

scale that it could not maintain long-term public support and, therefore, had no chance of success. Summers concludes that any future military intervention by the United States will end as disastrously as Vietnam unless, before undertaking the intervention, American officials have built a durable base of public support for the action.

In sum, the new analyses of low-level conflict should not be seen as simply "Counter-Insurgency Craze, Part II." Rather, this new body of literature builds on that earlier body of literature by accepting its valid insights while correcting its omissions and flaws.

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Wilkinson, Paul, *The New Fascists*, London and Sydney: Pan Books, 1983

Paul Wilkinson has written this book with the avowed purpose of alerting "the general public, and particularly the young generation, to the resurgence of neo-fascist and related movements of the ultra-right."<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon with which he is concerned is the spread in the 1970s and 1980s of extreme right-wing parties and organizations, many of which resemble, where they do not deliberately emulate, the pre-1945 fascist movements. This world-wide resurgence of fascism, as he sees it, is an accompaniment to the recent economic slump and to growing racial and national antipathies.

Fascism is here defined as an extreme movement which espouses authoritarian views, builds on an intolerance of racial or ethnic minorities and on anti-communism and deliberately appeals to irrational fears and hatreds. While fascists organize themselves into political parties, preferably under the leadership of an idolized *fuhrer*-figure, they also frequently give secret or open support to affiliated terrorist groups. Rejecting flatly and without justification the definition by Ernst Nolte and others who view fascism as a product of peculiar historical circumstances between 1918 and 1945, Wilkinson does nevertheless admit that many of his post-1945 fascisms have been mere carbon copies of Hitler's movement. He also admits that anti-communism has not been as vital an element in recent years and that many of the neo-fascisms today have difficulty finding leaders who are recognizable *fuhrer*-figures. In short, the practical definition which he offers of contemporary fascist movements is that of extreme and violent right-wing parties that trade on racial and ethnic hatreds.

Today's targets, in addition to Jews, include blacks, Asians and the *Gastarbeiter* (guestworker) programme of the European Common Market. In developing his theme, Wilkinson seeks fascism far and wide, examining not only fascist movements in Europe and Britain, but also drawing on movements and developments in such disparate locations as Japan, Argentina, South Africa, El Salvador, Israel and the United States.

After a brief survey of fascism's "Golden Age" between 1922 and 1945, Wilkinson examines the post-war fate of fascism. Between 1945 and 1965, fascism was weighed down with the double stigma of defeat and Nazi brutalities and those movements that did exist served mainly to attract fascist supporters from an earlier period. The Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) was established in Italy in the late 1940s to capture the fascist vote there and the French OAS and other right-wing groups in the 1950s drew much strength from former Vichyites. It was not until 1965, with the emergence of Alfred Von Thadden's NPD in West Germany that the extreme right organized around a contemporary political issue, in this case, the *Gastarbeiters* from Southern Europe.

The real surge of neo-fascism came in the early 1970s, when, with the decline of the European "economic miracle" and the beginning of the oil crisis, the Italian MSI and the British National Front made a credible showing at the polls and acquired a degree of political respectability. Yet the MSI and the National Front were unable to sustain their achievements, partly because of their own internal disputes and partly because moderate parties moved to expose their fascist leanings and to take over some of their programmes. Wilkinson claims that the collapse of fascist or quasi-fascist regimes in Spain, Portugal and Greece in the mid-1970s also proved a great shock to the European Right.

Having failed in their bid for political respectability, the neo-fascists at the end of the decade fell back on terrorist tactics; the early 1980s witnessed a brutal upsurge of right-wing terrorism throughout the world, much of it with a racist tinge. Wilkinson acknowledges that terror tactics are a sign of weakness and desperation, not of great strength, but he is concerned that his readers be aware of the fact that changing times could make the neo-fascists respectable once again. He concludes his book by advising the governments and citizens of liberal democracies to resist the challenge of fascism "through economic development and the achievement of greater social justice. . . ; the strengthening of the rule of law and the protection of human rights by means of appropriate judicial and police measures; and the countering of fascist ideology and propaganda by means of moral and civic education."<sup>2</sup>

This study offers a useful *tour d'horizon* of the variety of right-wing extremist groups in the world today. Wilkinson's research is extensive and his depiction of the ebb and flow of fascism in the post-war period is of value and interest. Yet, the flaw in this study is that

Wilkinson fails to discriminate both between his various "neo-fascisms" and also between the contemporary "neo-fascisms" and their fascist antecedents. This is unfortunate since, had he done so, he could have given us a much better understanding of many recent political developments on the extreme right.

What is particularly striking is the way in which Wilkinson deliberately rejects the rich, if at times contradictory, literature of historians and social scientists on the subject of fascism, stating "that much of the social science is extremely dry, and very little of it deals with fascist ideas, movements and violence today."<sup>3</sup> This is unfortunate since, had he recognized some of the themes pursued by other scholars, he might have been able to differentiate more effectively between the various fascisms he discusses.

Scholars now distinguish fascism as a political movement from fascism as a political regime. They point out that, as a movement, fascism has worked for radical and revolutionary change and looked for support wherever it could be found — among the lower middle classes, among workers and among the established classes and institutions. While there have been many fascist movements, there have been few fascist regimes; Mussolini's Italy, Hitler's Germany and, arguably, Franco's Spain have been the only candidates. Once in power, fascism has tended to reverse direction, becoming reactionary and dictatorial rather than radical and revolutionary. The central problem of fascist politics, then, has been how to turn a movement into a regime, or how to acquire control of the levers of power.

Where fascism has acquired power or has come close to it has been as a result of the organic development of a particular society; fascism has acquired extensive support when it appears to respond to broader concerns in the social context. Once it attracts this support, it then becomes a significant factor in the national political arena. When social and political conditions are stable, fascisms are relatively innocuous; they may wear their uniforms and hold their parades but no one pays much attention. When society is shaken, as it was in the 1970s, the fascist movements can make real headway in acquiring public support, as witnessed by the success of the MSI and the National Front at that time. With returning social stability in the 1980s, fascisms have turned to terrorism in a desperate gesture to continue the destabilization and thereby to retain some opportunities for their political advancement.

To evaluate a given fascism, it is necessary to evaluate its social, national and historical context. One of the myths of the pre-1945 period was of the existence of an international fascist movement. Fascism, by definition, is intensely nationalistic and attempts in the early 1930s to create a "Fascist International" were utter failures. The Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis was a negative creation of diplomatic necessity and Hitler's Nazi empire rested on German military power, not on any ideological identity between fascists. One must, therefore, be sceptical of any contemporary attempts at international coopera-

tion between fascists and see this, like the resort to terrorism, as a sign of weakness. Obviously fascisms that seek help and support abroad have not been able to establish themselves very well within their national political frameworks.

All of which leads us to the interesting post-1945 phenomenon of the "nostalgic Nazis" — those groups who deliberately ape the style, uniforms and insignia of Hitler's National Socialists. Wilkinson accepts the existence of such groups as evidence of the continuing spread of fascism in the post-1945 period. Yet, apart from Germany and Austria where they are outlawed, such groups have no organic relationship with their societies whatsoever, at least as active political fascisms. Not only do they idolize an alien German political movement but they also revere a leader, Hitler, who has been discredited by history. By definition, these groups have no hope of acquiring a broad political following, so what do these "nostalgic Nazis" really represent? Are they the ultimate in deliberate and self-imposed political isolation and alienation or are they merely demonstrating their dedication to a cult of demonic racism? Wilkinson obscures the fact that the American Nazi party and the MSI or even the National Front are poles apart in terms of potential political effectiveness.

In fact, "fascist" as a label is almost as unfashionable as Nazi worship for those who seek real political power. In the 1930s, "international fascism" was a concept developed not by the fascists themselves but by their left-wing opponents who sought to define the common enemy. Wilkinson, one suspects, is seeking to define a similar category for the political practitioners of today's extreme right. Since he rejects the bulk of existing scholarship on fascism, most of which supports the contention that European fascism was a phenomenon restricted to the period between 1918 and 1945, the reader cannot help but feel that this study is not intended to be a serious historical and political analysis so much as a tract for the times. By showing the general public that racism and fascism may be found everywhere, he is deliberately entering the fray against these movements. Otherwise, why would he lump the European neo-fascists with the Ku Klux Klan, the Central American death squads, the South African Nationalists and the cultural traditionalists of Japan and claim them all as an extension of those discredited political movements of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s?

"Fascism" has always been an inadequate category for understanding many of the political movements of the first half of the twentieth century; it is even less satisfactory for understanding today's politics. Much can be learned from the models of the Fascist Era but we need a new vocabulary and new categories for understanding and coping with right-wing extremism in the 1980s.

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**Footnotes**

1. Paul Wilkinson, *The New Fascists* (London and Sydney: Pan Books, 1983), p.vii.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
3. *Ibid.*, p.viii.

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