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Conference Report

Fascist Ideologues. Past and Present

Centre for Fascist, Anti-Fascist and Post-Fascist Studies
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Abstract

This international conference, organised by Teesside University in conjunction with the University of Cambridge (John Pollard), offered a variety of perspectives on leading fascist and far-right ideologues over the course of the twentieth (and into the twenty-first) century. Focusing upon the historical impact and contemporary influence of key far-right figures and intellectual trends (such as transnationalism and meta-politics), the conference brought together speakers over two days of academic discussion. The conference served several purposes: to examine the continuities and changes in fascist ideology; to present a report on the turn to online anti-Muslim hate by the contemporary far right in Britain; and to mark the formal launch of a new Centre for Fascist, Anti-Fascist and Post-Fascist Studies (CFAPS) based at Teesside University.

Keywords

fascism; Neo-Fascism; Far Right; Extreme Right; Radical Right; European New Right; transnationalism; Counter-Jihad; anti-Semitism; conspiracy

Proceedings opened with a first panel organised around the theme of fascist ideologies and inter-war regimes. GREGORY MAERTZ (St John's, New York) examined the *Junge Kunst im Deutschen Reich*, an exhibition of 'young art' held in Vienna in 1943. He focused in particular on the instrumental role played by Baldur von Schirach (Head of Hitler Youth, and later Reich Governor of Vienna) as the exhibition's patron. Maertz argued that this exhibition represented an ambitious attempt by von Schirach to improve upon, and supersede the annual

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Great German Art Exhibitions held in Munich. This Viennese exhibition, featuring work by much neglected and marginalised artists, was a significant departure because it was modernist/expressionist in aesthetic style, which clearly challenges orthodox views of the Nazi aesthetic as ‘static in eternity’. This state-sponsored exhibition of modernist art (*as* Nazi art) represented, for Maertz, an important act of ‘cultural insurgency’ by von Schirach (it gave rise to opposition within the Nazi hierarchy).

The next paper, by DAN STONE (Royal Holloway, London) questioned the place of racial ideologues in the Third Reich’s ‘racial state’. For Stone, racial ideologues were at their most significant when they performed simple propagandistic tasks and not when they offered more ‘scientific’ justifications for racism. It is therefore possible, according to Stone, to distinguish between ‘race propaganda’ or ‘race mysticism’ on the one hand, and ‘race science’ on the other. The dominant race ideologues in the Third Reich were more race propagandists than race scientists (and so it is important not to overstate the significance of the latter in the Nazi decision-making apparatus). This distinction becomes clearer when we consider Nazi anti-Semitism for it evolved, Stone argued, more from mystical notions and political considerations than from eugenic or anthropological research.

The first panel concluded with a paper from a recent graduate of Cambridge University, NATHAN KUNKELER, who spoke on the evolution of inter-war Swedish fascism. Sweden’s fascists proclaimed themselves proudly as ‘Fascists’ (following the Italian model) at first but they soon became, as ideas of Nordic supremacy gained traction, critical of Italian Fascism’s ostensible lack of race theory. The Italian model was then largely jettisoned in favour of National Socialism. Drawing on an indigenous tradition of racism, Swedish fascists increasingly explained their fascism as an ideology not connected to any nation in particular, but to the Nordic race (which transcended national boundaries). This expression of fascist self-identity coincided with Nazi Germany’s controversial international politics, which then forced Swedish fascists to abandon National Socialism altogether, leaving an anonymous transnational racism in its place. Kunkler’s paper underscored fascism’s capacity for revision whilst also raising awkward questions about fascism’s relationship to ultra-nationalism.

This problematic relationship was explored further in a second panel (on fascist internationalism revisited). STEFFAN WERTHER (Södertörn, Stockholm) surveyed greater Germanic ideology as propagated by the SS. In Himmler’s mind, this Germanic ideology was rooted in a transnational concept of a greater Germanic racial community whereby peoples of Germanic/Nordic race all shared a ‘community of destiny’. Accordingly, the SS project represented, for Werther, a post-national, ‘nation-building’ project in its own right. This SS vision extended beyond 1945 (especially amongst SS veterans), and after the fall of the Iron Curtain, even into parts of post-Communist

Eastern Europe. Werther gave the example of post-Communist Estonia, which has witnessed SS veteran parades.

In his contribution to the second panel, ARISTOTLE KALLIS (Lancaster) examined the evolution of Italian Fascism's claims to universality from Mussolini's declaration in October 1930 that fascism could be exported, through the establishment and activities of CAUR – Action Committees for the Universality of Rome (which could boast its own constitution in 1935), and then on to the *Esposizione Universale Roma* – EUR project. The site for a world's fair, the EUR project was intended as a major statement of the universal potential of Italian Fascism. For Kallis, the EUR project (which was finally abandoned in 1942) represented an abortive attempt to re-assert the primacy of Italy in the 'pecking order' of international fascism (given that by 1938 Hitler's fascism had become the pre-eminent fascism).

ANDREA MAMMONE (Royal Holloway, London) then discussed the nature of pan-European fascism in the post-war period. He identified an immediate attempt to regenerate fascism after the war. As post-war fascists looked to escape their social and political ghettos, and responding to international developments (principally the process of European integration in the late 1940s/early 1950s), certain pan-European fascists (e.g. Oswald Mosley, Per Engdahl) offered their alternative visions for Europe. In France, key platforms for the articulation of this transnational pan-European fascism were Maurice Bardèche's journal, *Défense de l'Occident* (which also drew contributions from outside France), and the organisation, Europe-Action, both of which pre-dated the formation of the French (European) *Nouvelle Droite* (ND; New Right). For Mammone, if we are to fully understand the contemporary far right's embrace of a transnational dimension, we need to appreciate that this development has a history that stretches back into the decades before the electoral breakthrough of the French National Front.

In opening the final panel of the first day, ELISABETTA CASSINA WOLFF (Oslo) offered an examination of the intellectual output of leading Italian far-right ideologue, Julius Evola. Wolff portrayed Evola as a 'philosopher of tradition' who understood fascism as a supra-national phenomenon, aimed at restoring traditional values inspired by aristocratic, monarchic and military ideals. Throughout Evola's writings four unchanging elements stood out: criticism of modern society; rejection of faith in progress; traditionalism; and the belief in spiritual hierarchy. Despite Evola's existential detachment from the world of politics, he became a cult figure for Italian neo-fascists, including those prepared to engage in terrorist massacres. In Wolff's view, Evola provides important analytical insights into the worldview of more recent far-right terrorists, and specifically Anders Breivik.

TAMIR BAR-ON (ITESM, Querétaro) closed the first day's proceedings with his paper summarising the French (European) New Right (ND). His contribution

covered four areas: the nature of the ND; conceptual tools for understanding the ND; the ND and the ‘new faces’ of ultra-nationalism today; and the ND’s significance and impact on the far right. His conclusion was that the ND is best understood (conceptually) as an ‘alternative modernist right’. For Bar-On, the ND matters for scholars (and opponents) of fascism because it claims to belong to an anti-racist and anti-fascist right; it speaks the language of the ‘multicultural right’; and it has impacted on the party-political far right. Bar-On believes that the ND’s relationship with the French National Front reveals differences over policy ‘nuances’ more so than disagreements over fundamentals.

The second day of the conference got under way with ERIK TONNING (Bergen) delivering a paper on fascist ideologue Ezra Pound. Tanning’s focus was on the arguments that Pound deployed in order to enlist support for the fascist cause amongst Christians in Britain. Tanning considered three of Pound’s correspondents: the economic historian Christopher Hollis; T.S. Eliot; and Henry Swabey. As the primary tool to develop pro-fascist sympathy amongst Christians Pound used canonical denunciations of usury. The practice of usury was, for Pound, a Jewish conspiracy. Whilst Tanning demonstrates that Pound registered varying degrees of success with these three correspondents, Pound proved unsuccessful in terms of his ultimate aim: enlisting their support for the British Union of Fascists (BUF).

JOE MULHALL (PhD student, Royal Holloway) further developed the theme of Jewish conspiracy in his analysis of the work of prominent British fascist ideologue, A. K. Chesterton. Mulhall began by discussing the inter-war period and argued that conspiratorial explanations for imperial decline had existed in Britain since the end of the First World War. However, they reached their zenith in the late 1950s under the influence of Chesterton who declared that the British Empire had been brought to its knees and destroyed by a secret cabal of Jews. For Mulhall, Chesterton’s ideas continue to exert lasting influence on Britain’s far right, especially upon the more nostalgic fascists for whom Britain’s imperial decline still remains a live issue.

PAUL JACKSON (Northampton) then spoke about the work of Colin Jordan, another prominent British fascist ideologue. The major theme running through Jackson’s presentation was the question of ‘ideological authenticity’. For Jordan – a Hitler-worshipping National Socialist – was nothing if not ‘ideologically authentic’. Throughout a political career spanning seven decades Jordan retained an ‘incorruptible’ core ideological identity that remained impervious to adaptation (unlike ND ideologues, for example). The flip side to this ‘authenticity’ was Jordan’s frequent denunciation of the ‘inauthentic’ and hence his condemnations of the ‘enemy within’, such as Strasserites and ‘Hollywood

Nazis' (a term used to refer to those who were more interested in the superficial trappings of Nazism than its core ideas).

The place of music in British fascism's inter-war project for national rebirth has been almost entirely overlooked. This stands in marked contrast to the attention paid to contemporary manifestations of 'white power' music. GRAHAM MACKLIN (Huddersfield), in a panel devoted to music and the far right, examined how music was used by the BUF to disseminate its ideology. More than just 'entertainment' for its own sake, Macklin demonstrated how politicised music served as a mechanism through which activists could be socialised and radicalised, their ideological commitment reinforced. All this resulted from a vision which saw culture, and not just musical culture, as a key battleground in the struggle for the soul of the British nation. Musical modernism and especially jazz constituted the antithesis. These genres offended British fascism's conservative cultural aesthetic and represented the wider degeneracy that British fascists felt was afflicting their race and nation.

The focus of ANTON SHEKHOTSOV's (Vienna) contribution was on the demonisation of the 'enemy' in contemporary far-right music, specifically neo-Nazi 'white power' music. According to Shekhovtsov, there is a general pattern to the construction of this enemy. It takes two forms: first, inherent or acquired 'others', such as peoples of non-white background (inherent) or left-wingers, liberals, anti-fascists, drug-users (acquired); and second, the 'system' (often synonymous with 'ZOG' – Zionist Occupation Government and/or the repressive state apparatus, such as the police). For Shekhovtsov, white power music is integral to far-right movements and should not be considered as some insignificant adjunct to the extreme right. Revenue streams provide financial support (and since this is a business, white power bands tend to be more internationalist in outlook, that is to say, they appeal to 'white pride' worldwide). What is more, their message is arguably more powerful than the written word. Shekhovtsov concluded his paper by quoting the cult figure of *Skrewdriver's* Ian Stuart Donaldson who once remarked that a pamphlet is read only once but a song is learned by heart and repeated a thousand times.

The theme of the conference's last panel was 'faces of the far-right today'. EGIL TONNING, a Norwegian psychologist, examined the extremist psyche of Anders Breivik. Initial psychiatric reports had suggested that Breivik suffered from a 'delusional psychosis' and that his ideology was of secondary importance. This initial assessment, when challenged in court, led to further psychiatric reports. These found no sufficient confirmation of any psychosis. However, they did suggest that Breivik suffered from both a narcissistic personality disorder and an anti-social personality disorder. So, Tønning asked, were Breivik's

victims the victims of his ideology or his pathology? For Tønning, this is not an either/or question. The question is really one of understanding the complex interaction between extremist ideologies on the one hand, and psychopathology on the other.

ANDREAS ÖNNERFORS (Lund and Malmö), in his presentation, examined the contemporary counter-jihad movement. For Önnerrfors, this movement can be defined (ideologically) by Islamophobia; a belief in conspiracy, involving the staged 'Islamisation' of the West/Europe; anti-multiculturalism; pan-European/Western and pro-Israeli positions; cultural Christianity; and by anti-establishment critiques. The question that Önnerrfors addressed is why there are no leaders in the counter-jihad movement, only leading figures. The reasons largely relate to structure and organisation. The counter-jihad movement, he argued, is comprised of dispersed, decentralised, non-hierarchical networks. There is no set command and control hierarchy, no leader(s) as such, and therefore no one point of failure. It is this loose network that enables 'ideas men' (leading figures) to propagate within the networks, particularly online.

The final conference paper, by DON WATTS (Emeritus, Anglia Ruskin) surveyed the far right in contemporary Denmark. According to Watts, Denmark, one of the most ethnically homogenous nations in Europe, has traditionally viewed itself as humane, tolerant and 'cosy'. However, since Denmark had very little experience of mass immigration when there was an influx of Muslim immigrants at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the 21st Century, it came as an enormous cultural shock. This influx was likened to the wartime experience of German occupation, with the far right drawing historic parallels between the German invasion and the 'Muslim invasion', and in so doing, appealing to respectable, mainstream society. The *Dansk Folkeparti* (DF; Danish People's Party), Watts argued, was the first to respond to popular concerns over Muslim immigration. It reaped the benefits, placing it in a key political position whereby co-operation with the governing coalition secured the implementation of some of Europe's strictest immigration laws.

The end to the conference proceedings came in a concluding session which formally launched the new *Centre for Fascist, Anti-Fascist and Post-Fascist* (CFAPS) at Teesside University (co-directed by Nigel Copsey and Matthew Feldman). Delegates heard more about the British Government's counter-terrorist *Prevent* agenda (PAUL JORDAN), which has recently undergone revision and now (somewhat belatedly) acknowledges the threat from far-right radicalisation; a summary of a new CFAPS report into online manifestations of anti-Muslim hate crime (NIGEL COPSEY); and information regarding training packages offered by the new Centre (MATTHEW FELDMAN).

Conference overview:

Thursday, July 4 2013

Panel 1: Fascist ideologues and interwar regimes

Gregory Maertz (St John's, New York) – 'Modernist art in the service of Nazi culture: Baldur von Schirach and the *Junge Kunst im Deutschen Reich* Exhibition of 1943'

Dan Stone (Royal Holloway, London) – 'Science and mysticism in the writings of Nazi racial ideologues'

Nathan Kunkeler (Cambridge graduate) – 'The evolution of Swedish fascism from National Socialism to *Völkisch* Racialism'

Panel 2: Fascist internationalism revisited

Steffen Werther (Södertörn, Stockholm) – 'SS Visions: the Greater Germanic ideology and propaganda during WWII and its revival in the present'

Aristotle Kallis (Lancaster) – 'Eugenio Coselschi and Giuseppe Bottai: Perspectives on Fascist internationalism and universality'

Andrea Mammone (Royal Holloway, London) – 'Pan-European fascists: Maurice Bardèche, Europe Action, and Alain de Benoist'

Panel 3: The European radical right, yesterday and today

Elisabetta Cassina Wolff (Oslo) – 'The last battle against modernity: Julius Evola and the Italian radical right'

Tamir Bar-On (ITESM, Querétaro) – 'Navigating between region, nation, and Europe: The French (European) New Right's alternatives to modernity'

Friday, July 5 2013

Panel 4: Case study: Britain from 'fascist epoch' to post-war world

Erik Tønning (Bergen) – '"Why can't you step on the Gas": Ezra Pound's efforts to recruit Christians for fascism in the 1930s'

Joe Mulhall (Royal Holloway, London) – 'A.K. Chesterton's *New Unhappy Lords* and decline of the British Empire: Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories for imperial decline'

Paul Jackson (Northampton) – 'Colin Jordan and post-war British neo-Nazism'

Panel 5: Fascist and neo-fascist music

Graham Macklin (Huddersfield) – “Onward Blackshirts!” Music and the British Union of Fascists (BUF)’

Anton Shekhovtsov (Vienna) – ‘The (re)construction of the enemy in neo-Nazi music’

Panel 6: Faces of the far right today

Egil Tonning (psychologist, Bergen) – ‘Lone-wolf terrorism and the extremist psyche: The case of Anders Behring Breivik’

Andreas Önnerfors (Lund and Malmö) – “Leaderless Counter-Jihad:” why there are no leaders but only leading figures in the counter-jihadist milieu’

Don Watts (Emeritus, Anglia Ruskin) – ‘The radical right in Denmark today’

Formal launch of *Centre for Fascist, Anti-Fascist and Post-Fascist Studies*