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# Left-Wing Fascism: An Infantile Disorder

Irving Louis Horowitz

Vladimir Lenin issued in 1920 a stunning pamphlet on "left-wing" communism. The concerns of this article are how, sixty years later, a left-wing fascism has materialized, and why, like its predecessor, it deserves to be characterized as "an infantile disorder." It was easy for Lenin to recombine elements in political society to forge new theories, yet it seems terribly painful for his followers to do likewise. For Lenin the Bolshevik struggle was two-sided: chiefly against opportunism and social chauvinism, but also against petty bourgeois revolutionaries operating on anarchist premises. Lenin's own words, in *"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, are equally appropriate to the conditions:

The petty bourgeois, "driven to frenzy" by the horrors of capitalism, is a social phenomenon which is characteristic of all capitalist countries. The instability of such revolutionariness, its barrenness, its liability to become swiftly transformed into submission, apathy, fantasy, and even a frenzied infatuation with one or another bourgeois "fad"—all this is a matter of common knowledge. But a theoretical, abstract recognition of these truths does not at all free revolutionary parties from old mistakes, which always crop up at unexpected moments, in a somewhat new form, in hitherto unknown vestments or surroundings, in peculiar—more or less peculiar—circumstances.

This article will discuss a similar infantile disorder in the context of U.S. political life in the 1980s; a disorder so profound that it is properly characterized in post-Leninist terms as "left-wing fascism."

Fascism is not simply a political condition, but is brought about by rooted psychological dislocations which, however, linked to larger concerns, exercise an independent dynamic. The very term *infantile disorder* sharply focuses on the subjective qualities of fascism. Even a politically oriented analyst such as Leon Trotsky speaks, in *The Struggle against Fascism in Germany*, of the cycle of fascism as "yearning for change . . . extreme confusion . . . exhaustion of the proletariat . . . growing confusion and indifference . . . despair . . . collective neurosis . . . readiness to believe in miracles . . . readiness for violent measures." While these characteristics are invariably linked to a social class, a constant fusion-fission effect characterizes the momentum toward fascism. These terms also describe religious-political

movements like Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church and political-religious movements like Lyndon LaRouche's National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC), recently rechristened as the United States Labor Party (USLP).

It would be dangerous, even foolish, to suppose that a set of psychological variables or political positions determines disposition toward fascism. However, appeals to authority, to tradition, to the mystique of nation, blood, or race, are necessary preconditions. Ideological denunciation of appeals to evidence, discourse, rationality, individual conscience, decision reversals, or consensus for specific policies are also characteristic. Rejection of these elements of psychic or intellectual conditioning is a key factor determining a propensity toward fascism. If the success or failure rate of fascism has to do with economic dysfunctions and political systems, preconditions for fascism have to do with social psychology, the mass psychology of a people. Inroads of cults into American life provide somber evidence of a propensity toward fascism.

We have so taken for granted distinctions between Left, Right, and Center that it has become difficult to perceive new combinations of these categories. New practical political integrations disquieting to the liberal imagination are hard to absorb. If Lenin was correct in criticizing left-wing European communism for its exaggerated emphasis on purity at the expense of victory, and vanguard *Putschism* at the expense of mass participation, similar phenomena of a different ideological persuasion are taking place in America. The purpose of this article is to suggest the character of this recombination of political categories; how it functions in American life, not simply to alter the nature of marginal politics but also to affect mainline political decision making.

While my analysis is largely confined to U.S. conditions, the state of affairs I call left-wing fascism is an international phenomenon. Massimiliano Fachini was arrested in connection with the Bologna bombing. He first drew attention as part of a Palestine Solidarity Committee which he helped organize with another fascist, Franco Freda, jailed for killing sixteen people in Milan in 1969. Claudio Mutti, known as the "nazi academic" because of his post at the University of Parma, founded the Italian-Libyan Friendship Society and helped publish speeches by the Ayatollah Khomeini in Italian. The supposedly leftist Baader-Meinhof gang, which earlier only lectured the Palestine Liberation Or-

ganization on the need for armed struggle, bought its first load of small arms from the neo-Nazi Bavarian underground. Christopher Hitchens, foreign editor of the *New Statesman*, noted in a recent article in that magazine: "There is a small and squalid area in which nihilists of left and right meet and intersect. There is a cross-fertilization, especially in Italy. Fascists often borrow demagogic leftist titles. One of the agreements facilitating this incest is a hatred of Israel; the other one is a hatred of democracy and a mutual conviction that a Fascist/Communist takeover will only hasten a Fascist/Communist victory."

### Chaotic Ancestry

Like all movements, left-wing fascism has a somewhat chaotic ancestry. Foremost is what might be called the later Frankfurt school—emphasizing in an uneasy mix the early Marx and the late Hegel and most frequently, if not necessarily properly, identified with the works of Adorno. The characteristics of the Frankfurt school are derived from Adorno's strong differentiation between mass culture and elite culture, and the massification of society in general. For the first time in the history of Marxism, Adorno addressed a strong attack on mass culture. This estimate of the obscurantist-elitist aspects of Adorno's *later* work does not refer to the democratic socialist analysis offered by Franz Neumann, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse, among others. Nor does it even refer to Adorno's efforts while in America on *The Authoritarian Personality* project. But to deny the antipopular and teutonic characteristics of Adorno's later works, worshipfully introduced in English by British and American scholars who should have known better, is to deny the obvious—and the dangerous.

Whether it be popular music or popular art, there is a clear notion that mass culture is tasteless, banal, and regressive. The assumption is that such culture evolves in some abstract sense through commercialization of social classes and the existence of a worthless society. This critique is pointless, since the emotional assault is on the masses for having such a culture. In many respects Adorno sets the stage for a culture of left-wing fascism. It represents an attack on the popular organs of society for being what they are and a corresponding elitist demand that they be otherwise; that is, purified.

The Adorno line of reasoning, its critical negativism, assumes that what people believe is wrong and that what they ought to believe, as designed by some narrow elite stratum of the cultural apparatus, is essentially right. With Adorno, the theory of vanguard politics is carried over into the theory of vanguard culture. The cultural apparatus is blamed for the elevation of mass culture into high culture. Attention given the so-called Frankfurt school in present radical circles derives not from its origins in antitotalitarian and anti-Nazi activities, but rather its outcomes: attacks and assaults on masses and their

culture. The original Frankfurt school has been corrupted in the hands of Adorno and has become central to the thinking of the avant-garde of left-wing fascism.

A second element of this belief characteristic of left-wing fascism is Marxism as praxis—or without Marx, and sometimes without Lenin. This results in what might be called praxis theory or action theory. It does away with the need either for an economic base to revolution, essential for Marx, or the political base of organization held essential by Lenin. What is left is a kind of revolutionary mysticism. The assumption is that all one really needs is an action group or some kind of organized group, usually clandestine, to create sufficient chaos or destruction of the state and society in selected periods of the capitalist economy. The combination of economic chaos and political protest will in itself somehow produce revolutionary action. Into the breach, a multinational terrorism will magically offset a multinational economy.

This is often called the "Cuban model of revolution," inspired by the works of Régis Debray. The transposition of a model from a small island like Cuba, with its special conditions of single-crop socialism, is quite difficult. What was originally a theory for social change in Cuba becomes enlarged to a universal theory of change; one is left with a "theory" of the vital force as the *élan vital*. The theory of the *Putsch*, the clandestine conspiratorial small group capable of seizing power at the proper moment, is common to fascism, but until recently was alien to Marxism. The theory of the *foco* first reduces Marxism by stripping away its sense of economic forces of oppression, then by stripping away its emphasis on the political sources of organization, and finally by stripping away its mass base. One is left with a theory of conspiracy in the name of Marxism rather than a theory of Marxism as a source of social change and revolutionary action.

A third vital pivot is nationalism, in which the demand for revolutionary change is lodged in patriotic claims of the total system, a demand of the moment, having nothing to do with history and antecedents. Such a nationalist approach insists on spontaneity and is not necessarily linked with so-called historical forces or recurring patterns. At this level left-wing fascism is fused to a theory of anarcho-syndicalism. The nationalist pivot involves not so much a doctrine of liberation as a doctrine of activity uninhibited by the need for social analysis. It is predicated on a notion of will and action at the "correct" moment to preserve the nation against its real or presumed enemies.

Other elements in the nationalist tradition fit into this left-wing fascist model: that every ordinary individual craves order over chaos; that one does not need a special theory of society to achieve revolutionary action; that individual economic origins are less important than social roles. In Pareto, Sorel, and Mosca, these elements are incorporated into a left-wing fascist interpretation of the world, in which psychological mass contagion re-

places social history as the interpretation of human events.

The sources of left-wing fascism are not abstract. Those who are enamored with appraisals of American society that seek immediate gratification and relief from ailments have become innovative in organizational form no less than ideological norms. Seeking ways to effect social change regardless of scientific or social base is the key to left-wing fascism. The effort to enlarge the cult into a state religion, the attempt to impose order and leadership on a society that seems purposively leaderless and fragmented, is characteristic of fascism—right or left, religious or secular.

In left-wing fascism we are dealing not so much with notions of traditional political involvement or traditional minor political parties, but with the notion of the act of both political means and ends. This involves inspiring others while servicing the needs of the actors, whether one is talking about special groups of nationalists or extreme self-styled radical groups seeking direct confrontation with other radical groups. The very act of confronting the enemy replaces any sense of organization or systems analysis. Action determines and defines one's place in the hierarchy of a political movement. In left-wing fascism the guerrilla movement replaces the clandestine *Bund* as the organizational vehicle. But its impact is not simply to be dismissed because of its barricade orientation. The latter provides the basis for the militarization of politics, its decivilianization, a central precondition to the fascist seizure of power.

#### Elitism and Populism

The main political source of left-wing fascism is its strange denial of America and the democratic system, together with the assertion of socialism as an abstraction. Left-wing fascists have the unique capacity to examine socialism without comment on the activities of the Soviet Union. They talk about the United States rather than about the loss of democracy. There is an inversion: the search for socialism becomes close to an abstract utopian ideal, but when it comes to a discussion of democracy, discourse is critically and severely linked to the United States as a nation-state. The rhetoric constantly shifts. So-called enemies are unambiguously identified as the United States and its allies. When dealing with its own allies, left-wing fascism turns socialism into a generalized hypothesis rather than concrete forms of socialism as they are expressed throughout the world. What Adorno appropriately called the "collectivization and institutionalization of the spell" becomes the new fascist norm.

Left-wing fascism is not a denial of socialism as an abstraction but a rejection of socialist practice and reality, and hence of critique as a source of democratic renewal. The history of fascism in the United States mirrors that of Europe. Socialism, far from being dropped,

becomes incorporated into the national dream, into a dramaturgy for redemption, for a higher civilization that will link nationhood and socialism in a new move forward. This combination of words, *national* and *social*, generates a new volatility. These two words together can arouse stronger and more active participation than either of the concepts taken separately.

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### Left-wing fascism ultimately represents the collapse of bourgeois and proletarian politics alike.

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The weakness of traditional right-wing organizations is that they asserted the primacy and value of Americanism as nationalism apart from "socialist" values. The weakness of traditional forms of leftism is that they have asserted socialism over and against American or national values. The potential strength of left-wing fascism, such as that practiced by the National Caucus of Labor Committees, is its unique combination, its ability to see how these concepts of Americanism and socialism can operate together as a mobilizing device in the development of a new fascist social order. The unique characteristic of left-wing fascism is its capacity, like its European antecedent, to combine very different ideological strains, traditional right-wing and traditional left-wing behavior, and come up with a political formula which, if it has not yet generated a mass base, has at least the potential for mass appeal.

The contents of left-wing fascism are heavily based on an elitist vision of the world. At every level of society it juxtaposes its minoritarianism over and against majoritarianism. It may take libertarian or authoritarian forms, but it always defends its leadership vision over any populist vision. Some examples are the "hip" versus the "square," the "gay" versus the "straight," the individualistic "free soul" versus the family-oriented "slave," those who believe in the cult of the antipolitical versus "fools" who participate in the political process, those who practice nonviolence over those who assert willfulness and violence as measures of human strength and courage, those who have strong affiliations with cults and cultism over and against the traditional nonbeliever (a marked departure from the antitheological vision of most forms of leftist and socialist behavior), those who argue the case for deviance over and against mainline participation in the working class or in segments of class society, those who choose underground organizations in preference to established voluntary organizations, and ultimately, those who choose some type of deracinated behavior over and against class behavior and participation.

Historically, communists, like fascists, have had an uncomfortable attraction to both elitism and populism. The theory of vanguards acting in the name of the true

interests of the masses presupposes a higher science of society (or in the case of fascism, a biology of society) than that susceptible to being reached by ordinary citizens. The superstructure of science, like culture generally, becomes a realm in which elites act in the name of publics. What happens to the notion of the people determining their own history in their own way? Here populism, or pseudopopulism, steps in to fuse formerly antagonistic trends. In some mysterious, inexplicable manner, these mass forces must be shaped or molded. What sharply distinguishes fascism from communism are the stratification elements in the national culture deemed unique or uniquely worth salvaging. But in the anti-ideological climate of the "new world," people (class) and folk (race) blend, becoming the raw materials for fashioning the new society.

Left-wing fascism does not so much overcome this dilemma of elitism and populism as it seeks to harness

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### Anti-Semitism is the point at which the fascist and communist hemispheres are joined.

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both under the rubric of a movement. Left-wing fascism, an ideology having its roots in the 1960s, views the loose movement, the *foco*, the force, as expanding upon the fascist élan and the communist vanguard. It permits a theory of politics without the encumbrance of parties. It allows, even encourages, a culture of elitism and crackpot technicism, as in the LaRouche emphasis on computer technology as a general ideology, while extolling the virtues of a presumed inarticulate mass suffering under inscrutable false consciousness. The mystification and debasement of language displaces the search for clarity of expression and analysis, enabling a miniscule elite to harness the everyday discontent of ordinary living into a grand mission. Left-wing fascism becomes a theory of fault, locating the question of personal failure everywhere and always in an imperial conspiracy of wealth, power, or status.

Anti-Semitism is not simply a "tactic" of fascism, nor is it opposed by communism. It becomes a modality of affixing blame, of finally locating the enemy. As a consequence, left-wing fascism operates in a climate of a post-Nazi Holocaust, a post-Stalinist Gulag, and a monopoly of petroleum wealth by forces historically antagonistic to Jewish ambitions. The new left-wing fascist segments, weak within the nation, can draw great strength from "world forces" deemed favorable to its cause. The unitary character of anti-Semitism draws fascist and communist elements together in a new social climate. Anti-Semitism is the essential motor of left-wing fascism. The grand illusion of seeing communism and fascism as polarized opposites, the one being evil with a few redeeming virtues, the other being good with a few

historical blemishes, is the sort of liberal collapse that reduces analysis to nostalgia—an abiding faith in the unique mission of a communist Left that has long lost its universal claims to a higher society. This catalogue of polarities, this litany of beliefs, adds up to a lifestyle of left-wing fascism. Isolating any of these reified frameworks may lead to the conclusion that the dangers are less than catastrophic. But in this panoply of beliefs and practices, one finds the social sources of left-wing fascist participation and belief.

There has been a noticeable shift from the 1960s to the present, although even in the formation of the New Left the roots of a left-wing fascist formulation were in evidence. Now in a more pronounced form, what has evolved is a strong shift from a class, party, or movement concept characteristic of the sixties to the rise of cultism. We have cults not only in the strictly religious sense but in the political sense as well—marginal movements gaining small numbers of adherents but having a profound impact on the edges of the society. Like the Nazi movement in the early 1920s, these left-wing fascist movements of the 1980s, such as the United States Labor Party and various socialist parties, are considered too small and inconsequential to have any impact on the body politic. But the danger to the society as a whole is that as the active element in the political process shrinks, this fringe becomes increasingly important. They do have sufficient numbers, once one takes into account that they do not rely on numbers for victory. They rely on organization, swift movement, willfulness, and the ability to seize the critical moment. In this sense, left-wing fascist movements are not unlike the Nazi movement of the early twenties—thought weak, marginal, and leaderless, but in fact very much part of a social scene marked by powerful economic dislocations and *Putschist* tendencies in segmented political processes.

Once left-wing fascism is seen as an authoritarian effort to destroy the legitimacy of the established system—a series of diminutions in voting participation, party affiliation, and faith in parliamentary systems and the achievement of social goals in an honorable and honest manner—then the potential of left-wing fascism becomes manifest. This also represents a decline in traditional socialist fall-back positions of mass action, mass participation, and ultimately mass revolution. That collapse of trust in the popular sectors corresponds to the collapse in party sectors. What might be called the bourgeois or political parliamentary pivot on one hand and the popular or revolutionary pivot on the other, are both viewed by left-wing fascism as a snare and a delusion—a mechanism for postponing the social revolution which is going to provide the cures to all ailments and remove all the temptations of ordinary people. Left-wing fascism ultimately represents the collapse of bourgeois and proletarian politics alike. It is not only the end of ideology in the traditional sense, or an end to participation in the political process, but an end of ideology even in the

socialist sense of adherence to revolutionary processes which ultimately promise organized change and social justice.

### End of Ideology

Left-wing fascism assaults both mass and class notions of legitimacy, both Jeffersonian and Leninist visions of the world, both the rational discourse and the popular participation models. Left-wing fascism is that unique rejection of both elements and the incorporation of nationalism from the bourgeois ideology and utopianism from the proletarian ideology. These rejections and absorptions define the four-part paradigm of left-wing fascism: for nationalism in general; for socialism in general; against parliamentarianism in particular; against organized political parties in particular. That combination gives the paradigmatic framework of left-wing fascism its substance.

Left-wing fascism is much more than a political psychology. It develops interesting patterns of thought in terms of specifics and connects them to the tradition of fascism and to a kind of extreme nationalism. There is a strong element of racism and anti-Semitism in this movement. There is a further belief, too, that the black movement must be subordinate to the class structure of American life and that blacks who see their own national destinies apart from this new movement are suspect. This leitmotif of disdain toward successful blacks remains muted. The anti-Semitic modality is overt and made manifest first by its fashionable currency in the Soviet Union and the Middle East. Historically, fascism has had a strong component of anti-Semitism: conviction of the need to liquidate the Jew as a political and economic entity and ultimately even as a biological entity. The easy glide from anti-Israeli to anti-Semitic visions has become part of the international left-wing rhetoric of our day. To move one large step further to left-wing fascism by utilizing anti-Semitism as a pivot becomes relatively simple; especially in the context of policy ambiguity concerning the legitimate claims of contending forces for national homelands.

Common wisdom has it that the most virulent forms of fascism in the twentieth century took anti-Semitic overtones. Less known but equally plain, is that in light of Soviet policies from the end of World War II in 1945 until the present, anti-Semitism has been a leitmotif of the Soviet system. There is no need here to argue whether anti-Semitism is at the center or periphery of Soviet orthodoxy. That such a controversy can even exist indicates the breadth and depth of anti-Semitism as a potent force in current affairs: it is the point at which the fascist and communist hemispheres are joined. Anti-Semitism is the cement providing a crossover from Right to Left in terms of both ideology and personnel.

Two examples will suffice: Eqbal Ahmad, a Third World advocate of impeccable credentials, and usually a quintessential democrat, criticizes Edward Said's book

on the Palestinians for its effort at creating a "balance sheet" of terror. We are given the usual defense of "revolutionary violence" as a new humanism.

For two decades before the hijackings, the Palestinians had engaged in representational politics; more than a dozen ignored UN resolutions on their behalf were all they had to show for it. Similarly, hijackings became a typically Palestinian form of revolutionary violence because they responded not only to their condition of exile but also because these were acts which the Israelis could not use as pretexts of collective punishments and mass deportations of the people in the occupied areas; given Zionism's demographic war against the Palestinians, this was, for the PLO, not a minor consideration.

The second illustration is the use of mass organization techniques, reminiscent of the popular front period, in which disparate organizations come together on a select range of issues. One such volatile issue in an American context is drug traffic. Probably for the first time, Jews rather than the customary Italians and Turks were blamed, with the consequent coming together of strange bedfellows. Again, we are led back to our prototypical organization, Lyndon LaRouche's National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC) and its electoral arm, the U.S. Labor Party. Despite the most manifest forms of racist appeal, LaRouche managed a united front with Wallace Muhammad, who in turn took the Black Muslims away from a black emphasis to an Islamic identification. Jack Eisner, in a recent article in *Jewish Socialist Critique*, wrote:

The effectiveness of the NCLC is seen most clearly in electoral activity and in the organization's success in building single-issue alliances with forces as diverse as the ultra-right wing and anti-semitic Liberty Lobby, the Black Muslims, and conservative-oriented Teamster union officials. . . . LaRouche and Black Muslim leader Wallace Muhammad formed an "Anti-Drug Coalition" which has spread to at least 8 cities. The coalition is based on LaRouche's theory that Jews are responsible for the drug traffic. The coalition's activities include mass rallies in ghetto churches; intensive and effective lobbying for stronger narcotics laws; and seminars in inner-city high schools. Wallace Muhammad has repeatedly refused to break off this alliance despite appeals from Jewish organizations and responsible Black leaders. The coalition has attracted an amazing range of clergy, businessmen, mayors, law enforcement officers, state legislators, Masonic leaders, and trade union officials.

This indicates the emergence of a left-wing fascism which has learned to use the techniques of right-wing fascism with impunity. It has also learned to appreciate

the mass character of appeals to anti-Semitism. Historically, the problem of the American Left has been its narrow socioeconomic base, intellectual self-isolation, and above all, isolation from the mainstream of workers. It perceives the working class as ready to be tapped, but only if the tactics are appropriate to the current internal situation—one in which Jews are perceived as isolated from working-class networks, gathered in the professional and middle strata of the population, and ideologically and organizationally distanced from their traditional Democratic party moorings. Under such "historical" circumstances, left-wing fascist elements have seen this as an ideal opportunity to seize a political initiative and link up with social segments of the population never before tapped.

The ambiguity of the present situation harbors the sort of populism that can easily accommodate to fascist and socialist ideals of a watered down variety. Populism is left-fascism in its most advanced, virulent form. It no longer stands for a set of rural values over and against urban corruption, or mass sentiments over and against elitist manipulation. While masquerading under populist slogans, it is highly urban and elitist. The effectiveness of such campaigns depends heavily on the state of American national interests: whether they can be sufficiently polarized to prevent concerted policy making or sufficiently galvanized as to reduce such left-wing fascist varieties of populism to manageable and nonlethal proportions.

Another serious element in left-wing fascism is its political mysticism, in which the cult of the group displaces individual conscience. Socialism becomes devoid of concrete practice or specific content. Socialism as negative utopianism becomes the order of the day. Real socialist practices are simply disregarded or at times privately rebuked. Like satanic lodges, new groups emerge which feel keenly that Stalinism has been an oft-misunderstood phenomenon that deserves to be supported once again. Just as there are cults of Hitler, there are now cults of Stalin—small bands of people convinced that history has assessed these leaders wrongly and that the source of strength of any future movement will involve a reevaluation of these earlier political figures.

What we have described remains a nascent movement—an ideology and organization in the making. We are not dealing with finished ideological products or large-scale political movements capable of threatening established structures. Nor are they necessarily a threat to classical left-wing politics. Left-wing fascism does, however, provide an answer to a question plaguing our century: In what form will fascism come to America? What will be its ideology? What will be its social message?

American fascism could provide a focus with a series of left-wing components: minoritarianism in the form of libertarianism; fundamentalism in the form of nationalism; a defense of socialist theory with denial of

socialist practice; an assertion of nationalism and Americanism as values, with a denial of mass participation and mass belief systems; elitism as vanguard populism; a mobilization ideology in place of a mobilized population. These tendencies remain nascent; these fusions still remain to be crystallized in political practice. As we move into a decade attempting to overcome severe economic dislocations and a breakdown of organic union manifested in a hesitant attitude toward patriotism; insofar as we exhibit a system with no publics and hence no Republic, in which small groups make cynical determinations for large-scale policies and structures—to this extent we can expect to find left-wing fascism a real component in the political practice of the remainder of the twentieth century.

These remarks could just as well be entitled right-wing communism as left-wing fascism. The twentieth century is polarized into diametrically opposed secular faiths. This dichotomy has taken hold because a century of war and genocide has given expression to competing messianic visions. After class annihilation comes classlessness, and racial annihilation is followed by a triumphal master race. Subordination of the person to the collective is the common denominator. New totalitarian combinations and permutations are dangerous because they move beyond earlier hostility into a shared antagonism toward democratic processes as such. Concepts of evidence and rules of experience give way to historicism and intuition. Comfort with a world of tentative and reversible choices gives way to demands for absolute certainty. In such a climate the emergence of left-wing fascism is presaged by a rebirth of ideological fanaticism. If the forms of totalitarianism have become simplified, so too has the character of the struggle to resist such trends. This awareness offers the greatest potential for democratic survival against totalitarian temptation. □

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writers and artists had not fled their country in the 1950s as their German counterparts had done in the 1930s. Accustomed before an American class to pointing out the horrors of the witch-hunts and blacklists, I found myself instead denying that McCarthy was a replica of Hitler, or that the HUAC investigations, however dishonorable to the informers and injurious to the victims, were quite the same as setting up concentration camps.

Somehow, the forecasts of fascism in America always sound exaggerated, even slightly hysterical, though no less ingenious for that. The designated movements never seem able to carry out their assigned role without at some point collapsing in ineptitude and farce. From Father Coughlin and the Liberty League acting as if they had stepped out of a William Gropper cartoon, to Senator McCarthy playing Oliver Hardy to Joseph Welsh's Stan Laurel on daytime television, the Great Dictators invariably turn out to be con-men and clowns—or consummate bunglers incapable of covering up their own break-ins and bag-jobs, as in the case of Richard Nixon and his Watergate cronies. Whatever else they were, Hitler and Mussolini had a program and a political identity. Our demagogues and grand inquisitors do not know what they want or often who they are. Neither do we. Amid the political and ideological confusion, the periodic rebirths of "new" Nixons and Rooseveltian Reagans, one is reminded of the newsreel that opens *Citizen Kane*. "Charles Foster Kane is a communist," bellows an outraged plutocrat. "Kane is a fascist," a radical haranguing a crowd replies. "I am what I have always been," Kane himself assures us—"an American."

All of these reservations occur to me as I think about Horowitz's article. Echoing his predecessors in the 1930s and 1950s, he reiterates the key question presumably "plaguing our century: In what form will fascism come to America?" He answers with a brilliant theoretical exploration of those elements that would surely make up a left-wing fascist movement in the United States. In theory, his analysis is hard to refute. No doubt such a movement would have the characteristics Horowitz describes. No doubt its emergence could be ascribed to (or blamed on) the failures of radicalism in the 1960s. No doubt it would be dangerous. No doubt it should be taken seriously; no one wants to minimize its potential or attempt to laugh it out of existence as German liberals and leftists did with Hitler in the 1920s.

But it is significant that Horowitz can cite only two specific examples of such a trend in his entire article: Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church and Lyndon La Rouche's National Caucus of Labor Committees. There are, of course, other groups (past and present) which also leap to mind: the Weatherpeople, the Symbionese Liberation Front, the Black Panthers, the Hare Krishnas, the myriad sects and splinters on the Marxist Left which sympathize with the P.L.O. and other terrorist organizations. For that matter, in the hunt for embryonic fascists one could easily forget the left-wing stormtroopers al-

together and concentrate on those squadrons of the Right who march to the drumbeat of the Moral Majority.

My point, however, is not that Horowitz should have mentioned more examples. Rather, I wonder whether these cults and movements actually do "provide somber evidence of a propensity toward fascism." Instead, I suspect that they are not nor will they ever be anything more than marginal, the bizarre detritus of a society addicted to fads and media hype as substitutes for a shared sense of cultural and communal affiliation. Moreover, I am not at all certain that the question of what form American fascism may take is really central to "our century," much less the 1980s. Indeed, I am tempted to suggest that while we are once again searching the political shrubbery for proto-fascist marauders, a far more potent enemy is at the gates (or in the House—at least the one in Washington).

### The Real Adversary

Simply put, fascism (whether of the Right or the Left) is not and never has been the major threat to American liberals and radicals. Our fundamental adversary, now again in power, is traditional mainstream conservatism. And if election returns in this land of the apolitical and geographically mobile mean anything at all, we have been getting badly beaten for some time. Once the Great Society vanished in the jungles of Vietnam, the American Left showed itself unable to deal with any of the major problems facing the country. While conservative politicians and neoconservative intellectuals promise an end to social and cultural division (not to mention tax cuts and balanced budgets, full employment and reduced inflation, the unleashing of private industry and an expanded war machine), liberals and leftists try to revive the New Deal coalition. The conservatives address some very legitimate concerns, many of them products of the 1960s: the conflicts between men and women as well as between parents and children, the diminishing value of work (both white collar and blue), the limitations of the welfare state in providing a satisfactory or fulfilling life for the poor, the liberal worship of managerial expertise and centralized bureaucracies that too often seemed a technique for protecting C. Wright Mills's power elite, the effort to extend educational and economic opportunities to minorities while preserving some notion of merit and excellence, the spectacle of once-proud cities now barely able to function, a foreign policy which does not know whether to speak in the language of human rights or *Realpolitik*. The Left, having no solutions, spends too much of its energy either yearning for or lamenting the 1960s. And wondering whether America is finally going fascist.

I do not mean to imply that those currently in power have better answers, or any answers. Conservatives have what they have always had—a commitment to corporate America and the Pentagon, combined with an indifference to social suffering and economic injustice. In any

# A Peripheral Disorder

Thomas Robbins

In his essay on "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell notes that the term *fascism* no longer has any clear meaning other than that which the speaker vehemently opposes. Contemporary discussions of the menace-of-fascism tend to reinforce this cynical view. Some observers have identified a fascist potential in the present surge of authoritarian neotraditionalism; e.g., the Moral Majority and the evangelical Right. With the aid of a little paranoia one can envision an Americanized "country fascism" featuring massive Nurembergian rallies in the Grand Ol' Opry! In contrast, Irving Louis Horowitz warns us against an upsurge of "left-wing fascism" oriented toward elitist "libertarian" and "minoritarian" ideologies which may exalt the visions and rights of gays, mystical cultists, and assorted bohemians and deviants at the expense of the traditionalist and pro-family values celebrated in the Grand Ol' Opry.

Horowitz's position is somewhat perplexing to this writer, since it seems very clear that any authoritarian ideology which might prevail in the United States is likely to be fiercely "majoritarian" and neotraditionalist and will mobilize the working class against gays, cults, radical feminists, and other convenient scapegoats. Lynndon LaRouche, with whom Horowitz and other anti-fascist sentries are increasingly preoccupied, is a case in point: he is anti-gay, anti-cult, and generally anti-bohemian; his followers have been observed by the present writer promulgating the slogan, "More Nukes and Less Kooks!" Historically, fascism has tended to pose as the champion of traditional social values against perceived anomic urban forces. Hitler, it will be recalled, exalted the patriarchal Germany family and sent gays and deviant religious sectarians (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses) to Auschwitz. If, as Horowitz foresees, resurgent anti-Semitism will play a key role in the crystallization of a new fascist pattern, persistent allegations that Jews are overrepresented among devotees of today's religious cults may be highlighted.

A fascism which prevails in the United States, or which becomes a broad popular current with a substantial social base, is likely to champion ideological neotraditionalism. But it is quite possible that small sectarian groups will arise in the context of legitimation crisis which will embody left-wing fascism as delineated by Horowitz. (This writer has heard of a gay Nazi group in San Francisco.) Indeed, Horowitz's descriptions seem to apply most clearly to anarcho-terrorist groups such as the Red Brigades, which have liberated themselves from co-

herent class politics and systematic social theory and seem to exist for the ecstasy of confrontation. Such groups are stronger in Europe than in the United States, but even in Europe their impact does not derive from either their electoral or their *putschist* prospects but from their ability to poison the political milieu and intensify the general sense of disintegration and chaos.

## "Obsolete" Civil Liberties

In the United States it would appear that the various elements of left-wing fascism exist somewhat independently of each other and cannot fully actualize any sinister potential until they are synthesized. The impact of each element by itself may be different from its impact in conjunction or interaction with other elements. "Libertarianism," in this writer's view, is by and large a healthy phenomenon which contributes to upholding the civil libertarian barriers to renascent right-wing authoritarianism. Other components of Horowitz's type appear more intrinsically sinister and contribute to a growing climate of illiberalism which cuts across right/left polarities.

One such element is "critical negativism," which Horowitz identifies with the later Adorno but which this writer associates with Marcuse, and which "assumes that what people believe is wrong and that what they ought to believe, as designated by some narrow elite stratum of the cultural apparatus, is essentially right . . . . The cultural apparatus is blamed for the elevation of mass culture into high culture." Diatribes against commercialization and the capitalist degradation of culture conceal an "emotional assault . . . on the masses for having such a culture." The wishes and "rights" of individuals imprisoned in a degraded culture need not be respected because the dehumanized products of cultural conditioning allegedly lack the critical capacity and elevated consciousness which is a prerequisite for being granted the privilege of choice.

A contemporary example of this orientation is afforded by an extreme formulation of the radical feminist attack on pornography. In an essay on "The First Amendment as Myth," Judith Bat-Ada (Reisman) argues forcefully that First Amendment protections of freedom of speech and the press presently embody merely an empty and meaningless formalism in the context of underlying corporate control of the media. "The manipulation of communication and persuasion in modern society; the control of ideas and expression . . . in the