

Will Fascism Return to the Far Right?

Wednesday 23 October 2019, by [RENTON David](#) (Date first published: 2 October 2019).

Today's far right is little more than an incoherent collection of provocations. But if it grows and attains more power, it will employ the consistent ideology and clear goals of traditional fascism. That's the danger the Left has to combat today.

This is an excerpt from [The New Authoritarians: Convergence on the Right](#) by David Renton.

In my book, [The New Authoritarians](#), I have argued that we are in a [post-fascist moment](#). In other words, that fascism remains a despised tradition and that the most successful recent movements on the Right have been those which have acknowledged fascism's unpopularity and based their politics on more recent events: on 9/11 rather than Hitler or Mussolini. Here I ask whether that shift within the far right is permanent, whether a far right which has turned away from fascism might turn back in years to come.

If this question is addressed from the perspective of today's leaders, then the answer is straightforward: none of Donald Trump, Nigel Farage, or Marine Le Pen envisage a revolutionary war against the liberal state; their approach is solely electoral and this is likely to remain the case for any foreseeable future. The leaders of the converged right and far right are well aware that the dominant values of our time remain hostile to fascism.

This is one reason why, for example, the League was able to form [a government in Italy](#) while the Front failed in France. The former was not founded as a fascist party, its adoption of Italian nationalism has made it a hybrid party, combining nationalism with its earlier regional politics. The party was mobile, heterogeneous, and hard to pin down. It was in these ways different from the Front and better equipped for power.

This piece approaches the question of whether under the next generation of leaders on the right, the direction of travel might yet be reversed. This question is approached in two ways: first, historically, through a study of the street movements of the far right and in particular the British [English Defence League](#) (EDL) and its successors, and then politically, by asking what the far right loses from the subordination of its fascist element.

Street Movements

The fascist parties of the 1920s and 1930s were committed to street politics at the expense of electoralism. They were serious about purging the liberal state and replacing the existing structures with their own appointees. This approach is incompatible with parliamentary politics, in which any victory is only temporary, and large parts of the state (the judiciary, the army, the civil service) are immune to political control. For that reason, if there is going to be a fascist party in the future, it is most likely to emerge out of those far right movements which reject conventional politics in favor of the street.

The typical street parties of recent years have been groups such as Britain's English Defence League or Germany's Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West (Pegida). As yet, neither of

these has become a party, still less a fascist party. These are principally racists, organized in a protest movement, with few cadres, with no conception of political or cultural revolution, and no model of personal leadership or of the spiritual renewal of the nation. For the most part, the leaders of these groups have had little knowledge of or interest in the fascist ideology of seventy years ago, and yet they have shared with historic fascism a profound hostility to conventional politics and to the existing state.

The far right has grown; its fascist component has withered. These two statements are both true, yet their combination is unstable.

The politics of such movements can be illustrated by the text of the Prague Declaration which Pegida signed in 2016 along with a series of allies, the Czech Blok proti islámu, Estonia's Conservative People's Party, Lega Nord, Poland's National Movement and Pegida groups in Austria, Bulgaria and Holland:

Being aware of the fact that the thousand-year history of Western civilisation could soon come to an end through Islam conquering Europe and the fact that the political elites have betrayed us, we, representatives of different European nations, declare the following: We will not surrender Europe to our enemies. We are prepared to stand up and oppose political Islam, extreme Islamic regimes and their European collaborators.

On the face of it, the Prague Declaration offered little more than a radical hostility to Islam, in other words, much the same politics as the dominant Western response to 9/11, except in a more concentrated form. Here were various figures on the Right taking ideas from the mainstream and pushing them further.

Yet even in this short passage there were hints that the step rightwards from mainstream to margin represented a change of substance as well as form. To speak of Islam's "collaborators" was to suggest that there were Europeans who had outstepped the limits of acceptable behavior and should themselves be jailed or expelled.

The signatories went on to explain who their enemies were: "the Central European government ... the global elites [whose rules] have brought ... corruption, chaos and moral collapse." Mere Islamophobia followed to its logical conclusion required a cultural war against politicians (in Pegida's case, the "traitor" Angela Merkel) and their business cronies. It meant the re-establishment of Europe as a mono-ethnic one party space, purged of anyone who equivocated in the face of the Islamic threat.

The origins of the English Defence League were similar to Pegida's. It was a street movement, mainly composed of newcomers to far right politics. Its dominant politics were anti-Muslim and post-9/11 rather than directly fascist. The formation to the EDL represented a rejection of previous models of far-right organizing. Between 2001 and 2009, the far right in Britain had been dominated by two main parties, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the British National Party (BNP). The latter's successes included the election of three councilors in Burnley in 2002, further gains until the party reached fifty-eight councilors in 2009, and in the same year the election of Andrew Brons and Nick Griffin to seats in the European Parliament.

During this period, the BNP modeled itself on the electoral Euro-fascists of the FN and the AN, naming its magazine *Identity* after the Front's publication of the same name. Despite its growth, the BNP suffered a very large number of splits, with elected councilors in different parts of the country quitting on contact with the national leadership. With its disavowal of any sort of street politics and its insistence on electoralism, the BNP seemed to be no more than half of a "proper" fascist party.

By 2009, the BNP had recruited members across the country, but many of its branches were in decline and this process accelerated from October 2009 when BNP leader Nick Griffin was [invited onto Question Time](#). Confronted by the other panelists, Griffin gave a series of shallow answers, claiming for example that he had ceased to be a Holocaust denier but was prevented by European law from explaining what he now believed. Griffin failed to connect with his audience and his answers cemented his party's public reputation as a party of unreformed fascists.

The roots of the EDL go back to a campaign by Luton football casuals angered by Anjem Choudary and his provocative group Islam4UK. Choudary held a demonstration in Luton against a homecoming march by the Royal Anglian Regiment, at which placards called the soldiers cowards and killers. In response, groups of football casuals demanded a physical reaction against Choudary and against Muslims. The result was a series of demonstrations, ostensibly against Islamic extremism, but often resulting in physical attacks on British Muslims.

The EDL was boosted by an influx of BNP members or former members. Nigel Copsey has listed the BNP figures who participated in the nascent EDL, including Peter Fehr, the BNP's Luton organizer who asked the members of his group to attend the EDL's first protest; Laurence Jones from Dunstable; and Chris Mitchell, an organizer for Young BNP who also attended. The EDL website organizer "John Sheridan" (Chris Renton) was a BNP member, as was Davy Cooling, administrator of the EDL's Luton Facebook group.

By autumn 2009, [Stephen Yaxley-Lennon \("Tommy Robinson"\)](#) had emerged as the EDL's leader. Robinson was a former member of the BNP, and photographs exist of him attending meetings addressed by the Holocaust denier Richard Edmonds. Other BNP stalwarts to have joined EDL events included Karen Otty, the BNP's Merseyside secretary; Wakefield BNP organizer John Aveyward; and Stuart Bates and Michael Fritz from the BNP's West Midlands security team. They brought organizing experience, but the BNP's support was in other ways a liability, since the BNP leadership was widely perceived as out of touch, obsessed with ideology, and tied to the past. By contrast, the EDL was trying to be something new.

The first point at which the English Defence League distinguished itself from the British National Party was through holding demonstrations, often in smaller towns and typically from the railway station to a central square where speeches would be held. This was different from the BNP for whom demonstrations were a rarity and the main local event was a private meeting with a single speaker. BNP members were expected to read and sell a magazine drafted by the party's leaders, reflecting a culture in which the membership served to communicate the leader's politics.

The League did not have a list of approved publications. The EDL's events were public rather than private, active rather than passive. They were supplemented by Facebook discussions and a website with a calendar of upcoming demonstrations. From the perspective of Muslims in the affected towns, an EDL presence meant racist language and physical attacks such as in Luton in May 2009, when an Asian man was assaulted, numerous car windscreens were smashed, and the window of a restaurant smashed in.

Different groups within the EDL distanced themselves from the BNP, as a way of seeking to imprint their own personalities on the movement. The largest group were football fans, many from Luton where the group had been formed. One early recruit was the pseudonymous "Billy Blake" whose book *Coming down the Road* provides a diary of the demonstrations held during the EDL's first two years.

Blake tried to portray the EDL as the inheritor of a socialist tradition, comprising such unlikely figures as [Bessie Braddock](#), the Labour MP for Liverpool Exchange from 1945, a one-time

Communist who became a hammer of the Labour left; and [Dave Nellist](#) the Militant supporter and Labour MP for Coventry South East from 1983 to 1992. Even the name Billy Blake was a tribute of sorts to the eighteenth-century radical poet. For Blake, it was significant that the EDL marched carrying English flags, not the Union Jack, and called itself the English Defence League:

[T]he English working class is a distinct ethnic group, with its own tradition and culture ... The English working class are traditionally proud people who lead tough lives and operate on a system of core beliefs and values: patriotism, loyalty, a black and white view of right and wrong and an ingrained support of the underdog ... Even though they might not necessarily support a particular war, the English working class will still support the military while they are risking their lives for Queen and Country ... With this in mind it is obvious to see how the protest by the radicals [Islam4UK] was perceived as a direct challenge by English working class males who took to the streets believing it was their duty to respond and defend the soldiers.

A second group seeking to shape the English Defence League were people who wanted to tie the group to an international milieu of far-rightists. In 2009–2010, these included “Alan Lake” (Alan Ayling), a computer technician who spoke at an anti-Islamic conference on September 6, 2009 in Malmö organized by the far-right Swedish Democrats and on his return was widely reported in the press to be the EDL’s financier and chief strategist. On September 11, a group known as Stop Islamisation of Europe (SIOE) called an event to oppose the building of a mosque in Harrow. The EDL was reported to have co-sponsored the event and at this stage it seemed likely that the EDL might evolve into the UK chapter of an anti-Islam international.

Others arguing for an “international” strategy included Roberta Moore, a Brazilian-born Jewish Islamophobe who founded an EDL Jewish division and was pushed forward by the EDL leadership as a way of proving that the group had a wide range of supporters. In February 2011, Moore announced that she was in discussions with Victor Vancier, a pro-Israeli terrorist who had been jailed in 1978 and 1986 for fire bombings of cars, homes, and concert halls associated in his mind with Israel’s Egyptian and Soviet enemies. Despite the controversy surrounding Moore’s association with a convicted terrorist, the leadership asked her to represent the EDL in discussions with the SIOE, including at conference in Strasbourg in June 2011.

The history of the Right includes various proterozoic stages, when new political forms emerged, capable of developing in different directions, including towards the creation of an authoritarian party. The violence and racism of the Ku Klux Klan has an obvious affinity to the politics of the 1920s and 1930s; and yet the Klan never developed the ideological coherence of classical fascism. The British Brothers League, which campaigned against Jewish migration from 1901 to 1905, can also be seen as a precursor to fascism, although it emerged with mainstream (i.e. Conservative) support and had little program other than anti-migrant racism. The post-1918 German Freikorps, characterized by nostalgia for the war, anticommunism, and an intense and violent misogyny, trained many future leaders of the NSDAP, Heinrich Himmler of the SS, Ernst Röhm of the SA, and Rudolf Höß, the commandant at Auschwitz. In Robert Paxton’s [history of fascism](#), groups of this sort form a first stage, giving way later to the more familiar faces of fascism as a mass movement and then as a regime.

Pegida and the EDL on their foundation had a similar capacity of evolving into a fully formed political party with a worked-out political program borrowed from the past (i.e. from fascism), although this was only one of several possible outcomes. There were other directions in which the EDL could have turned. Another might have been for the group to shed its origins as a social movement and to become an electoral party.

Something like this happened in Germany where Pegida was at its height for a year after October 2014, after which the movement shifted in an electoral direction, with several of its former supporters going over to the [Alternative for Germany](#), which won ninety-two seats in federal elections, securing its highest votes in the southern districts of the old East Germany (the exact area, in other words, where Pegida had been strongest).

Alternatively, the English Defence League could have followed the Billy Blake model, deepening its social content and formulating a wider ideological program. This could have included drawing on the EDL's past as a group of working-class football supporters, but developing a wider project. Or the group could have become a British affiliate of SIOE or any of the other mini-internationals of the Right.

Tommy Robinson, Kevin Carroll, and the leaders of the EDL proved incapable of choosing between these strategies, but attempted all of them at different times. In September 2009, Robinson staged a press conference in front of journalists from Newsnight for which he and a dozen others dressed up in black balaclavas and produced a swastika, which they then burned. While this seemed to be an attempt — albeit an inept one — to separate the EDL from any far-right association, by the following April, EDL supporters were seen attending a demonstration in support of Geert Wilders outside the Dutch embassy called by the Pax Europa Citizens Movement.

In November 2011, Robinson announced he was ending the EDL in favor of an electoral alliance with the British Freedom Party, a splinter from the BNP. The move was criticized by the EDL's members and ultimately dropped, despite Kevin Carroll's success in winning 8,500 votes in the election for Luton's Police and Crime Commissioner in 2012.

In 2013, Tommy Robinson announced that he was quitting the far right in order to work with the anti-Islamist Quilliam Foundation. Within a couple of years, however, he was back with the far right, offering to be the leader of a UK offshoot of the Pegida campaign. When this failed to break through, Robinson sought to reinvent himself as an independent journalist and social media celebrity. He was paid a salary of just under £100,000 a year by the Canadian far-right social media site Rebel Media, to film himself carrying out stunts in which he would confront advocates of multiculturalism. These were followed up by obsessive tweets in which Robinson claimed to know of undocumented Islamic outrages. In June 2017, [Darren Osborne](#) drove a van at Finsbury Park Mosque, killing Markram Ali, a grandfather from Haringey. Osborne was radicalized in part by reading posts from Robinson. Following Osborne's trial for murder, Twitter closed down Robinson's account.

Through the course of 2017, the English Defence League was superseded by a new organization, the Football Lads Alliance, which mobilized a similar demographic of football hooligans and first-time supports of the far right. At least initially, the FLA's cadre was older than their counterparts among the EDL and ostensibly even more hostile to all organized politics, even right-wing politics. It made strenuous efforts to ban chanting, slogans, banners, flags (save for the St George's flag and the Union Jack), even alcohol, all of which it associated with the EDL. In its first few months, the FLA sought to exclude Robinson. The FLA also found new allies, notably in Birmingham, where a "Justice4the21" campaign group had been set up to demand a fair inquest for the victims of the 1974 pub bombings.

The Football Lads Alliance split in an argument concerning John Meighan, the FLA's founder, and the steps he had made to set up a private company to profit from FLA merchandise, giving rise to a Democratic FLA (DFLA) successor. For the DFLA, like the EDL, the target was not just "extremists" (in other words, Muslims) but their allies: all of liberal society.

Having lost his Twitter account, Tommy Robinson forced his way to the leadership of the movement,

speaking at DFLA events and confronting the state, filming trials of Muslim suspects and risking the collapse of those cases. He had already received a suspended sentence for contempt of court in 2017, after attempting to film from the court building where (he said) Muslim rape suspects were being tried. Robinson did the same again a year later, pleading guilty to [contempt charges](#) and received a thirteen-month sentence, which he then successfully appealed.

Through these events, and in particular a mass campaign demanding Robinson's release from prison, a new far-right milieu was built, combining supporters of electoral projects (Gerard Batten, the new leader of UKIP), Canadian and American funders, British allies of Steve Bannon (Raheem Kassam, formerly of Breitbart London), the supporters of the Football Lads Alliance, and people brought in by Robinson's social media presence. Once again, different parts of the Right were converging in defiance of their seeming political differences. The parliamentarianism of UKIP and the street approach of Tommy Robinson were no obstacle to a sustained collaboration. What the final result would be of this convergence was far from clear.

One theme of Klaus Theweleit's study of a previous generation of proto-rightists, the German Freikorps of 1918-1920, is that they were equipped as much by misogyny as by racism. In their imagination, women might be "white," that is nurses or aristocrats, beautiful and passive; or they might be "red," the castrating women who led Communist gangs and who deserved to be met with rape or murder.

A similar contempt for women has informed parts of the emergent British far right since 2017. Tommy Robinson portrays his movement as a campaign to save white women and children from what would otherwise be their inevitable rape at the hands of Muslims. This is a discourse in which even at its most "heroic," women are never more than the subjects of other people's decisions. In Sunderland, the DFLA has organized under the banner of "Justice for women and children."

The men who are supposed to be protecting women turn out themselves to be no paragons of virtue. Far-right supporters John Broomfield of Britain First and Richard Price of the EDL have been convicted for downloading, and making, child pornography. Kristopher Allan of the EDL's Scottish affiliate was convicted of sending indecent images to and having sexual contact with a thirteen-year-old child. It is not surprising that the men who claim to be defending women turn out to be sexual predators. Even at its most "feminist," their politics treats women as the objects and not the subjects of their own lives.

In her book [Angry White People](#), the journalist Hsiao-Hung Pai spent several years shadowing members of the EDL, including "Darren," a founding member of the group who had taken part in early EDL marches, carrying a "black and white unite" banner, and was fiercely loyal to the group's origins in terrace culture. Darren was Kevin Carroll's cousin and, like him, of Irish ancestry. A key moment came when Darren saw Carroll taking his grandfather's wartime medal to an EDL protest, in order to ward off criticisms that he came from an Irish background. "Grandad went through all that war, for Kev to stand in the Midlands somewhere, to try and prove to the EDL crowd that he's British. I'll never forgive him for that." Darren believed that the leaders of the EDL presented themselves as the representatives of the working class but that, unlike the people who lived on Luton's housing estates, Carroll and Robinson had no belief in the underdog and were not loyal even to their own families.

Darren's story should not be taken as a sign that the EDL and its successors had a continuing problem with the war, or that they were simply a stage in what was the inevitable re-emergence of a fascist street culture. One of the EDL's favorite pub songs was "Ten German Bombers" ("and the RAF from England shot them down"), with the word "Muslim" substituted for German. The supporters of the EDL left wreaths at war memorials. Tommy Robinson himself has a Churchill quote

on his arm. As a group, the EDL was at ease with its sense of history, and more than capable of presenting itself as the successor to the British patriotic glory of 1939–1945.

While the street orientation of the EDL and its successors and their rejection of democratic politics might be said to open the door to a more aggressive street politics of the Right, there is very little else that points in the same direction. Tommy Robinson's alliances have been with the various anti-Islamic internationals (SIOE and Pegida) rather than with parties of fascist origin. The movements he has built have remained just that, social movements rather than parties. The unifying factor is anti-Islamic racism rather than a fascist program.

The method of fascism was not to reject parliament in favor of the street but to combine both. Fascism is a coherent form of politics with a worked out strategy for confronting the state and a program for government. Robinson's success is by contrast defiantly anti-political. The politics of an epoch of conservative far-right convergence have assisted the far right; but what they had not yet done is produce growing numbers of fascists.

Can the Far Right Return to Fascism?

The far right has grown; its fascist component has withered. These two statements are both true, yet their combination is unstable. After all, fascism is a part of the far right; so the more that the Right grows, you would expect fascism to flourish. Another reason you would expect the fascist component of the far right to grow in future is connected to the very category "far right."

While this term has a changing meaning, it has a certain recurring logic, which shapes all the groups which belong to it. At different points in the last one hundred years the far right has been principally nostalgic (in the 1900s, with Action Française), a party of anti-black racists (the Klan), antisemitic (Dreyfus, the British Brother Leagues) counterrevolutionary (after 1917), and so on.

Despite this discontinuity of ideas, the people involved in the different far right projects are coherent enough to be worth treating as a single group. People can inhabit a similar point on the political spectrum to those who went before, even while the projects which motivate them change. Indeed the logic of occupying the same political space causes parties to find different routes to the same solutions: opposing democracy, opposing social reforms, using rhetorical and physical violence against their opponents.

The metaphor of a genealogical tree suggests that the effective content of political tradition can be recreated even while the surface forms are changed. Under capitalism, it is possible to have parties that call for greater or lesser equality (the Left and the Right); it is possible to have parties that call for stability or transformation (the mainstream and the extremes). If and when there are future mass parties calling for a counterrevolutionary war to re-establish fading social hierarchies, the chances are that these parties will behave something like a fascist party, even if they have not copied the ideas of previous fascists, but have found their own way to them.

While the ideas of fascism were opportunistic and the speeches contained a very high degree of verbiage and promises which no leader intended to keep, there were certain recurring themes which equipped fascists in their project of fighting a social and cultural war against their enemies. Some examples of these core ideas include the idealization of struggle, the use of anti-socialism and of antisemitism.

The fascists maintained that they were fighting a cultural and political war against the society around them and that the outcome of their war would be an entirely different system. They presented themselves as revolutionaries (in the sense of being violently opposed to the status quo in

Europe) and in that way, were able to appeal to some of the most impoverished people in the world around them, including many unemployed workers. Anti-socialism was another core idea, which gave the fascists a purpose and a source of allies among the mainstream right.

Anti-Jewish racism fitted closely with the way in which German and Italian fascists saw themselves. They were against the Russian Communists, who (they said) were led by a generation of left-wing Jews, and against the Western Communists who were leading strikes that threatened to destroy the nation. Antisemitism provided the fascists with a series of enemies below them.

Yet the fascists were also (in their own eyes) militant advocates of change. In their understanding of the world, the Jews were not merely in the Soviet Union, they were also in America, where they dominated Wall Street. Antisemitism gave the interwar right a critique of capitalism as well as communism and enabled the fascists to appear neither left nor right. This dual positioning was essential to the project of mass counterrevolutionary politics.

Over the past two decades, the Right has renounced these ideas. Rather than teaching their supporters to prepare for a struggle, literal or metaphorical, the dominant style of the contemporary right is to present their messages as a series of provocations. Supporters of the far right like to say that they speak ironically. This is, as one right-wing blogger, Mytheos Holt, puts it, “an ironic pose: a way to stick their thumbs in the eyes of the moralists and orthodoxy-enforcers of both Right and Left.”

This style can be a successful way for unpopular groups to win a hearing. But when a movement acquires any sort of power, it must take a responsibility for its supporters and for other people’s lives. At a certain point it has to acknowledge its obligations and has to start planning for what it will do with its newfound authority. It needs a program. In order to acquire a program, the Right is compelled to join up the dots between the different positions that it holds, and to argue its ideas strategically.

The far right of recent years has replaced socialism as its great enemy with social liberalism, and even liberalism is fought intermittently (so that the “feminism” which justifies the subordination of Muslims is supported, while the politics that rejects all male violence is despised). Again, this weakens the far right compared to its ideological ancestors, leaving it ideologically vague, and shorn of any long-term coherence.

As for anti-Islamic racism, this is a widespread and popular opinion, whose adoption by the far right serves to normalize and legitimize parties which were previously considered unacceptable. But it is hard to see how — even from the paranoid perspective of the Right — anti-Muslim racism could be used to explain the 2008 crash in the way that Jews were once blamed for the Wall Street crash and the Great Depression. Anti-Muslim racism is an ideology which kicks down, which condemns migrants and the racialized poor of the inner cities. It provides the Right with narrower opportunities than the racism which dominated the Right in the past.

Fascism has a functional utility to the far right, which motivates people to revert to it. For twenty years, this has been a weaker tendency than the sustained move to keep the Right clear of the stigma still attached to Hitler and Mussolini. However, as the far right has grown, in particular since 2016, we have started to see initial signs of parts of the politics of the 1930s returning.

During the 2016 election campaign, Donald Trump counterposed his message of America First to the risks posed by the “global” power structure, manifested in the “international banks” that he accused of holding covert meetings with Hillary Clinton. Trump was echoing a group of his far-right allies, for whom globalization is an error in late capitalism, which is in all ways the perfect economic system

save for its supposed takeover by Jews. Under the impact of his campaign, antisemitic images and themes became widespread on social media, with websites such as [Andrew Anglin's Daily Stormer](#) calling on their readers to denounce their opponents as Jewish communists, and to confront them with twitter hashtags such as #HitlerWasRight.

Indeed, Trump himself was not shy of using anti-Jewish symbols, for example, [by tweeting images](#) of Hillary Clinton with a pile of money, the words "Most Corrupt Candidate ever," and a six-pointed Jewish star. The Anti-Defamation League counted 2.6 million antisemitic worldwide tweets between summer 2016 and summer 2017. These dynamics have continued after Trump's victory. In the year starting January 29, 2017, for example, the number of antisemitic tweets increased to 4.2 million.

The return of old forms of politics has not been limited to social media. In areas of far-right strength, such as the southeastern corner of Germany which has been the base for Pegida and more recently the AfD, attacks on Jewish-owned shops have increased. Racism, in all its forms, has become more pervasive.

As the international far right has grown in strength since 2016, its participants have shown a greater willingness to use violence, and have become more likely to identify the Left as their chief antagonist. In October 2018, Jair Bolsonaro was elected President of Brazil. Although Bolsonaro chooses his targets widely (to include Brazil's LGBT community, anti-Zionist Jews, political women, and many others beside); key to his campaign was the [promise to destroy his opponents on the Left](#). "These red outlaws," he promised, "will be banished from our homeland. It will be a clean-up the likes of which has never been seen in Brazilian history."

From the perspective of those who identify with the far right, fascism is a "tight" ideology, which provides a series of positions which justify the adoption of violence and offer its supporters not just the excitement of military struggle and race war but in the final stages a new society and a new fascist mandate. Nothing developed by the far right in the past decade, in the United States or in Europe, offers the same coherence. This is why fascism may yet return; because unlike the non-fascist far right, fascism has a clear goal; and because the supporters of the Right will increasingly need one.

"The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content," Karl Marx once wrote. In a similar spirit, this book argues that today's anti-fascists have to confront the far right on the basis of what the parties are now, not for what their ideological ancestors did.

That said, it is also true that an increasing number of states and right-wing parties combine the forms of political democracy with a style of leadership which is authoritarian and nationalist and hostile to opposition. If this politics continues to succeed in a space to the right of mainstream conservatism, the likelihood grows that we will face new and still more aggressive configurations of the Right, evolving their own politics in ever more aggressive directions.

Indeed, the financial catastrophe of 2007-8 was so intense, and the collective learning from it has been so shallow, that it is hard not to believe that some sort of economic crisis will recur. When it does, and if the Right continues to mutate and produce new political forms, then its new partisans will emerge into a world where the far right will have many more supporters than it did ten or twenty years ago. Fascism will remain an option for them, and it will satisfy certain needs that even a militant conservatism cannot answer.

David Renton is the author of *The New Authoritarians: Convergence on the Right*.

David Renton

[Click here](#) to subscribe to our weekly newsletters in English and or French. You will receive one email every Monday containing links to all articles published in the last 7 days.

P.S.

Jacobin Magainze

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/10/far-right-fascism-ideology-antisemitism>