

RESURGENT RACISM AND NEOFASCISM IN EUROPE

Grant Proposal for the Alicia Patterson Foundation

by Martin A. Lee

I am seeking a grant to conduct an indepth investigation into the organized political forms and the cultural dimensions of contemporary European fascist movements.

Condemned to the margins of political life since the end of World War II, neofascist activity had long been dismissed as an expression of a lunatic fringe inhabited by cranks, misfits and fanatics. Although tragic for its victims, neofascist violence was seen for the most part as a minor problem, not as a threat to the stability of democratic societies. But this complacent notion has been shattered by recent events.

A 1991 report by the European parliament described an escalating pattern of violence directed at refugees, immigrants, guest workers, asylum seekers, Jews and ethnic minorities throughout the Continent. Soccer riots, the proliferation of skinhead gangs, vandalism targeting synagogues and mosques, and the growing electoral clout of far right political parties are all manifestations of a neofascist resurgence in Europe that has gained considerable momentum since the end of the Cold War.

Accentuated by the collapse of Soviet Bloc Communism and the reunification of Germany, the revival of fascism constitutes one of the most dangerous and disturbing trends in Europe today--a development that underscores the importance and timeliness of this project. In addition to examining how neofascist strategies have evolved since the reconfiguration of superpower relations, I will assess the current status of extreme right groups, their links to terrorism and racist violence, the potential threat they pose in various countries, and the key social and economic factors that are triggering their resurgence.

Economic recession in Western Europe coupled with the wrenching transition to capitalism in Eastern Europe have afforded fascist and Nazi groups with a mass constituency that is receptive to their pitch. These structural shifts in the European economy have brought to the fore an undercurrent of racism, xenophobia and hyper-nationalism that was never truly banished from the European scene.

As the social fabric unravels in the erstwhile Soviet Bloc, millions of refugees are fleeing to Western Europe, providing a winning issue for neofascist demagogues who peddle a politics ready-made for the economically disenfranchised. Touting emotive slogans such as "Our own people first!" and "Europe for the Europeans," neofascist political parties have seized the political initiative by denouncing foreigners.

All over Europe a major shift in the political climate is occurring, spearheaded by a neofascist revival that has pulled the entire spectrum sharply to the right. Far right political parties have emerged as the biggest vote-getters in major European cities, including Vienna and Milan. Boasting seats in several national governments, they currently constitute a fascist voting bloc in the European Parliament. And they may be on the verge of muscling their way into national governing coalitions in Austria and France, as well as regional governing coalitions in Germany and elsewhere.

I believe that much is genuinely at stake in the inquiry I am proposing. A grant from the Alicia Patterson Foundation will enable me to greatly expand the network of contacts I developed during previous investigative sojourns. My plan is to take a year's leave-of-absence from my job in order to work and travel in Europe for most of 1993. During this period I will gather information primarily through interviews and archival research. Sources I intend to consult include law enforcement authorities, diplomats, magistrates, government officials, social scientists, lawyers, think tank experts and antifascist "moles" who have infiltrated far right organizations. I will also speak with human rights and antiracist activists, as well as leaders of ethnic minority and immigrant groups.

Most importantly, I will interview neo-Nazi and neofascist militants--something I have done successfully on a number of occasions in the past. I will try to attend neofascist rallies, "no holocaust" conferences, and other largescale events such as the annual "nationalist" festival in Diksmuide, Belgium, where neo-Nazis from around the world convene each year. At such gatherings it is easy to obtain underground newspapers, books and other forms of neofascist propaganda. I also expect to access legal records, police documents, government reports, and privately-circulated newsletters.

During the past year-and-a-half I have submitted over 200 Freedom of Information (FOIA) requests to various U.S. government agencies in an effort to obtain additional data on neo-Nazi and neofascist groups in Europe. Some of these requests have already yielded pertinent information; most are still pending.

While in Europe I will explore various overlapping subjects areas, including mass-based neofascist political parties; skinheads and neo-Nazi youth culture; official and grassroots responses to neofascist violence; and regionalist movements with fascist overtones. The following are descriptions of articles I would like to write for the Alicia Patterson Foundation:

- 1) A Portrait of Vlaams Blok. The neofascist Vlaams Blok (Flemish Block) recently grabbed 25.5% of the vote, the most of any political party, in Antwerp, Belgium's second largest city,

which has been designated Europe's "cultural capital" for 1993. Campaigning against proposals for a European Union, Vlaams Blok also registered significant electoral support in Brussels, the provisional seat of the European Community. This article will examine the extent to which Vlaams Blok has influenced Belgian government policies. It will also explore links between Vlaams Blok and neofascist groups in Eastern and Western Europe. In addition I will try to ascertain whether Vlaams Blok leaders use skinheads and hardcore Nazi elements as a political slugging arm. In particular, I will examine the role of Xavier Buisseret, a Vlaams Blok MP who was previously a member of the VMO, a right-wing terrorist organization banned by the Belgian government in the early 1980s. The former publisher of a holocaust-denial journal, Buisseret is now his party's propaganda chief.

2) Regionalism and racism. Since the early 1970s, neofascist ideologues associated with the European New Right have advocated a "Europe of regions." Regionalism has emerged as a pivotal geopolitical force in post-cold-war Europe--a development welcomed by right-wing extremists. While regional movements are not intrinsically fascist, they are often receptive to the New Right's critique of capitalist-driven, global mono-culture as a sinister, all-pervasive force that is eroding regional identity. Under the guise of preserving the integrity of ethnic cultures, neofascists seek to justify the expulsion of foreigners from Europe. This article will examine the relationship between regionalism and racism, focusing primarily on the meteoric rise of the Lombard League in northern Italy and its implications for the future of that country and of Europe as a whole.

3) The Red-Brown alliance in Russia. Russian President Boris Yeltsin has repeatedly warned that a "red-brown alliance" of old guard Communists and fascist Russian nationalists may try to depose him. This article will seek to determine the viability of a red-brown alliance in Russia today and whether it poses a serious threat. It will trace the roots of this alliance, which existed in various forms before and during the Gorbachev era. Once-classified U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency documents (which I obtained through the Freedom of Information Act) indicate that Pamyat, a virulent Russian fascist organization, was backed by hardline Communist Party officials and local army commanders in the Soviet Union, where anti-Semitism--masquerading as "anti-Zionism"--had long been a hallmark of government propaganda.

4) Grassroots responses to racist violence. This article will examine how church groups, labor unions, antiracist activists, human rights organizations and victims of hate crimes are responding to neo-Nazi violence in their communities. Focusing mainly on the situation in Germany, where Nazi attacks have reached appalling levels, I will analyze the successes and failures of the antiracist movement. Examples from other countries may also be cited by way of comparison.

MARTIN A. LEE

--Biographical Data--

I began researching neo-Nazi and neofascist activity in Europe during the mid-1980s while I was completing my first book, Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD and the Sixties Rebellion (published by Grove Press in 1986). Choice described Acid Dreams as "a landmark contribution to the sociopolitical history of the U.S." The American Journal of Psychiatry said the book contained "a wealth of historical, sociological, and political information." The San Francisco Chronicle called it "a generalist's history that is bound to replace all others." Currently in its eighth printing, Acid Dreams was on the Chronicle's bestseller list for six weeks.

Since writing Acid Dreams, my main professional focus has involved working with the media research group FAIR (Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting), which I co-founded in 1986. The decision to devote my energies to FAIR stemmed from a belief that aggressive, investigative journalism was lagging in the U.S., while many in the mainstream press, particularly the Washington press corps, had grown too close to government and corporate power. FAIR advocates for hardhitting, independent reporting and greater pluralism and diversity in news media.

I am the founding editor and the current publisher of Extra!, FAIR's magazine of media criticism, which received The Utne Reader's award for general excellence in 1990. My duties with FAIR presently entail writing, public speaking, media appearances, as well as co-hosting "CounterSpin," FAIR's nationally syndicated radio program.

While employed by FAIR, I co-authored Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias In News Media, published by Lyle Stuart in 1990 and reprinted as a trade paperback in 1991. The Washington Post called Unreliable Sources "a worthy addition to the library of any student of American news media, social structure and political science." Booklist described it as "a telling indictment, urgently but not hysterically expressed." Currently in its sixth printing, Unreliable Sources has been assigned as a text for journalism and sociology classes at numerous colleges and universities in the United States.

Since launching FAIR, I have traveled to Europe on six occasions to research the extreme right and related subjects. As yet, however, I have never been able to spend more than a few weeks at a time investigating neofascist and neo-Nazi activity. Thus, I am seeking a grant from the Alicia Patterson Foundation that would enable me to live and work in Europe for most of 1993. I intend to take a leave of absence from FAIR in order to travel extensively throughout the Continent. The information gathered during this period will probably culminate in a book on the neofascist resurgence in Europe. As yet, however, I have not

submitted a proposal to book publishers--and I may not do so until after my research in Europe is largely completed.

My cover story on right-wing terrorism, which appeared in the Village Voice (1985), provoked international press attention and led to an appearance on CNN's "International Hour." I co-authored a subsequent cover story, "Europe's New Fascists," in Mother Jones (1987), which was reprinted in a number of European publications. Earlier this year I was commissioned by Mother Jones to write an investigative report on current developments in the German neo-Nazi scene. This piece will not be duplicative of what I intend to write for the Alicia Patterson Foundation.

My investigation in The Nation ("How the Drug Czar Got Away") and my analysis of news coverage of the Central American peace plan were cited by Project Censored as being among the nation's ten best underreported stories of 1987. In 1990, two of my articles--"National media ignore CIA misdeeds" and "Ex-DEA agent calls drug war a 'fraud'" (published in the Seattle Times and Extra!, respectively)--were commended by Project Censored.

During the last ten years, my articles have also appeared in such publications as Newsday, Rolling Stone, Cleveland Plain Dealer, San Jose Mercury, San Francisco Chronicle, National Catholic Reporter, Spin, Dissent, The Progressive, In These Times, Christian Century, Christianity & Crisis, St. Louis Journalism Review, Z and E magazine.

My articles have been translated and published in various foreign newspapers and magazines, including Le Monde Diplomatique and L'Evenement du Jeudi (Paris), New Statesman and Index on Censorship (London), Aktuelt (Copenhagen), Avvenimenti (Rome), Humo (Brussels), Sydsvenska Dagbladet (Stockholm), Vrij Nederland (Amsterdam) and Kritisches Christentum (Vienna).

I was a contributor to the College Dictionary of American Literary Biography on the Beat Writers. I have been a guest teacher-in-residence at the University of Illinois, and I have lectured at numerous colleges and universities including Harvard, Dartmouth, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, University of Missouri, University of Wisconsin, and the American University in Paris.

Interviewed as an expert on terrorism, espionage and media issues, I have been a guest on numerous TV and radio programs including CNN, CNBC's "The Real Story," C-Span, Turner Broadcast System's "Earth Report," "Fresh Air" on National Public Radio, Christian Science Monitor radio, and Pacifica Radio News.

My reasons for dedicating my professional life to journalism stem from a love of words and ideas (before reporting, I wrote poetry and short stories), as well as a deep-felt commitment to human rights and social justice. In 1975 I graduated with a B.A. in Philosophy from the University of Michigan, where I won four Hopwood awards for creative writing.