



ECOFASCISM

Just because it's often been a fascist narrative, that doesn't mean that apocalyptic collapse *isn't* happening. Climate breakdown will be a source of enormous stress on the global economy, culture, and our collective life support systems. Millions of people will leave their homes to find safer places. Wars will almost certainly spread, and violence will become an increasingly major part of billions of people's lives worldwide. Some parts of the globe will become uninhabitable. If places such as Europe – where much of the far-right politics we have discussed comes from – will be sheltered from the worst of the immediate effects by virtue of their wealth, political power, and comparatively mild climates, the vast majority of people in Europe and North America will not be spared the sudden, unpredictable and irreversible contraction of their standards of living, as supply chains intermittently seize up and fall apart. Across the globe, in highly uneven ways, it will begin to look a lot like the end of the world.

If this seems alarmist, consider that the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 was almost certainly the first of many,

increasingly damaging, pandemics and other extreme climate events.⁷⁶ If climate change has often been imagined as a single great wave breaking over New York City, or a series of blazing hot summers, now is the time to face reality. Climate breakdown will not be a single event, but a series of highly complex stressors on society like the COVID-19 pandemic: stressed global supply chains; an unprecedented contraction and the detachment of millions of people from it; shelter-in-place orders; a rise in state intervention into life; emergency legislation; and global racialised finger-pointing. These waves of shock will be highly unpredictable, but their overall frequency and intensity is likely to increase. Like accelerating wave motion, eventually the pattern of social shocks will shift over into turbulence, and each crisis will become indistinct from the last, their effects rapidly spiralling beyond control.

As narratives of long-term material progress face their self-evident refutation and atrophy even further, people in Europe and North America will withdraw their support from industrial modernity and the liberal social order, and place it in whatever promises to extricate them from their predicament. Indeed, the struggle to articulate and explain the unfolding disaster of anthropogenic climate breakdown might well be the central challenge of political narrative-making in the 21st century and beyond. Why are we saying all this? In part, because the far right will almost certainly be positioned well to provide a compelling, if entirely false, narrative about both the breakdown's causes and its drastic solutions.

In the long term, this might coalesce into any number of movements and political formations that could be labelled in advance as 'ecofascism'. Under such circumstances, fascism might return, not only as a political form that relies on myths of civilisational rebirth, but also as a movement that melds together extreme and public violence with mass participation in the party or movement form. Indeed, what is perhaps so worrying about the relationship of fascism to the conditions created by climate change is how well they seem to fit together: the collapse of a 'natural order' through unstoppable and catastrophic 'decadent' growth seems to lead inexorably to the opportunity for a racist 'palingenetic' movement of national or civilisational rebirth. Fascism requires a sense of crisis, one that needs immense violence to prevent or reverse. Again, climate change, which seems insoluble within both the current economic system of capitalism and with the current geopolitical order of – as the far right sees it – compromise, hedging and mediocrity, might be just such a crisis.

CONTEMPORARY FAR-RIGHT ECOLOGISTS

There are multiple strands to far-right thinking about nature, which we can separate into three groups: the right-to-far-right political parties; a variety of movement-based identitarian approaches; and blackpilled collapsts.

The first group – from the New Ecology initiative of the French Rassemblement National to the coalition of the right-wing Austrian People’s Party and the Green Party to the cynical use of the climate-like COVID-19 pandemic by the Fidesz government in Hungary – contains some parts that are explicitly strategising around our climate-breakdown future and some that will opportunistically push through their existing policies in times of crisis. Environmental politics have been alloyed with anti-immigrant and far-right policies in the Five Star Movement in Italy and have been cynically used by the US Center for Immigration Studies to promote anti-immigration policies. The deep institutional roots of these organisations and their ability to organise politics at the scale of the nation-state will likely make them key players in the early right response to climate breakdown. However, some of these parties have been embroiled in various ways for too long in the practice of climate denial, and their fundamental interest in maintaining a relatively conventional capitalist modernity will prevent them from taking what will increasingly seem like necessary action. In this they are likely to be understood from their right – in the long run – as simply another instance of the failed political centre. Their supporters will be up for grabs – and this could be an immensely important opportunity for the left. However, as they withdraw from these groups, these supporters will not automatically join the left-environmentalist movements, too committed to social justice for their tastes. Where will they go instead? Perhaps, rightwards.

The second group – movementists of the right and identitarians – are perhaps the most worrying group for the long term. Their main focus – cultural politics and its variations – is flexible enough to produce widespread hatred towards refugees, assuming these increase by virtue of climate change. Indeed, versions of far-right ecologism were adopted by the now-defunct Identitarian Movement UK and American Identity Movement. The latter summarised its connection with environmentalism in one of its sticker campaigns: “Plant trees, save the seas, deport refugees”. These groups’ organisational flexibility, and perhaps even more importantly their relative youth, which inoculates them from obvious accusations of blame for our future predicament, will let them thrive when the right and far-right parties look (by comparison) like increasingly sclerotic apologists for the liberal capitalist order. Political savvy and ability to translate smoothly between racist fears about migration and the spectacle of a declining natural order make this kind of movement the most serious threat. These political ideas proliferate on the internet and such groups have found common cause with the masculinist movement, as well as anti-modern currents more generally. Presently, these groups (at least their European variants) aim to influence the state, although depending on the success of their broader metapolitical strategy, they could come to be a serious alternative to the largely left-leaning mainstream climate movement.

The last group – the blackpilled collapsists – are banking not so much on a mass politics that turns the white populations

in Europe and the US against people of colour as on a full-scale social collapse of order in which they plan to thrive – both personally and with their packs. They often deploy survivalist and prepping language and, in America at least, dovetail neatly with existing militia groups, whose concerns about infringement of gun rights can easily expand to include declining social and environmental stability. One of the most important cultural changes in the last few years, both on the far right and in the wider culture, although largely disparaged, is the mainstreaming of prepping. As unexpected breakdown events become more frequent, so the logic goes, so too does the rational case for preparing for them become stronger. In retrospect – writing from the inside of the COVID-19 pandemic – the turn of these blackpilled groups, such as international group The Base, towards recruiting from the ex-military wing of the US prepping scene seems like extraordinary foresight on their part. It goes without saying that their politics is less obviously attractive to masses of people at the present moment and, indeed, the numbers of far-right actors involved in such groups are smaller than the voting public of large far-right parties. However, this might not remain the case.

Climate breakdown, that long dark tunnel into which our planet is heading, has no clear solution, and neither do the distinctions between these three segments have much solidity. We said in the previous chapter that there is a tension between deadly violence and movement building. It may not always be so: the contradiction between the two

is resolvable if the broader context changes. Widespread climate breakdown has the potential to be such a change. As the 21st century progresses, the currently stark distinction between identitarians and the blackpilled might start to wane.

In the context of global catastrophe, one central plank of anti-fascist strategy – pointing out the connections between movements and the terrorists they would attempt to disavow – might begin to be less effective. Consider the case of the shootings of migrants on the Greek/Turkish border in early 2020. Where before the violence of Greek fascists was treated as aberrant, when rumours that the migrants were infected with COVID-19 spread, the case for warding them off – using deadly violence if necessary – began to seem more reasonable for the far right.

The central argument of anti-fascist opposition to ‘ecofascism’ must be that it is not only likely to be politically catastrophic but also unlikely to solve the climate crisis itself. Indeed, despite the long history of environmental concern on the far right – from the conservationism of Madison Grant to the supposed ‘green wing’ of the Nazi party – the far right has extracted from the box of ‘nature’ a large number of distinct lessons; it has, in power, consistently worked to destroy the natural environment. Instead of a biocentrist defence of the sanctity of all life, what it has almost entirely been concerned with, through this history, is not nature but access to nature: preserving both a particular structure within nature and the social relations that allow people to access and engage with it. It is this we call ‘far-right ecologism’.

Far-right ecologism is built around the attempt to stabilise and resolve a contradiction between two opposed conceptions of nature. On the one hand, nature is conceived of something true and eternal, whose ultimate triumph is guaranteed: nature is the central regulatory ideal of society. On the other hand, nature is almost always presented as something that has been obscured in fact. Thus, it must be restored by the deliberate and often extreme acts of its most ardent exemplars – often a particular race. On the one hand, nature is eternal and pure and irresistible. On the other, it has *always already inexplicably been resisted* by the far right's enemies. Attempting to resolve this underlying contradiction in the ideology of nature is the central task of far-right ecologism.

What does this have to do with capitalism? Perhaps such a contradiction simply indexes a deeper ambivalence in far-right politics: a wish to enjoy the spoils of capitalist expansion without the attendant social transformations that such a process has often entailed. Racial domination cannot be achieved without the operations of capitalism. However, capitalism also entails both ever-escalating production and resource extraction, destroying particular aspects of the life-world the far right wants to root itself in. Further, capitalism inexorably tends towards its own globalisation. Rootness (and its attendant social forms) is undercut by the force (capitalism) that gives that rootness its particular sense of its own superiority.

Our second book, *The Rise of Ecofascism* (Polity, 2022), will deal with these possibilities and dynamics. Here, however,

the structure of the far right has been elaborated enough. We have attempted to clarify the relationships between all the various strands of the contemporary far right. It is now time to discuss how we can respond.