

Canada's Evolving Soft Fascism

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, July 24, 2013

<http://politicsrespun.org/2013/07/canadas-evolving-soft-fascism/>

Things are bad under Prime Minister Harper. They're getting worse, even since [the last time I wrote about Harper's soft fascism](#). But how do we measure it? It's so...subjective, unless you have some kind of benchmark for totalitarian political behaviour.



Luckily we do, at least these three:

1. This powerful graphic comes from [Fascism Anyone?](#), a Laurence W. Britt piece pasted below. [You can find the link here](#), along with some very thoughtful critiques of the piece.
2. The other piece comes from that eternal credit to humanity, Umberto Eco, [Eternal Fascism: Fourteen Ways of Looking at a Blackshirt](#), which is also pasted below for your convenience.
3. And [from Wikipedia](#), a precis of Naomi Wolf's book. Here again, [I've already written about](#) how elements of Wolf's list have grown in Canada particularly in connection with the G20 in Toronto.

In [The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot](#), Wolf takes a historical look at the rise of fascism, outlining 10 steps necessary for a fascist group (or government) to destroy the democratic character of a nation-state and subvert the social/political liberty previously exercised by its citizens:

1. Invoke a [terrifying internal and external enemy](#)
2. Create [secret prisons](#) where torture takes place
3. Develop a thug [caste](#) or [paramilitary force](#) not answerable to citizens
4. Set up an [internal surveillance](#) system
5. Harass [citizens' groups](#)
6. Engage in [arbitrary detention](#) and release
7. [Target key individuals](#)
8. [Control the press](#)
9. Treat all [political dissidents](#) as [traitors](#)
10. Suspend the [rule of law](#)^[28]

Our job, as Canadians, is to pay attention to governance trends and compare them to these benchmarks to see how our democracy is slowly evaporating.

We need to not be fooled by what past incarnations of anti-social, totalitarian behaviour looked like. EVERYTHING EVOLVES. And so do totalitarians when they are trying to screw the rest of us. And the blind, uninformed belief that it can't happen here is increasingly dangerous. Let's keep our eyes open!

Facism Anyone?

By Laurence W. Britt, Free Inquiry Magazine, Vol 22 no 2, [15 July 2003], followed by a critique by Chip Berlet of an earlier publication of the article

Free Inquiry readers may pause to read the Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of Principles on the inside cover of the magazine. To a secular humanist, these principles seem so logical, so right, so crucial. Yet, there is one archetypal political philosophy that is anathema to almost all of these principles. It is fascism. And fascism's principles are wafting in the air today, surreptitiously masquerading as something else, challenging everything we stand for. The cliché that people and nations learn from history is not only overused, but also overestimated; often we fail to learn from history, or draw the wrong conclusions. Sadly, historical amnesia is the norm.

We are two-and-a-half generations removed from the horrors of Nazi Germany, although constant reminders jog the consciousness. German and Italian fascism form the historical models that define this twisted political worldview. Although they no longer exist, this worldview and the characteristics of these models have been imitated by protofascist regimes at various times in the twentieth century. Both the original German and Italian models and the later protofascist regimes show remarkably similar characteristics. Although many scholars question any direct connection among these regimes, few can dispute their visual similarities.

Beyond the visual, even a cursory study of these fascist and protofascist regimes reveals the absolutely striking convergence of their modus operandi. This, of course, is not a revelation to the informed political

observer, but it is sometimes useful in the interests of perspective to restate obvious facts and in so doing shed needed light on current circumstances.

For the purpose of this perspective, I will consider the following regimes: Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal, Papadopoulos Greece, Pinochet's Chile, and Suharto's Indonesia. To be sure, they constitute a mixed bag of national identities, cultures, developmental levels, and history. But they all followed the fascist or protofascist model in obtaining, expanding, and maintaining power. Further, all these regimes have been overthrown, so a more or less complete picture of their basic characteristics and abuses is possible.

Analysis of these seven regimes reveals fourteen common threads that link them in recognizable patterns of national behavior and abuse of power. These basic characteristics are more prevalent and intense in some regimes than in others, but they all share at least some level of similarity.

1. Powerful and continuing expressions of nationalism.

From the prominent displays of flags and bunting to the ubiquitous lapel pins, the fervor to show patriotic nationalism, both on the part of the regime itself and of citizens caught up in its frenzy, was always obvious. Catchy slogans, pride in the military, and demands for unity were common themes in expressing this nationalism. It was usually coupled with a suspicion of things foreign that often bordered on xenophobia.

2. Disdain for the importance of human rights.

The regimes themselves viewed human rights as of little value and a hindrance to realizing the objectives of the ruling elite. Through clever use of propaganda, the population was brought to accept these human rights abuses by marginalizing, even demonizing, those being targeted. When abuse was egregious, the tactic was to use secrecy, denial, and disinformation.

3. Identification of enemies/scapegoats as a unifying cause.

The most significant common thread among these regimes was the use of scapegoating as a means to divert the people's attention from other problems, to shift blame for failures, and to channel frustration in controlled directions. The methods of choice were relentless propaganda and disinformation, usually effective. Often the regimes would incite spontaneous acts against the target scapegoats, usually communists, socialists, liberals, Jews, ethnic and racial minorities, traditional national enemies, members of other religions, secularists, homosexuals, and terrorists. Active opponents of these regimes were inevitably labeled as terrorists and dealt with accordingly.

4. The supremacy of the military/avid militarism.

Ruling elites always identified closely with the military and the industrial infrastructure that supported it. A disproportionate share of national resources was allocated to the military, even when domestic needs were acute. The military was seen as an expression of nationalism, and was used whenever possible to assert national goals, intimidate other nations, and increase the power and prestige of the ruling elite.

5. Rampant sexism.

Beyond the simple fact that the political elite and the national culture were male-dominated, these regimes inevitably viewed women as second-class citizens. They were adamantly anti-abortion and also homophobic. These attitudes were usually codified in Draconian laws that enjoyed strong support by the orthodox religion of the country, thus lending the regime cover for its abuses.

6. A controlled mass media.

Under some of the regimes, the mass media were under strict direct control and could be relied upon never to stray from the party line. Other regimes exercised more subtle power to ensure media orthodoxy. Methods included the control of licensing and access to resources, economic pressure, appeals to patriotism, and implied threats. The leaders of the mass media were often politically compatible with the power elite. The result was usually success in keeping the general public unaware of the regimes excesses.

7. Obsession with national security.

Inevitably, a national security apparatus was under direct control of the ruling elite. It was usually an instrument of oppression, operating in secret and beyond any constraints. Its actions were justified under the rubric of protecting national security, and questioning its activities was portrayed as unpatriotic or even treasonous.

8. Religion and ruling elite tied together.

Unlike communist regimes, the fascist and protofascist regimes were never proclaimed as godless by their opponents. In fact, most of the regimes attached themselves to the predominant religion of the country and chose to portray themselves as militant defenders of that religion. The fact that the ruling elites behavior was incompatible with the precepts of the religion was generally swept under the rug.

Propaganda kept up the illusion that the ruling elites were defenders of the faith and opponents of the godless. A perception was manufactured that opposing the power elite was tantamount to an attack on religion.

9. Power of corporations protected.

Although the personal life of ordinary citizens was under strict control, the ability of large corporations to operate in relative freedom was not compromised. The ruling elite saw the corporate structure as a way to not only ensure military production (in developed states), but also as an additional means of social control. Members of the economic elite were often pampered by the political elite to ensure a continued mutuality of interests, especially in the repression of have-not citizens.

10. Power of labor suppressed or eliminated.

Since organized labor was seen as the one power center that could challenge the political hegemony of the

ruling elite and its corporate allies, it was inevitably crushed or made powerless. The poor formed an underclass, viewed with suspicion or outright contempt. Under some regimes, being poor was considered akin to a vice.

11. Disdain and suppression of intellectuals and the arts.

Intellectuals and the inherent freedom of ideas and expression associated with them were anathema to these regimes. Intellectual and academic freedom were considered subversive to national security and the patriotic ideal.

Universities were tightly controlled; politically unreliable faculty harassed or eliminated. Unorthodox ideas or expressions of dissent were strongly attacked, silenced, or crushed. To these regimes, art and literature should serve the national interest or they had no right to exist.

12. Obsession with crime and punishment.

Most of these regimes maintained Draconian systems of criminal justice with huge prison populations. The police were often glorified and had almost unchecked power, leading to rampant abuse. Normal and political crime were often merged into trumped-up criminal charges and sometimes used against political opponents of the regime. Fear, and hatred, of criminals or traitors was often promoted among the population as an excuse for more police power.

13. Rampant cronyism and corruption.

Those in business circles and close to the power elite often used their position to enrich themselves. This corruption worked both ways; the power elite would receive financial gifts and property from the economic elite, who in turn would gain the benefit of government favoritism. Members of the power elite were in a position to obtain vast wealth from other sources as well: for example, by stealing national resources. With the national security apparatus under control and the media muzzled, this corruption was largely unconstrained and not well understood by the general population.

14. Fraudulent elections.

Elections in the form of plebiscites or public opinion polls were usually bogus. When actual elections with candidates were held, they would usually be perverted by the power elite to get the desired result. Common methods included maintaining control of the election machinery, intimidating and disenfranchising opposition voters, destroying or disallowing legal votes, and, as a last resort, turning to a judiciary beholden to the power elite.

Does any of this ring alarm bells? Of course not. After all, this is America, officially a democracy with the rule of law, a constitution, a free press, honest elections, and a well-informed public constantly being put on guard against evils. Historical comparisons like these are just exercises in verbal gymnastics. Maybe, maybe not.

When facism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the American flag.

- Huey Long

Notes

1. Defined as a political movement or regime tending toward or imitating Fascism Websters Unabridged Dictionary.

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Laurence Britts novel, *June*, 2004, depicts a future America dominated by right-wing extremists.

Eternal Fascism: Fourteen Ways of Looking at a Blackshirt

By Umberto Eco

Writing in *New York Review of Books*, 22 June 1995, pp.12-15. Excerpted in *Utne Reader*, November-December 1995, pp. 57-59.

The following version follows the text and formatting of the *Utne Reader* article, and in addition, makes the first sentence of each numbered point a statement in bold type. Italics are in the original.

For the full article, consult the *New York Review of Books*, [purchase the full article online](#); or purchase Eco's new collection of essays: *Five Moral Pieces*.

In spite of some fuzziness regarding the difference between various historical forms of fascism, I think it is possible to outline a list of features that are typical of what I would like to call Ur-Fascism, or Eternal Fascism. These features cannot be organized into a system; many of them contradict each other, and are also typical of other kinds of despotism or fanaticism. But it is enough that one of them be present to allow fascism to coagulate around it.

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1. The first feature of Ur-Fascism is the *cult of tradition*.

Traditionalism is of course much older than fascism. Not only was it typical of counterrevolutionary Catholic thought after the French revolution, but it was born in the late Hellenistic era, as a reaction to classical Greek rationalism. In the Mediterranean basin, people of different religions (most of the faiths indulgently accepted by the Roman pantheon) started dreaming of a revelation received at the dawn of human history. This revelation, according to the traditionalist mystique, had remained for a long time concealed under the veil of forgotten languages -- in Egyptian hieroglyphs, in the Celtic runes, in the scrolls of the little-known religions of Asia.

This new culture had to be *syncretistic*. Syncretism is not only, as the dictionary says, "the combination of different forms of belief or practice;" such a combination must tolerate contradictions. Each of the original messages contains a sliver of wisdom, and although they seem to say different or incompatible things, they all are nevertheless alluding, allegorically, to the same primeval truth.

As a consequence, there can be no advancement of learning. Truth already has been spelled out once and for all, and we can only keep interpreting its obscure message.

If you browse in the shelves that, in American bookstores, are labeled New Age, you can find there even Saint Augustine, who, as far as I know, was not a fascist. But combining Saint Augustine and Stonehenge -- that is a symptom of Ur-Fascism.

2. Traditionalism implies the rejection of modernism.

Both Fascists and Nazis worshipped technology, while traditionalist thinkers usually reject it as a negation of traditional spiritual values. However, even though Nazism was proud of its industrial achievements, its praise of modernism was only the surface of an ideology based upon blood and earth (*Blut und Boden*). The rejection of the modern world was disguised as a rebuttal of the capitalistic way of life. The Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, is seen as the beginning of modern depravity. In this sense Ur-Fascism can be defined as *irrationalism*.

3. Irrationalism also depends on the cult of action for action's sake.

Action being beautiful in itself, it must be taken before, or without, reflection. Thinking is a form of emasculation. Therefore culture is suspect insofar as it is identified with critical attitudes. Distrust of the intellectual world has always been a symptom of Ur-Fascism, from Hermann Goering's fondness for a phrase from a Hanns Johst play ("When I hear the word 'culture' I reach for my gun") to the frequent use of such expressions as "degenerate intellectuals," "eggheads," "effete snobs," and "universities are nests of reds." The official Fascist intellectuals were mainly engaged in attacking modern culture and the liberal intelligentsia for having betrayed traditional values.

4. The critical spirit makes distinctions, and to distinguish is a sign of modernism.

In modern culture the scientific community praises disagreement as a way to improve knowledge. For Ur-Fascism, *disagreement is treason*.

5. Besides, disagreement is a sign of diversity.

Ur-Fascism grows up and seeks consensus by exploiting and exacerbating the natural *fear of difference*. The first appeal of a fascist or prematurely fascist movement is an appeal against the intruders. Thus Ur-Fascism is racist by definition.

6. Ur-Fascism derives from individual or social frustration.

That is why one of the most typical features of the historical fascism was the *appeal to a frustrated middle class*, a class suffering from an economic crisis or feelings of political humiliation, and frightened by the pressure of lower social groups. In our time, when the old "proletarians" are becoming petty bourgeois (and the lumpen are largely excluded from the political scene), the fascism of tomorrow will find its audience in this new majority.

7. To people who feel deprived of a clear social identity, Ur-Fascism says that their only privilege is the most common one, to be born in the same country.

This is the origin of nationalism. Besides, the only ones who can provide an identity to the nation are its enemies. Thus at the root of the Ur-Fascist psychology there is the *obsession with a plot*, possibly an international one. The followers must feel besieged. The easiest way to solve the plot is the appeal to xenophobia. But the plot must also come from the inside: Jews are usually the best target because they have the advantage of being at the same time inside and outside. In the United States, a prominent

instance of the plot obsession is to be found in Pat Robertson's *The New World Order*, but, as we have recently seen, there are many others.

8. The followers must feel *humiliated by the ostentatious wealth and force of their enemies.*

When I was a boy I was taught to think of Englishmen as the five-meal people. They ate more frequently than the poor but sober Italians. Jews are rich and help each other through a secret web of mutual assistance. However, the followers of Ur-Fascism must also be convinced that they can overwhelm the enemies. Thus, by a continuous shifting of rhetorical focus, the enemies are at the same time too strong and too weak. Fascist governments are condemned to lose wars because they are constitutionally incapable of objectively evaluating the force of the enemy.

9. For Ur-Fascism there is no struggle for life but, rather, life is lived for struggle.

Thus *pacifism is trafficking with the enemy*. It is bad because *life is permanent warfare*. This, however, brings about an Armageddon complex. Since enemies have to be defeated, there must be a final battle, after which the movement will have control of the world. But such "final solutions" implies a further era of peace, a Golden Age, which contradicts the principle of permanent war. No fascist leader has ever succeeded in solving this predicament.

10. Elitism is a typical aspect of any reactionary ideology, insofar as it is fundamentally aristocratic, and aristocratic and militaristic elitism cruelly implies *contempt for the weak.*

Ur-Fascism can only advocate a popular elitism. Every citizen belongs to the best people in the world, the members or the party are the best among the citizens, every citizen can (or ought to) become a member of the party. But there cannot be patricians without plebeians. In fact, the Leader, knowing that his power was not delegated to him democratically but was conquered by force, also knows that his force is based upon the weakness of the masses; they are so weak as to need and deserve a ruler.

11. In such a perspective *everybody is educated to become a hero.*

In every mythology the hero is an exceptional being, but in Ur-Fascist ideology heroism is the norm. This cult of heroism is strictly linked with the cult of death. It is not by chance that a motto of the Spanish Falangists was *Viva la Muerte* ("Long Live Death!"). In nonfascist societies, the lay public is told that death is unpleasant but must be faced with dignity; believers are told that it is the painful way to reach a supernatural happiness. By contrast, the Ur-Fascist hero craves heroic death, advertised as the best reward for a heroic life. The Ur-Fascist hero is impatient to die. In his impatience, he more frequently sends other people to death.

12. Since both permanent war and heroism are difficult games to play, *the Ur-Fascist transfers his will to power to sexual matters.*

This is the origin of machismo (which implies both disdain for women and intolerance and condemnation of nonstandard sexual habits, from chastity to homosexuality). Since even sex is a difficult game to play, the Ur-Fascist hero tends to play with weapons -- doing so becomes an ersatz phallic exercise.

13. Ur-Fascism is based upon a *selective populism*, a *qualitative populism*, one might say.

In a democracy, the citizens have individual rights, but the citizens in their entirety have a political impact only from a quantitative point of view -- one follows the decisions of the majority. For Ur-Fascism, however, individuals as individuals have no rights, and the People is conceived as a quality, a monolithic entity expressing the Common Will. Since no large quantity of human beings can have a common will, the Leader pretends to be their interpreter. Having lost their power of delegation, citizens do not act; they are only called on to play the role of the People. Thus the People is only a theatrical fiction. There is in our future a TV or Internet populism, in which the emotional response of a selected group of citizens can be presented and accepted as the Voice of the People.

Because of its qualitative populism, Ur-Fascism must be *against "rotten" parliamentary governments*. Wherever a politician casts doubt on the legitimacy of a parliament because it no longer represents the Voice of the People, we can smell Ur-Fascism.

14. *Ur-Fascism speaks Newspeak.*

Newspeak was invented by Orwell, in Nineteen Eighty-Four, as the official language of what he called Ingsoc, English Socialism. But elements of Ur-Fascism are common to different forms of dictatorship. All the Nazi or Fascist schoolbooks made use of an impoverished vocabulary, and an elementary syntax, in order to limit the instruments for complex and critical reasoning. But we must be ready to identify other kinds of Newspeak, even if they take the apparently innocent form of a popular talk show.

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Ur-Fascism is still around us, sometimes in plainclothes. It would be so much easier for us if there appeared on the world scene somebody saying, "I want to reopen Auschwitz, I want the Blackshirts to parade again in the Italian squares." Life is not that simple. Ur-Fascism can come back under the most innocent of disguises. Our duty is to uncover it and to point our finger at any of its new instances — every day, in every part of the world. Franklin Roosevelt's words of November 4, 1938, are worth recalling: "If American democracy ceases to move forward as a living force, seeking day and night by peaceful means to better the lot of our citizens, fascism will grow in strength in our land." Freedom and liberation are an unending task.

Umberto Eco (c) 1995