



Jean-Yves Camus, Nicolas Lebourg. *Far-Right Politics in Europe*. Translated by Jane Marie Todd. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2017. 310 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-97153-0.

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The Far Right and the influence it exerts on both domestic and international political systems have attracted increasing attention in recent years. Although there exists an abundance of scholarly work on the ebbs and flows of this diverse phenomenon, *Far-Right Politics in Europe* by Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg is a useful addition to the existing literature due to its meticulous investigation of the numerous Far Right factions that have been developed over time and across space. With a predominant focus on the European continent, the book defies easy explanations and can, more generally, be approached as an answer to the voices that indiscriminately tend to treat the Far Right as a single and unified entity.

The introductory chapter, titled “How the Far Right Came into Being,” covers a large part of the book. This comes as no surprise however, as a fundamental premise of the book is that the modern Far Right can be better understood if viewed through a historical lens. Therefore, Camus and Lebourg position the unit of their analysis in French history and specifically in the workings of the Constituent Assembly at the end of the eighteenth century. They trace the origins of Far Right thought, which was at the time portrayed as a plea for the restoration of the ancien régime by counterrevolution advocates. The chapter invites

the reader to delve into the social processes that influenced the trajectory of the Far Right since that moment, showing how “the first globalization” of Europe allowed ideas and people to disseminate across geographic territories (p. 7). A recurring theme refers to this constant exchange of ideas and the tendency of the Far Right to adopt beliefs that may even belong to different political leanings along its own ideological lines. Another interesting observation is the realization that some of the dominant traits of the Far Right today cannot be considered idiosyncrasies of our era; in fact, national populism is shown to have been part of the French system for the last 130 years. Camus and Lebourg convincingly argue that the developments of the Far Right in terms of its ideological and organizational synthesis cannot be explained if context and time are omitted from analysis.

Chapter 1 turns its attention to the period after the Second World War, providing a detailed overview of the difficulties faced particularly by those groups that were closer to Fascism and Nazism. The Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) is mentioned here, and this is important because academic work has often attributed the transformation of several like-minded groups to the catalytic role MSI has played. But what stands out in this chapter is the effort of the Far Right to build

networks beyond national borders, since “immediately after the collapse of the Axis powers, Fascist militants saw a united Europe as the justification for their previous positions” (p. 64). Camus and Lebourg illustrate, for example, how these attempts led to the New European Order (NEO), an organization that decided to divert from Nazism and to adopt a discourse for the defense of neo-racism, marking a critical moment for the history of the Far Right as “that discourse would have many incarnations and transmutations” (p. 74). Another movement with the same purpose of establishing European presence is Jeune Europe (JE), which is also discussed at length due to its innovative nature. The chapter concludes with an important observation that “despite the desire of Fascist movements, a supranational and social re-orientation has not really taken hold. Their efforts have not been fruitless, however, because, their innovations were useful to both populist and neorightist factions” (p. 96).

The next chapter deals with the role of white power and the role of race as driving forces for the actions of some Far Right groups. Here the discussion revolves around neo-Nazi groups that are “more cultural than political in nature” (p. 101), placing emphasis on the skinhead movement. It is interesting to see how this type of movement developed across Europe, in a period of time that the “proletariat was deconstructing” (p. 104). The authors explain that, among others, indoctrination through music and participation in violent practices are key characteristics of a Far Right skinhead, and then proceed to a more eloquent exploration of how violence is articulated through the activities of neo-Nazi groups. This section shows the extent of influence that the American Far Right had on its European counterparts. As one would expect at this point, there are references to the lone wolf strategy, which “should not be confused (as it often is) with the question of self-radicalization” (p. 110), and *The Turner Diaries* (1978), an influential book that is based on the principle of the struggle for race. Once more

the narration of the authors is strengthened by the use of various case studies, helping the reader engage with the material of this section.

Much has been written in the academic literature about the impact that the New Right had on ideological aspects of the modern Far Right, mainly as this was expressed through the idea of ethnopluralism that “every individual is attached to an ethnocultural group that would protect its identity by avoiding racial mixing” (p. 130). In chapter 3, the reader has the opportunity to engage with an important moment in the history of the Far Right. Camus and Lebourg exemplify that the New Right or Nouvelle Droite (as is often mentioned) is an amalgamation of intellectual groups and personalities that cannot, however, be assumed uniform. A key figure is GRECE (Groupe de Recherches et d'Études pour la Civilisation Européenne), which occupies a central place in this chapter. It is also interesting to see that the reason why the New Right emerged was “the organizational failure to build a European nationalist party in France” (p. 127). Once more the interplay between groups is evident as well as the influence of historic events (for example, May 1968) on the development of the Far Right. The ability of the authors to attain accuracy is outstanding, and this is evident, for example, in their narration on neopaganism and the New Right or the impact of Julius Evola's theories.

Chapter 4 dissects the relationship between religious fundamentalism and the Far Right, beginning with the intriguing observation that faith should not be associated with extremism, since it embraces the qualities of “freedom of conscience,” the antithesis to dogmatism, and takes an “interest in individual rights” (p. 152). However, the authors show how ideological stances can be fused into paths of multiple interpretations, signifying in this way the complexity of reality. This might explain, for instance, why compared to Catholics more Protestants vote for a Far Right party. Camus and Lebourg also define terms that

seem to be conflated (see, for instance, on page 159 the differences between integrists and traditionalists), while a large section looks into the association between integrism and the National Front. Even the issue of the Jewish Far Right is raised and addressed toward the last pages, describing its true dimensions.

On the other hand, scholars keen on learning more about populism will find chapter 5 interesting, where the term is analyzed in depth. The chapter shows how populist questions came to the forefront and dominated the political debate. Indicative of this is the speech of Enoch Powell in 1968, which assigned blame to nonwhite immigrants and asked for their repatriation. The latter combined with the impact of the New Right thinking, as discussed previously, helps the reader understand that the evolution of the Far Right is the result of multiple factors. The chapter also offers a compelling account of successful and failed cases, showing that populism is no panacea for success, and that political groups may face insurmountable obstacles and challenges when they put the populist model into practice. Particular emphasis has been finally placed on the so-called neopulist shift that was determined by “the geopolitical crisis subsequent to September 11, 2001, and the socioeconomic recession that followed the 2008 financial crisis” (p. 196). The description of the Dutch case reveals how this shift can materialize.

The last chapter investigates the Far Right in Eastern European countries. Although it is debatable within academia to what extent the Eastern European Far Right can be compared to its Western counterparts, Camus and Lebourg make clear at the outset that “the eastern part of the continent must not be understood in terms of Western assumptions” (p. 210). What the authors find particularly interesting is the fact that some of the prewar ideologies did not lose their significance during the Communist era and appeared again after the collapse of the regimes. The chapter also familiarizes the reader with the ideas of one of

the most important figures of Russian neo-nationalism, Aleksandr Dugin, and his concept of neo-Eurasianism, which “reconciles the two theoretical elements of George Sorel’s thought: myth and utopia” (p. 227). What is more, the analytical prism under which numerous countries (for example, Russia, Ukraine, and Bulgaria, to name a few) are being approached sheds light not only on the peculiarities of Eastern European Far Right groups but also on the composition of their base of support.

Finally, despite the fact that one could raise objections about the labels that have been used (for example, radical Far Right and national populism) or feel that some points are being obscured by the detailed description of events, this book is essential reading for those aspiring to understand the Far Right. In essence, readers have the opportunity to acquaint themselves with Far Right groups that encompass varying degrees of radicalism, and to look into their differences, overlaps, influences, and evolution up to the present time.

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