

Britain on the path to fascism

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I was on the panel of an event for [West Country Voices](#) last night, alongside Naomi Smith, Molly Scott Cato and Peter Jukes.

During the discussion, both Molly and I referred to the fact that we think the UK is under threat from fascists. Molly [has written about this](#) on a number of occasions. We both referred to Umberto Eco's fourteen-point definition of fascism and agreed that we are close to these being met. These are those characteristics, originally published in 1996 in the [New York Review of Books](#):

- * "The Cult of Tradition", characterized by cultural [syncretism](#), even at the risk of internal contradiction. When all truth has already been revealed by Tradition, no new learning can occur, only further interpretation and refinement.
- * "The Rejection of [modernism](#)", which views the rationalistic development of Western culture since the Enlightenment as a descent into depravity. Eco distinguishes this from a rejection of superficial technological advancement, as many fascist regimes cite their industrial potency as proof of the vitality of their system.
- * "The Cult of Action for Action's Sake", which dictates that action is of value in itself, and should be taken without intellectual reflection. This, says Eco, is connected with [anti-intellectualism](#) and [irrationalism](#), and often manifests in attacks on modern culture and science.
- * "Disagreement Is Treason" — Fascism devalues intellectual discourse and critical reasoning as barriers to action, as well as out of fear that such analysis will expose the contradictions embodied in a syncretistic faith.
- * "Fear of Difference", which fascism seeks to exploit and exacerbate, often in the form of racism or an appeal against foreigners and immigrants.
- * "Appeal to a Frustrated Middle Class", fearing economic pressure from the demands and aspirations of lower social groups.
- * "Obsession with a [Plot](#)" and the hyping-up of an enemy threat. This often combines

an appeal to [xenophobia](#) with a fear of disloyalty and sabotage from marginalized groups living within the society (such as the German elite's 'fear' of the 1930s Jewish populace's businesses and well-doings; see also [anti-Semitism](#)). Eco also cites [Pat Robertson](#)'s book [The New World Order](#) as a prominent example of a plot obsession.

* Fascist societies rhetorically cast their enemies as "at the same time too strong and too weak." On the one hand, fascists play up the power of certain disfavored elites to encourage in their followers a sense of grievance and humiliation. On the other hand, fascist leaders point to the decadence of those elites as proof of their ultimate feebleness in the face of an overwhelming popular will.

* "Pacifism is Trafficking with the Enemy" because "[Life is Permanent Warfare](#)" — *there must always be an enemy to fight. Both fascist Germany under Hitler and Italy under Mussolini worked first to organize and clean up their respective countries and then build the war machines that they later intended to and did use, despite Germany being under restrictions of the [Versailles treaty](#) to NOT build a military force. This principle leads to a fundamental contradiction within fascism: the incompatibility of ultimate triumph with perpetual war.*

* "[Contempt for the Weak](#)", which is uncomfortably married to a chauvinistic popular elitism, in which every member of society is superior to outsiders by virtue of belonging to the in-group. Eco sees in these attitudes the root of a deep tension in the fundamentally hierarchical structure of fascist polities, as they encourage leaders to despise their underlings, up to the ultimate Leader who holds the whole country in contempt for having allowed him to overtake it by force.

* "Everybody is Educated to Become a Hero", which leads to the embrace of a *cult of death*. As Eco observes, "[t]he Ur-Fascist hero is impatient to die. In his impatience, he more frequently sends other people to death."

* "Machismo", which sublimates the difficult work of permanent war and heroism into the sexual sphere. Fascists thus hold "both disdain for women and intolerance and condemnation of nonstandard sexual habits, from chastity to homosexuality."

* "Selective Populism" — The People, conceived monolithically, have a Common Will, distinct from and superior to the viewpoint of any individual. As no mass of people can ever be truly unanimous, the Leader holds himself out as the interpreter of the popular will (though truly he dictates it). Fascists use this concept to delegitimize democratic institutions they accuse of "no longer represent[ing] the Voice of the People."

* "[Newspeak](#)" — *Fascism employs and promotes an impoverished vocabulary in order to limit critical reasoning.*

I stand by the argument.

Worry.