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INTRODUCTION: **DEFINING THE FAR RIGHT**
Peter Davies

Today, no political current is in ruder health than the far right. Across the continent of Europe, from Britain to the Baltics and Munich to the Mediterranean, those movements and ideas we choose to classify as of far-right orientation are in pretty good shape. This may not be a particularly healthy thing but, if we can put aside our partisan feelings for a moment and look at the situation from the perspective of a political scientist or modern historian, it turns out that the rise and continued development of far-right politics is both beguiling and worthy of serious study.

The world around us is constantly fascinating and it is the duty of academics to try and make sense of it. Let us be frank: there is something unpleasant and worrying about the rise of the far right but in many countries it is now an integral part of political life, sometimes in government, or sharing power, or racking up impressive electoral performances. And given its topicality there is an onus on us – yes, an onus - to try to understand it, rationalise it and put it into context as dispassionately as possible.

So, the *Encyclopedia of the Far Right in Europe* is necessary. The aim of the volume is to explore the phenomenon and work towards classifying the people, movements, issues and ideas, events, places and publications that constitute the far right in Europe. We are never going to be able to execute this task to perfection because, as a contemporary phenomenon, the far-right is constantly changing, and updating and reinventing itself. It is difficult to pin down and make judgements about something that is so current and modern. Depending on your taste in metaphors, it is like shooting at a moving target, or playing a game of football and realising that the goalposts, at both ends of the pitch, are constantly moving.

There are also challenges implicit in compiling a reference work of this nature. What balance do you strike between incarnations of the far right in different parts of the continent, in different eras, which have achieved different levels of success? To illustrate this point, we have had to balance the claims of parties that have no history and no real achievements to their name (like, for example, the confusingly-named Ukrainian Conservative Party, born 2005) with parties that have super-rich histories (like the MSI in Italy or Freedom Party in Austria). There is no easy way to deal with this kind of dilemma. All we can say is that we have done our best and used our academic judgement, as well as our human instincts, to try and produce a book that is as balanced, sensible and useful as possible.

We have also encountered the problem of definition.

Defining the far right

One anecdote serves to emphasise the difficulties inherent in defining 'the far right'. As I, as editor, recruited fellow academics to write articles for this encyclopedia, nearly every one came back to me with the following line: 'I'd be delighted to help, and prepare the article you suggest, but can I ask you just one preliminary question: how exactly are you *defining* the far right in this context?' On each occasion it was a tricky question to answer, but I invariably responded with something like this: 'Well, I'm writing an introductory section on "what is the far right?", so I'll send you a copy of that when it's

ready.' Now I come to writing this section, I realise once again what a difficult question I have left myself with to address.

There are no easy answers to the question, 'what is the far right?'. The far right is an often confusing and bewildering part of the political spectrum, inhabited by a range of strange and controversial political formations. One of the few things we could probably agree upon from the outset is that 'far right' usually implies post-war, in the sense that far-right political movements of the pre-1945 era are usually labeled simply as 'fascist'. But still, 'far right' could imply late-1940s or early twenty-first century, so we are still dealing with a phenomenon that straddles seven decades.

There are also terminological difficulties: 'far right', 'extreme right', 'hard right', 'neo-fascist', 'post-fascist'? Are these terms all interchangeable or do they each connote something specific and different? This question will form an interesting undercurrent to the ensuing discussion.

Over the years, commentators have exerted much time and energy debating the character and ideological make-up of this thing we have come to refer to as the 'far right'. As a starting-point, let us consider the definition of the international far right offered by the controversial website, Wikipedia:

> In the modern world, the term far right is applied to those who support authoritarianism, usually involving a dominant class…and/or an established church…Their favored authoritarian state can be an absolute monarchy, but more often today it is some form of oligarchy or military dictatorship…The term 'far right' also embraces extreme nationalism, and will often evoke the ideal of a 'pure' ideal of the nation, often defined on racial or 'blood' grounds. They may advocate the expansion or restructuring of existing state borders to achieve this ideal nation, often to the point of embracing expansionary war, racialism, jingoism and imperialism…More generally, the term 'far-right' has been applied to any stream of political thought that rejects democracy in favour of some form of elite rule (including monarchy, plutocracy, and theocracy).[i]

Unintentionally perhaps, this 'definition' highlights the central problem. It is designed to offer students and the general reader an accessible introduction to the topic; yet, if we are being harsh, it offers only an odd mixture of the obvious and some other confused points about authoritarianism, religion and monarchy.

For Paul Wilkinson, the emergence of this modern far right is a cause for both regret and alarm. The first words in the preface to his book are as follows: 'My aim in writing *The New Fascists* was to alert the general public, and particularly the young generation, to the resurgence of neo-fascist and related movements of the ultra-right, and the implications for the liberal democracies.'[ii] In a slightly more detached manner, Hans-Georg Betz portrays the far right is an amalgam of radicalism and xenophobic populism.[iii] Paul Hainsworth defines it in a similar way. He talks about the 'emergence or resurgence of extreme right-wing or neo-populist politics and parties that, to some extent, have revived fears of a return to the dark past, but which, in other ways, are very much the products of more contemporary developments.'[iv]

This last point is significant, for the post-war far right is, by its very nature, something distinct from the inter-war fascist right. Of course there are echoes of Mussolini's

Fascism and Hitler's Nazism on the contemporary far right, but on the whole this post-war phenomenon is the product of new circumstances and influences. This is something Roger Griffin agrees on. He defines neo-fascism as 'offering something new with respect to inter-war phenomena' rather than 'attempting to resuscitate an earlier movement'.[v] Robert Paxton takes the argument a step further. He explains that far-right leaders, 'have become adept at presenting a moderate face to the general public while privately welcoming outright fascist sympathisers with coded words about accepting one's history, restoring national pride, or recognising the valor of combatants on all sides.'[vi] And in this context, Roger Eatwell cites the example of the MSI in Italy. He claims that the aim of Gianfranco Fini, the leader of the movement, was to turn the MSI 'into a "post-fascist", moderate right-wing party, modeled loosely on the lines of French Gaullism.'[vii]

Given the topicality and controversiality of the far right, news organisations have also had to grapple with the same issue. In 2000 *The Guardian* in its special online report – 'Europe's far right' – identified the following individuals and movements as representative of the phenomenon:

Austria
Freedom Party (FPÖ)
Key figures: Jörg Haider…Susanne Riess-Passer…

Belgium
Flemish Block (VB)
Key figure: Frank Vanhecke (VB's president)

Denmark
Danish People's Party (DPP)
Key figure: Pia Kjaersgaard (leader, DPP)

France
National Front (FN)
Key figure: Jean-Marie Le Pen (leader and founder, FN)

Germany
Republican Party (REP), German People's Union (DVU), National Democratic Party (NPD)
Key figures: No dominant leaders.

Greece
Hellenic Front
Key figure: Makis Voridis (leader, Hellenic Front)

Italy
Northern League, National Alliance
Key figures: Umberto Bossi (leader, Northern League), Gianfranco Fini (leader, National Alliance)

The Netherlands
Pim Fortuyn's List (LPF), Liveable Netherlands
Key figure: Mat Herben (leader, LPF)

Norway
Progress party
Key figure: Carl Hagen (leader, Progress party)

Portugal
Popular party
Key figure: Paulo Portas (leader, Popular party)

Switzerland
Swiss People's party (SVP)
Key figure: Christoph Blocher (Leader, SVP)

United Kingdom
British National party (BNP)
Key figure: Nick Griffin (leader, BNP)[viii]

In the same year, the BBC produced another online survey called 'Rise of the Right':

Norway
Political parties: Progress Party
Popular support: 15 percent
Key figures: Hagen

Sweden
Political parties: none
Popular support: none
Key figures: none

Denmark
Political parties: Danish People's Party

Popular support: 18 percent
Key figures: Kjaesgaard

Netherlands
Political parties: Livable Netherlands, Pim Fortuyn List
Popular support: 16 percent
Key figures: Fortuyn (assassinated 6 May 2002)

Belgium
Political parties: Vlaams Blok
Popular support: 9.9 percent
Key figures: Dewinter

Spain
Popular support: n/a

France
Political parties: NF, MNR
Popular support: 17 percent
Key figures: Le Pen

Italy
Political parties: Northern League, National Alliance
Popular support: 5percent
Key figures: Bossi, Fini, Alessandra Mussolini

Switzerland
Political parties: Swiss People's Party
Popular support: 22.5 percent
Key figures: Blocher

Germany
Political parties: German People's Union, National Democrats, The Republicans
Popular support: 3 percent

Austria
Political parties: Freedom Party
Popular support: 20 percent

Key figures: Haider, Riess-Passer

UK
Political parties: BNP
Popular support: 1-2 percent[ix]

The first thing to say is that there is generally quite a lot of agreement about what constitutes the 'European far right'. That said, the *Guardian* included two countries that the BBC ignored (Portugal and Greece) and the same was true vice-versa (Spain, Sweden). It is also interesting that both surveys neglected to mention the far-right movements of Eastern Europe. This would seem to be an error because the majority of ex-communist states in Eastern Europe have witnessed the growth of far-right political activity since 1989. The movements that have emerged have been very different from their equivalents in Western Europe. Invariably, they have been shaped by the pre-1989 communist experience, and have turned out to be loud, aggressive and ultra-nationalist in political persuasion. As Luciano Cheles, Ronnie Ferguson and Michalina Vaughan have written: 'The far right is no longer an exclusively Western European phenomenon; its presence in Central and Eastern Europe is by now a fact.'[x]

Furthermore, the issue of influence is a curious one. Does one measure the impact of a far-right movement by its electoral success? Or by its presence 'on the ground'? Or via some other criteria? Here, Sweden is an interesting case. The BBC survey says 'none, none, none' for 'political parties, popular support, key figures', but it goes on to state:

Sweden has no organised far-right parties, but in recent years the country has seen a wave of neo-Nazi violence - including murders and bombings which have targeted immigrants. Many Swedes have found it difficult to come to terms with the existence of racist violence in a country which prides itself on its egalitarian social democracy. Some suspects have been arrested and charged, but there remains an organised underground of white supremacist youth who conduct such attacks, as well as posting violent neo-Nazi material on the internet, and communicating with similar organisations in the US and Britain. Immigrants account for about one million of Sweden's population of nearly 10 million, but the number is growing.[xi]

Here we learn that far-right activity isn't always 'official' or 'engaged with the political process'. It *can* be visible, but more often than not it is 'clandestine' or 'underground', as the report on Sweden notes.

All this goes to show that neither political scientists nor commentators or journalists can agree on the defining characteristics of the far right – which doesn't bode particularly well for our search for definitions and meanings.

Problems of terminology and definition

We must also take account of how those on the far right – those who are happy to be situated there – perceive themselves in terms of their own ideological make-up. Here a

suitable starting point is Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the Front National in France. He is probably the most famous - and notorious – of modern far-right leaders, and also, in his writings, a politician who is totally frank and unambiguous about being 'of the right'. His core values are nation, family, religion, and hierarchy. According to Le Pen, these values are permanent and unchanging, and are 'concrete' rather than 'abstract'. As such, the FN is convinced that its doctrine is fully in tune with a sense of 'nature' and 'tradition'. The FN is always proud to proclaim itself as a movement of the right, but at the same time it sees itself as 'transcending the artificial division between left and right.'[xii] It has no truck with egalitarian ideas and has put forward various justifications for natural selection and inequality.[xiii] Furthermore, Le Pen has ridiculed the 'rights of man' and has consistently viewed his values as the antithesis of left-wing principles. In particular, he contrasts his brand of nationalism with the 'cosmopolitanism' and 'internationalism' of the Socialist and Communist parties in France. If one attitude has underpinned almost every utterance of the FN leader since 1972, it is hostility to the left; he argues that, particularly in the French context, it is obsessed with 'individualism' and the 'rights of man' and that as a result social institutions like the family and the nation are being undermined.

Maybe at this point we can come to an interim conclusion – that, when it comes down to basics, 'far right' equates to having some relationship with inter-war fascism (in terms of leadership, ideology or membership, for example) and/or being of the right to an outlandish or dangerous degree. In France, for example, Le Pen has trivialised the Holocaust by portraying it as a 'detail' in the history of the Second World War. Perhaps it is no coincidence, therefore, that his party, and others, find themselves sitting on the far right – literally – of parliamentary chambers the length and breadth of Europe. Or that in some countries there have been calls for far-right political movements to be outlawed.

In some cases such calls have been successful and parties have been banned. In Belgium in 2004 the Vlaams Blok was the subject of a high-court ruling. It was considered to be a 'racist' political movement and was forced to disband. However, it reinvented itself soon after as the Vlaams Belang. Episodes like this have led to much debate about 'strategy' in the face of the far right. State authorities have invariably argued that the best policy is to deny far-right movements the 'oxygen of publicity' and to legislate them 'out of existence' (as was the case in Belgium). However, it occurs to both friends and foes of the far right that this may not be the most astute and intelligent of tactics. The debate was played out in almost text-book fashion in Belgium. One right-wing sympathiser posted this message to an online discussion forum: 'I am a great admirer of the Vlaams Blok. While the politically correct thought police in Belgium have attempted to outlaw the largest party in the country - their censorship will only serve to increase its popularity. The Blok is a group of bright, disciplined, white nationalists who show a real tenacity to protect our wonderful shared European culture from the asinine leftists who would turn Europe into a multicultural cesspool. The leftists have met their match. We will triumph.'[xiv] From a different perspective, Abou Jahjah – a political campaigner in Belgium – has argued: 'The banning of Vlaams Blok only allowed them to start up a new party with more clubbable members...their persecution has not held them back. Pragmatically, it has helped them.'[xv]

Throughout, there are complicating factors that cloud the issue and make the challenge of defining the 'far right' even more daunting. First, it is clear that the term 'far right', just like its sister term 'fascist', has, over the years, become nothing more than a

term of abuse, pinned on anyone or anything that is offensive, particularly to those on the left. Let us examine some archetypal left-wing perspectives. In *The Socialist* in 2006, the former editor of *Marxism Today*, Martin Jacques, commented: 'Not since the 1930s has the threat of racism and fascism been so great in the West'.[xvi] Likewise, in the same year Christian Bunke of the Socialist Party turned the spotlight on the leader of the BNP:

> Cambridge graduate and rural landlord Nick Griffin…said that British workers had always fought against 'the gaffers'. Today, he claimed, this struggle is against the Muslims. In classic far-right fashion, Griffin takes the vocabulary of class struggle and turns it into its opposite…Nick Griffin told *Newsnight* that Muslim protests on the Danish newspaper cartoons 'will swell the ranks of the BNP'. The BNP is a parasitic organisation that would support a conflict between Muslim and non-Muslim workers. Such conflict would not be in the working class's interests; the BNP is a right-wing anti-worker organisation. In office on local councils, BNP councillors have failed abysmally to oppose cuts, for example in Burnley. Workers cannot rely on these people to fight for their interests. But it would also be foolish to rely on courts to get rid of the BNP.[xvii]

Left-wing commentators are also liable to exaggerate the internal divisions and disputes evident within far-right parties.[xviii]

However, commentators with a more balanced approach – some even on the left – are keen to dispel the idea of a 'resurgent fascism'. Lynn Walsh, writing in *Socialism Today* is representative of this trend:

> The growth of the far right certainly poses a threat to the working class. Racism, unless effectively countered, opens up dangerous divisions within the working class. If Le Pen were to come to power in France…he would launch brutal attacks on the working class, just as Berlusconi is doing in Italy. But a Le Pen government, though a serious setback, would not be a totalitarian fascist regime. It would be a right-wing capitalist government - and would provoke massive resistance from the working class and other strata. Despite the neo-fascist antecedents of many of the leaders of the far-right parties, these formations are not fascist-type parties with their own para-military forces…Leaders like Le Pen and Haider have past links with neo-Nazi organizations…But they have grown on an electoral level, presenting a respectable face, distancing themselves from the tiny neo-fascist groups on the fringes of far-right politics.[xix]

Similarly, Brendan O'Neill, writing on www.spiked-online.com, asked: 'Is Europe really heading for a new Dark Age, with its Nazi past coming back to haunt it? Are fascistic far-right parties really 'on the march again' everywhere from Greece to France, from Italy to Holland? In a word, no. The current obsession with the rise of the far right tells us far more about the European elites' crisis of confidence and legitimacy than it does about any Nazi reality.'[xx] Perhaps these opinions should be viewed as a necessary corrective to the slightly predictable comments emanating from 'old-style' leftists, who seem to detect the 'fascist' threat almost everywhere.

Second, and without too many exceptions, it seems to be the case that some individuals and

movements on the far right do not particularly like being characterised as 'being of the far right'. If one is not comfortable with, or proud of, the description, it could be viewed as the ultimate insult or the 'kiss of death', or even a libelous statement. This point particularly relates to movements with serious political aspirations who, for all kinds of reasons (the desire for credibility or access to state funding perhaps), would like to be considered 'mainstream'. The obvious contradiction here is that many movements generally considered to be 'far right' are actually proud of this fact, and make great play of the fact that they do not wish to be 'tainted' by being bracketed with the 'other', 'traditional' parties who are invariably portrayed as 'corrupt' and 'old fashioned'. During the 1980s Le Pen in France crusaded against *'la Bande des Quatres'* – the disparaging nickname he assigned to the 'ruling coalition' of PS, PCF, RPR and UDF. Even though these four parties were totally independent and fundamentally distinct, he came to realise that pigeon-holing them together was a useful tactical device.

Third, what is in and what is out? Do we debate and discuss the public or private utterances of movements we suspect of falling into the 'far right' category? And is it significant that, in some cases, there is a divergence between the two? Likewise, are we interested in the discourse of movements or individuals? Or both? Do we content ourselves with analysing the 'party line' as articulated by far-right political parties, or can we also build in analysis of individual activists and thinkers, who could be slightly out of line with the corporate philosophy of their movement? Similarly, is there a sense in which 'far-right attitudes' can permeate a *society* rather than being, merely, the basis of one party's political platform? This spectre has certainly been raised in Germany, where some analysts fear that 'extreme' attitudes are now becoming mainstream. In 2006 *De Spiegel* announced that:

> Far-right views are not just the domain of skinheads and neo-Nazis but are firmly anchored throughout German society, regardless of social class or age, according to a study of attitudes towards foreigners, Jewish people and the Nazi period. A new survey has found that right-extremist attitudes are firmly anchored in German society. A study based on a survey of 5,000 people found that 9 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that a dictatorship can in certain circumstances be a preferable form of government, and 15.1 percent agreed with this: 'We should have one leader to rule Germany with a strong hand for the good of everyone.' 'The term "right-wing extremism" is misleading because it describes the problem as a peripheral phenomenon. But right-wing extremism is a political problem at the centre of society,' says the report commissioned by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation...[xxi]

Surf the web and you will invariably find other studies in other European countries saying similar things.

Fourth, it is clear that, in the context of Europe, the far right is neither uniform nor homogenous, but configured slightly differently in each individual country. This should come as no surprise to us. Each European country has its own unique history and political culture. It is not just the strength and popularity of the far right that differs from country to country, but also – perhaps more significantly – the nature of its political discourse. Different issues matter in different places. For example, in countries where immigration is a topical subject, it is maybe

easier to detect a 'far right' party than in countries where it isn't a prominent issue. Different countries and continents have differing political cultures, and what is 'far right' in one context may not be, or may be different from, what is 'far right' in another context. Likewise, the backdrop can vary: in Germany and Austria memories of the Nazi period is ever-present; in Scandinavia the welfare state is a major bone of contention; while in Eastern Europe the legacy of the communist period is all-enveloping.

Fifth, and in a related sense, it is apparent that the European far right – if it is possible to speak of such a demarcated phenomenon – has changed and evolved over time. By way of illustration, let us consider, for example, three specific eras: the 1880s/1890s, the 1920s/1930s and the 1990s/2000s. In France in the 1880s and 1890s we see the birth of a new type of right-wing politics, variously described as 'new', 'radical' or 'revolutionary'. This was exemplified by the 'right' forged by Maurice Barrès, General Boulanger and the League of Patriots – novel on account of its belief in some kind of republicanism or executive government rather than royalism and aristocracy. This 'right' was 'right' in the sense that it was nationalist, xenophobic and sometimes racist, and thus emphasised the *inequality* of peoples, nations and races. It was also authoritarian and viewed the masses as vulnerable to manipulation and propaganda. Importantly, though, it was a 'right' that had no qualms about campaigning on terrain that was traditionally 'working class' and on integrating archetypal left-wing concerns into its manifesto programme (for example, training, education and workers' welfare). Its signature policy was the repatriation of immigrant workers – thereby blending typical right- and left-wing political instincts (in a nutshell: latent xenophobia and concern for native French workers). Not surprisingly, therefore, Barrès labelled his movement in Nancy as 'national-socialist' in political orientation – a key marker for the future.

As in so many other spheres, the Great War also had a significant, catalysing effect on politics and political ideas. By the 1920s and 1930s this 'right' had evolved into a 'right' that was incontestably revolutionary. The variants of fascism that existed in Italy, Germany and France, and also across swathes of Western and Eastern Europe, were viewed by opposition groups as both dangerous and threatening. It was posited that the very essence of western civilization was in jeopardy. There was still an association and alignment with left-wing or socialist values (Mussolini, for example, was an ex-syndicalist and the former editor of *Avanti*, a socialist newspaper), but the revolutionary right of the inter-war period was interested in more than just winning votes and putting in place new forms of executive government. In Germany, Hitler institutionalised his extreme ideology in the Holocaust and *Lebensraum*, and sought a legacy in the creation of a master race. By the final years of the twentieth century, the extreme right had, to an extent, redefined itself. In fact, it had been forced to re-invent itself. In the post-1945 period, it was untenable to try to maintain any kind of connection with the Hitler era. So, movements like the MSI in Italy and FN in France – and many others across the continent – have attempted to re-configure the political space in which they seek to operate. Of course, they have found it difficult to smother their hardline, occasionally neo-Nazi, attitudes, but in some cases they have made a decent fist of this.

Here it is also pertinent to consider the way in which far-right movements have interested themselves in 'green' issues. Until relatively recently, ecology and environmentalism were regarded as 'left-wing' issues. Green MPs and councillors habitually aligned themselves with socialist and communist parties in parliaments and other legislatures *ergo* ecology was viewed as an exclusively 'left-wing' concern. However, over the last two decades, far-right

activitists have tried to claim the issue for themselves. They have utilised the language of 'conservation' and 'protection', and linked the idea of the 'natural world' to the idea of the 'nation'. The FN in France unveiled this new way of thinking in 1990. Other movements have followed suit. The Danish People's Party puts it like this:

> We must take care of the natural world. We will work to ensure that we and future generations are able to live in a clean and healthy environment. Denmark must develop in unison with the natural world, exercising caution when it comes to long-term consequences of the way we live. Moreover, we will work both at national and international levels to ensure that the way in which the earth's resources are used bears the stamp of consideration, care and a sense of responsibility, which includes showing care for the natural world and all its living creatures, for which we, as stewards of the earth's riches, are responsible.[xxii]

It is clear that, in the context of far-right discourse, a link has been made between the environment as an issue and various 'myths' of idealised homelands. In the Nazi era, for example, Walther Darré established himself as one of Hitler's leading 'blood and soil' ideologists. He served as Reich Minister of Food and Agriculture between 1933 and 1942.

Finally, we need to be aware that far-right political movements do not necessarily exist in neat, compartmentalised units. In fact, it is usually taken as read that traditional conservative parties across Europe – like the Tories in Great Britain and the RPR in France – contain their own far-right 'fringes' eg. radical and often eccentric political activists whose ideas and beliefs are slightly out of synch with their leaders'. The most famous example of this phenomenon is Enoch Powell. Powell was a Conservative MP and shadow cabinet minister when, on 20 April 1968, in Birmingham, he produced his 'Rivers of Blood' speech:

> It almost passes belief that at this moment 20 or 30 additional immigrant children are arriving from overseas in Wolverhampton alone every week - and that means 15 or 20 additional families a decade or two hence. Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre. So insane are we that we actually permit unmarried persons to immigrate for the purpose of founding a family with spouses and fiancés whom they have never seen…As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood.'[xxiii]

In France, in more recent times, Charles Pasqua has become notorious for his hardline attitudes and policies towards immigrants. In the 1990s Pasqua was a minister in the RPR government. The RPR was an avowedly conservative movement, but it is argued that Pasqua's policies had more in common with the far right and actually played into their hands. According to Christian E. O'Connell, 'The Pasqua laws were enacted in 1993 at the instigation of then-Interior Minister Charles Pasqua, whose vigorous endorsement of "zero immigration" set the tone

for recent French policy in refugee and asylum matters…the legislation encompassed a broad panoply of severe measures…a toughening of visa requirements, a reduction in the number of visas issued, an expansion of police enforcement powers, an extension of the permitted detention period, and a narrowing of the administrative review scheme.'[xxiv]

We could also quote the example of Nicholas Sarkozy who, as Interior Minister in 2005, caused controversy by describing those responsible for the Paris riots as 'troublemakers' and 'a bunch of hoodlums' – a form of words that was taken by many to have distinctly racial overtones.[xxv] There is no doubt that the far right has helped to make immigration a major political issue. Even Labour prime minister Gordon Brown was accused by Conservative leader David Cameron of aping the language of the far right during the Queen's Speech debate of November 2007.[xxvi]

Main characteristics

So, having aired our misgivings about the term, and debated its merits and drawbacks, the question now is a simple one. Assuming the term does have some value, what characteristics are most commonly exhibited by, and associated with, the far right of the political spectrum? It is possible – and perhaps actually quite desirable - to work towards some kind of consensus based on the judgement of academics and the statements of key political players.

Some preliminary points need making straight away. While it must be acknowledged that the European far right has had a significant impact and influence over the last few decades, and that it has proved both newsworthy and controversial, it would also be true to say that it is still only a minority force in political and electoral terms, and also prone to splinter and implode organisationally. Nowhere has it been a majority force in any sense of the term. But, the far right probably makes up for its lack of 'formal' success by constantly provoking controversy and media interest. The phrase 'all publicity is good publicity' could have been invented with the parties and politicians of the far right in mind. One story goes that Le Pen in France aims to involve himself in a scandal 'every September' – the start of the French political and parliamentary year - so that he can maintain his profile in the media. Not surprisingly, therefore, the FN leader has been embroiled in his fair share of 'colourful' controversies – from fisticuffs with members of the general public to allegations of torture during the Algerian War. Furthermore, in an effort to discredit him, his ex-wife posed naked for a pornographic magazine. Across Europe, far-right leaders have displayed a similar ability to make news for the 'wrong' reasons, though without obvious comeback: for example, Jörg Haider and his 'pro-Nazi' views, Zhirinovsky and his demand for a 'new Russian empire', and Richard Barnbrook (leader of the BNP in London), who was subject to allegations that he produced and directed a gay porn film.[xxvii]

It could also be argued that as a political entity the far right is associated with what could be termed 'male' values and perhaps even 'machismo'. Far-right movements do not particularly sell themselves as such, but there is no doubting the fact that, on the whole, the 'image' of the far right is a 'masculine' one. There are also appeals to aggression and violence – exemplified best perhaps by the 'skinhead' culture that has attached itself to the far right. Moreover, most far-right leaders are male. Across Europe,

the only real exceptions have been Susanne Riess-Passer of the Austrian Freedom Party and Pia Kjaersgaard, leader of the Danish People's Party. (We should also note that Marine Le Pen – daughter of Jean-Marie – is being groomed for the leadership of the Front National in France when her father stands down,[xxviii] and that two other famous 'daughters' have hit the headlines: Alessandra Mussolini and Jennifer Griffin[xxix]). Note also that the electorate of the far right is overwhelming male and membership figures reveal a male bias.[xxx]

In the popular imagination, the far right is probably best known for its nationalism and racism. The names employed by contemporary far-right movements are the best indicators of doctrine and ideology: for example, Front National, National Alliance, National Democratic Party, and Danish People's Party, Swiss People's Party, Hellenic Front. Beyond the titles, each of these movements is clear that its primary reference point is the nation. The BNP takes a historical perspective on this issue:

> The British National Party exists to secure a future for the indigenous peoples of these islands in the North Atlantic which have been our homeland for millennia. We use the term indigenous to describe the people whose ancestors were the earliest settlers here after the last great Ice Age and which have been complemented by the historic migrations from mainland Europe. The migrations of the Celts, Anglo-Saxons, Danes, Norse and closely related kindred peoples have been, over the past few thousands years, instrumental in defining the character of our family of nations.[xxxi]

Many far-right movements are prone to simplify their message. The FN have used 'The French First' as one of their banner slogans. Likewise, the Sweden Democrats are linked to the 'Keep Sweden Swedish' movement.[xxxii] The corollary of this nation-centredness is a general hostility to foreigners, immigrants and any manifestation at all of 'the other'. The Hellenic Front has talked about 'Islamic infiltration in Greece and Europe' and argues:

> The problem of illegal immigration in Greece is not a question of principles or ideology, but a policy issue, if we assume that there exists a structured national state. If there is a state, then there are borders too. It is known that three are the elements which define the existence of a state: the existence of definite territory, the existence of people living on this territory and the existence of power exercised within the boundaries of the territory and for the benefit of the people. And if there exists a state, then the legal distinction between a native and an alien is absolutely legitimate and founded on our Constitution…Say YES to the immediate DEPORTATION of ALL ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS…Say NO to illegal immigration.[xxxiii]

Likewise, the Danish People's Party has stated:

> The country is founded on the Danish cultural heritage and therefore, Danish culture must be preserved and strengthened. This culture consists of the sum of the Danish people's history, experience, beliefs, language and customs. Preservation and further development of this culture is crucial to the country's survival as a free and enlightened society. Therefore, we

wish to see action on a broad front to strengthen the Danish national heritage everywhere. Outside Denmark's borders we would like to give financial, political and moral support to Danish minorities. Denmark is not an immigrant-country and has never been so. Therefore, we will not accept a transformation to a multiethnic society. Denmark belongs to the Danes and its citizens must be able to live in a secure community founded on the rule of law, developing only along the lines of Danish culture.[xxxiv]

And according to BBC reports, the People's Party was able to make immigration the primary issue in the 2005 national elections.[xxxv]

These passages are highly illuminating. They are critiques of the state in different parts of Europe, and point to its reluctance, if not outright failure, to place control of national identity at its core. From this stems other points. In the language of the far right: if the state is failing in its duties, then nationalist parties have a legitimate right to organise the defence of their respective nations. And it is then a short step to policies of 'national preference' and manifestoes and doctrines that are deemed by ordinary people and mainstream political parties, to be xenophobic and racist.

One step on from xenophobia and racism is anti-Semitism. Even though, the 'immigrant question' has become more topical in recent decades, far-right movements still exhibit, and can't let go of, a very pointed and unpleasant anti-Semitism. This is less a doctrine or ideology than an instinct and impulse that manifests itself in certain situations and contexts, sometimes simply in 'wordplay' or off-the-cuff comments.[xxxvi] Also, aside from its racist aspect, anti-Semitism still works on the level of a conspiracy theory, as in the inter-war era. On occasions, too, anti-Semitism breeds revisionism – a criminal activity whereby the reality of the Holocaust is called into question. We have already cited Le Pen's infamous statement in 1987. In more recent times, there have been other instances of revisionism in action. In January 2005 the following report appeared in the media:

Far-Right German Party Belittles Holocaust
A week before Europe hosts a series of memorial services in honour of the freeing of Auschwitz, a group of far-right German politicians caused a stir by walking out on a state ceremony for Nazi victims…In Germany, the historic moment when Soviet forces freed the infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau camp in Poland in 1945 will be remembered throughout the country. On Friday, a week before the anniversary, the state parliament in Saxony paid tribute to the victims of the Nazis – some six million Jews – with a moment of silence. Instead of being a solemn moment of reflection, the tribute turned into a political bashing as 12 regional lawmakers for the far-right National Democratic Party (NPD) refused to participate and stormed out of the chamber.[xxxvii]

In this general context, nostalgia has played a key role. Just like the 'new radical right' activists of the 1880s and 1890s and the fascists of the 1920s and 1930s, the far-right militants of the post-war era have long memories. Whereas Boulanger and Barrès, under the Third Republic in France, reminisced about a strong and patriotic France, and Mussolini and Hitler looked back to 'golden age' periods in the history of their respective countries, the far-right agitators of today have a

variety of historical reference points. For Le Pen in France it is the glory of *Algérie française* (the period prior to independence being granted to France's Algerian colony in 1962), while for Zhirinovsky in Russia a world in which Russia's borders took in the Baltic states and others. Thus, the notion of empire, and lost empire, is important for the far right. And in Austria Haider's views on the Nazi era have caused great controversy. One of his most infamous utterances came in December 1995 when he declared: 'The Waffen SS was a part of the Wehrmacht (German military) and hence it deserves all the honour and respect of the army in public life.'[xxxviii] When Haider entered government, the EU was forced to act. As a mark of protest they inaugurated a period of sanctions. In time, the FPÖ was pressured into disassociating itself from Haider's remarks. Thus, in 2000 a joint manifesto was issued by the FPÖ and their partners in government, the centre-right Austrian People's Party:

> The federal government affirms its unshakeable commitment to the spiritual and moral values which are the shared heritage of the peoples of Europe and which underlie the personal freedom, political freedom and the rule of law upon which all true democracy is based. The government will work for an Austria in which xenophobia, anti-Semitism and racism have no place. It espouses its own particular responsibility for respectful dealings with ethnic and religious minorities…Austria embraces its responsibility arising from the disastrous history of the 20th Century and the monstrous crimes of the National Socialist regime. Our country shoulders as its responsibility the light and dark aspects of its past and the deeds of all Austrians, good and evil…The uniqueness and incomparability of the crime of the Holocaust are a warning to be eternally vigilant concerning all forms of dictatorship and totalitarianism.[xxxix]

Likewise, in Germany the contemporary far right is linked to the Nazi period. The former leader of the Republikaner Party, Franz Schönhuber, was a Waffen-SS sergeant, while the NPD still likes to associate itself with the colours of the German Empire: black, white and red.

For political movements on the fascist right during the inter-war years, leadership was always an important issue. Leaders, whether they were in government or opposition, had a vital role to play: to inspire, rally and organise. Hence, the 'cult of personality' that developed around leaders such as Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy, and Franco in Spain. It was also interesting the way in which fascist leaders in other countries tried to copy and ape the Central European dictators. In France, for example, Jacques Doriot called himself the 'French Führer' and started to dress like Hitler and also pose and gesticulate like him. In the post-war years, far-right movements have placed a similar emphasis on charisma. Le Pen in France has led his party since 1972 – over 35 years – mainly because potential rivals cannot compete with him as an orator or *médiatique* personality.

Parties on the extreme right have also emphasised their lack of faith in established parliamentary and governmental institutions. The BNP is representative: 'The struggle to secure our future is being waged on many fronts. The need for political power is crucial to bring about our goals. Without effective political representation the majority of Britons, who are deeply concerned about the future, have no voice in the chambers where decisions are made. Increasingly numbers of voters are expressing apathy and discontent with the endless incompetence, lies, false promises and sleaze coming from

the three parties that make up the Old Gang. The BNP will contest and win elections at council, parliamentary, Assembly or European level in order to achieve political power to bring about the changes needed.'[xl] So, as with other far-right parties around Europe the avowed aim is to work within 'the system' in order to change it. At some junctures far-right parties have also been happy to endorse and encourage extra-parliamentary activity, whether riots or demonstrations. Occasionally, these events have spiralled into violence. In France in March 2006 the FN was implicated in a wave of political riots. A year previous, Le Pen had claimed that direct-action tactics had the potential to be advantageous and beneficial for his movement: 'We are receiving thousands of new members, tens of thousands of e-mails. All of our offices are submerged, we don't know how to respond because we don't have the staff to reply to the wave of people who, 95 percent of them, salute and approve our positions.'[xli]

It is also clear that far-right movements thrive on, and put great store by, propaganda. Of course, in today's world all political groupings want to spread their message effectively, 'spin' stories to their advantage, and produce converts. But it would be fair to say that the far right puts a special emphasis on this, perhaps because they exclude themselves (or feel excluded) from mainstream political processes or because, historically, fascist, extreme-right and far-right parties have resorted to propaganda quite instinctively and successfully.

In recent years, far-right political propaganda has taken various forms. On one level it is quite traditional: hard-hitting posters with a powerful political message, aimed especially at the young.[xlii] On another, it is about the different types of media that can be employed to influence people. Take, for example, the FN in France. They have created a cottage industry out of merchandising their political message and making it accessible to ordinary people through such things as CDs, videos, books, badges, stationery, and even key rings![xliii] There is general agreement, too, on the fact that the FN was the first French political party to upload an effective and stylish website.[xliv] Far-right movements across Europe have followed suit – and some have even provided an English-language version.[xlv] Today, YouTube even hosts BNP songs.[xlvi] Propaganda is also about the nature of the political message being conveyed. The names that far-right movements choose for themselves are particularly interesting. In Austria: the Freedom Party. In Russia: the Liberal Democratic Party. Do these monikers accurately reflect the nature and character of the movements concerned, or are they are a form of propaganda in themselves?

The attitude of the far right to the mainstream right is also an interesting issue. The relationship is normally characterised by mistrust and mutual dislike. However, on some occasions, far-right movements have been courted by the mainstream. It has been argued that in Denmark in 2002 the liberal premier Anders Fogh Rasmussen moved his party rightwards as part of a strategy. His rhetoric changed and became much more alarmist about the 'threat' posed by immigrants. The strategy was so successful, it is claimed, that the far-right Danish People's Party claimed 12 percent of the national vote and thereafter Rasmussen was able to use the DPP as a 'parliamentary safety net'.[xlvii] It is also clear that, almost without knowing it, the far right has the ability to stir, galvanise and sometimes unite 'the opposition'. In October 2000, for instance, the BBC reported that in Belgium, 'Opposition parties have vowed to co-operate to prevent the far-right Flemish Bloc from gaining power in Belgian town and city halls. The Bloc increased its share of the poll in Antwerp, Ghent, Mechelen and other

northern Dutch-speaking towns during weekend elections. But politicians from across the political spectrum said they would boycott the Bloc and form local coalitions to keep the party out of local government.'[xlviii]

Opponents of the far right can try to 'stereotype' it or 'exterminate' it.[xlix] The academic response is to try and understand it. Attempting to define 'the far right' is a troublesome business. We can focus on perceptions and self-perceptions, and then try to identify the main characteristics of the majority of far-right movements. But it isn't easy. There is something quite nebulous and elusive about the far right. What is 'far'? What is 'right'? And how do we gauge the nature of political extremities?

Academics across the world are divided on the nature of the post-war far right. They cannot assume that everyone is following a single definition that simply does not exist. Indeed, the onus is really on students of the phenomenon to develop their own version of the 'story', their own timeline and lexicon. That said – and we have got to try and move towards some kind of conclusion - it is clear that across Europe far-right parties do harbour some common political impulses and instincts.

To recap, almost all movements of the far right are united by a powerful and vehement anti-communism, although the irony is that many of the most vociferous ultra-nationalists (especially in Eastern Europe and the Balkans) are former communists and were actually brought into being, politically and ideologically, by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR.

There is also an interesting and important relationship with the individuals who embodied 'classic fascism' between the wars. At first, the instinct on the post-war far right was to ape and mimic, and even to aim for the reconstitution of, the fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s. But there was a gradual realisation that this would be counter-productive, and so many movements now style themselves as 'post-Fascist' and admit to only a passing, adjacent, contiguous relationship with inter-war fascism, if that. The truth, of course, is that parties have had to adapt and configure themselves adroitly to the exigencies of post-war milieus. And this has had unpredictable outcomes, with fuzzy relationships developing between far-right parties and extremist factions in more mainstream parties, and some boundaries being blurred.

Fundamentally, though, the far right has almost taken ownership of such issues as national identity, racism and anti-Semitism, and forms of praxis such as strong leadership, direct action and propaganda.

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