



Alexander Reid Ross. *Against the Fascist Creep*. Chico: Ak Press, 2016. 400 pp. \$16.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-84935-244-4.

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Against the Fascist Creep, written by the US-based journalist and antifascist Alexander Reid Ross, is comprehensive, international, and historical, a wide-ranging overview of fascist interconnections within the left. Well documented and annotated, it draws from previous scholarship, blogs, websites, the author's own knowledge of the fascist scene, and interviews. As an activist outing fascists, he uncovered a South African journalist whose activities spanned the anarchist and the white nationalist scene. The book is rewarding for the reader in search of the continuities in fascist ideologies, strategies, and practices, as well as links between fascists throughout the centuries. From time to time, the author also mentions how radical groups and movements have organized to try to stop fascism.

Against the Fascist Creep covers fascism across a broad range of geopolitical regions and countries, including the United States, Europe, Russia, and South Africa, although fascism in Asia (Japan, India, etc.) is not investigated, possibly because ultranationalism there might have a separate historical tradition. Consequently, the book is best understood as an international rather than global account of the fascist creep. The book's broad reach, nonetheless, reinforces the fact that fascism is not a specific Italian or Spanish political

formation. In this way, *Against the Fascist Creep* contributes to the understanding of the wave of fascist and far-right politics that we witness nowadays worldwide.

Reid Ross does not explicitly outline an analysis of fascism but seems to follow the method of the historian Roger Griffin (*The Nature of Fascism*, 1993) in trying to understand fascists from within their own ideology. In response to a review of his book by E. Z. Kay, Reid Ross explains that he views fascist cross-class alliances as the outcome of material conditions (alienation and material disenfranchisement) and fascists' ability to seize on popular discourses.[1] He therefore does not separate materialism from phenomenology. In the book, however, such an understanding is mostly implicit. Only at the beginning of the book and at the end of some sections does he succinctly sum up how he understands fascism and its creeping strategy. *Against the Fascist Creep* is not a theoretical analysis of fascism, nor does it explain why people adhere to fascism or what makes fascism grow. It is perhaps best understood as an historical-journalistic overview.

The originality of Reid Ross's historical overview lies in portraying creeping fascism in two ways: on the one hand, how fascist groups adopt leftist tactics and ideas, make use of entryist strategies, and attempt to rally the left to their

causes, and on the other hand, how leftist groups and individuals cross over. His intent is to show "the crossover space between right and left that engenders fascism in the first place" and the thin line that separates fascism and the radical right from mainstream discourses (p. 3).

Indeed, the line between the radical right and fascism is very thin, although, according to Reid Ross, it is also important not to mistake the two. At the beginning of his book, in a section dedicated to definitions, he explains that "the radical right is generally perceived as a socially conservative milieu that rejects immigrants, religious difference, gender, and sexual diversity, and it is, if not openly racist, then racist in deed" (p. 12). Fascists, on the other hand, typically embrace a more hardcore revolutionary ideology than the radical right and attempt to build and lead a mass movement. This differentiation is indeed not commonly accepted in everyday life. In fact, in a much later chapter entitled "From the Tea Party to Occupy Wall Street," Reid Ross admits that in practice fascism and the radical right have common networks and goals.

Reid Ross's short definition of fascism goes as follows: "fascism is a syncretic form of ultranationalist ideology developed through patriarchal mythopoeisis, which seeks the destruction of the modern world and the spiritual palingenesis (re-birth) of an organic community led by natural elites through the fusion of technological advancement and cultural tradition" (p. 7). With this, he resorts to Roger Griffin's use of a minimalist definition focusing on the palingenesis of fascism, but he also adds other characteristics to help understand fascism as a whole. Agreeing partly with David Renton's development of Leon Trotsky's analysis in *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (1999), Reid Ross also sees fascism as a cross-class alliance, since ultranationalism implies a cross-class national community. Underlying his analysis of the fascist creep, he identifies "the stealth with which fascists continue to adapt and cultivate ide-

ological platforms to and integrated with the left" as one of the basic aspect of fascism (p. 290).

Even though Reid Ross's book deals mostly with fascism after World War II, it starts with the story of the "national socialist" Marquis de Morès in the late nineteenth-century United States, and his white supremacist friend, Theodore Roosevelt. In this chapter, Reid Ross sees fascism stemming from crusading and colonialism, and therefore views fascism as a tradition from within Western culture and not necessarily as a consequence of modern capitalism (at least concerning crusading). At the same time, he agrees with Zeev Sternhell (*The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 1994) that fascism has roots in totalitarian ideals that emerged with the Enlightenment. After a long journey through the diverse shades of fascism, the book ends with Donald Trump supporters, drawn from paleoconservatives to fascists.

Against the Fascist Creep portrays a wide range of fascists, far-rights groups, and political parties that continually reinvent themselves. While the history of fascism before and during the Second World War is well known, Reid Ross introduces lesser-known ideologues and tendencies, from elitist, mystical fascists such as Julius Evola; "Odinist" pre-Christian tribalists like Else Christensen; the "third positionists" adhering to a kind of syndicalism beyond capitalism and Stalinism, with roots in skinhead culture; the Nouvelle Droite who read Antonio Gramsci; the National Bolsheviks in Russia; and the fascists who take inspiration from philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ernst Jünger, and Carl Schmitt. His account surveys fascist neofolk bands, occult religious groups, esoteric fascists, fascists operating in the squatter community Casa Pound in Italy, fascists who self-identify as national anarchists, those supporting nonwhite rioting or radical groups such as the Nation of Islam or the New Black Panther Party in order to polarize radicalized movements and lead to racial separatism, the boutique fascism of the Nipsters (Nazi-

Hipsters), or men's rights groups linked to Holocaust deniers.

Since the financial crisis, fascists have increasingly used tactics associated with the radical left, as is the case with the Autonomous Nationalists turning to hip-hop and punk and using black block-oriented forms of action. Reid Ross also shows that some Autonomous Nationalists were involved in the civil war in Yugoslavia and used anticapitalist slogans and marched in remembrance of Nestor Makhno in the Ukraine before fighting in the civil war. The crossover between the Occupy movement and fascists and, before that, fascist interest in the antiglobalization movement, is illustrated by the overlap of ideas, for example, environmental conservation, rediscovery of authenticity, anticonsumerism, egoism of the rich, and producerism. Such an overlap explains the partial success of fascists in the ecological movement and Earth First!, whose fringes were attracted by white nationalism. This fascist creep is especially important to the author, because he witnessed firsthand the fascist infiltration of Earth First! [2] Finally, Reid Ross focuses on the entanglement of conservatives with the radical right and fascists, who together constitute a brave new world. In case anyone had lingering doubts, this book demonstrates clearly that fascism is alive and an active threat before us.

Against the Fascist Creep ends with a short chapter with a biblical title, "Swords into Ploughshares," with considerations on how to counter fascism. The mythopoetic character of fascism, as Reid Ross explains, creates new myths, an "everyday life that stems from myths rather than from fact" (p. 6). This feature leads to his conclusion that to fight fascism one must refute prejudices and superstitions, develop supportive communities, promote an ethic of cooperation and mutual aid, and rely on facts. In his words, "it is fascism and the radical right's distortion of truth that poses the greatest threat to the world—not immigration or 'Islamization.'" Combating fas-

cism requires the courage of facts. Knowledge pierces prejudice. Education around politics, immigration, Islam and Judaism—to name only a few hot points—remains crucial" (p. 330).

Education, however, seems to be more effective when fascism has suffered defeat, such as during the post-World War II period. In the "post-facts" society of today, where the fascist beast is alive and growing, the fight against the mythopoetic character of fascism by means of education and verifiable truths has become less possible. In my own experience, argumentation in training courses against racism underlines the facts that the number of immigrants is far lower than assumed, that immigrants have contributed positively to the total wealth of the country, that they are often paid less than nationals, et cetera. Even if these are facts, they have never really helped to fight fascism or the radical right. Instead, they tend to reinforce the status quo of the capitalist economies, which itself engendered the (re)birth of fascism. What if, as the fascists predict, immigrants become more numerous than nationals or more well-off? Even if, due to the rise of anti-immigrant policies throughout the world, this scenario is not close to coming true, to base facts on numbers and integration might even be dangerous: it might lead to the far-right conclusion that migration cannot go beyond the limits of the manageable. Rather than education by means of facts, it might be more helpful to reveal, as Reid Ross proposes in the same chapter, the oppressive contradictions of fascism. Relying on facts may even lead back to the political status quo and therefore reinforce the national cross-class alliance that can lead to fascism.

Fascism is mythopoetic, but facts unfortunately help little if people are convinced that liberation should be national, racial, or based on culture and ethnicity and that it should be a liberation from the greed of "parasites," as in a "producerist" worldview. As mentioned by Reid Ross at the beginning of his book, one prominent feature

of fascism, and a means to generate a broad base, is to emphasize the producerism of the working class against "parasites," who are identified as Jews, speculators, technocrats, and immigrants. The emphasis on the producerism of the working class is unfortunately not fully developed by the author. Yet it might have helped to explain the "why" of the fascist crossover with parts of the left. It might have also identified those parts of the left more vulnerable to fascist discourse and entryist tactics. For instance, a left that believes in producerism and the nation as central virtues seems most susceptible. Reid Ross is correct to describe deep ecology, reconnection with an authentic past, anticonsumerism, egoism, and producerism as left-right crossover issues. But are they crossover issues for the entire left?

Indeed, one problem with Reid Ross's analysis is that it fails to explain why "the left" crosses over to fascism, and it is exactly this homogenization of "the left" that leads him to believe that the entire left can smoothly slide towards fascism. While Reid Ross provides definitions for fascism, the radical right, parafascism, et cetera, he does not define the different strands of left politics. Indeed, it goes without saying, for the author as well, that there is, for example, a central difference between state-oriented social democratic, statist anticapitalistic, anarchist, and anti-state communist left politics, not to mention other important differences.

Not defining "the left" precisely allows Reid Ross to state at the beginning of the book that "if we consider the left's embrace of equality as its defining characteristic, fascism remains decisively on the right" (p. 1). Herein lies the problem of minimalist defining characteristics: it assumes that there is a single element that can be opposed to the right and therefore fascism. However, it is rather an analysis of the economic system which makes some leftist positions incompatible with fascism. Some leftist politics have no overlap with fascism (those that are opposed to hierarchy, the

nation, and the state, or that seek the abolition of private property and the exchange economy, for example). That individuals from the various left tendencies that have no overlap with fascism sometimes cross over means only that they are confused and therefore do not understand that the groups they were in were incompatible with fascism. What is nevertheless true is that being anticapitalist is not sufficient to resist fascist appeals; one must carefully define what the abolition of capital means and not simply be against capitalists.

A last note on *Against the Fascist Creep*: because of the large number of sources and short examples, these examples are not explained in detail. For the reader who does not know all the fascist tendencies, it is therefore difficult to assess the specific ideologies of these groups. Reid Ross, for example, writes about Marco Tarchi's Hobbit Camps and his use of and borrowing from Guy Debord's critique of everyday life (*Society of the Spectacle*, 1967), but no description is provided for the Hobbit Camp and how this fascist group of the Nouvelle Droite perverts the ideas of the Situationists. This example, one of many, points to a limitation of the book: that it does not fully illustrate how fascists mingle their ideologies and tactics with leftist ideas and practices. *Against the Fascist Creep* is best understood as an inspiration for further reading among the left, which has been encroached upon by fascist groups and individuals and which is incompatible with fascism.

Notes

[1]. Alexander Reid Ross, "Against the Fascist Creep: Mistaken Histories," *Toward Freedom*, September 22, 2017, <https://towardfreedom.com/archives/americas/against-the-fascist-creep-mistaken-histories/>

[2]. Alexander Reid Ross, "Responding to the Fascist Creep: An Interview with Alexander Reid Ross," *Anti-fascist News*, January 23, 2017, <https://antifascistnews.net/2017/01/23/responding-to-the-fascist-creep-an-interview-with-alexander-reid->

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