

Populism's hidden menace

What are the people in this clip actually celebrating?

We now know that it *wasn't* the beginnings of a vision or a plan. Farage resigned and disappeared within hours of this recording.

It was simply having beaten the other lot, who were the enemies of the *real* people as we hear in his speech.

But before we all jump on the bandwagon and get down to Brexiting, let's look at some of the characteristics of this and other populist movements.

- Intense Nationalism
- Mass appeal
- Dictatorial rule (i.e. the leadership dictate the targets for the membership)
- Anti-intellectual
- A-theoretical
- Charismatic leader

These seem to sum up the activities of UKIP pretty well, but this list is not drawn from analysis of UKIP, rather from a Britannica entry of the rise of the Nazis:

<https://www.britannica.com/event/National-Socialism>

The similarities continue. In large part both movements are emphatically anti-establishment, assume only one Volk - or set of people - who are of a single mind and envision the destruction of their enemies. And who are those enemies? Well, basically anyone who doesn't see things their way. Not only are they enemies by the way, they are traitors.

Of course, UKIP and its close relatives, the European populist parties, don't have roots in a Prussian military tradition which regarded the militant spirit and discipline of the army as a model for all individual and civic life. So the uniforms aren't here...yet.

But they do proclaim the rights of exceptional individuals, the 'decent', 'ordinary', 'real' folk who are emphatically better than outsiders, foreigners, members of minority groups or religions and they do assume that these decent folk are all of one mind, united in their grievances and sharing a traditional idea of 'us' enshrined in patriotism.

To apply the origins of Nazism to our modern day, we need to replace contempt for the Jews and Slavs with contempt for Muslims, speakers of different languages or owners of a different coloured skin. But the contempt is there nonetheless. There has been a sustained rise in hate crime since

the referendum on the EU.

Another feature of 1930's National Socialism was its understanding of mass psychology, the fact that all propaganda must keep its intellectual level at the capacity of the least intelligent member of the audience and that truthfulness is much less important than success;

According to Hitler:

It is part of a great leader's genius to make even widely separated adversaries appear as if they belonged to but one category, because among weakly and undecided characters the recognition of various enemies all too easily marks the beginning of doubt of one's own rightness.

[Mein Kampf]

Thus any group that the leader deems adversarial are legitimate targets for the *same* contempt, the *same* accusations of being traitors to the nation, perpetrators of the *same* dishonest or corrupt practices and all 'decent' folk quite naturally share that contempt. It doesn't matter what particular ideas, values, beliefs or policies these dissenters profess, their dissent alone is sufficient to mark them out - and to warrant their destruction.

Funnily enough in today's populism, occurring as it does in complex and diverse democracies, it is very difficult to unite all decent folk behind any vision other than a return to better past times presaging a better future. Somehow it will include the idea of 'Freedom' for decent, ordinary people, but because of the complexity of urbanisation, diversity of actual populations, religions, beliefs and values, there can be no forward view that aligns or characterises this future that starts from where we are now.

It goes without saying that this future will be more homogenous, more unitary, more traditional.

So we must start from the past, and a hugely fictitious past at that.

In the UK, all such romantic dreams start from a place like this:

Middle England is...

A mystical realm that does not actually exist beyond the pages of the newspapers and the tourist brochures. Middle England is something in all of us; a longing for a place where we can feel safe, secure and 'at home'. It is somewhere peaceful and quintessentially British, far from the madding crowd...



It doesn't matter that hardly anyone in Britain has lived in such a realm for 100 years and that when they did, life was often nasty, brutish and short. Everyone is assumed to long for the symbolic safety, tranquillity and peace that such a realm assures...and the hidden but important sub-text, that you wouldn't find many 'others' there. That's true in at least one respect, virtually everyone but the guy in the big place with the ramparts was a serf!

Thus UKIP, Austria's Freedom Party, Belgium's Flemish Interest, Denmark's Danish People's Party, Finland's True Finns, France's National Front and Holland's Party for Freedom all share distaste for others - *and define others as anybody who does not agree with them*. Note the resonance with Hitler's suggestion that enemies must be painted with a single brush, however different they may be.

I have no problems respecting people's desires to re-invigorate, re-frame or re-invent values, practices or traditions that are worthwhile. And I don't believe for a second that I'm the only one

who knows what these things are or how it should be done. I'm equally certain that as his sudden disappearance suggests, Nigel Farage does not either.

But I do emphatically propose that we arrive at decisions about what to re-visit - or what to invent - and how to go forward - through discussion, debate and reasonable argument, from which we reach compromises that serve us all. While 17 million voted to Leave, more than 16 million voted to stay.

Surely they can't all be traitors?