the so-called “war on terrorism”, it is evident that the scope for authoritarian options is growing exponentially. In this sense the political lunatics on the right edge of the political spectrum don't really need to do very much at all because the popular consensus and the practical policy output of the state is moving the ideological centre of gravity in their direction. They can afford to wait – we can't.