

Demystifying Fascism: The Nightmare Years

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I have in my library dozens of books that were written about the history of fascism and its politics, economics, religious affiliations and psychology that makes it succeed so often.

That includes the varieties of fascism that were studied in Italy, Germany, Spain, Japan, Britain and America, among others. To my recollection, none of the lessons I learned from my books had been even mentioned during my high school education or even my college careers. I don't recall hearing any of my teachers talk about American-style fascism. And none of my teachers led me to doubt the validity of the anti-democratic, pro-fascist and very unethical Monroe Doctrine, Manifest Destiny, Laissez Faire capitalism, the Dred Scott decision or any of the wartime atrocities that were so commonly perpetrated by American troops in any of its wars (ex: inventing water-boarding on innocent Filipinos and then massacring them during the Spanish-American War).

The "Nightmare Years" (in Germany): 1930 - 1940



I started on my path of trying to de-mystify fascism, ultra-right-wing conservatism and authoritarian nation-states after reading "into" William Shirer's "the Rise and Fall of the Third Reich". (I say "into" with no shame because I don't know anybody who has actually read the entire 1500 pages of that seminal work.) Shirer was to later write a book titled "The Nightmare Years: 1930 - 1940" about his experiences as an American correspondent in Berlin during the run-up to WWII. (I was later to become interested in the dynamics of a nation's authoritarian parenting styles, a reality that correlates nicely with a nation's militarism, war-mongering, racism, fascism, and imperialism.)

At the beginning of the Nightmare Years (for Shirer) was the phenomenon of Horst Wessel and the song that he was said to have written (the "Horst Wessel Lied"). Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, cunningly took an unknown Brown Shirt street fighter (and alleged pimp) and turned him into a martyred hero for the far right-wing extremist political party: the Nazis. (Robert Welch, Jr, the founder of the John Birch Society was to do the same thing for his hero John Birch exactly 30 years later - read on.)

Wessel was a member of the SA and the son of a conservative Protestant chaplain. He had been killed in 1930 by anti-fascist, pro-communist street fighters and then was memorialized by Goebbels. With a beautiful German folk tune accompanying the lyrics (and with the obligatory Hitler salute during the singing), the Horst Wessel song was sung by uber-patriotic Germans at Nazi rallies. Wessel's song was more popular than the official Nazi anthem, "Deutschland Uber Alles".

The lyrics of the song were quite pathetic but, because of the melodious tune, the song, especially when sung by a male chorus, easily aroused the patriotic fervor of rallying Nazis to more eagerly follow the psychopathic Hitler anywhere he desired. The song's lyrics went like this:

The flag on high! The ranks tightly closed!

The SA marches with quiet, steady step.

Comrades shot by the Red Front and reactionaries

March in spirit within our ranks.

Comrades shot by the Red Front and reactionaries

March in spirit within our ranks.

Clear the streets for the brown battalions,

Clear the streets for the storm division!

Millions are looking upon the swastika full of hope,

The day of freedom and of bread dawns!

Millions are looking upon the swastika full of hope,

The day of freedom and of bread dawns!

For the last time, the call to arms is sounded!

For the fight, we all stand prepared!

Already Hitler's banners fly over all streets.

The time of bondage will last but a little while now!

Already Hitler's banners fly over all streets.

The time of bondage will last but a little while now.

The flag on high! The ranks tightly closed!

The SA march with quiet, steady step.

Comrades shot by the Red Front and reactionaries,

March in spirit within our ranks.

Comrades shot by the Red Front and reactionaries,

March in spirit within our ranks.

Of course, the preceding decade of the 1920s that followed WWI's wartime devastation, was a nightmare decade for all of Europe, and the same could be said about the decade of the 1940s that saw all Europeans and their infrastructure decimated once again, thanks to the pro-war nationalism of conservative, racist, sexist, testosterone-laden ruling elites whose militarists made use of ever more destructive military technology.

The Nightmare Decade: The Life and Times of Senator Joe McCarthy



I have long been concerned about the radical rightward shift of my neighboring state of Wisconsin, especially the mean-spirited, anti-democracy Republican majorities in both legislative houses. But I have been especially concerned about the mean-spiritedness of the born-again Christian Fundamentalist Republican governor Scott Walker and the huge influence that the union-busting Koch brothers have had over all of Wisconsin politics.

I have also been concerned about the dangerous power of right-wing extremist Paul Ryan, who was Mitt Romney's running mate. Ryan, a native (and current resident) of Janesville, WI, is Chairman of the US House Budget Committee and a disciple of the atheistic libertarian Ayn Rand. Ryan actually requires his staff to read Rand's "Atlas Shrugged"; but he says that he is a devout Roman Catholic, a contradiction that Ryan fails to acknowledge. Ryan is the darling of the National Rifle Association, the Tea Party and various anti-choice groups and has actually proposed criminalizing and harshly prosecuting women who have had abortions.

I just read another "antique" book of mine with the title "The Nightmare Decade: The Life and Times of Senator Joe McCarthy" (authored by Fred J. Cook in 1971). McCarthy is the discredited, almost forgotten, two-term Irish Catholic Senator from Appleton, Wisconsin (who served in the Senate from 1947 until his death in 1957) who proved to his successors in the Republican Party how effective it can be to take money from corrupt and corrupting power elites and to use Dirty Tricks in order to gain political power.

McCarthy was a pathological liar and considered by many to be the most despised politician in recent American memory. He was a hard-drinking compulsive gambler and a failed stock market speculator, whose bad habits became lethal for him when he arrived in Washington,

DC. Before pursuing a political career, he was an unsuccessful small town lawyer and an amoral circuit court judge who joined the Marines in order to obtain photo-op “proof” of his patriotism. Later he shamelessly exaggerated his wartime experiences in order to claim that he was some sort of military hero. At best, the documented evidence from the Marine Corps says that he was at best a “wannabe” hero who never saw real combat, but he was willing to lie in order to obtain false credentials for future political gain – and Wisconsin voters bought it, to their ever-lasting shame!

After coming home to Wisconsin, McCarthy won a surprising GOP primary electoral victory in 1946 over the incumbent US senior Senator Bob La Follette, Jr (son of the legendary Progressive Party’s “Fighting Bob” La Follette). The general election against his highly ethical and honorable Democratic Party opponent was a piece of cake for the dirty trickster from Appleton.

As soon as he managed the upset victory over La Follette, McCarthy attracted huge amounts of campaign money and media support from out-of-state conservative corporations and individuals like bankers, conservative newspapers, real estate moguls, Texas oilmen, the sugar lobby, the Hearst newspaper empire, wealthy conservatives like the DuPonts, E. F. Hutton, H. L. Hunt, and, most importantly, the ultraconservative Chicago Tribune and its eccentric owner and rabid anti-communist Colonel Robert McCormick. Later on in his Senate career, Appleton’s local bank even bailed their favorite son out by loaning him serious amounts of money to pay off embarrassing gambling debts and investment losses.

Wisconsin Republicans wish that the story of the fraudulent “Tail-gunner Joe” would go away or be forgotten (probably one reason that historical illiteracy and anti-intellectualism are important planks of the unwritten GOP platform).

Cook’s book exposing McCarthy as a fraud and crook was published 11 years after the “nightmare” decade of the 1950s ended, when McCarthy had begun publicly accusing everybody and their mothers of being communists. His popular witch hunts paralleled the efforts of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Later on McCarthy chaired the Senate’s infamous Army-McCarthy hearings that were simply expanded witch hunts for “commies” in the US Army. That “investigation” was the straw that broke the camel’s back for McCarthy and led directly to his Senate censure and ultimate demise).

During that decade, America’s most honorable thinkers, best artists, poets, singers, film writers, politicians and patriotic citizens were black-listed, mercilessly hounded into silence and unemployment (some even forced into exile) by paranoid right-wing anti-communist conspiracy theorists like McCarthy – until temporary reason surfaced in the Senate and he was exposed as a pathetic fraud. He could have been forced to resign in shame, but backroom political dealings saved him.



President Eisenhower, along with died-in-the-wool conservatives like John Foster Dulles, had actually been accused by McCarthy of being communist dupes. Some Americans wondered why Ike had tolerated McCarthy's recklessness. To that question, Ike privately said: "I'm just not going to get into the gutter with that son of a bitch."

McCarthy had been given enough rope to hang himself. He had discredited himself – and the Republican Party – and he lived his last years going broke from his gambling debts and speculative stock market losses. He died in 1957 at age 48, of alcoholic cirrhosis of the liver a few short years after his fall from grace.

But McCarthy's anti-democratic, liberal-hating, neo-fascist efforts and outrageous anti-communist conspiracy theories did not die. Instead, what McCarthy began was vigorously continued by the John Birch Society (JBS) at the beginning of another nightmare decade for America, for the JBS's poisonous political influence led directly to the next nightmare decade that was marked by the assassinations of 3 important progressive national leaders during the 1960s (JFK, MLK and RFK) and the ascendance of anti-democratic national leaders like Barry Goldwater, Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew.

The Truth About the John Birch Society – and the Koch Brothers

Another book in my library that I have recently read is titled "The Truth About the John Birch Society" (authored by Richard Vahan). It was published in 1962, 5 years after McCarthy's death and shortly after the birth of the paranoid, rabidly anti-communist John Birch Society.

At the same time as Vahan was writing his book, Bob Dylan was writing a song that was a scathing parody of the John Birch Society, titled "The Talkin' John Birch Society Paranoid Blues" (1962). That was the song that Dylan was scheduled to sing – and CBS refused to allow him to sing – on the nationally televised Ed Sullivan Show. CBS's Columbia Records feared the powerful anti-communist crusaders enough to insist that Dylan also remove the song from his second album, which he did. Dylan's skewering of the John Birch Society and assorted other masters of war is one reason that conservatives despise unwelcome liberal truth-telling recording artists like Dylan, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Phil Ochs, Peter, Paul & Mary and others.

Interestingly, one of the 11 co-founding committee members of the John Birch Society was Fred C. Koch, the father of the current right-wing extremist Koch Brothers. The

independently wealthy Koch was a friend of the Birch Society's authoritarian originator, the equally wealthy Robert Welch, Jr.

The Koch family patriarch was the president of the Rock Island Oil and Refinery Company of Wichita, Kansas that later morphed into the privately-held multibillion dollar Koch Industries, which has, for many years, been lavishly funding – usually secretly – a whole host of far right-wing political action committees, right-wing think tanks and attack ads. These income-tax hating, corporate regulation-hating, union-hating, One Percenter Republicans met at the invitation of founder Welch in historically KKK-friendly Indianapolis, Indiana for a two day organizing session on December 8 – 9, 1958.

Who Was John Birch?

The mythical figure John Birch was the real son of ultra-conservative Southern Baptist lay missionaries to India, where he was born. In his college student years back in the states, Birch (who had been indoctrinated early in life to fear and hate liberalism and “godless communism”) was one of thirteen Christian Fundamentalist students at a Southern Baptist Church college who tried – and failed – to purge a handful of faculty members because of what the students regarded as heresy. (I can't help but wonder if those targeted professors had been simply applying, in their lectures, the ethics of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount teachings, a topic that seems to be a taboo subject for most Christians; or perhaps the “heretical” faculty members had expressed doubt about the church doctrine of a Young Earth [the Christian Fundamentalist teaching that planet earth is only 6,000 years old, as had been “calculated” by any number of pseudoscientists from the genealogical evidence in the “inerrant” Hebrew Bible]).

In the late 1930s, John Birch was being groomed for missionary work in China and, in 1940, he went there to convert heathens and do whatever was necessary to support the small number of Chinese Christian churches. In a couple of years, because of the war with Japan, he was recruited to join the US Army and then was commissioned as an intelligence officer in the US Army (and thus was under suspicion of being a spy, which he probably was). While on an armed mission with a Chinese nationalist soldier (who was loyal to the neo-fascist dictator, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek), he was shot and killed – during a struggle over his service revolver – by Chinese communist guerrilla soldiers. Ironically, his death came two weeks after Japan had surrendered.

So Birch was an early victim of the Chinese civil war between Mao's anti-fascist communist army (who were chaffing at the tyrannical rule of Chiang's fascist government and military. Ultimately Mao's communist army forced the (baptized Methodist) Generalissimo and his followers to flee into exile on the island nation of Formosa (now Taiwan). In the process Chiang slaughtered thousands of innocent Formosans (a la America's treatment of Native Americans or Israel's treatment of the Palestinians after WWII). Welch, who was independently wealthy after cashing in his interest in his brother's candy company, researched the story of John Birch and wrote his biography, calling him “the first American uniformed casualty of World War III”.

The Hysterical Paranoid Anti-communist Conspiracy Theories of Joseph McCarthy and Robert Welch

Welch had been a close friend and political consultant to McCarthy during the “Pepsi-Cola Kid's” brief heyday. He called McCarthy “one of the greatest Americans of the 20th century”.

The purpose of the John Birch Society, was simplistically and deceptively stated to “promote less government, more responsibility and, with the help of God, a better world”; but the hidden motivation of the twelve original members, including Fred Koch (which eventually shaped the politics of two of Fred’s four sons, Charles G. Koch and David H. Koch), was the same as McCarthy’s, and that was “to rid the nation of Communists, Communist sympathizers (“comsymps”) and Communist dupes”, relying on propaganda and counter-brainwashing systems utilizing techniques such as reading rooms, radio and TV broadcasting efforts, newsletters, magazines and establishing front groups that promoted its authoritarian, anti-liberal, anti-Semitic and racist ideologies.

Welch despised even moderate Republicans (calling them Communist dupes) like Eisenhower, the Dulles brothers and Earl Warren (who he sought to impeach). He has used tactics and strategies identical to those used by hate groups like the KKK, the American Nazi Party, the Silver Shirts, the America First Committee and the German-American Bund.

Here is how one of Welch’s critics described him, which reminds me of Goebbels early enchantment with Hitler when he first listened to the mesmerizing Nazi leader speak: “The man is a marvelously gifted demagogue, a natural speaker and writer with a strong lust for power and leadership; and he is convinced that it is his mission to save the world from communism. It’s not the lunatic fringe of literature, but a first class piece of demagoguery. The man is clearly a genius in his chosen field, a force not to be trifled with. There is just enough truth, just enough logic, and more than enough poetry and power in his arguments to bemuse millions of uncritical readers.”

Thinking people who understand Goebbels’, McCarthy’s and Welch’s propaganda techniques shouldn’t find it too hard to de-mystify the realities of mass hysteria, mass paranoia and the willingness of most citizen’s to give their support for their nation’s crimes against humanity. Such pseudo-patriotism can be easily generated by the telling of heroic war stories, the playing of rousing patriotic anthems, the application of constant and cunning propaganda, the total control of the mainstream media’s message by the ruling elites, and the support of (or silence from) the nation’s religious leadership. Good Christian Germans and good Christian Americans are not much different in their susceptibility to brain-washing techniques and pledges of allegiance to the flag, whether Swastika or Stars and Stripes.

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