

Histories of Hate: The Radical Right in Aotearoa New Zealand

Edited by Matthew Cunningham, Marinus La Rooij and Paul Spoonley

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The contemporary far-right is an extraordinarily complex, diverse ideological and political ecosystem: Christian, atheist, and pagan; violent and parliamentary; nationalist and civilisational; fear- and hate-laden and utopian; individualist and communitarian; traditionalist and accelerationist; statist and libertarian; progressivist and declinist. *Histories of Hate*, edited by Matthew Cunningham, Marinus La Rooij, and Paul Spoonley demonstrates that such multiplicity is a feature of the history of the far-right in this country.

The chapters in this important, compelling collection touch upon an incredible number of ideas, activists, and organizations, indicating that New Zealand's radical right has been shaped by a wide range of threatening others, dystopian figures, core constituencies, activating structural factors, imagined communities, and political solutions. What is it that brings unity to this diversity? In their introduction, Cunningham, La Rooij, and Spoonley take a cautious, "fluid approach" (33), surveying scholarly efforts to conceptualise, periodise, and explain the far-right, fascism, and populism, and emphasising intolerance as a central feature of their preferred object of analysis, the radical right – the "ceaseless struggle to expose, confront and/or expel a dizzying array of others" (33). Such intolerance is ideationally connected to conspiratorial understandings of the world, and with anti-pluralist, social and cultural monist political behaviour. And it is best explained as a series of backlashes to real or imagined threats to values, traditions, and identities.

Histories of Hate is a work profoundly shaped by the March 15 terror attacks. As the editors note, "this might not be us, to borrow from PM Ardern's words after the attacks, but there is still a little bit of us in this" (10). At the same time, they emphasise that this country's radical right tradition is, in many ways, "a history of abject failure" (40). Yet, many of the chapters demonstrate that the distinction between the centre-right and radical right has often been blurred, and that the radical right has frequently "jumped the firebreak" (12) to impact mainstream politics and popular discourse.

Part 1 instantly draws our attention to this, as it deals with late nineteenth and early twentieth century ideas and practices that were characteristic of the liberal imperial centre, and which only appear to belong to the radical right from a contemporary vantage point. Here, Pihama and Smith not only point to the widespread support for eugenics in New Zealand by the 1920s, but also underscore the ways in which covert forms of eugenics thinking "underpin and reproduce attacks on Māori ... for having big families, for being considered a burden on the taxpayer, for having children too young and for being neglectful or abusive parents" (60). Similarly, Eldred-Grigg and Dazheng demonstrate that, by 1920, anti-Chinese sentiment was part of the reigning political consensus. This chapter (and La Rooij's study of Lionel Terry that follows) indicates the ways in which unionists and socialists could be drawn towards anti-Chinese politics, particularly around the notion of "The Chinaman's wage" (66). Eldred-Grigg and Dazheng, though, point to the complexities of class politics here – for instance, in episodes in which shopkeepers and farmers tried to protect their interests in the name of the "White race", or in the way in which the growth of socialist internationalism after 1917 weakened left Sinophobia.

These early chapters draw our attention to the painful past in the present. In 1905, Lionel Terry murdered Joe Kum Yung in Wellington, motivated by his belief in a Jewish conspiracy to destroy Empire and replace racial Britons through mass migration, and hoping to ignite revolutionary racial cleansing. As La Rooij notes, at the time, Terry was “no mere outlier” (96). Today, the far-right notion of the “Great Replacement” – equipped with a narrative structure very close to Terry’s – borders, and, sometimes, crosses into the mainstream. Similar connections between past and present are found in the ideas of Arthur Desmond – the likely author of a proto-fascist manifesto “*Might is Right*”, according to Derby. A Hawkes Bay farm worker and left-wing firebrand, who caused a stir in 1889 by supporting Te Kooti’s right to return to the Hawkes Bay, Desmond’s politics took an antisemitic, racist, misogynist, and autocratic turn. Espousing a far-right philosophy of action, to be carried by “mighty men of valour, great destroyers; destroyers of all that is vile, angels of death” (105), “*Might is Right*” was rediscovered from the 1980s and “has become a primary text and inspiration for the white nationalist movement in the US and elsewhere” (112).

Despite the availability of such ideas, fascism and right-wing authoritarianism failed to take root here in the interwar years. Nevertheless, radical anti-socialist and antisemitic currents attracted significant support. Ward’s and Cunningham’s chapters focus on the Protestant Political Association (PPA), the Loyal Citizens League, the Welfare League, and the New Zealand Legion (NZL). As Cunningham notes, both the PPA and the NZL achieved the “threshold of mass membership” (137). Energised by the Bolshevik Revolution and fear of socialism, these organisations and their constituencies were far from uniform. For the PPA, the Easter Rising and the issue of the conscription of Catholic clergy were mobilising issues, the organisation linking the Catholic Church to socialism in a conspiracy to bring down the British Empire. The Welfare League focussed its attention on the Labour Party and the union movement, linking both to a Bolshevik campaign against the British Empire. The Loyal Citizens League, meanwhile, was a short-lived, government-initiated attempt to form a secret citizen army that would defend the nation against socialist revolution. And the New Zealand Legion was a populist anti-party organisation, intent on defending free market capitalism against growing interventionism.

The successes of the PPA and NZL indicate, Cunningham suggests, that, in the right conditions, radical right ideas can catch on in this country. This is also demonstrated in La Rooij’s chapter on antisemitic radicalisation in the 1930s, amidst dramatic economic downturn, fast-rising unemployment, and growing farm and national debt. The main force here was the Douglas Social Credit movement, which grew rapidly during 1932-3. And a particularly important role was played by Arthur Nelson Field – a respected mainstream journalist, whose “awakening” was prompted by re-reading *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, and whose *The Truth About the Slump* was described by Labour’s Bob Semple as a “great book” (166). While the notion of a Jewish world conspiracy lost ground as the economic crisis eased and New Zealand joined the War, the early years of the crisis are described by La Rooij as a moment of “radicalising contagion that helped reshape the political landscape” (174).

As the editors note, New Zealand didn’t really experience a wave of neo-fascism after World War II, in the absence of major political and economic crises and lacking a pre-War domestic fascist movement. However, as Loveridge details, the first explicitly neo-Nazi groups appear in the period 1950-70. These organisations were part of a wider range of right-wing fringe organisations, which never achieved mass influence, including the League of Rights, which developed out of the social credit movement, and, in the late ‘50s, the Christian Campaign for

Freedom, which opposed fluoridation of drinking water as “Communism via the Water Tap” (187).

A particularly intriguing aspect of this period is the way in which South Africa became, as Potgieter says, “a symbolically important site for New Zealand’s radical right” (203). The connection to South Africa was long-running – imagined shared ties to Empire, the right of conquest, white dominance – but, from the ‘60s, a range of pro-South Africa organisations appeared, mobilised by concerns about decolonisation and the counter-culture, and their links to communism. While fringe groups like the League of Rights supported apartheid, these organisations attracted a much wider popular base – Potgieter suggesting that the connection made between communism and the anti-apartheid movement was “perhaps the radical right’s most successful campaign in recent history” (214).

Unsurprisingly, no such mainstreaming occurred with racist skinheads – the subject of the final chapter in this section on the post-war radical right. As Gilbert details, skinhead gangs appeared here from the late ‘70s, but surged to national attention in the early 1990s, amidst recession, increased Asian immigration, and concessions made to Māori. While skinhead gangs and activism were fading by the end of the 1990s, some of those involved, especially Colin King-Ansell and Kyle Chapman, continued to be important far-right activist-organisers. Chapman reappears in the final part of the book, Dunick examining his involvement in the neo-fascist right, across a range of often short-lived ventures – for instance, with the Fascist Union, alongside King-Ansell and Kerry Bolton, and with the Direct Democracy Party, led by Counterspin Media’s Kelvyn Alp. Emerging as a high-profile spokesperson for the far-right in 2004 as leader of the National Front, Chapman has presented himself as the voice of the forgotten working class, against multiculturalism, free market globalization, liberalism, Marxism, and feminism. Chapman’s hopes for a more disciplined paramilitary street movement, with a new organisation Right Wing Resistance, briefly seemed to come to life and gain international reach, before, exhausted and dejected, he stepped down as leader and the organisation collapsed.

The two chapters in Section 4, religious and cultural intolerance, examine radical right currents that have achieved far greater success. Janiewski examines the post-1970 Christian right, which was focussed initially on “family values”, abortion, and homosexuality. Effectively losing our version of the culture wars, in the face of a dominant political culture favouring sexual and market liberalism, mobilization against the anti-smacking bill by a range of groups contributed to the Labour Party’s defeat in 2008. And, more recently, an updated “family values” agenda, often joined with elements of global populism – nationalism, anti-Islam, anti-immigration, anti-“gender ideology” – was broadly attractive to over 100,000 New Zealanders in the 2020 elections. Never the force it has been in America or even Australia, a number of factors suggest, nevertheless, that the Christian right “may be on the verge of increasing its influence” (259).

Arguably, Christopher Luxon’s accession to leadership of the National Party might draw elements from the Christian right towards the Party. National might also gather support from a current Richard Hill has named “anti-Treatyism” – the subject of Meihana’s chapter. While the themes of anti-Treatyism can be traced to a much earlier period – the Treaty as a “supreme act of benevolence” (265), the “humanitarian” quality of white settlement, the gifting of civilisation to Māori, and Māori privilege among indigenous peoples – contemporary anti-Treatyism might be located, above all, as a counter-mobilisation to the social and cultural movements of liberation of the 1960s and ‘70s. Instances of contemporary anti-Treatyism include Stuart C. Scott’s popular 1995 *Travesty of Waitangi*, a number of carpet-eating attempts

to demonstrate that Europeans were this nation's first settlers, and, more recently, Hobson's Pledge, the New Zealand Centre for Political Research, and Tross Publishing. Meihana summarises this activity as driven by the concern with the re-writing of history and by a narrative of Treaty activism as "a coordinated drive to defraud Pākehā of the wealth they have accrued from colonisation, and to funnel it to a 'Māori elite' and a cabal of historians, lawyers and officials who are riding the so-called 'Treaty gravy train'" (287).

The conspiracism found in both anti-Treatyism and the Christian right is, for Spoonley and Morris, a central feature of contemporary alt-right and identitarian politics. In this and the final chapter by Daubs on the international dimension of white extremism, we return explicitly to March 15 and to what appears to be a decidedly fringe politics. Attracting young white men, many of whom are university students or graduates, deploying more intellectual and skilful messaging, and pushing compelling conspiracy narratives, such as the Great Replacement and variants of QAnon, these movements, as Spoonley and Morris note, have increasingly taken more civilisational form, appealing to Christendom and Christian heritage. And, while this country's identitarian groups, the Dominion Movement and its successor Action Zealandia, are small, many of their core ideas intersect with larger organisations, such as the New Conservatives, Advance New Zealand, Vision New Zealand, the ONE party, and Counterspin Media.

Daubs's chapter explores similar ground, but examines the global dimension of today's white extremism, utilising Castells' work on the network society. Thoughtfully discussing the Christchurch terrorist's ties to the wider culture of the far-right, Daubs claims that the "fluid exchange" allowed by digital media represents a "significant shift" (329) in the communicative and organisational possibilities for white extremism. Rather than viewing such actors as lone wolves, we must see them as operating "as representatives of a loosely networked community of white extremists based on a trans-local white identity" (335).

As noted, across the collection as a whole, radical right ideas are shown to have deep-lying roots in this country, and to have often jumped the firebreak. Clearly, from the 1920s, fascistic variants have faced certain barriers to wider success, some of which are touched on in the book: for instance, that the New Zealand state was never in jeopardy in the 1930s, as it was in places where fascism took hold; that a strong current of anti-elitism in the Antipodes has made it difficult for populists to stake out distinctive positions; that the impact of the Global Financial Crisis was far less dramatic here than elsewhere; that we see continuing relatively high levels of trust in the political system and in parties; that the social order has never been threatened by a radical left. I would add here, significantly, the blockage that Māori resistance and Māori-led intellectual and moral reform has placed, from the last quarter of the twentieth century particularly, on explicit racism and white nationalism.

Nevertheless, perhaps we will look back on the 2022 parliamentary protests as another important point at which a constantly mutating far-right broke into the mainstream. Connected to this is one mutation, in particular, that has seen the far-right successfully borrowing and redeploying tropes associated with the '60s movements of liberation, the right to difference, irreverence, and, especially, free speech. This last, a cause championed as a part of a global far-right struggle against "wokeism", "cultural Marxism", "gender ideology", and "critical race theory", is now well beyond the fire break, and is supported by liberal and libertarian commentators who, in the name of tolerance, defend an increasingly ugly freedom characteristic of today's "marketplace of ideas". Such shifts should make us wary as to how "isolated and self-contained" (29) this country's radical right really are.