

Springtime for Hitler in Ottawa

by Tia Everitt - Tuesday, May 01, 2012

<https://politicsrespun.org/2012/05/springtime-for-hitler-in-ottawa/>



Last week, our favourite sweater vest hoarding Prime Minister made the world's laziest Nazi/Hitler invocation during Question Period. This is the latest in a string of Hitler references made by sundry politicians in Ottawa during 2012, and we're not even half way through the year. His gaffe brought jeers and tears of laughter to denizens of the House and online. For your viewing pleasure, witness the exchange between Mulcair the Bearded Sandwich Explainer and Stevie Soulless Eyes [HERE](#).

After I was done laughing and wiping tears of hilarity from my eyes, I went back to the Politics Respun crew, and asked them for their input. Stephen Elliot-Buckley, Kevin Harding, Jasmin Mujanovic and I weighed in:

Is there ever an appropriate time in debate for comparing our politicians, parties and policies to those of Adolf Hitler?

Short of starting some ethnic cleansing campaign or annexing a neighbouring state, no. The bar is set quite high. That said, I think there's too much careless thoughtlessness when people are rejecting criticisms of fascism and totalitarianism and corporatism. Tossing those words around seems to fit some of the positions we've seen in Canada in recent decades that are contemptuous of democracy. As a society we need to be better educated about the meaning and historical context of those words so we can use them more intelligently. And we don't need Hitler for all that. – Stephen

I'm not one to really ascribe limits to speech, save for the kind that involves things like yelling "fire" in a crowded movie theatre. That being said, I also think that there's problems with making comparisons between exceedingly horrific historical events and the leader of the NDP asking Harper when he was going to bring Canadian soldiers home from our neo-colonialist romp in Afghanistan. There's a balance; if you honestly, seriously, fully think that comparing the actions of your debate opponent to those of Hitler are necessary, then, by all means, do so - but don't be surprised if you're made out to look like an

idiot after doing so. It's a comparison that should be made exceedingly rarely, and only in circumstances that actually warrant it. – Kevin

Sure but only once they begin engaging in or advocating for the systemic genocide of a segment of our population. Until then, it's juvenile idiocy. – Jasmin

If the politician/party/policies are truly akin to those of Adolph Hitler and not simply something that opponents of the politician/party/policies merely dislikes or takes offense to, yes. Using it as a tool to insult or derive a reaction (Godwin's Law) does make it a de facto debating tactic. - Tia

Was Harper out of line on Thursday when he erroneously stated that the NDP did not support the fight against Hitler in 1939? Was Mulcair, when he shot back about Reform Party?

I think it would be wonderful to get into the debate about where Canada has stood on events like the Boer War, WW1, WW2, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq x2, and Afghanistan. And the centuries of various forms of war against the first peoples. There is precious little serious, non-zinger based rhetoric floating around when, as a nation, we ought to be getting into the soul of the issue of the role of our military. – Stephen

No, and no. In the most literal sense. Take a look deeper at the statements - Harper said that the "leader of the NDP in 1939" didn't even support war against Hitler. This - and only this - is specifically true. J.S. Woodworth, an ardent pacifist, opposed war in Germany. And he - alone in the House of Commons - voted against the declaration of war. And he was soundly castigated for his actions, and made fun of quite rightly, for his vote. Extending this smear to insinuating that the NDP itself loved Hitler is just fucking stupid, plain and simple. Mulcair, on the other hand, shot back about the Reform Party's policies - here, he took the policies of the party as it then was and compared it to the actions of the party as it is now. No spurious smearing; if the party changed names, it's still the party's policies as they were, not the actions of an individual who was then castigated by the party. – Kevin

Harper's statement was the depths of gutter politics--pathetic more than anything else. I thought Mulcair's retort was rather funny, though, and I don't even really like the guy. Not much else to do in a situation like that than mock the Prime Minister. - Jasmin

If the HOC was a UFC octagon (which would actually make a lot of politics in Canada much more entertaining and culturally relevant for the masses) this tactic by Harper would have been a move akin to kneeling your opponent in the balls. It was cheap, lazy and a last ditch effort to keep away from having to tap out. Mulcair's retort was priceless, and he chalked up laugh points from me with his verbal ground n' pound. - Tia

In the media (both traditional and social) there are perpetual invocations of Hitler/Nazis by Left of centre thinkers/commentators directed towards Harper, his government, and Conservative Party policy. Is there legitimacy in this comparison?

Like I said above, I think we need to be more precise. When we say totalitarian, we need to talk about an issue like "free speech zones" in Vancouver during our Olympics corporate orgy, with respect to the Charter and how such acts are an egregious violation of reasonable limits from Section 1 [<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/charter/page-1.html>]. When we talk about corporatism and the corporate-

political junta that is the neo-liberalism of the Liberal Party, Reform Party and Conservative Party, we should be clear on how we talk about governing for corporate interests. When we bring up soft fascism or hard fascism, we should connect that discussion with these handy 14 elements of fascism:

<http://www.rense.com/general37/char.htm>. - Stephen

There's legitimacy in comparing a lot of the actions of governments to fascism. To Hitler? Nope. And don't get me started in the stupidity that one can find in certain right-wing fora who insist that Hitler was a commie socialist, not a right-wing fascist. – Kevin

No, absolutely not. I have very, very strong objections to Harper's policy in particular as it relates to our treatment of First Nations peoples and overseas(mis)adventures--situations where people are actually dying)but he's not Hitler, nor are the Tories Nazis, either. We have plenty of fascist movements around the world (including Canada) who make very few bones about their politics; we'd be better off actually engaging those people than wasting time on these partisan theatrics. – Jasmin

Comparing what is actually going on in Ottawa with the current Conservative government and WWII Nazis is laughable and makes your argument look small minded and uninformed. Like Harper or not, he's not actively gassing his enemies in death camps and annexing small nations. Find a better comparison in history or grab some originality and create a term. I'm fond of Sweatervestism, myself. - Tia

Is Nazism a useful symbol for what makes us angry, from opinions on extended breastfeeding to criticism about opposing politicians?

I believe in Godwin's law. Short of contemporary Nazis and similar groups, I think we need to educate people with more precise terms. – Stephen

If you legitimately think that the comparison is necessary, sure. Just don't be surprised if you're made to look like a complete idiot on your comparison if it's out of line. There are way more useful comparisons or symbols to use. Boots stomping on faces, sweater vests, et cetera. – Kevin

Only a Nazi could ask such a question! Which is to say: sure...but only if you're kind of slow and uncreative. First of all, very rarely are our opponents actually Nazi-like in nature. And on the odd occasion where I have engaged with actual fascists, the comparison to the Nazis was hardly insulting to them. So, with very few exceptions, the comparison is unjustified--and none of those exceptions are part of the mainstream Canadian political scene. – Jasmin

What is the term I'm looking for? Ah, yes. *Reductio ad Hitlerum*: claiming that a policy/group leads to/is the same as one advocated or implemented by Hitler/the Third Reich, and so "proves" that the original policy/group is undesirable. Guilt by association. Having been called a "*Boob Nazi*" (somewhat erroneously) often and *FemNazi* a few times, I am always perplexed as to how the person making the comparison arrives at the choice of words. I presume that the person throwing the terms around lacks a functional vocabulary/creativity. - Tia

Does invoking Hitler/Nazi in Canadian politics trivialize and desecralize memories of holocaust and the horrors of WW2?

Yes. And while trying to elicit empathy for violated peoples is a valid motive, we should do it in a more realistic context. We don't have to go to gas chambers to talk about the abject poverty that millions of Canadians are one paycheque away from because of neoliberal, totalitarian, corporatist soft fascism. – Stephen

No. It trivializes the person making the comparison, if the comparison is not justifiable. Cf "Godwin's Law" and etc. – Kevin

Yes, full stop. – Jasmin

Hell, yes. It's disrespectful of people who have been affected by Hitler, who dealt a lasting blow generationally to so many families and individuals around the world. My grandparents were children/teenagers during WWII in Germany/Eastern Europe and our family is still impacted, several generations later. - Tia

Other thoughts/comments on this topic?

Harper is clearly desperate. He's seen his polling numbers drop stunningly since the NDP leadership race, which is the kind of event to give the NDP a bump, not usually a corresponding plummet in the governing party's stature. And now that I enjoyed the Twitterverse Monday morning kicking the tires of the NDP talking about expecting a coalition government with the Liberals and not a merger, the Harper Junta will be further trimmed in the polls. And now that the Liberals are going to let non-members vote in their leadership race, Cullenistas in the NDP can vote for a leader who is interested in a distinct, yet cooperative posture with the NDP. And yesterday NDP House Leader Cullen called for the speaker to enforce more decorum in the house. Cooperation and dignity, two of Cullen's core leadership messages, seem to be defining this era of the NDP even if Cullen didn't "win" the leadership. Harper's a politician full of hate and vitriol. He is so angry, eager to demolish the Liberals, eager to cram his self-assured ideology wherever he can for the sake of some monarchist imperial brand of corporatism. He knows that suppressing voter turnout illegally or through negative politics keeps voters who embrace hope from turning up and mobilizes his base that hates their enemies. We need to reject gutter politics. As simply as last spring when Layton unilaterally stopped his party from heckling in the House, there is room for building something positive. Harper is incapable of doing that. So he invokes monsters, and in doing so, Godwin. - Stephen

The meta-narrative on Harper's stupidity in jumping into Godwin's law so quickly ignores the fact that Harper didn't have an answer as to when the troops engaged in neo-colonialism in Afghanistan will be coming home - so instead he pulled out Hitler. Idiot. – Kevin

I've been left with a Broadway show tune from The Producers in my head, ear-worming me endlessly. Springtime! For Hitler! In Germany! Thanks for that, Harper. - Tia