

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Europe, Great Britain > Great Britain & Northern Ireland (Europe) > Extreme right / Fascism (Britain) > **Covid-19 & conspiracy theorists (Britain): The Face of Creeping Fascism**

Covid-19 & conspiracy theorists (Britain): The Face of Creeping Fascism

Monday 7 September 2020, by [HEARSE Phil](#) (Date first published: 3 September 2020).

Last Saturday's demonstration by conspiracy theorists is a serious warning, argues Phil Hearse.

It looked comical: a Trafalgar Square rally involving a mix of conspiracy theorists, anti-vax campaigners, and a sprinkling of organised fascists to protest Covid-19 lockdown measures. It would be easy to regard it as so wacky as to be somehow outside politics.

This would be a serious mistake, compounding a succession of mistakes that many on the Left have made since the 2016 Brexit Referendum. The scepticism that greeted Creeping Fascism when we first published the book in 2017 seems to have been silenced by events. When armed right-wing militia stand alongside police armoured cars and shoot down Black Lives Matter protestors, it is not easy to argue that fascism is not a clear and present danger.

But you don't need a Trump baseball cap and an automatic rifle to be part of the fascist surge. One thing we are learning fast is that it is broad, diverse, and multifaceted – a hydra-like monster of many heads and tentacles, growing above all inside the reactionary swamp that is cyberspace.

We don't have monolithic parties like the Italian Fascists or the German Nazis any more. We have something much looser, something sprawling and spontaneous, erupting in dozens of different forms. It is represented by the misogynist hate sites, the neo-Nazi militias, the mad conspiracy theorists, and the back-street thugs whose dearest wish is to punch a black man or torment a Muslim woman.

Make no mistake: last Saturday's demonstration was fascist. Conspiracy theorists, anti-vaxxers, anti-abortionists, and climate-change deniers are spreading a blend of reactionary ideological tropes that fit perfectly into the far-right paradigm.

Key organiser was Piers Corbyn, brother of Jeremy. In the 1970s he was a member of the International Marxist Group and a leading figure in the London squatters' movement. He went on to make millions from his weather-prediction business, which one-sidedly (to say the least) posited that the weather was mainly determined by sunspots.

Today, like others speaking at the rally, he is a climate-science denier. He attacks 'globalists led by George Soros' for wanting to control people's thought through 5G mobile technology and eventually to implant microchips in everyone's brain.

The worldwide right-wing attack on George Soros – promoted, amongst many others, by Hungarian far-right premier Victor Orban – is dead in the centre of a decades-old fascist anti-Semitic myth. For 'globalists' read liberals and socialists. For 'George Soros' read Jewish capitalists. This is a warmed-up version of Hitler's 'international Jewish conspiracy' linking Wall Street and the Kremlin.

Alongside Corbyn was long-time conspiracy theorist David Icke, another proponent of the 'globalists led by George Soros' perspective. Icke holds that 'the globalist elite' (aka 'the illuminati') have controlled the world for thousands of years. At one time he claimed they were actually lizards. (Like the Slitheens in Dr Who?) This seems to have been a bit too wacky even for Icke, so now it's not actually lizards that are the problem, but that tried-and-tested fascist staple, the Jews. What threatens us, Icke warns, is a global conspiracy of 'Rothschild Zionists'.

Icke has close links with leading US conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, who attacks 'the George-Soros-financed Communist campaign to overthrow the United States' – represented most recently, of course, by Black Lives Matter and Anti-Fascist Action. During his 2016 election campaign, Donald Trump appeared on Jones' online TV channel Info Wars, praising Jones' work. Jones in turn claims his ideas are often taken up by the White House. He has been banned on Facebook and Twitter.

The ability of conspiracy cranks to mobilise a few thousand against (very inadequate) coronavirus precautions is disturbing, but not really a surprise. You can be sure that present at the rally were large numbers of people who voted for UKIP and the Brexit Party in the last European elections, and then voted for Johnson in the 2019 general election. The core was probably a mix of middle-class and working-class racists. These are Daily Mail readers who want to put their paper's politics into action.

Now there are plans to give these people a major new voice via a current affairs TV channel on the model of Fox News. Rupert Murdoch is one competitor to run the channel. Ofcom has already given a license to a rival group to broadcast under the name GB News.

Tories and other reactionaries have long complained that the BBC is 'biased' against the Conservative Party and – in extreme versions – run by 'Marxists'. The very opposite is true. Cowed by threats to abolish the license fee that funds Britain's public broadcaster, the BBC has retreated into ever-more craven conformism. Today, ITV news is much more independent, especially Channel 4 News, and, according to a recent survey, ITV News is seen as the most politically neutral. The Conservative Party wants to smash up the existing balance of TV News, by breaking up the BBC or making it a commercially-run channel, and by privatising Channel 4 (a step towards curbing its news output).

Britain's culture wars are well under way. The Left has to fight them and not pretend that the issues involved – particularly issues of racism and migrant rights – can be evaded by fighting mainly on economic issues and the defence of the NHS.

Phil Hearse

P.S.

- Mutiny. 3 September 2020:
<https://www.timetomutiny.org/post/the-face-of-creeping-fascism>
- Phil Hearse is co-author of *Creeping Fascism: what it is and how to fight it*.