Contemporary Right-Wing Radicalism in Europe

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Herbert Kitschelt in collaboration with Anthony J. McGann, *The Radical Right in Western Europe. A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 323 pp., $49.50, ISBN 0-472-10663-5.

Peter Merkl and Leonard Weinberg (eds.), *The Revival of Right Wing Extremism in the 90s* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 304 pp., £18.50/$24.50, ISBN 0-714-64207-X.

Urs Altermatt and Hanspeter Kriesi, *L'Extrême droite en Suisse. Organisations et radicalisation au cours des années quatre-vingt et quatre-vingt-dix* (Fribourg: Les Éditions Universitaires, 1995), 293 pp. (pb.), SFr. 42.00, ISBN 2-827-10727-9.

Mike Cronin (ed.), *The Failure of British Fascism. The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 182 pp. (hb.), £35.00, ISBN 0-333-58438-4.

Gerhard Feldbauer, *Von Mussolini bis Fini. Die Extreme Rechte in Italien* (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1996), 224 pp. (pb.), DM 29.40 ,ISBN 3-885-20575-0.

Helmut Reinalter, Franko Petri and Rüdiger Kaufmann (eds.), *Das Weltbild des Rechtsextremismus. Entsolidarisierung und Bedrohng der Demokratie. Gesellschaftliche Bedingungen, Strukturen und Wirkungen rechtsextremen Denkens* (Innsbruck/Vienna: Studienverlag, 1998), 576 pp., DM 82.00, ISBN 3-706-51258-0.

Tore Bjørgo, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia: Patterns, Perpetrators, and Responses* (Oslo: Tano-Aschehoug, 1997), 386 pp., Kr 298.00, ISBN 8-251-83665-4.

Jeffrey Kaplan and Tore Bjørgo (eds.), *Nation and Race: The Development of a Euro-American Racist Subculture* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 273 pp. (pb.), £19.00, ISBN 1-555-53331-0.

For most of the postwar period the radical right has represented little more than a marginal factor in European society and politics. This was hardly surprising. The memories of the enormous human and material devastation caused by the Nazis' quest for domination and the confrontation with genocidal mass murder committed in the name of racial purity and superiority completely discredited fascism as a viable ideology and the extreme right as an acceptable political force. This is not to say that the extreme right completely vanished from the European democracies. However, instances of right-wing mobilisation, such as the rise of the Poujadists in the 1950s or of the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) in the 1960s, remained sporadic, short-lived, and isolated events.

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In the past decade, the situation has significantly changed. Since the late 1980s, a growing number of European democracies have witnessed the re-emergence of radical right-wing parties and movements.[1] Within a relatively short period of time, several of these parties gained enough support at the polls to mount a significant political challenge to the traditional parties. In some countries, the radical right even managed to become part of the political establishment.

Not surprisingly, the growing success of radical right-wing parties and movements has given rise to a rapidly growing body of literature seeking to understand the causes of this new wave of radical right-wing mobilisation and warning of its likely consequences.[2] Initially, the focus of this work was primarily on individual parties in the major western European democracies. But since the early 1990s, work on the contemporary radical right has considerably broadened. This reflects the recognition that the electoral success of radical right-wing parties is just one, albeit perhaps the most significant, expression of a much broader resurgence of right-wing radicalism that has left few European democracies untouched. One development that raised particular concern was the wave of violence against refugees and other foreigners erupting in the early 1990s throughout western Europe, most of it committed by youthful perpetrators. The result has been a more comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to the contemporary radical right and thus a better understanding of the threat it poses and of how it can be met effectively.

Each of the publications under consideration for this review contributes to this objective. Together, they offer an illuminating and disturbing overview of the multifarious and variegated nature of contemporary right-wing radicalism. What emerges from this literature is a phenomenon that extends far beyond the confines of politics. In significant ways, contemporary right-wing radicalism represents a distinct and growing subculture which, if at all, is only marginally political and/or has only tenuous links to organised politics. Some analysts even suggest that the contemporary radical right represents a social movement comparable to the new social movements whose 'anti-political' style had such a decisive influence on political culture in the 1980s.

This is a world that is increasingly centred around the new communication technologies and particularly the internet. The World Wide Web has not only provided right-wing groups and individuals with a relatively fast and cost-effective new forum for the propagation of their ideas, it has also allowed them to circumvent restrictive national legislation and escape prosecution. In the process, the radical right has gone a long way towards the establishment of a 'virtual international community' that connects like-minded groups in rapidly growing transnational and transcontinental – particularly transatlantic – networks.[3] This virtual community has

[1] The success of these parties has not been confined to European democracies. Significant parties have appeared in North America, Australia and New Zealand, and in India. See Hans-Georg Betz and Stefan Immerfall (eds.), *The New Politics of the Right* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

[2] For an overview see Diethelm Prowe, '"Classic" Fascism and the New Radical Right in Western Europe: Comparisons and Contrasts', in *Contemporary European History*, 3, 3 (1994), 289–313.

[3] Jeffrey Kaplan and Tore Bjørgo, 'Introduction' in Kaplan and Bjørgo, *Nation and Race*, xii.

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its own symbols, cult figures, music, and, most important of all, its own distinct discourse. Central elements of this discourse – a large part of which has come to Europe via the United States – are historical revisionism (the negation of the Holocaust), all kinds of conspiracy theories often with blatantly anti-Semitic overtones, a defensive kind of white-power racism, and, although (still) a minority position, different types of neo-paganism. The latter is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the current revival of right-wing radicalism – its links to what appears to be a growing 'occult underground'. The reader is reminded of similar developments that occurred at the turn of the century and which exerted a significant influence on leading figures in the Nazi movement.[4]

If earlier studies tended to focus primarily on developments in the major western European countries, more recent works explore right-wing radical tendencies in the smaller democracies. This fills an important gap: the contemporary radical right has made its most impressive electoral gains in relatively small countries – the Freedom Party in Austria (FPÖ), the Flemish Bloc in Belgium (Vlaams Blok), and the Progress Party in Norway (Fremskridtspartiet). At the same time, these case studies serve as an important corrective of widely held perceptions. As Tore Bjørgo's study of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden shows, racist and right-wing violence has been as pronounced in the Scandinavian countries – widely held up as successful models of social democracy – as in France and particularly Germany. It might come as a shock to some readers to learn that during the past ten years, Sweden has emerged as a major centre of radical right-wing activities in Europe and beyond.[5]

I. What accounts for the resurgence of right-wing radicalism in the eighties and nineties?

There is widespread agreement in the literature that the upsurge of radical right-wing activities has to be seen in the context of a combination of global and domestic structural change. By now, the main elements of this change have been discussed at great length: the decline of traditional industries and the growth of new post-industrial structures; globalisation and the emergence of an information and network society; individualisation and new social inequalities. Given the turmoil and uncertainties associated with these developments, it is hardly surprising that radical right-wing mobilisation has increased so dramatically during the past fifteen years. There is less agreement, however, on the exact link between right-wing mobilisation and socio-structural change.

One argument sees the main cause in the social dislocations and anxieties provoked by socio-structural change. Developments such as the information and communications revolution tend to leave a significant number of people behind,

[4] Michael Fischer, 'Die sektiererischen Grundlagen des rechtsextremen Denkens: Der Nationalsozialismus', and Karin Liebhart, 'Esoterik, Okkultismus und rechtsextremes Denken', in Reinalter, Petri and Kaufmann, *Das Weltbild des Rechtsextremismus*, 131–69. *Ibid*. also James Webb, 'Occult Underground'.

[5] Bjørgo, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia*, ch. 5.

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thus creating 'a new unskilled and under-educated underclass'. These people 'feel trapped by their lack of relevant skills' which makes them particularly vulnerable to the discourse of resentment characteristic of the radical right.[6] This argument has been quite appealing, particularly among those who themselves view the current process of globalisation and socioeconomic modernisation with some unease. From this perspective, the growth of new forms of racism, right-wing violence and popular support for right-wing parties constitute above all an expression of increased feelings of 'social insecurity and relative deprivation' in the face of an unrelenting and unchecked onslaught of 'turbo-capitalism'.[7] However, as Peter Merkl points out, empirical evidence supports this thesis only to a degree. Although both the perpetrators of violent assaults on foreigners and the supporters of right-wing parties and movements tend to have lower levels of education, they do not tend to be disproportionately unemployed or belong to otherwise socially marginal groups.[8]

Explanations that focus solely on the negative consequences of modernisation tend to ignore other significant factors, such as the response of institutions – and especially the established political parties – to the problems generated by change. In fact, there exists now a substantial literature that provides strong and convincing evidence of growing public alienation from and disaffection with the established political parties and, in some cases, even with the democratic process itself.[9] Empirical studies also suggest that a heightened sense of political powerlessness and alienation tends to correlate highly with support for right-wing parties.

Herbert Kitschelt's study of the radical right in western Europe is an ambitious attempt to combine these elements into a coherent theory of right-wing support. He starts from the assumption that 'contemporary post-industrial democracies generate a limited but distinctive demand for a political combination of ethnocentric, authoritarian, and free-market liberal appeals'.[10] Post-industrialisation and globalisation generate new work experiences and, at the same time, lead to a fragmentation of the labour market. Workers whose skills fail to match the demands of an internationally competitive economy increasingly based on the processing and communication of information face obsolescence and tend to become defensive and thus open to the culturally parochial and politically authoritarian appeals of the radical right. At the same time, the rigidity of western European welfare states makes it very difficult, particularly for young unskilled workers, 'to get an economic and political foothold in these systems'. This makes them more likely to 'turn toward market liberalism in order to smash the institutions exacerbating their weak

[6] Peter Merkl, 'Why are They so Strong Now? Comparative Reflections on the Revival of the Radical Right in Europe', in Merkl and Weinberg, *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties*, 26.

[7] Claus Leggewie, 'What's next? Oder: Neokapitalismus und neue Linke', in Reinalter, Petri and Kaufmann, *Das Weltbild des Rechtsextremismus*, 20.

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] Leonard Weinberg, 'An Overview of Right-Wing Extremism in the Western World: A Study of Convergence, Linkage, and Identity', in Kaplan and Bjørgo, *Nation and Race*, 6.

[10] Kitschelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe*, 5.

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position in labor markets'.[11] However, whether the resulting conflicts can be exploited by new right-wing parties 'depends on the strategic behavior of the established moderate leftist and rightist parties'. If they converge in the center, creating the impression that there is no difference among the established parties and that politicians are only out for themselves, they create an inducement for voters to abandon the established parties and instead give the new right-wing challengers a try.[12]

Kitschelt's approach yields a number of important insights. For one, he makes it quite clear that one factor, immigration, which plays a central role for the contemporary radical right, has not been the main reason for the success of radical right-wing parties. Although 'racism and immigration are important catalysts for the growth and entrenchment' of right-wing parties such as the French Front national (FN), their electoral strength 'is anchored in a broader web of concerns and appeals'.[13] But perhaps the most important result is his ability to show that there is a considerable variety among the political parties that have generally been included among the radical or extreme right. Pronouncedly populist parties such as the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) or the Italian Northern League (Lega Nord) are significantly different in terms of the composition and attitudes of their constituencies from radical right-wing parties such as the FN, the Vlaams Blok, or the Scandinavian Progress parties and from traditional right-wing extremist parties such as the Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano, MSI) or the NPD. At the same time, Kitschelt's framework also offers a solution to the question of why the radical right has had a lasting success in some countries but not in others, such as Great Britain, which also has had to confront major social and economic problems during the past two decades.

Kitschelt offers a combination of reasons for the electoral failure of the main representative of the British radical right, the National Front. One reason was that the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher adopted the kind of authoritarian populism that would become characteristic of the radical right in other countries.[14] A second reason was the existence of 'internal roadblocks' such as particularly the legacy of British social fascism with its strong anti-capitalist bias which prevented the National Front from 'finding the winning electoral formula of authoritarian capitalist appeals'.[15]

Kitschelt's argument is modified and enriched by a comprehensive new collection of essays edited by Mike Cronin which examine the failure of fascism and the far right in Britain.[16] The contributors deal with the whole history of British fascism, starting with the British Fascists in the 1920s, the emergence of the British Union of Fascists under the leadership of Sir Oswald Mosley in the early 1930s, and

[11] *Ibid.*, 9.
[12] *Ibid.*, 17, 257.
[13] *Ibid.*, 116.
[14] *Ibid.*, 248–9.
[15] *Ibid.*, 252.
[16] Mike Cronin (ed.), *The Failure of British Fascism*.

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his futile attempts to transform the Union Movement into a mass political party in the two decades after the Second World War. They then go on to discuss the history of the post-Mosleyite far right. It starts with the emergence of the National Front in the late 1960s, and its attempt to solve the 'problem of political space' by taking advantage of the anti-immigrant mood stirred up by Enoch Powell's infamous 'rivers of blood' speech (1968), and ends with the short-lived success of the British National Party's 'Rights for Whites' campaign in local elections in the early 1990s. Each one of these episodes ended in failure. Whereas the French radical right is well entrenched in the local, regional, and even national scene, the British far right has remained on the margins of British politics. There are good reasons for this failure, ranging from the apparent aversion of British political culture to an ideology that appears extremist and foreign, to the formidable barrier represented by Britain's majoritarian electoral system, to Margaret Thatcher's manipulation of the immigration issue. Others have to do with the particular nature of the British far right which, as Nigel Copsey maintains, 'persists with a revolutionary fascist agenda which is scarcely hidden (unlike the FN in France) and continues with a transparent, uncharismatic leadership (unlike Le Pen) which has a clear Nazi past'.[17] At the same time, however, electoral failure should not be equated with ineffectiveness. As several contributors point out, the British far right managed to exert considerable influence on wider debates on issues that it considered important and thus saw its ideas find a sympathetic hearing in the political mainstream.[18] In this respect, the British experience has been similar to that of other western European countries.

II. Contemporary radical right-wing parties

The European Centre for Research and Action on Racism and Anti-Semitism counted for 1994 no fewer than forty extreme right-wing political parties in western Europe.[19] To be sure, not all of these parties were organisationally and electorally significant. In fact, in the 1980s, only in Austria did the radical right gain more than 10 per cent of the vote in national elections. On average, support for these parties remained below 5 per cent.[20] Since the early 1990s, this situation has significantly changed. In many instances, right-wing parties have made significant gains. This has been particularly pronounced in Austria, where the FPÖ can count on about 25 per cent of the vote, but also in France, Norway, Italy, Belgium, and Denmark. In other cases, however, support for the radical right, after initial successes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, quickly collapsed. This has been the case in Germany (Republicans), Switzerland (Automobile Party, but not the League in the Italian

[17] Nigel Copsey, 'Contemporary Fascism in the Local Area: The British National Party and "Rights for Whites"' in Cronin, *The Failure of British Fascism*, 137.

[18] Mike Cronin, 'Introduction: "Tomorrow We Live" – The Failure of British Fascism?' in Cronin, 8.

[19] Weinberg, 'An Overview of Right-Wing Extremism in the Western World', 9.

[20] *Ibid.*, 11.

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canton of Ticino), Sweden (New Democracy), and the Netherlands (Centre Democrats).

The growing visibility of these parties has raised several important questions. One involves definition. What is the extreme right, what does it mean, and what traits do parties have to share to belong to the same family? Not surprisingly, there is little agreement among scholars on any of these questions. One promising step forward is the notion of a right-wing extremist minimum (following Roger Griffin's idea of a 'fascist minimum') as proposed by Cas Mudde. According to Mudde, right-wing extremism shares a core of five common notions: exclusionary nationalism, culture-based racism; xenophobia; aversion to democratic procedures; and the preference for a strong state.[21] If this looks familiar, it is hardly unintended. Piero Ignazi states as much when he insists that 'by extreme right we mean that political/ideological space where fascism is the key reference'.[22] In his view, even if extreme right parties do not express nostalgia for the fascist period, they still express 'anti-democratic values' reflected in their 'hostility to modernity, a hatred of divisions and a search for harmony, and exaltations of natural community and a hostility towards foreigners, a faith in hierarchical structures and a distrust of democratic individual representation'.[23] On the basis of this definition, Ignazi divides the contemporary extreme right into two categories: traditional extreme right-wing parties such as the NPD and the MSI with a direct link to fascism; and 'new, post-industrial extreme right parties' (e.g., Front National, FPÖ, Vlaams Blok, and the Danish and Norwegian Progress parties) which might be 'alien to the fascist tradition' but whose issues, values, and attitudes undermine system legitimacy.[24] As indicated earlier, Kitschelt goes one step further and divides the right-wing family into three groups: traditional extreme right-wing parties, new radical right parties, and populist antistatist parties (i.e., the FPÖ and the Lega Nord).[25]

At this point the reader might be tempted to ask to what degree these definitions and classifications have helped to bring clarity to a complex and confusing subject. The answer is rather disappointing. The major reason is that the radical right has proven to be considerably more flexible and fluid than rigid classification schemes allow for. Recent history has been particularly unkind to Kitschelt's main theoretical propositions. One of his central points is that radical right electoral success depends crucially on a party's ability to combine authoritarian positions with a strong pro-market appeal. In fact, parties 'that follow the new rightist authoritarian and market-liberal ''master strategy'' should lose votes if they emphasise immigration, xenophobia, and race as their key issue but neglect market liberalism'.[26] The opposite has happened. Since the early 1990s, a growing number of radical right-wing parties have toned down or abandoned outright market liberalism, adopting instead a

[21] *Ibid.*, 7–8.
[22] Piero Ignazi, 'The Extreme Right in Europe: A Survey', in Merkl and Weinberg, 49.
[23] *Ibid.*, 52.
[24] *Ibid.*, 52–53.
[25] Kitschelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe*, 19–42.
[26] *Ibid.*, 23.

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comprehensive position of national protection reflected in the FN's call for 'préférence nationale'. In most cases, this new strategy has been quite successful. The example of the Danish Progress Party (Fremdskridtspartiet) is particularly instructive. The party split in 1995 into two parties; one retained the established name and its radical neoliberal program, the other adopted the name Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti) and a pronounced xenophobic and protectionist position. In the national elections of spring 1998, the Fremskridtspartiet received 2.4 per cent of the vote, while Dansk Folkeparti gained 7.4 per cent – 1 per cent more than the then united party had received in 1994.

A second important and largely unforeseen development has been the effort on the part of some of the major radical right-wing parties to moderate their programmes in order to appeal to mainstream voters. This trend started with the MSI in 1994 when the party, under the leadership of Gianfranco Fini, gradually distanced itself from its fascist legacy, repudiating both racism and totalitarianism and changing its name to the National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale, AN).[27] The new course was confirmed after the radical wing of the party, led by Pino Rauti, left Alleanza Nazionale and (re)founded the Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore) as an extreme right-wing party. Under Fini, Alleanza Nazionale acknowledged antifascism 'as the historically determinant factor in the restitution of democratic liberties' to Italy, affirmed its support for European integration and monetary union, and abandoned traditional statist and corporatist positions in favour of modernisation and the free market.[28]

The FPÖ has undergone a similar evolution. Starting in the late 1980s, the party, under the leadership of Jörg Haider, increasingly radicalised its rhetoric and programmatic positions. This strategy proved highly successful. In little over a decade, electoral support for the party more than quadrupled, from 5 per cent in 1983 (the last election before Haider took over as party leader) to almost 22 per cent in 1995. At the same time, however, the FPÖ opened itself up to charges of right-wing extremism and became increasingly marginalised politically. In response, Haider embarked on a new course, starting in the mid-1990s. In order to gain credibility as a serious contender for national political office, Haider progressively moderated the party's image and its most contentious programmatic positions. Thus Haider abandoned the party's traditional German–nationalist stance in favour of a new 'Austrian–patriotic profile', distanced himself from earlier attempts to trivialize the past by acknowledging the centrality of the Holocaust, and toned down the party's position on immigration. At the same time, Haider promoted the FPÖ as a future-oriented party that was ready to meet the challenge posed by globalisation and the information revolution without neglecting to exploit the fears and anxieties of those most affected by these developments. This was reflected in the party's abandoning its earlier radical neoliberal position, which it replaced with the notion

[27] Piero Ignazi, *Postfascisti?* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994).
[28] See Gianfranco Fini, 'Porquoi nous avons rompu avec le FN', *Le Monde*, 26 Jun. 1998, 1, 16.

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of a 'fair market economy'.[29] With this new programme Haider adopted a catch-all strategy consciously designed to counteract the party's extreme right-wing image. Le Pen and other leading representatives of the European extreme right were not particularly taken by this turn of events. They charged their former model student with having betrayed the cause.[30]

Their alarm reflects the worry that the example set by Fini and Haider might prove contagious. The sudden eruption of massive dissent inside the FN in December 1998 shows that these worries are not entirely unfounded. The secession was initiated and provoked by Bruno Mégret, the party's 'general delegate' and, until December 1998, second-in-command behind Jean-Marie Le Pen. Mégret, who before joining the FN had been a member of the Gaullist RPR, had long favoured refashioning his party along the lines of Alleanza Nazionale, if only to make it more presentable to the moderate right. When Le Pen refused to offer him the top spot on the party's list for the European election of 1999, Mégret felt strong enough to challenge Le Pen. Although he failed to force Le Pen to hand over party leadership to him – he got expelled instead – his challenge severely damaged Le Pen's stature within the FN and his claim to be 'a man of destiny'.[31]

These developments are clear signs of growing divisions in the western European radical right. In their quest for respectability, a growing number of parties have kept their distance from the extremist positions espoused by Le Pen.[32] In response, Le Pen has strengthened his network of like-minded allies in the Vlaams Blok and the ultra-nationalist German People's Union (Deutsche Volksunion, DVU), led by Gerhard Frey and Franz Schönhuber, the latter the former leader of the Republikaner. At the same time, Le Pen and his allies have tried to forge new ties with extreme right-wing parties in central and eastern Europe.

There are good reasons for this strategy. For one, most right-wing parties in central and eastern Europe espouse positions and views that are very close to those held by their western counterparts. Central elements are ethnic nationalism and xenophobia, anti-communism and anti-liberalism, a strong emphasis on hierarchy, discipline, and law and order, and 'an essentially statist outlook' favouring 'a considerable role in the economy as well as in the distribution of resources'.[33] A second reason is that in a number of countries the extreme right has established itself as a significant political factor. This has been the case in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia and, of course, Russia. Against that, in Poland and, after the most recent

[29] See Jörg Haider, *Befreite Zukunft jenseits von links und rechts* (Vienna: Ibera & Molden, 1997).

[30] Rolf-Josef Eibicht (ed.), *Jörg Haider: Patriot im Zwielicht?* (Stuttgart: DS-Verlag, 1997).

[31] Jonathan Marcus, *The National Front and French Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 28.

[32] Before the last election in Norway, Norwegian television reported that Le Pen had come out in support of the Fremskridtspartiet. The leader of the party, Carl Hagen, 'was apparently furious' about this endorsement, fearing that this would hurt his party's chances. See Ketil Bjugan, 'The 1997 Norwegian Parliamentary Election: A Swing towards Parliamentary Power', in *The Political Quarterly*, 69, 2 (1998), 180.

[33] Thomas S. Szayna, 'The Extreme-Right Political Movements in Post-Communist Central Europe', in Merkl and Weinberg, 113.

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election, in the Czech Republic, the extreme right plays little more than a marginal role.

In the past few years, Le Pen and his allies have established close personal relationships with 'fraternal parties' in the east. Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the leader of the Russian Liberal Democratic Party, has been a guest at DVU conferences, while Istvan Csurka, the leader of the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIEP), was among the participants at the most recent conference of the FN. And FN officials have been invited to Romania and Slovakia.[34] This clearly looks like an attempt to revive the idea of a pan-European extreme right. However, any such attempt is likely to fail. As Thomas Szayna points out, the central and eastern European extreme right shares a fervent nationalism that tends to reflect a deep insecurity about the survival of their own nation and which for this reason is directed outside. Thus Polish and Czech extreme right nationalism is directed primarily against Germany, Slovak and Romanian extreme right nationalism against Hungary, and Hungarian extreme right nationalism against both its Slavic neighbors and Romania.[35] Given these mutual animosities – not to mention Zhirinovsky's occasional threats against Russia's neighbours – the dream of an international European extreme right is likely to end the same way as earlier attempts to create a western European right. They failed largely because of irreconcilable differences between the MSI and the German Republikaner over the question of Southern Tyrol.[36]

III. The transnational meta-political (new) right

It seems highly unlikely that the idea of a united extreme right front will ever become a political reality. On a different level, however, it already exists. This is the world of circles, groups, and organisations which, rather than trying to influence directly electoral politics, pursue a 'metapolitical' strategy inspired by Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'cultural hegemony'. As Michael Minkenberg argues, the rise of the metapolitical radical right in western Europe was largely a reaction to 1968. Its strategy, 'in an obvious attempt to "learn" from the left and the new left in particular, focused on spreading their ideas through the infiltration of the education system, the mass media and other "metapolitical" spheres of the public'.[37] The first significant circle to propagate and pursue this strategy was the French Groupement de Recherche et d'Études pour la Civilisation Européenne (GRECE), founded by Alain de Bénoist and others in 1968. With as many as 3,000 members, GRECE held seminars and workshops, published a number of influential theoretical journals such

[34] Mark Hunter, 'Les réseaux européens du Front national', in *Le Monde diplomatique*, December 1998, 3.

[35] Szayna, 'Extreme Right Political Movements', 119–138; Henry F. Carey, 'Post-Communist Right Radicalism in Romania,' in Merkl and Weinberg, 155–156.

[36] Piero Ignazi, *L'estrema destra in Europa* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), 184.

[37] Michael Minkenberg, 'The New Right in France and Germany: Nouvelle Droite, Neue Rechte, and the New Right Radical Parties', in Merkl and Weinberg, 71.

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as *Nouvelle Ecole* and *Elements* and even managed to infiltrate the editorial board of the weekly *Figaro-Magazine*. By the 1980s, the French new right's core ideas and concepts had decisively influenced and shaped the discourse of the radical right in and outside France.

The new right's ideological starting point was 'the diagnosis of a crisis of European civilisation and its attribution to universalist and egalitarian principles to be found in all major political philosophies from Christianity to liberalism to socialism/Marxism'.[38] Against universalism the new right advocated a syncretic third way between capitalism and socialism, a kind of 'national-bolshevism' to be achieved through a national-revolutionary struggle for liberation from superpower (particularly American) domination. Most of these concepts were borrowed from the representatives of the Weimar 'conservative revolution' such as Ernst Niekisch, Ernst Jünger, and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck.

By far the most important and influential new right concept has been 'ethnopluralism'. Unlike traditional racism, ethnopluralism 'rejects all notions of biological racism and racial superiority and replaces it with the acceptance of the co-existence of different races'.[39] Ethnopluralism is a particularly insidious concept. It entails affirmation, if not outright celebration, of cultural differences and identities – and thus absolves the new right from the charge of racism. At the same time it can be used to justify the rejection of any mixing of cultures, as through immigration or marriage, in the name of protecting cultural identities as a precondition for preserving difference. In this way, ethnopluralism is justifiably seen as the new right's 'countermodel to the New Left's multiculturalism'.[40]

As Urs Altermatt and Hanspeter Kriesi document for Switzerland for the period of the 1980s and early 1990s, the new right gave rise to and influenced a large number of right-wing groups and 'groupuscules' with intellectual pretensions.[41] The authors provide an exhaustive overview of a widespread network of right-wing organisations, often with international connections, ranging from traditional fascists, national revolutionary groups and racist 'fronts' to followers of the French new right. Although the authors maintain that the Swiss extreme right generally lacks a coherent and 'homogeneous ideology', they find a number of common traits that unite all of the groups they discuss. The most important are a 'visceral nationalism and pronounced xenophobia', but also the recourse to conspiracy theories to explain complex developments such as immigration or globalisation.[42]

Altermatt and Kriesi also show to what degree major figures of the Swiss extreme right are integrated into larger, international networks. These networks in turn are part of a rapidly growing transnational extreme right subculture. These developments are explored by the contributors to *Das Weltbild des Rechtsextremismus*, a collection of essays, which offers a comprehensive introduction to this emerging

[38] *Ibid*., 72.
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] Urs Altermatt and Hanspeter Kriesi, *L'extrême droite en Suisse*, 14–81.
[42] *Ibid*., 96–7.

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subculture. The book is a compilation of essays for a project that was initiated by the University of Innsbruck. Therefore, the majority of the contributions deal primarily with the current situation in Austria and, to a lesser degree, Germany. However, many of the observations have broader validity and implications. Among the most interesting contributions are essays that analyse lesser-known, but increasingly prominent, aspects of the contemporary extreme right, such as the role of esoteric and occult tendencies, neo-paganism, and conspiracy theories in extreme right-wing discourse. One chapter deals with the most recent trend – the growing use by the extreme right of the new information technologies for the dissemination of their ideas and as relatively cheap means of communicating with each other.

There can be no doubt that the use of computer networks and particularly the internet has been a major contributor to the establishment of a transnational extreme right subculture. One of the main reasons is that they are 'virtually inaccessible to law enforcement agencies' and thus provide right-wing extremist groups with a relatively secure international forum where they can circulate their materials 'regardless of laws prohibiting them in individual nations'.[43] This has been a particular boon for one of the most important topics of right-wing extremist discourse, namely historical revisionism, or what Altermatt and Kriesi prefer to call 'negationism'.[44] In its most simplified form this is the denial that the Holocaust, that is, the organised and systematic murder of hundreds of thousands of human beings in extermination camps, ever happened. The qualification is important. For, as Walter Laqueur has pointed out, the negationists do not deny that hundreds of thousands of Jews 'might have been deported to the east because they were considered security risks. Because of the severe climatic conditions, lack of food, and spread of diseases, some of them might indeed have died, perhaps as many as 100,000, perhaps even 300,000'. What they deny is that there ever was a Holocaust, that gas chambers ever existed, and that the Nazis ever intended to commit genocide.[45]

In Germany and several other western European countries, denying or trivialising the Holocaust represents a punishable crime. German negationists such as Thies Christophersen, the author of *Die Auschwitz Lüge* (*The Auschwitz Lie*), were forced to leave Germany in order to escape prosecution (Christophersen found refuge in Denmark). Leading revisionists such as the controversial British historian David Irving have been prohibited from entering a number of countries. Although they continued to produce a mass of literature, they had a hard time delivering it to potential readers. This has fundamentally changed with the emergence of the internet. The World Wide Web has allowed the promoters of revisionist ideas such as Irving or the notorious German–Canadian Ernst Zündel to make their case to a global cyber audience, complete with downloadable facsimiles of documents, photographs, and 'research' reports and articles.

[43] Les Back, Michael Keith, and John Solomons, 'Racism on the Internet: Mapping Neo-Fascist Subcultures in Cyberspace', in Kaplan and Bjørgo, *Nation and Race*, 77.

[44] Altermatt and Kriesi, 59.

[45] Walter Laqueur, *Fascism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 138.

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Holocaust negationism is part of a larger extreme right project that might be characterised as 'white (male) resistance'. One of the most prominent expressions of this movement is 'white power or white noise music' which has experienced a significant growth in the past few years and now represents a profitable branch of the international music industry. One of the main centres of white power music is Sweden. This has largely been due to *Nordland*, one of the most successful promoters of white power music. Starting out as a 'fanzine' (a white power music magazine) in 1995, *Nordland* gradually expanded. It now serves as a distributor of CDs and concert organiser and as a link for various 'music bands, record companies, mail order outlets, and individual activists and sympathizers' whom it supplies with 'a shared ideological outlook' through its website.[46] *Nordland*'s strategy has been highly successful: by the end of the 1990s, Sweden 'is considered to be one of the world's largest producers of racist rock. About fifty of the world's more than 250 known white power bands are Swedish.'[47]

Behind white resistance is the idea that the white race and white culture is fundamentally threatened. As one Swedish fanzine, cited by Bjørgo, put it: 'The white race is threatened with extermination. Throughout the world our birth rate is sinking, whereas that of other races merely goes on increasing. At the same time immigration and the mixing of races threatens to eradicate the white race that has survived so far . . . We stand on the threshold of annihilation; the next generation will be hopelessly outnumbered by the other races. Something must happen *now*; it is our last chance.'[48] This also explains why negationism plays such a prominent role in the extreme right discourse of resistance.[49] In the extreme right's view, the constant insistence on remembering the Holocaust has been the instrument par excellence to emasculate the whole white race and to discredit historical attempts at white resistance, such as Nazism. Not surprisingly, the extreme right's main target is the Jewish community. In the process, anti-Semitism has (re)emerged as a core element of cyber-racism. For good reason: 'anti-Semitic ideas are enhanced by the Internet's global framework precisely because these discourses have historically been articulated through the notion of an international conspiracy.'[50] One of the tales which appears to be gaining growing appeal in extreme right-wing skinhead and other white power circles is the 'Zionist Occupation Government' (ZOG) theory which originated in the United States and then spread to Scandinavia and from there to Germany and other parts of western Europe. A second increasingly prominent story is the notion that there is a Muslim conspiracy to conquer Europe for Islam.[51]

[46] Tore Björgo, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia*, 182.

[47] *Ibid*., 183.

[48] *Ibid*., 155. Italics in the original.

[49] A major Swiss extreme right website which, among other things, features essays by Jürgen Graf, the most prominent contemporary Swiss negationist, is called 'Wilhelm Tell'.

[50] Back, Keith and Solomos, 'Racism on the Internet', 90.

[51] Bjørgo, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia*, 64, 154–61, 291–7. See also Heléne Lööw, 'White Power Rock'n Roll – A Growing Industry', in Kaplan and Bjørgo, *Nation and Race*, 127–31.

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Conspiracy theories and the notion that European culture and the white race are fundamentally threatened are, of course, hardly limited to the 'intellectual new right' or to the emerging extreme-right cyber subculture. Both have frequently been used as arguments by the political radical right to justify opposition to immigration, or to appeal to latent fears vis-à-vis alien cultures (primarily Muslim culture) and to evoke resentment towards those who are different. Particularly the explicitly xenophobic parties such as the Vlaams Blok and the FN have frequently used these strategies, to some effect. Thus the Vlaams Blok conducted their 1991 electoral campaign, which resulted in the party's electoral breakthrough, with the slogan 'out of self-defence'. At the same time the party distributed pamphlets that featured cartoons on the covers depicting streets populated by immigrants with exaggerated Arabic or African features, churches turned into mosques, and a native white population fearfully hiding behind closed doors. The party's success in the early 1990s suggests that these are images and messages that find widespread resonance among the population.

IV. Racially motivated and right-wing extremist violence

Among the various aspects of extreme right-wing activities none has been more disconcerting than the explosive growth of violence against foreigners and other minorities throughout Europe in the 1990s. During the past few years, there has been a growing scholarly interest in this phenomenon. For obvious reasons, this interest has been particularly strong in Germany, the scene of several widely publicised incidents such as the riots in Hoyerswerda (September 1991) and Rostock-Lichtenhagen (August 1992) and the lethal arson attacks in Mölln (November 1992) and Solingen (May 1993). Among the main reasons why these and similar incidences attracted much attention was the fact that the perpetrators tended to be young people and that in several cases the attackers, even when they were skinheads, were openly 'encouraged by applause from local residents'.[52] Recent studies have shown that particularly in the eastern part of the country the (mostly youthful) perpetrators of right-wing violence can still count on widespread sympathy from the population and even local politicians who often see in them 'defenders of the German order'.[53] This tacit support explains at least in part the recent dramatic increase in extreme right-wing activities on the territory of the former East Germany (GDR). In 1997, according to the German Office for the Protection of the Constitution, east German groups and individuals accounted for half of the total number of known German right-wing extremists prepared to use violence.

As Wolfgang Kühnel points out, there are a number of reasons why right-wing

[52] Wolfgang Kühnel, 'Hitler's Grandchildren? The Reemergence of a Right-Wing Social Movement in Germany', in Kaplan and Bjørgo, *Nation and Race*, 154–5.

[53] Alexandra Föderl-Schmid, 'Die Typen einmal ordentlich vertrimmen,' *Der Standard*, 28 Apr. 1998, 2.

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extremism has become particularly pronounced in eastern Germany.[54] The majority has to do with the particular nature of the former GDR. Considering itself officially an 'anti-fascist democratic society', the GDR ritualised anti-fascism instead of really confronting the past. As a result, the use of right-wing symbols and slogans has been a particularly effective way for young eastern Germans, who spent their formative years under the GDR regime, to revolt against the older generation, the authorities, and the whole 'system'. But at the same time, in the east these symbols and slogans are curiously devoid of real historical meaning and thus rarely serve more than provocative purposes. A second factor can be traced back to the peculiar structure of East German society. There were very few foreigners in the GDR, and those who worked and lived there were not allowed 'to develop self-organised forms of work or public life'. As a result, 'East Germans were not accustomed to dealing with social differences of any kind. They were, however, used to being dissociated from anything "alien" or "foreign"'[55] When, after unification, the government began to distribute asylum seekers among the eastern German states, the population was largely unprepared for the new arrivals and reacted with open hostility. Given this configuration, it is not surprising that right-wing violence against foreigners and other minorities has become a major problem in eastern Germany since unification.

Germany is hardly an exceptional case, either with regard to the number of violent acts (for example, there have been as many cases in Great Britain as in Germany in the 1990s), or to the nature of right-wing violence. This is one of the most significant conclusions one can draw from Tore Bjørgo's study of racist and right-wing violence in Scandinavia. This is an important study, not least because it deals with an area of western Europe which is generally best known for its egalitarianism and relatively high tolerance, even if some of this is more myth than reality.[56] And yet, as Bjørgo demonstrates at great length, even these societies have been unable to protect themselves effectively against xenophobia and right-wing violence. A similar, although less comprehensive and detailed, analysis of right-wing violence is provided by a group of Swiss social scientists, which forms part of a larger study of the extreme right in Switzerland. Perhaps not surprisingly, the two studies arrive at similar conclusions, although they differ in scope and emphasis. Together they offer a wealth of empirical evidence based on interviews and case studies which provide important insights into what motivates individuals to become part of the right-wing 'milieu', join extreme right-wing groups, and/or commit acts of violence.

For the authors of the Swiss study, recent right-wing mobilisation was above all a consequence of the gradual acceptance of extremist attitudes on the part of public opinion. Especially after some of the established centre-right parties such as the Swiss People's Party (SVP) adopted xenophobic rhetoric as part of their official

[54] Kühnel, 'Hitler's Grandchildren?' 153.

[55] *Ibid*.

[56] See, for example, Lise Togeby, 'Prejudice and Tolerance in a Period of Increasing Ethnic Diversity and Growing Unemployment: Denmark since 1970', in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21, 6 (1998), 1137–54.

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discourse, extremist views were increasingly seen as legitimate and normal. The result was 'latent and widespread xenophobia' which the authors consider to be a crucial factor behind the explosion of violence in the early 1990s. In their view, the 'minority which is perhaps already disposed towards violence find in the support accorded to them a certain justification for their behavior. They almost have the impression that they acted in the name of the silent majority'.[57]

This argument seems plausible. As the authors show on the basis of ten case studies, the recent wave of right-wing violence is best understood as an expression of a broader climate of anxiety and resentment directed primarily against non-European migrants and particularly asylum-seekers. The justifications offered by the perpetrators are hardly new and original: the fear of the loss of cultural identity; the notion that foreigners abuse the right to asylum, cause unemployment and raise the crime rate; the charge that foreigners receive privileged treatment at the expense of the tax-paying citizens.[58] A lack of public-opinion data prevents the authors from demonstrating to what extent these views are held by the Swiss public and thus substantiating that there is indeed a link between public opinion and right-wing violence. However, given the success of right-wing parties in the early 1990s and the more recent rise of a Swiss brand of populist nativism represented by Christoph Blocher, the president of the Zurich SVP, it is unlikely that the Swiss are less xenophobic than their neighbours in Austria, France, or Germany, for which we have a plethora of survey data.

Swiss and Scandinavian police records indicate that xenophobic violence is a 'typical group crime'. In the vast majority of cases the perpetrators are young males, often with a working-class background.[59] Violence tends to be a function of complex group processes, such as the attempt to impress others in the group, maintain loyalty or establish status. In a large number of cases, alcohol plays a major role both in the planning and carrying out of violent acts. Often violence appears to be inspired by media accounts of similar actions in other localities, producing what Bjørgo calls a 'contagion effect'. Only in a minority of cases are the acts of violence explicitly motivated by right-wing political ideologies, although 'the perpetrators often use symbols, slogans, and arguments ''borrowed'' from organisations of the far right'.[60]

Xenophobic violence, as long as it is unorganised and not politically motivated, is primarily a case for the courts and social workers. By contrast, organised and ideologically motivated racist and anti-foreigner violence represents a potential danger to democracy. This is one of the main themes of Bjørgo's study of racist violence in Scandinavia, which focuses primarily on organised youth gangs and racist and neo-nazi groups in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. What differentiates these groups is that they have consciously adopted the new transnational racist discourse, considering themselves part of the white resistance movement fighting

[57] 256.
[58] *Ibid.*, 214–19.
[59] Bjørno, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia*, 101–2.
[60] *Ibid.*, 106.

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the 'Muslim invaders', 'racial traitors' and the 'Zionist Occupation Government' in general. One of Bjørgo's most interesting observations relates to the way in which racist groups seek to draw on history to legitimate their violent campaign against foreigners. In Denmark and Norway, anti-immigrant groups have tried to present their opposition to immigrants and refugees as analogous to the resistance against Nazi occupation during the Second World War. 'The implicit claim is that it is just as necessary and justified to fight – with violence if required – against today's ''national traitors'' and ''foreign invaders'' as it was in the past when Norway and Denmark came under German occupation.' Against that, in Sweden, which had a much more ambiguous relationship with Nazi Germany during the war, 'National Socialist and anti-Semitic symbols and notions are in principle not incompatible with Swedish patriotism'. Consequently Swedish racist groups promote themselves and their fight as a 'direct extension of Nazi Germany's struggle against the ''insidious influence'' of the Jews' and their use of immigration as a 'strategic weapon' in 'their ongoing race war against the Aryans'.[61]

To be sure, these 'racial revolutionary' groups represent only a small minority in the right-wing extremist subculture. They are marginal, their views finding little support among the general public. Although they tend to be highly violent in their rhetoric, 'their practice rarely approaches the level of violence one could expect from their rhetoric'.[62] In the 1990s most of the acts of violence committed by ideologically motivated right-wing extremists in the three Scandinavian countries targeted anti-racist activists and left-wing politicians. Interestingly enough, the favourite and unfortunately quite effective strategy of eastern German xenophobic youth, namely to establish 'foreigner-free zones' through harassment and threats of physical violence, does not seem to have found imitators in Scandinavia.

Finally, what can democratic societies do to combat racially motivated violence against foreign residents? The answers proposed by the authors of the two studies are not always encouraging to those who believe in the possibility of open, multicultural societies. One answer is vigorous law enforcement. This presupposes, as Bjørgo shows, that the police and the court system take xenophobic violence seriously and treat racist motives as aggravating circumstances.[63] Here the media have a special responsibility not to sensationalise right-wing violence and thus confer status on the perpetrators or encourage imitators.[64] Another answer is to change the immigration and asylum laws. As Bjørgo points out, in Sweden attacks on asylum centres virtually stopped after the number of asylum seekers had been reduced by more than 70 per cent between 1992 and 1994 and the government closed down three-quarters of all asylum centres. As a result, 'the ''favourite targets'' of xenophobic attacks disappeared from many localities, or at least became less visible'.[65] This invariably leads to one solution, which is, at least implicitly, also

[61] *Ibid.*, 281, 291, 292.
[62] *Ibid.*, 297.
[63] *Ibid.*, 321.
[64] *Ibid.*, 249–55.
[65] *Ibid.*, 91.

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suggested by the authors of the Swiss study: namely that the established parties (and here especially the moderate right) make 'substantial concessions' to the radical right by adopting some of their priorities while at the same time decisively distancing themselves from their organisations and leading personalities. In this case, the authors suggest, 'the moderate right which radicalises itself deprives the extreme right of all legitimacy'.[66]

This, of course, was the strategy adopted by the CDU-led German government in the early 1990s to combat the rise of the Republikaner. (Ironically, critical German observers consider the change in the immigration laws one of the main reasons for the widespread xenophobia, particularly in the eastern part of the country.) Unfortunately, the strategy has only worked in part. It may have curbed xenophobic violence and reduced it to a 'tolerable' level, but, as the experience of most prominently France and Norway has shown, it failed to check substantially the political radical right. In fact, the adoption of right-wing anti-immigration positions by the established parties was nothing more than an official acknowledgement and recognition of the extent to which these positions were supported by the public. The result has been a continuing process of what French observers have called the 'Lepenisation' of the mind. What this entails is nothing less than the notion that ideas that once were considered unacceptable are now more and more openly debated as genuine problems requiring political solutions. This tendency has become particularly obvious in the recent debate in Germany on the question of how to deal with the memory of the Holocaust triggered by remarks made by the novelist Martin Walser . In view of western Europe's historical legacy and sensitivities, the current process, which goes far beyond what the Swiss authors call normalisation, marks a fundamental turning point in the form of a sharp break with the norms and conventions that informed the Cold War period. Undoubtedly, the radical right has played a more than marginal role in this process. Given the potential for economic turmoil and social dislocation generated by globalisation, together with the new opportunities created by the communications revolution, it is likely to continue to present a major challenge to European democracies.

[66] *Ibid.*, 279.

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