An Overused and Frequently Misused Political Term

MARK WEGIERSKI

Professor Paul Edward Gottfried is a leading analyst of conservative movements in the Western world, who is credited with coining the terms "paleoconservative" as well as "alt-right." For many years he was an endowed professor in the humanities at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania. Professor Gottfried is a polyglot humanist, familiar with at least ten languages, including German, Ancient Greek, and Latin. All of his books have been published by academic or respectable commercial presses, including three books on the conservative movement in America (1988, 1993, and 2007).

His 2007 work on what is a controversial subject is an extended critique of the shallowness and anti-intellectualism of "movement conservatism" in the U.S. Professor Gottfried has also published a number of books that provide an extended critique of "the managerial-therapeutic regime" — which he regards as a dystopia that has engulfed most of Western society. These studies include *After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State* (1999), and *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt: Toward a Secular Theocracy* (2002). Gottfried's first published book was *Conservative Millenarians: The Romantic Experience in Bavaria* (1979), his expanded dissertation which gave indications of his lifelong interest in intellectual history and the search for authentic movements of the Right. His book, *The Search for Meaning: Hegel and the Postwar American Right* (1986), was glowingly reviewed in *National Review*, before that publication fell into the hands of new management. In those days, even so-called mainstream conservatives did not shrink from what has been called "purposeful pessimism." In 1990 came Gottfried's incisive study of the German legal theorist Carl Schmitt and several books later, *The Strange Death of Marxism*. In this work Gottfried pointed to the elements of social conservatism embedded in the Old Left and argued that, to the extent that former communists embraced managerialist capitalism, multiculturalism, and "alternative lifestyles," they became *less* not more "conservative."

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FASCISM
The Career of a Concept
By Paul E. Gottfried
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Professor Gottfried mentions that one of the origins of this book was his real anger at the widespread misuse of the term *fascism* in current political conversations:

> While listening to TV and reading newspapers from both here and western Europe, I noticed that news reporters and news interpreters referred to what displeased them as "fascist" or "playing with fascism." Most of these references had nothing to do with the historic phenomenon known as fascism and were instead attempts to excite the audience by linking the speaker's or the writer's current peeve to some long-ago unpleasantness.

In the Introduction, Professor Gottfried cogently lays out the structure of the book. He calls for clarity in the definition of fascism, as opposed to, for example, the tendentious anti-fascism of the Frankfurt School, especially as expressed in Adorno and Horkheimer's *The Authoritarian Personality*. As he explains:

> Those who stand in the way of social change [favored by the Left] and whose "bigotry" must be addressed are conveniently dismissed in western Europe [and the U.S., Canada, Australia] as "fascist," an epithet that has an added value because it is no longer associated with state corporatism and other now widely ignored but once-essential features of fascism. Calling someone a fascist today means that he or she is a Nazi.

In his first chapter, Professor Gottfried seeks to define fascism" and considers some of the problems of making that definition. A principal reason is because of the genuine paucity of purely fascist regimes in modern history. Indeed, Gottfried argues there was historically only one purely fascist regime in power, that of Mussolini's Italy. Gottfried also stresses the major differences between Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany, although the two regimes became allied after 1938. Nevertheless, he also devotes attention to the ideas of German historian Ernst Nolte, who called the Nazis "radical fascists" — so some commonality is suggested between the two regimes.

He then takes up the issue of "Totalitarianism and Fascism," looking at the interpretation of Nazism and Stalin's Communism as similar systems. In actual practice, he sees Fascist Italy to be an authoritarian not totalitarian regime [this despite the fact that it was Mussolini who coined the term "totalitarianism"]. This interpretation largely arose out of Hannah Arendt's highly insightful writings, most notably her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951]. This then forces one to question the "anti-fascist" credentials of the Soviet Communists.

Moving on to a discussion of "Fascism as the Unconquered Past," the author reviews the variety of "anti-fascism" engendered especially by the Frankfurt School. Gottfried writes:

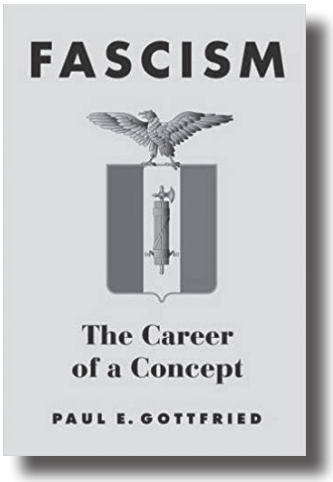
> The crusade against neofascism and other manifestations of the European nationalist Right has led to the replacement of a totalitarian enemy by a struggle against "right-wing extremism" (pp. 80-81).
>
> Terms like "totalitarianism" and "fascism" have no meaning at the political and journalistic level. They function as charges rather than as attempts to make sense of the history of Europe in the twentieth century.
>
> In this widening crusade against neofascism, all "insensitive" or unprogressive positions have been indiscriminately branded as fascistic. Be it opposition to Third World Immigration, complaints about the high rate of crime among Muslim residents in European cities…anything deemed as politically offensive indicates a fascist recrudescence.

This damning of the past and one's own nation is especially advanced in the case of Germany, and only slightly less so in France. Professor Gottfried also notes: "Moreover, while most historians previously (and rightly) viewed the Nazis as anti-Christian as well as anti-Jewish, since the 1960s the public has been awash in polemics blaming Christianity for the Holocaust." (p. 84).

Professor Gottfried next discusses "Fascism as a Movement of the Left" (pp. 87-104). Here he considers the work of thinkers, such as Catholic traditionalist Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn (cf. *Leftism from de Sade and Marx to Hitler and Marcuse* [1974]), the scholar A. James Gregor, and the anti-New Deal American critics. One may recall that once-famous phrase: "Fascism was the basis of the New Deal". Indeed, some American liberals of the 1920s and 1930s praised Mussolini's regime. Gottfried also discusses such recent journalistic efforts as Jonah Goldberg's *Liberal Fascism* (2007). Gottfried sharply criticizes this shallow book in these terms:

> Moreover, Goldberg's charges are profoundly hypocritical since he goes after Democrats, under the label of "liberals" and "leftists" for supporting policies that have commanded bipartisan support for decades… the size and reach of government that Goldberg explicitly or implicitly supports goes well beyond anything Democratic presidents enacted in the first half of the last century (p. 99).

Professor Gottfried then takes up "The Failure of Fascist Internationalism" (pp. 105-128). As he points out, it was in a novel by Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles*, where a Latin Fascist internationalism was articulated. Theorists of Italian Fascism also attempted to spread their ideology around Europe—efforts which met with little success. The section on "Oswald Mosely as an Apostle of Fascist Internationalism" (pp. 118-123) shows the British politician to be a more multivalent figure than the frequent grotesque caricatures of him would suggest.



The author considers whether fascism had a vision for an idealized future, rather than mostly an *ad hoc* ideology of the moment, in "The Search for a Fascist Utopia" (pp. 129-150). Special attention is paid to the leading theorist of Italian Fascism, Giovanni Gentile. Gottfried observes acerbically:

> Anti-Nazi and non-Nazi fascists ended up in the same rogues' gallery with Hitler and Himmler, just as the communists who had once served the Nazis during the period of the Soviet-Nazi Non-Aggression Pact were rehabilitated as the world's most reliable antifascists (p. 146).

Professor Gottfried points to the shallowness of current political discourse, especially in America, in his seventh chapter, "A Vanished Revolutionary Right," (pp. 151-158). He notes, for example, the curious movement-conservative campaign against the confirmation of Chuck Hagel as American Secretary of Defense. Searching for an "essentialist Right," Professor Gottfried makes a compelling case that: "Fascists embodied, however defectively, some traditional conservative sentiments and did so in a way that those who now call themselves 'conservative' usually do not" (p. 158).

The book concludes with a two-part Appendix, wherein he discusses "Fascism and Modernization" (pp. 159-162). This section points out that there were some links between fascism and literary and artistic modernism. The second part of the Appendix, "A Final Loose End" (pp. 163-173), discusses the work of German historian Rainer Zitelmann, who argues that "Hitler and Goebbels were anti-Christian totalitarian modernizers" (p. 167).

As Professor Gottfried himself admits in this book, an attempt to clarify the meaning of fascism is not likely to make much headway in the face of massive journalistic and academic industries of anti-fascist disapprobation. Nevertheless, it is helpful that someone of Gottfried's immense stature and learning is undertaking the effort. This reviewer's predominant reaction when reading the book was to especially notice the immense gulf and gap between the current-day world, and the world of the 1930s. In the 1960s, it could be argued that another storm had broken over Western civilization, a raging storm whose consequences continue into the present day, most notably the Sexual Revolution, and the Diversity Revolution. The ongoing enactment of mass, dissimilar immigration threatens to disrupt whatever fragmentary traditionalist residues may have remained from before the 1960s.

We have also had at least two generations of an educational system that mainly inculcates various forms of "political correctness." Indeed, there are today multifarious techniques for rendering nearly all of Western civilization, to appear as utterly hideous, to so-called "decent" sensibilities. All of this has taken on the appearance of an inexorable, permanent revolution. The Trump insurgency may well be seen as one of the last attempts to put American society on a more even keel than the topsy-turvy, antinomian world created since the 1960s. This attempt is being fought tooth-and-nail by the American left, which is unwilling to concede one millimeter of the vast ground it has gained in society since the 1960s. The careful study of earlier historical periods and political movements can put contemporary society in proper context, and perhaps help relieve some of the inexorable pressures toward so-called "progress." ■

Excerpts from *Fascism: The Career of a Concept* by Paul Gottfried

The old communist theme of fighting fascism remained popular but was given a non-socialist focus sometime in the 1970s. Even in socialist coalitions, the socialist war against fascist-prone capitalists came to center less on nationalizing productive forces than on fighting prejudice and welcoming Third World populations into Europe.

The heart of this ascending ideology was an impassioned rejection of all forms of Western or European identitarian politics, be it national, ethnic, or religious, and an expression of solidarity with an idealized world community. The social base of antifascism now comprises the historic working class less and less as it has come to embrace intellectuals, public-sector employees, and Third World resident communities in Europe.

The enemy this multicultural Left now has in its sights is "neofascism." This particular term has explosive power for those who wield it, and what renders it particularly useful is that it doesn't call for definitional precision…journalists are free to describe the other side as fascism redivivus. But most of these supposed throwbacks show no real resemblance to Nazism and only limited affinity with generic fascism…. [G]roups on the European right stand out by virtue of rattling intellectuals and journalists. These groups uniformly oppose immigration from the Third World and praise the historic identity of those nations that they view themselves as being linked to. These aggregations of European nationalists also hold no brief for gay lifestyles and see themselves as following in the critical stance of both biblical Christian and traditional bourgeois norms (pp. 76-77).

Another argument that cannot be missed in this text is the inadmissibility of applying "fascist" to whatever the speaker finds viscerally repulsive. In Europe this practice has gone so far that antifascism has been turned into a state religion by the governments and media in some western European countries. Antifascism typically entails equating every form of politically incorrect protestation, whether directed against gay marriage or the introduction of Sharia law into European countries, with "fascist" intolerance and then inventing some kind of linkage between the putative outrage and those atrocities committed in Nazi Germany. In such a forced connection the *argumentum ad Hitlerum* trumps any sober attempt at persuasion or dissuasion (p. 152). ■