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Explorations of the Far Right

edited by Anton Shekhovtsov

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3 *Matthew Feldman, Paul Jackson (eds.)*
Doublespeak
The Rhetoric of the Far Right since 1945
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DOUBLESPEAK

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INTRODUCTION

Paul Jackson and Matthew Feldman

> What is really important in the construction of a world of doublespeak is the ability to lie, whether knowingly or unconsciously, and to get away with it; and the ability to use lies and choose and shape facts selectively, blocking out those that don't fit an agenda or program [...] doublespeak is tied closely to way of looking at the world – political agendas and frames – that give them authenticity and seeming naturalness and inevitability.[1]

Having received a knockout blow at the end of World War Two, the radical right has long sought methods able to overcome the toxic legacies of 1945. The revelations of Nazi genocide in the 1940s only further added to the discrediting of ultra-nationalist extremism. While long associated with violence, fascist ideology quickly became indelibly linked to savagery and extermination in the European and American public imagination. Even if far from fully understood in the years immediately after the war, the Holocaust against European Jews, the so-called 'euthanasia' program against the disabled, as well as the murderous actions committed against a wide range of demonized scapegoats – from homosexuals to Roma and Sinti peoples – helped to establish a powerful postwar allergy to radical right politics in Europe and the US. This led, in turn, to anti-fascism becoming a normative, even commonsense response.[2] In the decades since, radical right protagonists have nowhere approached the heights reached by German Nazism, Italian Fascism and the other radical right satrapies established during the 'fascist epoch' in Europe between 1919 and 1945. For several decades thereafter, attempts to reawaken the 'beast' of fascist ideology were marked by popular failure no less than by attempts at ideological continuity by radical right ideologues.[3]

Over the last 30 years or so, in Europe and the US, the radical right's self-conceptions and public influence have changed markedly. In the first place, very few activists – let alone organizations – from these spheres would ever self-identify as fascist. The stigma of war and Holocaust, quite simply, put this term beyond the pale. As one avowedly fascist ideologue, Maurice Bardèche, already emphasized some 50 years ago:

> The single party, the secret police, the public displays of Caesarism, even the presence of a Führer are not necessarily attributes of fascism, let alone the reactionary thrust of political alliances [...] The famous fascist methods are constantly revised and will continue to be revised. More important than the mechanism is the idea which fascism has created for itself of man and freedom. [...] With another name, another face, and with nothing which betrays the projection from the past, with the form of a child we do not recognize and the head of a young Medusa, the Order of Sparta will be reborn.[4]

This thinking was subsequently repackaged by one of the more successful radical right activists since World War Two. Lyndon LaRouche, in a 1978 essay revealingly titled ‘Solving the Machiavellian Problem Today’, stated, ‘It is not necessary to wear brown shirts to be a fascist [...] it is not necessary to wear a swastika to be a fascist [...] It is not necessary to call oneself a fascist to be a fascist. It is simply necessary to be one!’[5] For these radical right ideologues and movements, leopards have not changed their spots as much as finding better cover. Yet such an attempted obfuscation has also long being intuited by anti-racist campaigners and analysts of fascism. It has been given eloquent voice by, amongst others, the French scholar Pierre-Andre Taguieff: ‘If vigilance was only a game of recognizing something already well-known, then it would only be a question of remembering’.[6]

As the essays in *Doublespeak* collectively attest, attentive observation and accurate recognition of the radical right pedigree also points beyond the ever-vexed issue of terminology. Proper recognition of the radical right, perhaps more than ever, means taking their (self-) presentation seriously; that is, taking seriously their deliberately crafted slogans, symbols and themes. As many of the specific chapters recount in detail, a deliberate process has been attempted to ‘repackage’ the radical right ‘brand’ in order to make it palatable – which in some European countries including Germany, France and Austria carries legal ramifications – to more mainstream European and American tastes. If rarely considered systematically, as this volume sets out to do, this re-presentation of fascism and radical right rhetoric has long been subject to warnings like Umberto Eco's celebrated 'Ur-Fascism' article of 1986;[7] or still earlier, Holocaust survivor and celebrated memoirist Primo Levi's warning from his *If this is a Man*: 'A new fascism, with its trail of intolerance, of abuse, and of servitude, can be born outside our country and imported into it, walking on tiptoe and calling itself by other names...'

If rarely examined at length, this 'memory of what happened in the heart of Europe', concludes Levi, 'can serve as a warning and a support'.[8] Nor has this lesson been lost decades after defeat of fascism. 'It is important that democracy in the early 21st century does not let itself be undermined by those who do not share its values but would cynically use its rhetoric', the reputed historian Richard Evans pointed out in the *New Statesman*. By this, he was referring to the notable rise of the 'extreme right' in Europe – in particular, Jobbik in Hungary and Golden Dawn in Greece, both at the extreme end of the radical right spectrum – while drawing some very loose parallels with interwar Europe:

> The far right is as aware of history as anyone else, maybe even more so. It realizes how easy it is for others to rob it of political legitimacy by labeling it as Nazi. As such, all the present-day movements of the extreme right, or at least those who are interested in gaining supporters, repudiate labels such as 'neo-Nazi' or 'neo-fascist' and adapt to the conditions of present-day democracy, at least on the surface.[9]

Using language as a kind of Trojan Horse to gain access to the liberal democratic political spectrum forms a central theme of *Doublespeak: The Rhetoric of the Far Right since 1945*. To begin to highlight what may be considered 'fifth column discourse' by radical right movements active in Europe and the United States, this Introduction can begin by briefly considering Britain's leading radical right political party, the British National Party (hereafter BNP), in order to shed some light upon this recurrent feature in the present collection of chapters.

Similar to Orwell's satirical 'doublespeak' from his dystopian masterpiece – actually a conflation of newspeak and doublethink in 1984[10] – a 'fifth column discourse' is specifically explored here in terms of the radical right's tactical, even underhand engagement with democracy; in short, making invisible a movement's radical, counter-democratic aims via the euphemized language of reform. This view is in keeping with scholars analyzing the shifting discursive registers and thematic patterns employed by the postwar radical right. One example is Cas Mudde, who argues that contemporary far right movements in Europe typically have a more 'moderate "front-stage"' intended for public consumption and 'a radical "backstage"' targeted at activists. Similarly, Michael Billig and more recently Roger Eatwell have commented on an 'exoteric' and 'esoteric' division in Britain's 1970s National Front discourse in the late 1970s, in many ways an electoral forerunner to the present-day BNP.[11]

In fact, the now-flailing British National Party offers a perfect case study of this attempted 'fifth column discourse', following the election of Nick Griffin as Party Chairman in September 1999. Founded by the uncompromising neo-Nazi John Tyndall in 1982, the BNP remained on the fringes of political life in Britain due to its association with Oswald Mosley's interwar group, the British Union of Fascists, as well as its recourse to overt symbolism from, and praise for, the Third Reich. To give just two examples underpinning this reputation for unvarnished radical right extremism, images of John Tyndall dressed as a Nazi had long done the UK media rounds; but compounding matters:

> On 25 May 1999, four days after the party's TV broadcast aired [for the London mayoral elections], the association with violent neo-Nazism reemerged when the *Mirror* newspaper exposed a link between the London nail bomber David Copeland and BNP leader, John Tyndall. In April 1999, Copeland had planted bombs in Brixton, Brick Lane and Soho [... causing] three deaths.[12]

Within six months of the *Mirror* exposé, the longtime National Front activist and Cambridge graduate Nick Griffin had taken over and set about 'modernizing' the party which, as Graham Macklin analyzes in greater detail in his contribution to this volume, first and foremost meant attempting to veil the racist, revolutionary and thuggish image of the past. As Griffin candidly laid out in his 1999 article:

> Of course, we must teach the truth to the hardcore [... but] when it comes to influencing the public, forget about racial differences, genetics, Zionism, historical revisionism and so on [...] It's time to use the weight of democracy's own myths and expectations against it by side-stepping and using verbal judo techniques.[13]

It is just this type of 'verbal judo', this organizational self-censorship by an extremist party, captured by the phrase 'fifth-column discourse' and expansively analyzed across *Doublespeak*. In this vein, 'fifth column discourse' is thus a rhetorical form of deception and political cunning intended to attack an enemy from within; in this case, by aping the language of liberal democracy. Thus could Nick Griffin, facing an angry crowd at the Oxford Union in November 2007, when he was due to address the congregation, claim without irony of his opponents: 'Had they grown up in Nazi Germany they would have been splendid Nazis'.[14]

Whereas the old BNP spoke of race and forced repatriation, the 'modernized' BNP speaks of identity, for this was to be a party of cosmetically respectable politicians, in Nick Griffin's words: 'in the least controversial way possible [...] we must at all times present them [the electorate] with an image of moderate reasonableness'. Launching the tellingly entitled *Rebuilding British Democracy* in 2005, Nick Griffin correspondingly claimed that his own party manifesto was 'a tightly argued, moderately presented, blueprint for the radical transformation of Britain and British society'.[15] Griffin was thus partially able to attempt a remodel of BNP extremism, not by changing its radical right outlook so much as successfully concealing these by way of political camouflage and 'verbal judo'.

No doubt in partial consequence, the most comprehensive book on the subject, Nigel Copsey's *Contemporary British Fascism*, concludes that 'at no period throughout the entire history of right-wing extremism in Britain, has a far right party registered as much success at the ballot box as today's British National Party'.[16] While the conscious adopting of this fifth column discourse led to some limited electoral success in UK local elections in 2003 and 2004, a breakthrough arrived in June 2009 at the European elections. Mirroring the resurgence of other far right parties across Europe, BNP functionaries Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons were elected MEPs with more than 6 per cent of the proportional-representational vote. This was far and away the greatest political success the BNP had yet scored, bringing with it European funding, mainstream media appearances, and a national profile.

Had this one-time, avowedly fascist party, in short, become a conservative one? Hardly, for this conclusion would be nothing more than falling for the party's self-censorship that has been so consciously applied over the last decade. Indeed, as one internal memorandum attests, just months before their electoral breakthrough of June 2009, the BNP's employment of fifth column discourse continued to remain a central, self-conscious part of its political strategy; for example, Rule #9 from the revised, April 2009 'Language & Concepts Discipline Manual': 'Racial and ethnic epithets and insults should never be used'. And finally, in terms of the revolutionary core of the inner party, consider Rule #12 from this instructive document: 'Successful revolutions from the right have always presented themselves as restoring older traditions. Therefore, we should couch our agenda in restorationist terms whenever possible'.

In nakedly endorsing fifth column discourse, the exemplary BNP doublespeak manual also raises the issue of political framing undertaken by the contemporary radical right generally. Unlike the radical right's embrace of fifth column discourse, however, the issue of extreme right-wing 'framing' has been relatively well established by scholars. Martin Lee's survey a generation ago, for example, discerned a wider 'ideological face-lift' pushed by ideologues across Europe:

> The jackals of the extreme Right believed they found the crucial pressure point when they seized upon immigration as the main issue to rally around. While a network of ultra-right-wing cadres continued to function as the violent vanguard of xenophobia, some shock troops from Europe's neo-fascist underground split off to form mass-based political parties.

A consequence of this 'cosmetic surgery', concludes Lee, is that radical right movements often 'watered down their pronouncements' in order to gain, at given times and on certain issues, 'a significant influence on public policy'.[17] Many radical right parties, from Austria's FPÖ to Italy's *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (renamed the *Allianza Nazionale* in 1995 after claiming to jettison all links with Mussolini's historic brand of Fascism), successfully convinced national and European electorates that they shared little or no common ground with the pre-Cold War radical right.

Furthermore, as Nigel Copsey argues in the launch issue of *Fascism* (the first journal dedicated to studying the evolution of the radical right since World War One) if right-wing extremists like to forget their heritage, political scientists need to redouble their efforts to incorporate historical continuities when approaching the contemporary radical right. In particular, the surfeit of terms applied to these groups by political scientists, ranging from 'ethnonationalist' to 'far right populist', collectively runs the risk of 'consign[ing] fascism to a museum'. As Copsey continues:

> For sure, we need greater interrogation of the continuities between historical fascism and contemporary manifestations. Admittedly, the historical contexts are different, but if we are to succeed in applying historical understanding to the present, it is time for the political science community (and social scientists more generally) to engage seriously with (neo) fascism studies.[18]

Bearing out this point, Cas Mudde's *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* identified no less than twenty six competing definitions and fifty eight different characteristic features used by political scientists (most commonly xenophobia, nationalism and varying degrees of hostility to liberal democracy) to describe the phenomena analyzed in the chapters to follow here.[19] Needless to say, this number has only grown in the years since the publication of Mudde's book in 2000. This collection is concerned with the framing and rhetorical tactics deployed by the extreme right since 1945, the term increasingly favored by historians and political scientists alike to describe the 'radical right'. This term effectively captures both the continuities and ideological profile (post-, neo-) fascism of a cluster of ideologies which, in Roger Griffin's view, 'constantly evolves to accommodate changes in its habitat, producing a wide variety of new strains'.[20] A number of major publications of late have registered this mutation of radical right politics in Europe and the US, ranging from comparative studies on radical right-wing populism;[21] social movements;[22] and political violence;[23] not to mention and expanding library of national case studies collectively far too lengthy to enumerate here, let alone comprehensively address in a single volume. It also bears noting that, while often narrowly focused on contemporary developments, think-tanks and third-sector charities have also fruitfully contributed research aimed at a better understanding of contemporary radical right politics and culture generally.[24]

Yet that said, one important ‘new strain’ of radical right rhetoric – albeit sharing many similarities with demonized communities in the past – frequently appearing in the chapters to ensue is the turn toward anti-Muslim politics. In the aftermath of mass-casualty terrorist attacks by Islamist militants in the US on 11 September 2001; Madrid on 11 March 2004; and the UK on 7 July 2005, the emergence of a potent anti-Muslim rhetoric in the political mainstream has also offered a crucial hook for a new generation of radical right politicians to hang an extremist agenda has been palpable in some sections the mainstream media and wider public. To take a final example from the BNP’s Nick Griffin, in a lecture directed to the ‘back stage’ of the movement in 2005, he urged activists to turn away from an unhelpful anti-Semitism and embrace anti-Muslim politics in an attempt at populist, ‘front stage’ campaigning:

> [...] in real politics in the real world, one’s proper choice of enemy is a group who you gain a worthwhile level of extra support by identifying, who you have a realistic chance of beating, and whose defeat will take you the furthest towards your goal. With millions of our people desperately and very reasonably worried by the spread of Islam and its adherents, and with the mass media ... playing ‘Islamophobic’ messages like a scratched CD, the proper choice of enemy needn’t be left to rocket scientists.[25]

As noted above, the biological anti-Semitism of German fascism under Hitler put paid to the biological racism so closely identified with interwar and wartime fascist movements. In its place in the twenty first century, radical right, has increasingly turned toward a ‘cultural racism’ of implacable difference and intractable conflict with European Muslims – in some ways playing on the same kinds of populist phobias, casual discrimination and demonization as anti-Semitism did a century ago. This cultural prejudice assumes that all Muslims are somehow responsible for the actions of an extremist minority centering on the notion that Islam – not just jihadi Islamist violence, which all citizens of goodwill naturally oppose – is an ‘other’ that cannot be accommodated in liberal democratic Europe. As Liz Fekete suggests, wider media narratives in particular are at the heart of this growth:

> Around much of Europe, the media is launching its own ‘witch-hunts’ of Muslims who display symptoms of ‘unacceptable behavior’ as enunciated by terrorism laws. No other communities are placed under the microscope, constantly questioned about their personal beliefs, their ‘foreign allegiances’, as the Muslim communities of Europe. It’s former Tory minister, Norman Tebbit’s cricket test gone mad.[26]

Without doubt, the more successful radical right ideologues and movements of the past generation have been acutely sensitive to shifts in the political and cultural landscape. Nowhere has this been more visible than in the embrace of populist anti-Muslim politics over the last decade.[27] Aided by recent jihadi Islamist attacks on one hand, and by longer-term demographic change on the other, Europe and the US have played witness to degrees of collective prejudice and scapegoating wholly at variance with democratic progress toward equality and individual agency. This new intolerance – as the far right has quickly grasped, and some of Anglophone literature has registered of late – would be considered unacceptable if leveled against other historical ‘out-groups’: Jews, Irish or black people and so on (not including Roma and Sinti peoples, who still collective stereotyping and discrimination to a shameful degree).[28] Clearly fanning these flames are windier sections of the mainstream media, thus providing an issue able to be shared by ideologues and talking heads of all right-wing stamps – ‘paleo-‘, ‘neo- ‘far-‘ and ‘extreme’ alike. From this perspective, Roger Eatwell has usefully detected a link between the rhetoric of radical right activists and jihadi Islamists contributing to a ‘cumulative extremism’, whereby ‘one form of extremism can feed off and magnify other forms’.[29] In this way, the intertwined extremes from opposing illiberal camps seek to radicalize otherwise liberal-democratic populaces rejecting both political violence and collective scapegoating – in all its forms – in favor of the clashing of supposedly hostile and monolithic civilizations.

The most violent voice in this yet in this process of ‘cumulative extremism’ has certainly been Anders Behring Breivik, whose attempt to start a ‘European Civil War' culminating with the end of Islam in Europe led to the deaths of 77 Norwegian innocents, mostly children, on 22 July 2011.[30] Writing for the *New York Review of Books,* in the wake of Breivik's terrorist bombing and mass shootings, Malise Ruthven stressed that his anti-Muslim views are 'shared by many on the right and some in Europe's liberal mainstream'. Ruthven's article, furthermore, highlights several of the wider similarities shared between both opposing, in some ways co-dependent, extremisms:

> Just as al-Qaeda represents an extreme, activist variant of political views held by a much wider constituency of Muslim radicals, most of whom would never consider crossing the boundary between thinking and action, so Breivik (judging from his manifesto) holds a broad range of positions common to what might be called the 'counter-jihadist' or 'paranoid right'. This is represented – among others – by Robert Spencer, Daniel Pipes, and Pamela Geller in the US, the controversial Dutch legislator Geert Wilders, and Bat Ye'or and Melanie Phillips in Britain. All these writers – most of whom have denounced the Utöya massacre in the most unequivocal terms – subscribe to variants of the thesis that Europe is sleepwalking into cultural disaster or (in the case of Phillips) enabling Islamist terrorists to gain a foothold.[31]

For the radical right, correspondingly, this has become a signature issue. With the exception of a remaining hardcore of 'traditional' biological racists tending toward varying shades of white supremacism, the different manifestations of the radical right – social movements, electoral parties, and, importantly, interconnected websites – have turned toward anti-Muslim prejudice core strategy for populist mobilization.

A further example here, again drawn from the British case, offers a microcosm of the way in which anti-Muslim rhetoric quickly circulates amongst the various shades of the illiberal right – not least, online. Consider the case of a February 2012 speech delivered by Paul Weston, chairman of the British Freedom Party. Launched only eighteen months earlier, the BFP was looking seeking funding and visibility ahead of the UK's May 2012 local elections. This placed Paul Weston on a tour of the eastern US, delivering speeches and attempting to find sympathetic allies during Winter 2011, including one