

HITLER WAS A SOCIALIST

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THE DEMAND FOR EXPLANATION

Now that more than 50 years have passed since the military defeat of Nazi Germany, one might have thought that the name of its leader would be all but forgotten. This is far from the case, however. Even in the popular press, references to Hitler are incessant and the trickle of TV documentaries on the Germany of his era would seem to be unceasing. Hitler even featured on the cover of a 1995 *Time* magazine.

This finds its counterpart in the academic literature too. Scholarly works on Hitler's deeds continue to emerge (e.g. Feuchtwanger, 1995) and in a recent survey of the history of Western civilization, Lipson (1993) named Hitlerism and the nuclear bomb as the two great evils of the 20th century. Stalin's tyranny lasted longer, Pol Pot killed a higher proportion of his country's population and Hitler was not the first Fascist but the name of Hitler nonetheless hangs over the entire 20th century as something inescapably and inexplicably malign. It seems doubtful that even the whole of the 21st century will erase from the minds of thinking people the still largely unfulfilled need to understand how and why Hitler became so influential and wrought so much evil.

The fact that so many young Germans (particular from the formerly Communist East) today still salute his name and perpetuate much of his politics is also an amazement and a deep concern to many and what can only be called the resurgence of Nazism among many young Germans at the close of the 20th century would seem to generate a continuing and

pressing need to understand the Hitler phenomenon.

So what was it that made Hitler so influential? What was it that made him (as pre-war histories such as Roberts, 1938, attest) the most popular man in the Germany of his day? Why does he still have many admirers now in the Germany on which he inflicted such disasters? What was (is?) his appeal? And why, of all things, are the young products of an East German Communist upbringing still so susceptible to his message?

MODERN LEFTISM

Before we answer that question, however, let us look at what the Left and Right in politics consist of at present. Consider this description by [Edward Feser](#) of someone who would have been an ideal Presidential candidate for the modern-day U.S. Democratic party:

He had been something of a bohemian in his youth, and always regarded young people and their idealism as the key to progress and the overcoming of outmoded prejudices. And he was widely admired by the young people of his country, many of whom belonged to organizations devoted to practicing and propagating his teachings. He had a lifelong passion for music, art, and architecture, and was even something of a painter. He rejected what he regarded as petty bourgeois moral hang-ups, and he and his girlfriend "lived together" for years. He counted a number of homosexuals as friends and collaborators, and took the view that a man's personal morals were none of his business; some scholars of his life believe that he himself may have been homosexual or bisexual. He was ahead of his time where a number of contemporary progressive causes are concerned: he disliked

smoking, regarding it as a serious danger to public health, and took steps to combat it; he was a vegetarian and animal lover; he enacted tough gun control laws; and he advocated euthanasia for the incurably ill.

He championed the rights of workers, regarded capitalist society as brutal and unjust, and sought a third way between communism and the free market. In this regard, he and his associates greatly admired the strong steps taken by President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal to take large-scale economic decision-making out of private hands and put it into those of government planning agencies. His aim was to institute a brand of socialism that avoided the inefficiencies that plagued the Soviet variety, and many former communists found his program highly congenial. He deplored the selfish individualism he took to be endemic to modern Western society, and wanted to replace it with an ethic of self-sacrifice: "As Christ proclaimed 'love one another'," he said, "so our call -- 'people's community,' 'public need before private greed,' 'communally-minded social consciousness' -- rings out.! This call will echo throughout the world!"

The reference to Christ notwithstanding, he was not personally a Christian, regarding the Catholicism he was baptized into as an irrational superstition. In fact he admired Islam more than Christianity, and he and his policies were highly respected by many of the Muslims of his day. He and his associates had a special distaste for the Catholic Church and, given a choice, preferred modern liberalized Protestantism, taking the view that the best form of Christianity would be one that

forsook the traditional other-worldly focus on personal salvation and accommodated itself to the requirements of a program for social justice to be implemented by the state. They also considered the possibility that Christianity might eventually have to be abandoned altogether in favor of a return to paganism, a worldview many of them saw as more humane and truer to the heritage of their people. For he and his associates believed strongly that a people's ethnic and racial heritage was what mattered most. Some endorsed a kind of cultural relativism according to which what is true or false and right or wrong in some sense depends on one's ethnic worldview, and especially on what best promotes the well-being of one's ethnic group

There is surely no doubt that the man Feser describes sounds very much like a mainstream Leftist by current standards. But who is the man concerned? It is a historically accurate description of Adolf Hitler. Hitler was not only a socialist in his own day but he would even be a mainstream socialist in most ways today. Feser does not mention Hitler's anti-Semitism above, of course, but that too seems once again to have become mainstream among the Western-world Left in the early years of the 21st century.

There is, however, no claim that Hitler was wholly like modern Leftists. In ways other than those listed by Feser, Hitler was in fact very much like some much older Leftists. [Ludwig von Mises](#) speaks of those similarities. Writing in 1944 he said:

"The Nazis have not only imitated the Bolshevik tactics of seizing power. They have copied much more. They have imported from Russia the one-party system and the privileged role of this party

and its members in public life; the paramount position of the secret police; the organization of affiliated parties abroad which are employed in fighting their domestic governments and in sabotage and espionage, assisted by public funds and the protection of the diplomatic and consular service; the administrative execution and imprisonment of political adversaries; concentration camps; the punishment inflicted on the families of exiles; the methods of propaganda. They have borrowed from the Marxians even such absurdities as the mode of address, party comrade (*Parteigenosse*), derived from the Marxian comrade (*Genosse*), and the use of a military terminology for all items of civil and economic life. The question is not in which respects both systems are alike but in which they differ..."

INSANE?

But what about Hitler's insanity? There have been many proposed explanations of Hitler's influence and deeds but nearly all of the social scientific explanations very rapidly come up with the word "insanity" or one of its synonyms (e.g. Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Sanford, 1950). Attributing mental illness or mental disturbance to Hitler seems to be the only way that many people can deal with his malign legacy.

Proving a negative is of course notoriously difficult so proving that Hitler was NOT insane is something we can only do probabilistically. As perhaps some initial context however, consider this description of a German country gentleman of Hitler's day:

"There is nothing pretentious about his little estate. It is one that any merchant might possess in these lovely hills. All visitors are shown their host's model kennels,

where he keeps magnificent Alsatians. Some of his pedigree pets are allowed the run of the house, especially on days when he gives a "Fun Fair" for the local children. He delights in the society of brilliant foreigners, especially painters, singers and musicians. As host he is a droll raconteur. Every morning at nine he goes out for a talk with his gardeners about their day's work. These men, like the chauffeur and air-pilot, are not so much servants as loyal friends. A life-long vegetarian at table, his kitchen plots are both varied and heavy with produce. Even in his meatless diet, he is something of a gourmet. He is his own decorator, designer and furnisher, as well as architect."

This apparently pleasant, artistic country gentleman was described in the 1938 edition of the British "*Homes & Gardens*" magazine -- which is now on the net [here](#). It sounds about as good an opposite to the insane Hitler as one could get, does it not? In reality, of course, it is a description of Hitler himself. The story of how the article concerned came to be posted on the internet is [here](#) or [here](#).

So we surely do need to look at the plausibility of the "insanity" claim. Do madmen achieve popular acclaim among their own people? Do madmen inspire their countrymen to epics of self-sacrifice? Do madmen leave a mark on history unlike any other? Until Hitler came along, the answers to all these questions would surely have been "no".

So is there an alternative explanation? Is there something other than mental illness that can explain Hitler's success? If there is we surely owe it to ourselves and to our children to find out. If by dismissing Hitlerism as madness we miss what really went on in Hitler's rise to power we surely run dreadful risks of allowing some sort of Nazi revival. The often extreme

expressions of nationalism to be heard from Russia today surely warn us that a Fascist upsurge in a major European State is no mere bogeyman. What we fail to understand we may be unable to prevent. All possible explanations for the Nazi phenomenon do surely therefore demand our attention. It is the purpose of the present paper, therefore, to explain the rise and power of Hitler's Nazism in a way that does not take the seductive route of invoking insanity. Before we do that, however, we have to place him in the context of his times. We literally have to know "where he was coming from".

PARTY PROGRAMMES

Let us start by considering political party programmes or "platforms" of Hitler's day:

Take this description of a political programme:

A declaration of war against the order of things which exist, against the state of things which exist, in a word, against the structure of the world which presently exists".

And this description of a political movement as having a '*revolutionary creative will*' which had '*no fixed aim, no permanency, only eternal change*'

And this policy manifesto:

9. All citizens of the State shall be equal as regards rights and duties.
10. The first duty of every citizen must be to work mentally or physically. The activities of the individual may not clash with the interests of the whole, but must proceed within the frame of the community and be for the general good.
11. Therefore we demand:

12. That all unearned income, and all income that does not arise from work, be abolished.
13. Since every war imposes on the people fearful sacrifices in life and property, all personal profit arising from the war must be regarded as a crime against the people. We therefore demand the total confiscation of all war profits whether in assets or material.
14. We demand the nationalization of businesses which have been organized into cartels.
15. We demand that all the profits from wholesale trade shall be shared out.
16. We demand extensive development of provision for old age.
17. We demand the creation and maintenance of a healthy middle-class, the immediate communalization of department stores which will be rented cheaply to small businessmen, and that preference shall be given to small businessmen for provision of supplies needed by the State, the provinces and municipalities.
18. We demand a land reform in accordance with our national requirements, and the enactment of a law to confiscate from the owners without compensation any land needed for the common purpose. The abolition of ground rents, and the prohibition of all speculation in land.

So who put [that manifesto](#) forward and who was responsible for the summary quotes given before that? Was it the US Democrats, the British Labour Party, the Canadian Liberals, some European Social Democratic party? No. The manifesto is an extract from the (February 25th., 1920) 25 point plan of the National Socialist German

Workers Party and was written by the leader of that party: Adolf Hitler. And the preceding summary quotes were also from him (See towards the end of *Mein Kampf* and O'Sullivan, 1983. p. 138).

The rest of Hitler's manifesto was aimed mainly at the Jews but in Hitler's day it was very [common for Leftists to be anti-Semitic](#). And the increasingly pervasive anti-Israel sentiment among the modern-day Left -- including at times the Canadian government -- shows that modern-day Leftists are not even very different from Hitler in that regard. Modern-day anti-Israel protesters still seem to think that dead Jews are a good thing.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF HITLER'S LEFTISM

Further, as a good socialist does, Hitler justified everything he did in the name of "the people" (*Das Volk*). The Nazi State was, like the Soviet State, all-powerful, and the Nazi party, in good socialist fashion, instituted pervasive supervision of German industry. And of course Hitler and Stalin were initially allies. It was only the Nazi-Soviet pact that enabled Hitler's conquest of Western Europe. The fuel in the tanks of Hitler's *Panzern* as they stormed through France was Soviet fuel.

And a book that was very fashionable worldwide in the '60s was the 1958 book "*The Affluent Society*" by influential "liberal" Canadian economist J.K. Galbraith -- in which he fulminated about what he saw as our "Private affluence and public squalor". But Hitler preceded him. Hitler shared with the German Left of his day the slogan: "*Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz*" (Common use before private use).

And we all know how evil Nazi eugenics were, don't we? How crazy were their efforts to build up the "master race" through selective

breeding of SS men with the best of German women -- the "*Lebensborn*" project? Good Leftists recoil in horror from all that of course. But who were the great supporters of eugenics in Hitler's day? In the USA, the great eugenicists of the first half of the 20th century were the "Progressives". And who were the Progressives? Here is one summary of them:

"Originally, progressive reformers sought to regulate irresponsible corporate monopoly, safeguarding consumers and labor from the excesses of the profit motive. Furthermore, they desired to correct the evils and inequities created by rapid and uncontrolled urbanization. Progressivism asserted that the social order could and must be improved..... Some historians, like Richard Hofstadter and George Mowry, have argued that the progressive movement attempted to return America to an older, more simple, agrarian lifestyle. For a few progressives, this certainly was true. But for most, a humanitarian doctrine of social progress motivated the reforming spirit"

Sound familiar? The Red/Green alliance of today is obviously not new. So Hitler's eugenics were yet another part of Hitler's LEFTISM! He got his eugenic theories from the Leftists of his day. He was simply being a good Leftist intellectual in subscribing to such theories.

The summary of Progressivism above is from [De Corte \(1978\)](#). Against all his own evidence, De Corte also claims that the Progressives were "conservative". More Leftist whitewash! See also Pickens (1968).

And are feminists conservative? Hardly. And feminists are hardly a new phenomenon either. In the person of Margaret Sanger and others, they were very active in the USA in first half of the 20th century, advocating

(for instance) abortion. And Margaret Sanger was warmly praised by Hitler for her energetic championship of eugenics. And the American eugenicists were very racist. They shared Hitler's view that Jews were genetically inferior and opposed moves to allow into the USA Jews fleeing from Hitler (Richmond, 1998). So if Hitler's eugenics and racial theories were loathsome, it should be acknowledged that his vigorous supporters in the matter at that time were Leftists and feminists, rather than conservatives.

HITLER THE GREENIE

And Hitler also of course foreshadowed the Red/Green alliance of today. The Nazis were in fact probably the first major political party in the Western world to have a thoroughgoing "Green" agenda. I take the following brief summary from [Andrew Bolt](#):

Hitler's preaching about German strength and destiny was water in the desert to the millions of Germans who'd been stripped of pride, security and hope by their humiliating defeat in World War I, and the terrible unemployment that followed.

The world was also mad then with the idea that a dictatorial government should run the economy itself and make it "efficient", rather than let people make their own decisions.

The Nazis -- National Socialists -- promised some of that, and their sibling rivals in the Communist Party more.

The theory of eugenics -- breeding only healthy people -- was also in fashion, along with a cult of health.

The Nazis, with their youth camps and praise of strong bodies and a

strong people, endorsed all that, and soon were killing the retarded, the gay and the different.

Tribalism was popular, too. People weren't individuals, but members of a class, as the communists argued, or of a race, as the Nazis said. Free from freedom -- what a relief for the scared!

You'd think we'd have learned. But too much of such thinking is back and changing us so fast that we can't say how our society will look by the time we die.

A KIND of eugenics is with us again, along with an obsession for perfect bodies.

Children in the womb are being killed just weeks before birth for the sin of being a dwarf, for instance, and famed animal rights philosopher Peter Singer wants parents free to kill deformed children in their first month of life. Meanwhile support for euthanasia for the sick, tired or incompetent grows.

As for tribalism, that's also back -- and as official policy. We now pay people to bury their individuality in tribes, giving them multicultural grants or even an Aboriginal "parliament".

But most dangerous is that we strip our children of pride, security and even hope. They are taught that God is dead, our institutions corrupt, our people racist, our land ruined, our past evil and our future doomed by global warming.

Many have also watched one of their parents leave the family home, which to some must seem a betrayal.

They are then fed a culture which romanticises violence and worships sex -- telling them there

is nothing more to life than the cravings of their bodies.

No one can live like this and be fulfilled. People need to feel part of something bigger and better than ourselves -- a family, or a church, or a tradition or a country. Or, as a devil may whisper, the greens.

The greens. Here's a quote which may sound very familiar -- at least in part. "We recognise that separating humanity from nature, from the whole of life, leads to humankind's own destruction and to the death of nations. "Only through a re-integration of humanity into the whole of nature can our people be made stronger . . .

"This striving toward connectedness with the totality of life, with nature itself, a nature into which we are born, this is the deepest meaning and the true essence of National Socialist thought."

That was Ernst Lehmann, a leading biologist under the Nazi regime, in 1934, and he wasn't alone. Hitler, for one, was an avid vegetarian and green, addicted to homoepathic cures. His regime sponsored the creation of organic farming, and SS leader Heinrich Himmler even grew herbs on his own organic farm with which to treat his beloved troops.

HITLER also banned medical experiments on animals, but not, as we know to our grief, on Jewish children. And he created many national parks, particularly for Germany's "sacred" forests.

This isn't a coincidence. The Nazis drew heavily on a romantic, anti-science, nature worshipping, communal and anti-capitalist movement that tied German identity to

German forests. In fact, Professor Raymond Dominick notes in his book, *The Environmental Movement in Germany*, two-thirds of the members of Germany's main nature clubs had joined the Nazi Party by 1939, compared with just 10 per cent of all men.

The Nazis also absorbed the German Youth Movement, the *Wandervogel*, which talked of our mystical relationship with the earth. Peter Staudenmaier, co-author of *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience*, says it was for the philosopher Ludwig Klages wrote his influential essay *Man and Earth* in 1913.

In it, Klages warned of the growing extinction of species, the destruction of forests, the genocide of aboriginal peoples, the disruption of the ecosystem and the killing of whales. People were losing their relationship with nature, he warned.

Heard all that recently? I'm not surprised. This essay by this notorious anti-Semite was republished in 1980 to mark the birth of the German Greens -- the party that inspired the creation of our own Greens party.

Its message is much as Hitler's own in *Mein Kampf*: "When people attempt to rebel against the iron logic of nature, they come into conflict with the very same principles to which they owe their existence as human beings. Their actions against nature must lead to their own downfall."

Why does this matter now? Because we must learn that people who want animals to be treated

like humans really want humans to be treated like animals.

We must realise a movement that stresses "natural order" and the low place of man in a fragile world, is more likely to think man is too insignificant to stand in the way of Mother Earth, or the Fatherland, or some other man-hating god.

We see it already. A Greenpeace co-founder, Paul Watson, called humans the "AIDS of the earth", and one of the three key founders of the German Greens, Herbert Gruhl, said the environmental crisis was so acute the state needed perhaps "dictatorial powers".

And our growing church of nature worshippers insist that science make way for their fundamentalist religion, bringing us closer to a society in which muscle, not minds, must rule.

It's as a former head of Greenpeace International, Patrick Moore, says: "In the name of speaking for the trees and other species, we are faced with a movement that would usher in an era of eco-fascism."

This threat is still small. But if we don't resist it today, who knows where it will sweep us tomorrow?

LEBENSRAUM AND THE POPULATION "PROBLEM"

Reading *Mein Kampf* can be a perverse sort of fun. You can open almost any page of it at random and hear echoes of the modern-day Left and Greens. The points I mention in this present article are just a sampling. I could fill a book with examples showing that Hitler was not only a Leftist in his day but that he was also a pretty good Leftist by modern standards. His anti-Semitism would

certainly pass unremarked by much of the Left today.

Among students of the Nazi period it is well-known that Hitler's most central concern after getting rid of the Jews was *Lebensraum* for Germany -- i.e. taking over the lands of Eastern Europe for Germans. But WHY did Hitler want *Lebensraum* (literally, "life-space") for Germans? It was because, like the Greenies of today, he was concerned about overpopulation.

Greenie [Paul Ehrlich](#) wrote in his 1968 book *The population bomb*:

"The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now. At this late date nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate..."

Hitler shared Ehrlich's pessimism:

"Germany has an annual increase in population of nearly nine hundred thousand souls. The difficulty of feeding this army of new citizens must grow greater from year to year and ultimately end in catastrophe, unless ways and means are found to forestall the danger of starvation and misery in time... Without doubt the productivity of the soil can be increased up to a certain limit. But only up to a certain limit, and not continuously without end..... But even with the greatest limitation on the one hand and the utmost industry on other, here again a limit will one day be reached, created by the soil itself. With the utmost toil it will not be possible to obtain any more from it, and then, though postponed for a certain time, catastrophe again manifests itself". (*Mein Kampf* pp. 121 & 122).

Both Prof. Ehrlich and Hitler were intelligent but overconfident Green/Left ignoramuses who knew nothing of the economics concerned -- as is shown by the almost hilarious wrongness of Ehrlich's predictions -- but Hitler unfortunately had the means to do something about his ill-informed theories. He concluded that rather than let Germans starve, he would grab more land off other people to feed them -- and the rest is indeed history.

But surely Hitler was at least like US conservatives in being a "gun nut"? Far from it. Weimar (pre-Hitler) Germany did have restrictions on private ownership of firearms but the Nazis introduced even further restrictions when they came to power. The Nazi Weapons Law (or *Waffengesetz*), which restricted the possession of militarily useful weapons and forbade trade in weapons without a government-issued license, was passed by the *Reichstag* ("State Assembly" -- i.e. the German Federal Parliament) on March 18, 1938.

MORE LEFTIST THAN RACIST?

Hitler was in fact even more clearly a Leftist than he was a nationalist or a racist. Although in his speeches he undoubtedly appealed to the nationalism of the German people, [Locke \(2001\)](#) makes a strong case that Hitler was not in fact a very good nationalist in that he always emphasized that his primary loyalty was to what he called the Aryan race -- and Germany was only one part of that race. Locke then goes on to point out that Hitler was not even a very consistent racist in that the Dutch, the Danes etc. were clearly Aryan even by Hitler's own eccentric definition yet he attacked them whilst at the same time allying himself with the very non-Aryan Japanese. And the Russians and the Poles (whom Hitler also attacked) are rather more frequently blonde and blue-eyed (Hitler's ideal) than the Germans themselves are! So what DID Hitler believe in? Locke suggests that

Hitler's actions are best explained by saying that he simply had a love of war but offers no explanation of WHY Hitler would love war. Hitler's extreme Leftism does explain this however. As the quotations already given show, Hitler shared with other Leftists a love of constant change and excitement --- and what could offer more of that than war (or, in the case of other Leftists, the civil war of "revolution")?

See [here](#) for a more extensive treatment of what motivates Leftists generally.

The idea that Nazism was motivated primarily by a typically Leftist hunger for change and excitement and rejection of the status quo is reinforced by the now famous account of life in Nazi Germany given by a young "Aryan" who lived through it. Originally written before World War II, [Haffner's \(2002\)](#) account of why Hitler rose to power stresses the boring nature of ordinary German life and observes that the appeal of the Nazis lay in their offering of relief from that:

"The great danger of life in Germany has always been emptiness and boredom ... The menace of monotony hangs, as it has always hung, over the great plains of northern and eastern Germany, with their colorless towns and their all too industrious, efficient, and conscientious business and organizations. With it comes a *horror vacui* and the yearning for 'salvation': through alcohol, through superstition, or, best of all, through a vast, overpowering, cheap mass intoxication."

So he too saw the primary appeal of Nazism as its offering of change, novelty and excitement.

And how about another direct quote from Hitler himself?

"We are socialists, we are enemies of today's capitalistic economic system for the exploitation of the economically weak, with its unfair salaries, with its unseemly evaluation of a human being according to wealth and property instead of responsibility and performance, and we are all determined to destroy this system under all conditions"

(Speech of May 1, 1927.
Quoted by Toland, 1976, p. 306)

Clearly, the idea that Hitler was a Rightist is probably the most successful BIG LIE of the 20th Century. He was to the Right of the Communists but that is all. Nazism was nothing more nor less than a racist form of Leftism (rather extreme Leftism at that) and to label it as "Rightist" or anything else is to deny reality.

The word "Nazi" is a German abbreviation of the name of Hitler's political party -- the *nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei*. In English this translates to "The National Socialist German Worker's Party". So Hitler was a socialist and a champion of the workers -- or at least he identified himself as such and campaigned as such.

There is a great deal of further reading available that extends the points made here about the nature of Nazism and Fascism. There is, for instance, an interesting review by Prof. Antony Flew [here](#) of *The Lost Literature of Socialism* by historian George Watson. Excerpt:

Many of his findings are astonishing. Perhaps for readers today the most astonishing of all is that "In the European century that began in the 1840s, from Engels' article of 1849 down to the death of Hitler, everyone who advocated genocide called himself a socialist

and no conservative, liberal, anarchist or independent did anything of the kind." (The term "genocide" in Watson's usage is not confined to the extermination only of races or of ethnic groups, but embraces also the liquidation of such other complete human categories as "enemies of the people" and "the Kulaks as a class.")

The book seems well worth reading but is not of course available online. An excellent earlier essay by Prof. Watson covering some of the same ground is however available [here](#). He shows in it that even such revered figures in the history of socialism as G.B. Shaw and Beatrice Webb were vocally in favour of genocide.

We do however need to keep in mind that there is no such thing as PURE Leftism. Leftists are notoriously fractious, sectarian and multi-branched. And even the Fascist branch of Leftism was far from united. The modern-day Left always talk as if Italy's Mussolini and Hitler were two peas in a pod but that is far from the truth. Mussolini got pretty unprintable about Hitler at times and did NOT support Hitler's genocide against the Jews (Steinberg, 1990; Herzer, 1989). As it says [here](#):

"Just as none of the victorious powers went to war with Germany to save the Jews neither did Mussolini go to war with them to exterminate the Jews. Indeed, once the Holocaust was under way he and his fascists refused to deport Jews to the Nazi death camps thus saving thousands of Jewish lives - far more than Oskar Schindler."

"*Far more than Oskar Schindler!*". And as late as 1938, Mussolini even asked the Pope to [excommunicate Hitler!](#) Leftists are very good at "fraternal" rivalry.

So unity is not of the Left in any of its forms. They only ever have SOME things in common -- such as claiming to represent "the worker" and seeking a State that controls as much of people's lives as it feasibly can.

[Tom Wolfe's essay on American intellectuals](#) also summarizes the origins of Fascism and Nazism rather well. Here is one excerpt from it:

"Fascism" was, in fact, a Marxist coinage. Marxists borrowed the name of Mussolini's Italian party, the *Fascisti*, and applied it to Hitler's Nazis, adroitly papering over the fact that the Nazis, like Marxism's standard-bearers, the Soviet Communists, were revolutionary socialists. In fact, "Nazi" was (most annoyingly) shorthand for the National Socialist German Workers' Party. European Marxists successfully put over the idea that Nazism was the brutal, decadent last gasp of "capitalism."

Other sources on the basic facts about Hitler that history tells us are Roberts (1938), Heiden (1939), Shirer (1964), Bullock (1964), Taylor (1963), Hagan (1966), Feuchtwanger (1995).

The above are however secondary sources and, as every historian will tell you, there is nothing like going back to the original -- which is why much original text is quoted above. For further reading in the original sources, the first stop is of course *Mein Kampf*. It seems customary to portray *Mein Kampf* as the ravings of a madman but it is far from that. It is the attempt of an intelligent mind to comprehend the world about it and makes its points in such a personal and passionate way that it might well persuade many people today but for a knowledge of where it led. The best collection of original Nazi documents on the web is however probably [here](#). Perhaps deserving of particular mention among the documents available there is a

widely circulated pamphlet by Goebbels [here](#). One excerpt from it:

The bourgeois is about to leave the historical stage. In its place will come the class of productive workers, the working class, that has been up until today oppressed. It is beginning to fulfill its political mission. It is involved in a hard and bitter struggle for political power as it seeks to become part of the national organism. The battle began in the economic realm; it will finish in the political. It is not merely a matter of pay, not only a matter of the number of hours worked in a day-though we may never forget that these are an essential, perhaps even the most significant part of the socialist platform-but it is much more a matter of incorporating a powerful and responsible class in the state, perhaps even to make it the dominant force in the future politics of the Fatherland

OBJECTIONS

At this stage I think I need to consider some objections to the account of Hitler that I have given so far:

Leftist denials of Hitler's Leftism: Kangas

Modern day Leftists of course hate it when you point out to them that Hitler was one of them. They deny it furiously -- even though in Hitler's own day both the orthodox Leftists who represented the German labor unions (the SPD) and the Communists (KPD) voted WITH the Nazis in the *Reichstag* (German Parliament) on various important occasions.

As part of that denial, an essay by Steve Kangas is much reproduced on the internet. Entering the search phrase "Hitler was a Leftist" will bring up multiple copies of it. Kangas however reveals where he is coming from in his very first sentence: "Many

conservatives accuse Hitler of being a leftist, on the grounds that his party was named "National Socialist." But socialism requires worker ownership and control of the means of production". It does? Only to Marxists. So Kangas is saying only that Hitler was less Leftist than the Communists - - and that would not be hard. Surely a "democratic" Leftist should see that as faintly to Hitler's credit, in fact.

At any event, [Leonard Peikoff](#) makes clear [the triviality of the difference](#):

Contrary to the Marxists, the Nazis did not advocate public ownership of the means of production. They did demand that the government oversee and run the nation's economy. The issue of legal ownership, they explained, is secondary; what counts is the issue of CONTROL. Private citizens, therefore, may continue to hold titles to property -- so long as the state reserves to itself the unqualified right to regulate the use of their property.

Which sounds just like the Leftists of today.

Some other points made by Kangas are highly misleading. He says for instance that Hitler favoured "competition over co-operation". Hitler in fact rejected Marxist notions of class struggle and had as his great slogan: "*Ein Reich, ein Volk, ein Fuehrer*" (One State, one people, one leader). He ultimately wanted Germans to be a single, unified, co-operating whole under him, with all notions of social class or other divisions forgotten. Other claims made by Kangas are simply laughable: He says that Hitler cannot have been a Leftist because he favoured: "politics and militarism over pacifism, dictatorship over democracy". Phew! So Stalin was not political, not a militarist and not a dictator? Enough said.

Other denials of Nazism as Leftist

When all is said and done, however, the challenge by Kangas is really just too silly to take seriously. More serious is the strong reaction I get from many who know something of history who say that Hitler cannot have been a Leftist because of the great hatred that existed at the time between the Nazis and the "Reds". And it is true that Hitler's contempt for "Bolshevism" was probably exceeded only by his contempt for the Jews.

My reply is that there is no hatred like fraternal hatred and that hatreds between different Leftist groupings have existed from the French revolution onwards. That does not make any of the rival groups less Leftist however. And the ice-pick in the head that Trotsky got courtesy of Stalin shows vividly that even among the Russian revolutionaries themselves there were great rivalries and hatreds. Did that make any of them less Marxist, less Communist? No doubt the protagonists concerned would argue that it did but from anyone else's point of view they were all Leftists at least.

Nonetheless there still seems to persist in some minds the view that two groups as antagonistic as the Nazis and the Communists just cannot have been ideological blood-brothers. Let me therefore try this little quiz: Who was it who at one stage dismissed Hitler as a "barbarian, a criminal and a pederast"? Was it Stalin? Was it some other Communist? Was it Winston Churchill? Was it some other conservative? Was it one of the Social Democrats? No. It was none other than Benito Mussolini, the Fascist leader who later became Hitler's ally in World War II. And if any two leaders were ideological blood-brothers those two were. So I am afraid that antagonism between Hitler and others proves nothing. If anything, the antagonism between Hitler and other

socialists is proof of what a typical socialist Hitler was.

Another difficulty that those who know their history raise is the great and undoubted prominence of nationalist themes in Hitler's propaganda. It is rightly noted that in this Hitler diverged widely from the various Marxist movements of Europe. So can he therefore really have been a Leftist?

My reply is of course that Hitler was BOTH a nationalist AND a socialist -- as the full name of his political party (The National Socialist German Worker's Party) implies. And he was not alone in that:

Other Leftist nationalists

From the days of Marx onward, there were innumerable "splits" in the extreme Leftist movement but two of the most significant occurred around the time of the Bolshevik revolution -- when in Russia the Bolsheviks themselves split into Leninists and Trotskyites and when in Italy Mussolini left Italy's major Marxist party to found the "Fascists". So from its earliest days Leftism had a big split over the issue of nationalism. It split between the Internationalists (e.g. Trotskyists) and the nationalists (e.g. Fascists) with Lenin having a foot in both camps. So any idea that a nationalist cannot be a Leftist is pure fiction.

And, in fact, the very title of Lenin's famous essay, "Left-wing Communism, an infantile disorder" shows that Lenin himself shared the judgement that he was a Right-wing sort of Marxist. Mussolini was somewhat further Right again, of course, but both were to the Right only WITHIN the overall far-Left camp of the day.

It should further be noted in this connection that the various European Socialist parties in World War I did

not generally oppose the war in the name of international worker brotherhood but rather threw their support behind the various national governments of the countries in which they lived. Just as Mussolini did, they too nearly all became nationalists. Nationalist socialism is a very old phenomenon.

And it still exists today. Although many modern-day US Democrats often seem to be anti-American, the situation is rather different in Australia and Britain. Both the major Leftist parties there (the Australian Labor Party and the British Labour Party) are perfectly patriotic parties which express pride in their national traditions and achievements. Nobody seems to have convinced them that you cannot be both Leftist and nationalist. That is of course not remotely to claim that either of the parties concerned is a Nazi or an explicitly Fascist party. What Hitler and Mussolini advocated and practiced was clearly more extremely nationalist than any major Anglo-Saxon political party would now advocate.

And socialist parties such as the British Labour Party were patriotic parties in World War II as well. And in World War II even Stalin moved in that direction. If Hitler learnt from Mussolini the persuasive power of nationalism, Stalin was not long in learning the same lesson from Hitler. When the *Wehrmacht* invaded Russia, the Soviet defences did, as Hitler expected, collapse like a house of cards. The size of Russia did, however, give Stalin time to think and what he came up with was basically to emulate Hitler and Mussolini. Stalin reopened the churches, revived the old ranks and orders of the Russian Imperial army to make the Red Army simply the Russian Army and stressed patriotic appeals in his internal propaganda. He portrayed his war against Hitler not as a second "Red" war but as '*Vtoraya Otechestvennaya Vojna*' -- The Second Patriotic War -- the first such war

being the Tsarist defence against Napoleon. He deliberately put himself in the shoes of Russia's Tsars!

Russian patriotism proved as strong as its German equivalent and the war was turned around. And to this day, Russians still refer to the Second World War as simply "The Great Patriotic War". Stalin may have started out as an international socialist but he soon became a national socialist when he saw how effective that was in getting popular support. Again, however, it was Mussolini who realized it first. And it is perhaps to Mussolini's credit as a human being that his nationalism was clearly heartfelt where Stalin's was undoubtedly a mere convenience.

I think, however, that the perception of Hitler as a Leftist is more difficult for those with a European perspective than for those with an Anglo-Saxon one. To many Europeans you have to be some sort of Marxist to be a Leftist and Hitler heartily detested Marxism so cannot have been a Leftist. I write for the Anglosphere, however, and in my experience the vast majority of the Left (i.e. the US Democrats, The Australian Labor Party, the British Labour Party) have always rejected Marxism too so it seems crystal clear to me that you can be a Leftist without accepting Marxist doctrines. So Hitler's contempt for Marxism, far from convincing me that he was a non-Leftist, actually convinces me that he was a perfectly conventional Leftist! The Nazi Party was what would in many parts of the world be called a "Labor" party (not a Communist party).

And, as already mentioned, the moderate Leftists of Germany in Hitler's own day saw that too. The *Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) who, like the US Democrats, the Australian Labor Party and the British Labour Party, had always been the principal political representatives of the Labor unions, on several

important occasions voted WITH the Nazis in the *Reichstag* (German Federal Parliament).

Non-Marxist objections

Objections to my account of Hitler as a Leftist can however be framed in more Anglocentric terms than the ones I have covered so far. In particular, my pointing to Hitler's subjugation of the individual to the State as an indication of his Leftism could be challenged on the grounds that conservatives too do on some occasions use government to impose restrictions on individuals -- particularly on moral issues. The simple answer to that, of course, is that conservatism is not anarchism.

Conservatives do believe in SOME rules. As with so much in life, it is all a matter of degree and in the [centrist politics](#) that characterize the Anglo-Saxon democracies, the degree of difference between the major parties can be small. But to compare things like opposition to homosexual "marriage" with the bloodthirsty tyranny exercised by Hitler, Stalin and all the other extreme Leftists is laughable indeed.

And it is the extremists who show the real nature of the beast as far as Leftism is concerned. Once Leftists throw off the shackles of democracy and are free to do as they please we see where their values really lie. Extreme conservatism (i.e. libertarianism), by contrast, exists only in theory (i.e. it has never gained political power anywhere in its own right). Conservatives are not by nature extremists. The issue of allegedly conservative Latin American dictators and the evidence that the core focus of conservatism has historically been on individual liberties versus the State is considered at some length [here](#).

Another more contentious point is that many of the conservative attempts at regulating people's lives are Christian rather than conservative in origin and that Christianity and conservatism are

in fact separable. So conservatism should not be blamed for the multifarious deeds of Christians. But to discuss an issue as large and as contentious as that would be far too great a digression here. A discussion of it can however be found [elsewhere](#).

But Neo-Nazis are Rightist!

A remaining important objection to the account I have given so far is that Hitler's few remaining admirers in at least the Anglo-Saxon countries all seem to be on the political far-Right. If Hitler was a socialist, how come that some modern-day far-Rightists admire him?

In considering this, the first thing to ask is whether the description "Far-Right" is an accurate one for the people we are talking about. I think it is. The American far Right do share important basic values with mainstream "conservatives": They are independent, individualistic, suspicious of big-government and find great wisdom in traditional American values and arrangements. But they seem to be much more doctrinaire about it all and sometimes carry their independence and individualism so far as to become "survivalists" -- trying to live as independently of government and of what they see as a corrupted society as they can. But the far Right is a broad church with many opinions within it and it must be noted that only some of them have added pro-Hitler and anti-Semitic attitudes to their gospel.

So although support for anti-Semitism was in Hitler's day widespread across the American political spectrum -- from Henry Ford on the Right to "Progressives" on the Left -- it has lived on during the postwar era mostly on the extreme Right. (Though recent upsurges of "Anti-Zionism" among Leftists on university campuses seem to be a harbinger of big changes in that situation). Why?

The pro-Hitler, anti-Semitic orientation of some modern Rightist fringe groups goes back to the fact that Marxism and Leninism were internationalist. Marx and Lenin despised nationalism and wished to supplant national solidarity with class solidarity. That this was the best way to better the economic position of the worker was, however, never completely obvious. The Fascists did not think so nor did most Leftists in democratic countries. Nonetheless, it did have the effect of identifying Leftism with skepticism about patriotism, nationalism and any feeling that the traditions of one's own country were of great value. The result of this was that people with strong patriotic, nationalist and traditionalist feelings in the Anglo-Saxon countries felt rather despised and oppressed by the mostly Leftist intelligentsia and sought allies and inspiration wherever they could. And Hitler was certainly a great exponent of national pride, community traditions and patriotism. So those who felt marginalized by their appreciation of their own traditional values and their own community tended in extreme cases to adopt Hitler and blot out of their minds or otherwise rationalize the fact that he was also a socialist. And the Leftists also blotted out of their minds or otherwise rationalized Hitler's socialism for exactly the same reason -- because Hitler was also a nationalist. The Rightists liked Hitler's nationalism and the Leftists did not but it suited neither to acknowledge his socialism. It did not suit the Leftists because it would have associated them with a failed and condemned figure and it did not suit the Rightists because socialism was no part of the traditional independent culture that they wished to preserve.

So anti-Semitism lived on in the postwar era among the extreme Right for two reasons -- firstly because such people are traditionalists and anti-Semitism had been traditional in European societies for roughly 2,000 years and secondly because it was a

central part of Hitler's doctrines. Their liking for Hitler's national and ethnic pride led to their adopting his anti-Semitism too.

SO HOW DID HITLER GAIN SO MUCH INFLUENCE?

I will submit the radically simple thesis that Hitler's appeal to Germans was much as the name of his political party would suggest -- a heady brew of rather extreme Leftism (socialism) combined with equally extreme nationalism -- with Hitler's obsession with the Jews being a relatively minor aspect of Nazism's popular appeal, as Dietrich (1988) shows. There were nationalist Leftists long before Hitler (Napoleon Bonaparte for one) -- as Karlheinz Weissmann shows at length [here](#) (PDF) but the usual "all men are equal" dogma of the Left and their Marxist belief in the all-important role of social class usually inhibited 20th century Leftists from being really keen nationalists. Hitler felt no such inhibitions. His "*Ein Volk*" dogma in effect very cleverly substituted the usual leftist dogma with "All GERMANS are equal" -- and also, of course, superior to non-Germans.

And Hitler's nationalism did have the very great appeal of being at least apparently heartfelt. Right from the earliest chapters of *Mein Kampf* Hitler's love of his German nation (*Volk*) stands out. And that his constantly expressed love of his people and belief in their greatness should have earned him their love and belief in return is supremely unsurprising.

Note also that, horrible and massive though the Nazi crimes were, they were anything but unique. For a start, government by tyranny is, if anything, normal in human history. And both anti-Semitism and eugenic theories were normal in prewar Europe. Further back in history, even Martin Luther wrote a most vicious and well-known attack on the Jews. And Nazi theories of German racial superiority differed

from then-customary British beliefs in British racial superiority mainly in that the British views were implemented with typical conservative moderation whereas the Nazi views were implemented with typical Leftist fanaticism and brutality (cf. Stalin and Pol Pot). And the Nazi and Russian pogroms differed mainly in typically greater German thoroughness and efficiency. And waging vicious wars and slaughtering people "en masse" because of their supposed group identity have been regrettably common phenomena both before and after Hitler (e.g. Stalin's massacres of Kulaks and Ukrainians, the unspeakable Pol Pot's massacres of all educated Cambodians, Peru's "Shining Path", the Nepalese Marxists, the Tamil Tigers and the universal Communist mass executions of "class-enemies"). Both Stalin and Mao Tse Tung are usually "credited" with murdering far more "class enemies" than Hitler executed Jews.

And another aspect of Hitler's "normality" is that, as he came closer to power, he did reject the outright nationalization of industry as too Marxist. As long as the State could enforce its policies on industry, Hitler considered it wisest to leave the nominal ownership and day to day running of industry in the hands of those who had already shown themselves as capable of running and controlling it. This policy is broadly similar to the once much acclaimed Swedish model of socialism in more recent times so it is amusing that it has often been this policy which has underpinned the common claim that Hitler was Rightist. What is Leftist in Sweden was apparently Rightist in Hitler! There are of course many differences between postwar Sweden and Hitler's Germany but the point remains that Hitler's perfectly reasonable skepticism about the virtues of nationalizing all industry is far from sufficient to disqualify him as a Leftist.

A DEMOCRATIC LEFTIST!

But Hitler was not a revolutionary Leftist. He fought many elections and finally came to power via basically democratic means.

It is true that both Hitler and Mussolini received financial and other support from big businessmen and other "establishment" figures but this is simply a reflection of how radicalized Germany and Italy were at that time. Hitler and Mussolini were correctly perceived as a less hostile alternative (a sort of vaccine) to the Communists.

And what was that about election campaigns? Yes, Hitler did start out as a half-hearted revolutionary (the Munich *Putsch*) but after his resultant incarceration was able enough and flexible enough to turn to basically democratic methods of gaining power. He was thenceforth the major force in his party insisting on legality for its actions and did eventually gain power via the ballot box rather than by way of violent revolution. It is true that the last election (as distinct from referenda) he faced (on May 3rd, 1933) gave him a plurality (44% of the popular vote) rather than a majority but that is normal in any electoral contest where there are more than two candidates. Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher never gained a majority of the popular vote either. After the May 1933 elections, Hitler was joined in a coalition government by Hugenburg's Nationalist party (who had won 8% of the vote) to give a better majority (52%) than many modern democratic governments enjoy. On March 24th, 1933 the *Reichstag* passed an "Enabling Act" giving full power to Hitler for four years (later extended by referendum). The Centre Party voted with the Nazi-led coalition government. Thus Hitler's accession to absolute power was quite democratically achieved. Even Hitler's subsequent banning of the Communist party and his control of the media at

election time have precedents in democratic politics.

Even the torturous backroom negotiations that led to Hitler's initial appointment as *Kanzler* (Chancellor, Prime Minister) by President Hindenburg on January 30th, 1933 hardly delegitimize that appointment or make it less democratic. Shirer (1964) and others describe this appointment as being the outcome of a "shabby political deal" but that would seem disingenuous. The fact is that Hitler was the leader of the largest party in the *Reichstag* and torturous backroom negotiations about alliances and deals generally are surely well-known to most practitioners of democratic politics. One might in fact say that success at such backroom negotiations is almost a prerequisite for power in a democratic system -- particularly, perhaps, under the normal European electoral system of proportional representation. It might in fact not be too cynical to venture the comment that "shabby political deals" have been rife in democracy at least since the time of Thucydides. Some practitioners of them might even claim that they are what allows democracy to work at all.

The fact that Hitler appealed to the German voter as basically a rather extreme social democrat is also shown by the fact that the German Social Democrats (orthodox democratic Leftists who controlled the unions as well as a large *Reichstag* deputation) at all times refused appeals from the German Communist party for co-operation against the Nazis. They evidently felt more affinity with Hitler than with the Communists. Hitler's eventual setting up of a one-party State and his adoption of a "four year plan", however, showed who had most affinity with the Communists. Hitler was more extreme than the Social Democrats foresaw.

The only heartfelt belief that Hitler himself ever had would appear to have

been his anti-Semitism but his primary public appeal was nonetheless always directed to "the masses" and their interests and his methods were only less Bolshevik than those of the Bolsheviks themselves.

HITLER'S POST-ELECTION MANOEUVRES

It is true that Hitler proceeded to entrench himself in power in all sorts of ways once he came to rule but reluctance to relinquish power once it is gained is not uncharacteristic of the far Left in a democracy. In the early '70's, for instance, Australia had a government of a very Leftist character (the Whitlam government) that tried to continue governing against all constitutional precedent when refused money by Parliament. Because Australia is a monarchy with important powers vested in the vice-regal office, however, the government could be and was dismissed and a constitutional crisis thus avoided. It may also be noted that the Whitlam government presided over a considerable upsurge of Australian nationalism. It was literally a national socialist government. Unlike Hitler, however, it was very anti-militaristic (particularly in the light of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam fiasco) and did not persecute its political opponents. Australia has, after all, inherited from its largely British forebears very strong traditions of civil liberty.

Among other far-Left democratic governments that have been known to cling to power with dubious public support the government of Malta by Mintoff and Mifsud-Bonnici springs to mind. On a broader scale, the use of gerrymanders by democratic governments of all sorts also tends to entrench power. Democratically-elected governments are not always great respecters of democracy. The post-war Liberal Democratic (conservative) government of Japan never had a majority of the popular vote and ruled for over 30 years only

by virtue of a gerrymander. Yet it has generally been regarded as democratic. None of this is said with any intention of excusing Hitler or drawing exact parallels with him. The aim is rather to show roughly in what sort of company he belongs as far as his attitude to democracy is concerned. In other words, like many democratic politicians he was a reluctant democrat (surely more reluctant than most) but his coming to power by democratic means still cannot be ignored. It meant that he had to be fairly popular and this affected the sort of person he could be and the policies he could advocate. As sincerity in a politician is hard to feign successfully, for maximum effectiveness (and Hitler was a very effective leader) he more or less had to be the sort of person who had a genuine feeling for his own people and who thus would not want to make war on large sections of them (unlike Stalin, Pol Pot and Li Peng of Tien Anmen Square fame). This meant that the great hostility which seems to be characteristic of the extreme Leftist had to have another outlet. Hitler was simply being an ordinary European of his times in finding the outlet he did: The Jews.

HITLER'S SOCIALIST DEEDS

When in power Hitler also implemented a quite socialist programme. Like F.D. Roosevelt, he provided employment by a much expanded programme of public works (including roadworks) and his *Kraft durch Freude* ("power through joy") movement was notable for such benefits as providing workers with subsidized holidays at a standard that only the rich could formerly afford. And while Hitler did not nationalize all industry, there was extensive compulsory reorganization of it and tight party control over it. It might be noted that even in the post-war Communist bloc there was never total nationalization of industry. In fact, in Poland, most agriculture always remained in private hands.

THE CONSERVATIVES AND HITLER

And what about the conservatives of Hitler's day? Both in Germany and Britain he despised them and they despised him. Far from being an ally of Hitler or in any way sympathetic to him, Hitler's most unrelenting foe was the arch-Conservative British politician, Winston Churchill and it was a British Conservative Prime Minister (Neville Chamberlain) who eventually declared war on Hitler's Germany. Hitler found a willing ally in the Communist Stalin as long as he wanted it but at no point could he wring even neutrality out of Churchill. Not that Churchill was a saint. In 1939 Churchill exulted over the Finns "tearing the guts out of the Red Army" but, despite that, he later allied himself with Stalin. Like Mussolini, he was something of a pragmatist and saw Hitler as the biggest threat. Churchill therefore, despite his opposition to all socialist dictators, retreated eventually to the old wisdom that, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend". His basic loathing for both Hitler's and Stalin's forms of socialism is, however very much a matter of record.

Parenthetically, it should perhaps be noted that the lessons of history are seldom simple. The fact that the British Prime Minister who actually declared war on Hitler was a (mildly) anti-Semitic English jingoist -- Neville Chamberlain -- is something of an irony. Churchill was soon called upon to replace Chamberlain at least in part because Churchill's opposition to Hitler was seen as more heartfelt and consistent.

In keeping with the fundamental opposition between Churchill's English conservatism (Rightism) and any form of socialism, it might also be noted that German monarchists were among Hitler's victims on "the night of the long knives".

Nor is Hitler's going to war uncharacteristic of a social democrat

(democratic Leftist). Who got the U.S.A. involved in Vietnam? J.F. Kennedy and L.B. Johnson. And who got the troops out? Richard Nixon. I am not, of course, comparing the Vietnam involvement with Hitler's *Blitzkrieg*. Kennedy and Johnson were, after all, only mildly Leftist whereas Hitler was extremely Leftist. All I am pointing out is that there is nothing in social democratic politics that automatically precludes military adventurism.

NATIONALISM

Perhaps the only thing that does at first sight support the characterization of Hitler as a Rightist is his nationalism. There generally does seem to be an association between political Conservatism and nationalism/patriotism (Ray & Furnham, 1984). This presumably flows from the fact that Leftists generally seem attached to their well-known doctrine that, in some unfathomable way, "all men are equal". They seem to need this philosophically dubious doctrine to give some intellectual justification for socialist (levelling) policies. If all men are equal, however, then it surely follows that all groups of men/women are equal too. Leftism and nationalism have therefore some philosophical inconsistency and a wholly consistent Leftist would -- like Trotsky -- have to deny nationalism. Thus only the conservatives are normally left to promote and defend nationalism with any vigour. Since nationalism is just another form of group loyalty, however, and group-loyalty seems to be a major and virtually universal wellspring of human motivation (Brown, 1986; Ardrey, 1961), this normally leaves conservatives in principal charge of some very powerful emotional ammunition. In wartime, as we have seen, even Leftists can become patriotic but normally they are at least half-hearted about it.

HITLER'S MAGIC MIX

Shoeck (1966) has however shown at some length that envy is also a very basic, powerful and pervasive human emotion and levelling policies such as socialism will always therefore have great appeal too -- regardless of any spurious intellectual gloss that may or may not be put on them (such as the gloss provided by the "all men are equal" doctrine). Hitler was one of those who felt no need for any great intellectual gloss. The raw emotional appeal of socialism was the principal thing for him.

This emotional rather than intellectual orientation also meant that he felt no need to deny nationalism. He could be as nationalist as he liked. And he did like! He in fact had the brilliant idea of using nationalism to justify socialism: Germans deserved to be looked after, not because of their innate equality with everybody else but because of their glorious Germanness. This was extremely clever and hard to resist. As noted above, nationalism is a heady and universally appealing brew. Thus Hitler's socialism had a double dose (socialism plus nationalism) of emotional appeal that enabled him, despite his extremity, to come to power by way of a popular vote whereas Communism normally has to rely on bloody revolution and forcible seizure of power. Hitler's brand of socialism was, then, a cleverer one than most: It had something for everybody. He stole the emotional clothes of both the Left and the Right. With the Nazis you could be both a socialist and a full-blooded nationalist. Hitler was thus simply the most effective figure in showing that socialism and nationalism, far from being intrinsically opposed, could be very successfully integrated into an electorally appealing whole. With the additional aid of Goebbels' brilliant showmanship, the Nazis simply had it all when it came to popular appeals to the emotions. So Nazism was emotional rather than insane.

In summary, Hitler saw from the outset (Bullock, 1964) that a combination of socialist and whole-hearted nationalist appeals could be emotionally successful among the masses, no matter what he personally believed. If the basic message of the Left was "We will look after you" and the message of the Right was "We are the greatest", then Hitler saw no reason why he could not offer both nostrums for sale. He did not trouble either himself or the masses with details of how such offers could be delivered.

NATIONALISM AS AN EXCITING NOVELTY

Something that seems generally to be overlooked is that the three countries with the most notable "Fascist" (national socialist) movements in the early 20th century (Germany, Italy and Spain) were all countries with fragile national unity. Germany and Italy had become unified countries only in the late 19th century and Spain, of course, is only nominally unified to this day -- with semi-autonomous governments in Catalonia and the Basque country. Right up until the end of the Prussian hegemony in 1918, Germans saw themselves primarily as Saxons, Bavarians, Prussians etc rather than as Germans and the contempt for Southern Italians among Northern Italians is of course legendary.

So the fierce nationalism of the Fascists (though Franco held himself above the Spanish Falange to some extent) appears to have been at least in part the zeal of the convert. Nationalism was something new and exciting and was a gratification to be explored vigorously. And the Fascists/Nazis undoubtedly exploited it to the hilt. The romance of the new nation was an important asset for them.

So if we regard the creation of large nation states as a good thing (a fairly dubious proposition) the small silver lining that we can see in the dark cloud

of Fascism is that they do seem to have had some success in creating a sense of nationhood. A German identity, in particular, would seem to be the creation of Hitler. There was certainly not much of the sort before him.

There are of course differences between the three countries but, in all three, an acceptance of their nation-state now seems to be well-entrenched. This acceptance seems to be strongest in Germany -- probably in part because modern Germany is a Federal Republic with substantial power devolved to the old regions (*Laender*) so that local loyalties are also acknowledged. Spain has moved only partly in the direction of federalism and there is of course a strong political movement in Northern Italy for reform in that direction also.

It is perhaps worth noting that it took a ferocious war (the civil war) to create an American sense of nationhood too.

NAZISM "BOURGEOIS"?

Perhaps I should at this stage comment very briefly about the usual Marxist claim that Nazism and Fascism were overwhelmingly "bourgeois" (middle-class) and lacked appeal to the working-class. This is a major stratagem that Leftists use to deny that Nazism and Fascism were in fact "socialist".

I have always found this claim amusing. As Heiden (1939) and others point out at length, Hitler was a hobo until 1914 so how does a hobo get to lead a middle-class movement? And both Roberts (1938) and Heiden (1939) -- prewar anti-Nazi writers -- portray Hitler as widely revered and popular among the Germans of their day. As Heiden (1939, p. 98) put it: "The great masses of the people did not merely put up with National Socialism. They welcomed it". And Madden (1987) presents modern-day scholarly evidence derived from

archival research to show that Nazis came from all social classes in large numbers. Mussolini, too, found supporters and adversaries in all social classes (De Felice, 1977, p. 176). And particularly in the early years of Fascism, Mussolini often [*attacked the bourgeoisie*](#) in his speeches!

It is in fact it is *Communist* movements that always have bourgeois leaders and mostly bourgeois supporters. The workers usually vote for more moderate Leftists. So once again we see Leftists projecting onto others things that are really true of themselves.

STALIN AS A NATIONAL SOCIALIST

As has been mentioned already, Hitler's strategy for popularity was not lost on Stalin. Quite soon after Hitler invaded Russia, Stalin reopened the Russian Orthodox churches and restored the old ranks and orders of the Russian Imperial army to the Red Army so that it became simply the Russian Army and stressed nationalist themes (e.g. defence of "Mother Russia") in his internal propaganda. As one result of this, to this day Russians refer to the Second World War as "the great patriotic war". Stalin may have started out as an international socialist but he ended up a national socialist. So Hitler was a Rightist only in the sense that Stalin was. **If Stalin was Right-wing, however, black might as well be white.**

It has already been mentioned that in Australia too, socialism and a degree of nationalism have been found to be quite compatible.

HO CHI MINH AS A NATIONAL SOCIALIST

Stalin showed that National Socialism could be used effectively against another National Socialist but it took Ho Chi Minh's regime and its Southern extension to demonstrate that National

Socialism could even defeat the Great Republic (the United States). That Ho Chi Minh was a socialist is hardly now disputable and it is also clear that he had Vietnamese nationalism working for him in his fight against the American interventionists. Their foreignness made this easy to do. Note that the Viet Cong were formally known as the National Liberation Front. Their primary ostensible appeal was in fact national, though their socialism was of course never seriously in doubt. So the nationalism of Ho Chi Minh's regime gave it widespread support or at least cooperation in the South as well as in the North. Ho thus stole the emotional clothes of the conservatives as effectively as Hitler did and the magic mix of nationalism and socialism was once again shown to be capable of generating enormous military effectiveness against apparently forbidding odds. So the simple explanation that works to explain Hitler's amazing challenge to the world also works to explain the equally amazing defeat of the world's mightiest military power by an relatively insignificant Third World nation. A National Socialist regime has such a strong emotional appeal that it galvanizes its subject population to Herculean efforts in a way that few other (if any) regimes can. It sounds about as crazy as you get to claim that it was Nazism that defeated the U.S. in Vietnam but this once again shows how Nazism has been misunderstood and consequently underrated.

IS RACISM RIGHTIST?

If nationalism is no proof of Rightism, what about racism? At least initially, racism and nationalism seem essentially undistinguishable so does not Hitler's racism make him Rightist? Hardly. The post-war exodus of Jews from the Soviet Union and the tales of persecution that they brought with them are surely proof enough of that. Or was the Soviet Union Rightist too? There is an association between

conservatism and racism in modern-day America but Sniderman, Brody & Kuklinski (1984) have shown that this is confined to the well-educated. Among Americans with only a basic education, the association is not to be found. Similarly, general population surveys in Australia and England find no association between the two variables (Ray & Furnham, 1984; Ray, 1984). Any association between racism and Rightism is, then, clearly contingent on circumstances and is not therefore of definitional significance.

Finally, it is clear that anti-Semitism was not a defining feature of Fascism. It was more a defining feature of Northern European culture. Both Mussolini in Italy and Mosley in Britain were Fascist leaders but neither was initially anti-Semitic. It is true that Mussolini was eventually pushed into largely unenforced anti-Semitic decrees by Hitler and it is true that Mosley was eventually pushed into doubts about Jews because of attacks on his meetings by Jewish Communists (Skidelsky, 1975 Ch. 20) but in the early 1930s Mosley actually expelled from his party Fascist speakers who made anti-Semitic remarks and one of the few places in Europe during the second world war where Jews were largely protected from persecution was in fact Fascist Italy (Herzer, 1989; Steinberg, 1990). Many Jews to this day owe their lives to Fascist Italians.

DISTINGUISHING HITLER FROM STALIN

Hitler was, however, more Rightist than Stalin in the sense that, as a popular leader, he did not need to resort to extreme forms of oppressive control over his people (Unger, 1965). German primary and secondary industry did not need to be nationalized because they largely did Hitler's bidding willingly. State control was indeed exercised over German industry but it was done without formally altering its ownership and

without substantially alienating or killing its professional managers.

The contempt that Hitler had for Stalin and for "Bolshevism" generally should also not mislead us in assessing the similarity between Nazism and Communism. Leftist sects are very prone to rivalry, dissension, schism and hatred of one-another. One has only to think of the Bolsheviks versus the Mensheviks, Stalin versus Trotsky, China versus the Soviet Union, China "teaching Vietnam a lesson", the Vietnamese suppression of the Khmer Rouge etc. Similarity does not preclude rivalry and in the end it was mainly competition for power that set Hitler and Stalin on a collision course.

Under Stalin's wartime innovations, the difference between Nazism and Communism became largely a difference of emphasis. Both Nazism and Communism were nationalistic and socialist but with Communism, socialism was the ideological focus and justification for State power whereas with Nazism, nationalism was the ideological focus and justification for State power.

There always remained, however, one essential difference between Nazi and Communist ideology: Their responses to social class. Stalin preached class war and glorified class consciousness whereas Hitler wanted to abolish social classes and root out class-consciousness. Both leaders, as socialists, saw class inequality as a problem but their solutions to it differed radically. The great Nazi slogan *Ein Reich, ein Volk, ein Fuehrer* ("One State, one people, one leader") summed this up. Hitler wanted unity among Germans, not class antagonisms. He wanted loyalty to himself and to Germany as a whole, not loyalty to any class. Stalin wanted to unite the workers. Hitler wanted to unite ALL Germans. Stalin openly voiced his hatred of a large part of his own population; Hitler professed to love all Germans regardless of class

(except for the Jews, of course). This was indeed a fundamental difference and substantially accounts both for Hitler's unwavering contempt for Bolshevism and his popularity among all classes of Germans.

THE HOLOCAUST

But what about Hitler's policies towards the Jews? How do we explain those? Towards the beginning of this paper, I quoted Dietrich's conclusion that Hitler's anti-Semitism was only a minor part of his popular appeal to Germans. One reason for this view is the important but seldom stressed fact that there was nothing at all odd or unusual about a dislike of Jews almost anywhere in the world of the 1930s. Hitler was to a considerable degree simply voicing the conventional wisdom of his times and he was far from alone in doing so. The plain fact is that it was not just the Nazis who brought about the holocaust. To its shame, the whole world did. That part of the world under Hitler's control in general willingly assisted in rounding up Jews while the rest of the world refused to take Jewish refugees who tried to escape -- just as the world would later refuse many Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees and will in due course refuse to take other would-be refugees from other places. Racial affect is now recognized as universal in psychology textbooks (Brown, 1986) and Anti-Semitism is, sad to say, an old and widely popular European tradition. There seems to be considerable truth in the view that the Nazis just applied German thoroughness to it. It is true that Hitler can be seen as obsessed with the Jews rather than being merely anti-Semitic but this too could be seen as more Austrian than personal. So Hitler's anti-Jewish policies (as far as they ever became popularly known) were actually among his least controversial policies. The support for them needs no great explanation beyond a reference to the general attitudes of the times. As far as the average German

knew, Hitler was just running (yawn) a Pogrom. The Russians did it all the time, didn't they? It was Hitler's nationalist and socialist policies that were really interesting.

FASCISM & MUSSOLINI

Hitler was not however original in being both a socialist and a nationalist. The first police State that was both Leftist and intensely nationalist was of course the French regime of Napoleon Bonaparte. (Even the personality cult surrounding Napoleon prefigured similar cults in the later Leftist tyrannies of Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Mao, Kim Il Sung etc.) Bonaparte's regime was as short-lived (1802-1814 vs. 1933 - 1945) and as salutary a warning as Hitler's however, and it was not until the 20th century that such a concept again came prominently to the fore in the hands of the Italian dictator Mussolini. Mussolini came to power much before Hitler but was in fact even more Leftist than Hitler. Although generally regarded as the founder of Fascism, in his early years Mussolini was one of Italy's leading Marxist theoreticians. He was even an intimate of Lenin. He first received his well-known appellation of Il Duce ("the leader") while he was still a member of Italy's "Socialist" (Marxist) party and, although he had long been involved in democratic politics, he gained power by essentially revolutionary means (the march on Rome). Even after he had gained power, railing against "plutocrats" remained one of his favourite rhetorical ploys. He was, however, an instinctive Italian patriot and very early on added a nationalistic appeal to his message, thus being the first major far-Left figure to deliberately add the attraction of nationalism to the attraction of socialism. He was the first 20th century far-Leftist to learn the lesson that Hitler and Stalin after him used to such "good" effect.

It is true that, like Hitler, Mussolini allowed a continuation of capitalism in his country (though the addition of strict party controls over it in both Italy and Germany should be noted) but Mussolini justified this on Marxist grounds! He was, in fact, it could be argued, more of an orthodox Marxist than was Lenin. As with the Russian Mensheviks, it seemed clear to Mussolini that, on Marxist theory, a society had to go through a capitalist stage before the higher forms of socialism and communism could be aspired to. He believed that capitalism was needed to develop a country industrially and, as Italy was very underdeveloped in that regard, capitalism had to be tolerated. What some see as Rightism, therefore, was in fact to Mussolini orthodox Marxism. Mussolini held this view from the early years of this century and he therefore greeted with some glee the economic catastrophe that befell Russia when the Bolsheviks took over. He regarded the economic failure of Bolshevism as evidence for the correctness of orthodox Marxism.

Nor was Mussolini a socialist in name only. He also put socialist policies into action. Thanks to him, Fascist Italy had in the thirties what was arguably the most comprehensive welfare State in the world at that time (Gregor, 1979).

It could be said, in fact, that Italian Fascism was noticeably closer to Communism than Nazism was. This is not only because of the influence of Marxism on Mussolini's ideology but because Mussolini's nationalism was sentimental and nostalgic rather than the intellectual and ideological nationalism of Hitler. Thus it is primarily the degree of ideological focus on nationalism that distinguishes the three forms of authoritarian socialism: Nazism, Fascism and Communism.

For more on Mussolini and Italian Fascism see [here](#)

That Nazism and Fascism are commonly called Right-wing when in fact they were Right-wing only in relation to Bolshevik "Communism" does, then, tell us much about the dominant perspective of intellectuals in most of the 20th century.

As an historical summary, then, Nazism and Fascism had great appeal simply because they stole the emotional clothes of both the Left and the Right.

NAZISM IN GERMANY TODAY

Although there are neo-Nazi movements throughout the world today, the phenomenon would appear to be of greatest concern in the former East Germany. There we find that apparently large numbers of young racist thugs are actively attacking immigrants in the name of "Germany for the Germans" and the Swastika is once more an insignia of terror for minorities. Yet are not these same young East Germans the product of a diligent Communist education? Surely they should have been the least likely to become Fascists? Why have they in fact become Hitler's most obvious heirs?

The facts pointed out in this paper make the phenomenon no mystery at all, however. A Communist education is an extreme socialist education and Nazism was extreme socialism too. All you need to do is to add the nationalist element and you have Nazism. And nationalist feeling seems to be virtually innate anyway so, rather than actively "add" it, all you have to do is permit it -- and modern Germany is a very permissive state.

In fact, even the old East German State was quite nationalist. In its always precarious struggle for legitimacy, it did much to present itself as the spiritual heir of old Prussia (which it largely was in a territorial sense). So socialist East Germany was also nationalist, though not aggressively so.

It was low-key Nazi! So it turns out that the deeds of the young East German thugs we are considering are indeed traceable to their education. German National Socialism has the same outcome in the 1980s and 90s as it did in the 30s and 40s.

FASCISM IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

Russia in the immediate post-Soviet era was kept on a largely democratic course by the erratic ex-Soviet apparatchik Boris Yeltsin, and now seems to be in moderate hands under President Putin but what can we expect of the future? There still seems to be in Russia a powerful Fascist movement under the principal influence of Zhirinovskiy and a powerful Communist bloc under Zyuganov. And nationalism generally seems to be as popular as ever in Russia. Will a socialist background combined with strong nationalist traditions again produce a Nazi-type regime if economic conditions continue to be dismal? Will there be a Russian Hitler? Russia's nationalist traditions were, as we have seen, encouraged to a degree even under Communism (by Stalin and his successors) so it seems not unlikely. It just needs nationalism to become an ideological focus in lieu of socialism, and we will have Communism reborn as Fascism. And since socialism as an ideological focus does seem to be *in extremis* in the post-Soviet world, we might well expect a people accustomed to a strong ideological focus in their politics to be looking for a replacement focus. Only a small step would be required to make the transition to Fascism.

And just as Hitler could harp on the past glories of the *zweite Reich* (the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation) and refuse to accept the internal collapse of the Kaiserreich (the German empire of World War I) so Zhirinovskiy and his ilk can stress the scientific glories and territorial

reach of the former Soviet empire and refuse to accept that its collapse was due to internal causes. There is little doubt that a Russian Goebbels could find a workable basis for overweening Russian national pride and that such pride could be used as an antidote to present woes -- just as similar pride was once used in Weimar Germany. Zhirinovskiy and those like him seem generally today to be seen in the West as clowns, but Hitler was once seen that way too.

IN CONCLUSION:

Because this article contradicts what most people think they know about Hitler, it has necessarily been a long one. There have been many potential questions to answer. I would therefore like to close with a useful *brief* summary of what happened and why it is so little known. It is excerpted from a comment by [Peter Hitchens](#) on what is being taught in British schools and purveyed by the British media today:

"A schools video produced last year on the Forties barely gives a walk-on part to Winston Churchill, a man who is being steadily written out of modern history because he does not fit the fashionable myth that the Tories sympathised with the Nazis and the Left were the only people who opposed Hitler....

LABOUR'S role in the rise of Hitler was to consistently vote against the rearmament measures which narrowly saved this country from slavery in 1940. Stalin's insane orders to the German Communist Party, to refuse to co-operate with the Social Democrats, virtually ensured the Nazis would come to power in 1933.

This would be mirrored, six years later, in the joint victory parade staged by Nazi and Red Army troops in the then-Polish city of Brest, and the efficient supply of Soviet oil to Germany which fuelled the Nazi

Blitzkrieg and the bombers which tore the heart out of London.

But millions of supposedly educated people know nothing of this, and are unaware that the one country which behaved with honour and courage when the fate of the world was being decided was Britain."

It was the Left who were on Hitler's side, not the conservatives. And the Left were on his side because he was one of them.

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