

Rezension: Robert O. Paxton: The Anatomy of Fascism

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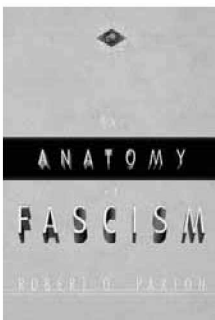
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in nicht wenigen Thüringer Gemeinderäumen zu finden. Auf volksmissionarischen Verkaufstischen befanden sich weiterhin DC-Traktate (S. 266 f.).

Schenk, der eine umfangreiche Bibliographie zur Thematik anbietet (S. 348–420), deren Benutzbarkeit indes eine Teilung in Quellen und Forschungsliteratur erhöht hätte, arbeitet in Grundmanns und Johannes Leopoldts späteren Veröffentlichungen Kontinuitäten zur NS-Zeit heraus, die bis in den Sprachgebrauch hineinreichen. Grundmann überzeichnete weiterhin die Differenz zwischen Jerusalem und Galiläa, die in seinem Jesus-Buch 1940 als Beleg für die „arische“ Herkunft Jesu galt (vgl. dazu Osten-Sacken, S. 293–295). Sein Bild vom Judentum blieb einseitig negativ (S. 248); es stand diametral im Gegensatz zum Christentum (Osten-Sacken, S. 304–311). In dem von Grundmann zu Beginn der 60er Jahre erarbeiteten Programm für den kirchlichen Unterricht wurde das Alte Testament auf die Geschichte des christlichen Gottes mit den Menschen reduziert. Die Namen Israel und Juda fehlten, der die Beziehung zwischen Gott und dem von ihm erwählten Volk beschreibende biblische Begriff „Bund“ hieß schlicht „Gottesverhältnis“ (S. 262).

Die Erfahrung des Jahres 1945 führte bei Grundmann nicht zu einer theologischen Neubesinnung, sondern es blieb in seinen Publikationen im wesentlichen bei Rechtfertigungen seiner vor allem in den Jahren 1938 bis 1940 entwickelten Konzeption (S. 276). Aufgrund der knappen Auswahl an theologischer Literatur in der DDR und des niedrigen Preises seiner Buchveröffentlichungen gehörte Grundmann in Ost- und Westdeutschland zu den vielgelesenen Neutestamentlern. Diese Tatsache ist offenbar jedoch nicht nur auf die günstigen äußeren Rahmenbedingungen zurückzuführen, sondern auch auf die lange, wie Osten-Sacken betont (S. 312), bis in die Gegenwart reichende Tradition des christlichen Antijudaismus.

Dr. Gerhard Lindemann



Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, New York 2004 (Random House), 336 S.

From the 1960s onwards books on Fascism enjoyed a tremendous vogue among both scholars and Left-wing academic activists. A handful of these books, notably Ernst Nolte's *Faces of Fascism* (1963), were works of major intellectual distinction; many more only appealed to a labyrinthine cast of academic Marxist mind that sought to divine the permutation of plutocrats who were the alleged puppet-masters of Mussolini and Hitler.

Between these extremes were books that resembled catalogues of Fascist movements and regimes. These routinely consisted of long chapters on Italy or Germany, shorter ones on Britain, Hungary or Romania, and scant paragraphs

on Denmark or Switzerland. Oh, and the obligatory inclusion, in ritual obeisance to the Third World, of a few remarks about Brazil and Argentina. Plus Japan. In the last two decades, cultural historians have tried to jazz up these stale formulae with stuff about Fascist “spectacle” and “theatre”, as if Mussolini and Hitler were glorified performance artists, but even that momentary academic sensation has become routine. None of this product showed much capacity for self-reflection. As the great François Furet reminded us in his last major book, the Left needs “Fascism” since “anti-Fascism” has been among its own most enduring alibis.

One turned, with genuine anticipation, to Robert Paxton’s *Anatomy of Fascism*, even though the title recalled a remarkably dry tract published over thirty years ago called *Anatomy of the SS*, as well as an even grimmer tome called *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*. At a very young age, Paxton wrote an extraordinarily fine book on Vichy France that is still the best account of that terrible episode. He has written some other good books, and has been a star witness at trials of Vichy personnel. Here, I thought, was someone who could say something fresh and interesting about Fascism. However, that goal is harder to achieve than in the 1960s.

This is not because there are no Fascists about nowadays. A few of them are in government. They range from the suave Professor Gianfranco Fini, Italy’s current “post-Fascist” deputy prime minister, about whose relations with his British opposite number John Prescott one marvels, to the far from suave BNP councillors of Burnley and Oldham who recently exercised the new Tory leader for all of a day. The trouble is that the wider context has changed, inevitably demoting “Fascism” as a hot political issue, notwithstanding rather separate allegations that European antisemitism is on the march again.

Exposure to the colossal criminality and failure of Communism, and the recent acts of ethnic cleansing committed by Communists who have mutated into Fascists in former Yugoslavia, have slightly undermined the Left’s purchase on the moral high ground. Paxton does not even address the arguments of, for example James Gregor or Richard Pipes about the Janus-faced duality of Communism and Fascism. The Left’s parallel attempts to identify itself with the cause of “anti-racism” have been challenged by Jewish commentators, who see the readers of *The Guardian* or *Independent* as the main repositories of recrudescing European antisemitism on the grounds of their criticism of Israel. A brave minority on the Left (such as David Aronovitch and Christopher Hitchens) are also sufficiently perturbed by “Islamofascism”, to discount the charge – emanating from their erstwhile comrades – of being racists. And here comes the most recent twist in the tale. Majority left-wing opinion, exemplified by the British Marxist New York intellectual Tony Judt, an historian hitherto known for writing about Belgium and the same three French intellectuals, increasingly identifies the current Israeli government of Ariel Sharon with Fascism. Paxton concurs, although his phrase “functional equivalent” is more slippery than Judt’s impassioned rhetoric: “By 2002, it was possible to hear

language within the right-wing of the Likud Party and some of the smaller religious parties that comes close to a functional equivalent to fascism. The chosen people begin to sound like a Master Race that claims a unique 'mission in the world', demands its 'vital space', demonises an enemy that obstructs the realization of the people's destiny, and accepts the necessity of force to obtain these ends".

This is quite possibly the only vaguely subversive thought that Paxton ventures in his analysis of the phenomenon of Fascism. Not really of course, because Paxton hasn't bothered to consult the Hamas website, where the poisonous antisemitism is borrowed verbatim from Adolf Hitler. He is not keen on the old game of identifying intellectual precursors, as Isaiah Berlin once absurdly did in the case of poor Joseph de Maistre, the leading late eighteenth century ideologue of *Throne and Altar*. This does not deter Paxton from a few perfunctory remarks about, inter alia, Nietzsche, Pareto or Sorel, that betray no profound acquaintance with any of them.

In the more compelling parts of his book, Paxton opts for an analysis of the circumstantial stages that increased the odds of a Fascist movement (of which some, such as those in Hungary or Spain, were neutered by conservative authoritarians, or as in Britain simply petered out) attaining and maintaining itself in power. This homage to the new contingency is a refreshing change from the over-determined agental approach of Marxists, as is its emphasis on hard-nosed politics, which makes the cultural approach to Fascism as "theatre" seem irredeemably light-weight and pretentious, something to entertain a graduate seminar on a wet Thursday afternoon.

According to Paxton, Fascism was the product of "weak or failed liberal states and belated or damaged capitalist systems", a claim that correctly exonerates both liberalism (in its broadest sense) and capitalism from the wilder generic charges of Marxists. The ability of Fascists to achieve power was largely the responsibility of traditional elites (Paxton is more reticent on the parallel failures of the Left) who could not mobilise equivalent support in a new era of mass politics that the Left was the first to successfully exploit. Paxton finally defines Fascism as follows: "a form of political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by the compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion".

Paxton sets out the terms of various ancillary academic debates, such as that about the role of individual will or ambient circumstances and processes in the formation of Fascist or Nazi policy. His conclusions invariably accord with those of the prevailing left-liberal academic consensus and will, doubtless, receive all the usual over-blown plaudits from the usual range of suspects. The comparative approach he adopts is also not without difficulties. Odd observations are

inserted on such themes as the adoption of political uniforms. He blames the Ku-Klux-Klan, although Garibaldi's Red Shirts may have beaten them to it. As this indicates, countries blur and merge, losing all specificity, while the absence of telling detail and incident, let alone the pithy insights provided by contemporary imaginative writers, either pro- or contra, results in a book of some blandness. One would have liked to know why, for example, Mircea Eliade, Ferdinand Céline, Giorgio de Chirico, Ezra Pound, or W. B. Yeats were attracted to Fascism, but the answers are not here. Rival explanations are briefly discussed, but the reader is rarely given an accurate account of their reasoning, and the author's summations are routinely within that left-liberal consensus with which universities have elected to endow themselves.

The claim that *The Anatomy of Fascism* will somehow contribute to future dissuasion and deterrence is overly optimistic. The history seems increasingly disconnected from contemporary European reality, although this won't worry those Americans, who seem to think Europe is still in the 1930s and 1940s. Future Fascists may not appear as plebeian British or East German skinheads, or so reconstructed as Professor Fini that he has been warmly feted by American Jews as a friend of Israel, but in the much more ambiguous populist guise of the late Pim Fortuyn, a libertarian homosexual, whose "martyrdom" has triggered a rightwards sea-change in the domestic politics of hitherto liberal Holland. As Norman Tebbit once predicted, moves towards a federal Europe, coupled with unregulated immigration, may conspire to produce dozens of local or regional neo-Fascisms, as governments concentrate on the big picture, and neglect the concerns of ordinary working class people about quality of life questions. Paxton does not tackle these problems, and nor, for that matter does he have anything to say about our collective failure to address the superfluity of non-academic working class young men (whatever their skin colour) who surely constitute the residual reservoir for Fascist style movements, a notion that should be extended to embrace the wilder fringes of Islam.

Meanwhile, publishers churn out books like this, and the History Channel is the "Hitler Channel". The barrel has been so thoroughly scraped, that TV producers now come up with such trivia as "Fascism and Football". Increasingly one's response to this junk is to switch off or over. One day, perhaps, a great novelist will say something of consequence about all of these matters. In the absence of a Dostoevsky, I suppose we have Michel Houellebecq, who unlike Paxton, is paying a heavy price for saying something that clearly got to contemporary Fascists.

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