

Neo-Fascism

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 4 min read

The Buddha talked of three conceits: I am better than, worse than and equal to. The first is straight forward pride. The second is an inverse pride either through a lack of self-esteem or a masquerade for humility. The third is perhaps the most subtle because in this case we identify with the group that resonates with us and so the small 'I' becomes 'we'. We can see this happening wherever a group has formed around an ideology or a religion. I am right and everyone else is wrong. I am more right because there are lots of other people who think like me. This is self-righteousness magnified by the self-righteousness of others. One such example is the growing shift from Liberal Democracy to Illiberal Democracy which is none other than Neo-Fascism. Fascism rooted itself in the identity given by race and country, based on racial theories, long proven unscientific, on Social Darwinism and the identity that comes from the Nation. It was driven by fear of the loss of such identities and hatred towards those who were seen as threatening those identities. This was taken to its logical conclusion by Nazism which split humans into Aryans and non-Aryans. These days the ground has shifted away from racial theories to cultural purity: 'All races are equal, but each culture should remain pure because I am my culture. My culture is grounded on this ground, my country. Each culture should return to its own country.' Still based on race, such Neo-Fascist ideology has added to the growing challenge of immigration. Unfortunately fear and hatred will always be stronger than love and compassion. The reason is because for most the meaning of life is based upon the delusive sense of a real, unchanging self. When self can define itself according to its beliefs – nationality, religion, ideology, it feels robust, real, ME! If it fails to do so, the self feels ungrounded, confused and lost. However, there is a safety and community to be found in like-minded people who suffer from the same fear and hatred. This is most clearly expressed in the Great Replacement Conspiracy where the indigenous European i.e. white population, is being replaced by non-European immigrants. Yet the irony is that the European civilisation has always been a melting pot of myriad peoples and their cultures – Romano-Greek, Celt, Germanic Scandinavian tribes, Huns, Turks, Mongols, Semitic and North African peoples. Most coalesced around Christianity during the Middle Ages and yet all the varied nations keep their different cultures. Neo-Fascism is a growing political movement. Most Western countries now have a mainstream Neo-Fascist party e.g. Hungary's Fidesz, Poland's Law and Justice Party, Italy's Fratelli d'Italia are in power. Others such as France's Front National, Germany's AfD and the right wing of the Republican Party even if not in power, pressure the traditional conservatives (and at times the Far Left e.g. on issues such as immigration) to adopt some of their policies and rhetoric. In this way, their ideas infect the whole body politic. In the UK the voting system of first past the post makes it virtually impossible for minority parties to find a seat in Parliament. Even so due to mounting pressure from the Far Right within the Conservative Government as well as the UKIP re-incarnation as

Reform, the UK is showing signs of this move toward Neo-Fascism in its immigration policy, laws restricting demonstrations, attacks on the Judiciary and increasing ease with breaking international laws. Unlike Fascism which gained power through violence outside the democratic system, Neo-Fascists have learnt how to use the democratic system to win power for its racist, homophobic, and xenophobic agenda via various media. Once in power they begin to dissolve democracy. How this is done is clearly described in Ece Temelkuran's *How to lose a Country: The Seven Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship*, which describes Erdogan's rise to autocracy in Turkey. For those of us committed to democracy, no matter how imperfect it is, these are troubling times. Winston Churchill once said that: "democracy is the worst form of government – except for all the others that have been tried." The Buddha was nurtured in a tribal system where a man from the Warrior caste would be elected as leader. His role was to head a council. Monarchies were by then well established and indeed the Sakyas were vassals to the King of Kosala. But the Buddha did not choose this authoritarian way to run the order. He did not leave a successor. He left the ordained Sangha with a constitution, a rule, the Vinaya, that did not allow anyone to be the leader. And he established ways in which disputes could be settled. Theravada Buddhism is structured on the Vihara, dwelling places for monastics, and monasteries. Monastics living together as a community know each other well and by way of discussion decide who should be the spiritual guide of their community. The Abbot or Abbess has authority by way of respect not fear. They are an authority not in authority, though they have natural powers that come with leadership. It is their duty to maintain harmony in the community. What is more, the institutions are entirely dependent on laypeople for support who must also feel they benefit from the Sangha, by way of talks, blessings and meditation instructions. In this way, the Buddha has given us a model on how society might be developed – one based on mutual respect and reciprocal service.

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