

# The Fascist Devil

by [Paul Gottfried](#) (February 2019)



Seekers, RB Kitaj

In early January, Stephen Pound, a PM from Northern Ireland, [led an effort](#) among his fellow-Labourites to remove a bust of Oliver Cromwell from Westminster. According to Pound and others of his persuasion, the onetime Lord Protector was a “butcher and war criminal,” who should not be celebrated as a hero by the Mother of Parliaments. Something that this protest brought immediately to my historian’s mind is how the present PC Left is spewing hatred on someone who was once widely

admired by Marxist intellectuals. When I was a graduate student at Yale in the mid-1960s, we were required to read [Christopher Hill](#) and other historians of the far Left who lavishly praised Cromwell as a revolutionary. Cromwell and his Model Army had fought against Charles I and Royalist forces. The Puritan revolutionaries were friendly to the rising bourgeoisie and were generally better disposed toward the principle of religious freedom (except for Catholics) than were their mostly Anglo-Catholic court opponents. The Puritan Revolution that Cromwell led also included social radicals, like the anarchistic Levelers and the socialist Diggers. Although these radicals defended their positions with biblical verses, English and German Marxists regarded them, even more than Cromwell, as progressives in their age. In the fullness of time the revolutionary process they began would lead beyond itself, to the proletariat uprising and the creation of a socialist state.

Those who hated Cromwell back then were my Irish fellow-students, who identified him with both an intrusive form of the Protestant heresy and his invasion of Ireland. Following the establishment of a republican commonwealth in England, Cromwell and his son-in-law Henry Ireton drove the Catholic population out of Northern Ireland and resettled the area with Protestants, mostly from Southern Scotland. But the group I recall who hated Cromwell the most were on the far Right and were latter-day adherents of the monarchist cause. Throughout my life I have felt, however, a reluctant admiration for Cromwell, who was a brilliant commander and an impressive English nation builder. During the Second World War, Churchill, who also revered Cromwell as a national leader and was his distant cousin, [tried to name a battle ship](#) for this controversial English republican. But the English king strongly and understandably objected, and England's seventeenth-century warrior was inevitably refused this

posthumous honor. Still, if I am properly remembering from my last visit to London, Cromwell's statue is still standing before the House of Commons, if nothing else than in the role that Edmund Burke famously assigned to him as an "avenging angel."

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Reflections about Cromwell entered my mind as I was busily at work on a book dealing with anti-fascism. The two contiguous activities are related in a way that should eventually become apparent. A feature of the current anti-fascism is free association between whatever peeves the PC protester and his claim to moral superiority. The causal nexus does not have to be obvious to anyone else, except for fellow virtue-signalers or protesting members of authorized victim groups. But the rest of us are expected to go along and presumably to believe that there is a verifiable connection between the object of the peeve or temper tantrum and something that if left unchanged, will cause infinite psychological harm to an accredited victim. Even more relevant, the statue, plaque, picture or very old name for a very old building that causes terrible offense has been around since time out of mind, and nobody seemed to care until the day before yesterday about the offense being caused. But here too there is an explanation that we are supposed to take *l'argent comptant*. Blacks, gays, Jews or anyone but straight white Christian males have allegedly always been deeply aggrieved by the sight of this or that, but those who felt anguish may have been too fearful or traumatized to protest, up until five minutes ago.

If certain grievances are therefore not addressed at once, for example, unless every Confederate memorial statue is ground down to sand and Cromwell's bust heaved into the junk pile at Westminster, the aggrieved individual or group will suffer a mental breakdown or a permanent loss of self-esteem. But there may be even worse consequences that could attend the failure to address the stated grievance. Fascism is waiting in the wings; and like Cromwell's notion of the Devil, evil incarnate could spring on us when we're least aware. Fascism, meaning a return to the horrors of the Third Reich, could overtake us unless we're sensitive to the signs of its approach. [Two otherwise respectable historians](#), Tim Snyder and Christopher Browning, believe that we're already well on our way to fascism since the election of Donald Trump. Our dangerously Führer-like president is already suppressing workers' movements (read, public sector unions) and has created a living hell for foreigners. He's also been doing some really strange things, like trying to build a border wall with Mexico, while his administration has been cool to dismantling Confederate monuments. This last failure supposedly shows Trump's links to white supremacist groups that have hung around from the segregationist South, something that Yale historian Tim Snyder asserts is a self-evident fact.

All of this may be true but I'd like to know why the same evidence of galloping fascism was not present when Senate Democrats in 2008 proposed an expensive border wall. It also seems that, according to some authoritative sources, Jesus would have objected to such an unseemly barrier and even more emphatically, against separating children from their parents among those illegally entering the country. Congressman Luis Guterierrez, a Democrat from Chicago, [launched into a rant](#) against anyone who wants to build a wall that "would have killed the baby Jesus." This would have occurred when Jesus's parents fled to Egypt from the murderous King Herod. It seems,



according to Gutierrez, that his Republican colleagues didn't remember their "Bible classes." Otherwise they would have known that Jesus would have opposed the "shame of separating parents from children at the border." Still one has to wonder why Jesus would not have minded the wall or even separating children from their parents at the border [when President Obama proposed or implemented those policies](#). It seems that back in those happy years, Jesus didn't mind what Gutierrez is protesting in his garbled account of the Bible. Nor were we being stalked by the ghost of Adolf Hitler. Oh, and Jesus was presumably an anti-fascist, meaning whatever the media and PC professors mean by that designation at a particular moment.

Two observations seem germane at this point. One, those who believe or pretend to believe that by satisfying the latest demand of our hysterical antifascists and virtue-signalers we can get stop the commotion are lying to themselves and/or us. [National Review editor Rich Lowry](#) has been conspicuously enthusiastic about tearing down Confederate memorial statues. This may be the least we can do to accommodate the descendants of black slaves and restore civil peace. Although I suspect that Lowry is taking this position in order to ingratiate himself with donors and his professional associates on the Left, we might ask ourselves whether pulling down thousands of once revered statues in every state of the former Confederacy will sate the destructive or bullying urges of those who claim to be aggrieved. What else will these grievance-mongers demand once their latest non-negotiable requirement is met? Those who run to make concessions can't possibly believe this will be the end of the protesting or the vandalizing of monuments.

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Two, I am genuinely struck by how much more intellectually coherent the traditional Marxist Left was than the anti-fascist Left that constitutes the object of my latest book project. Perhaps I should admit another secret, although this one may be more obvious than my mildly pro-Cromwell sentiments on the subject of the English Civil War. In comparison to both the Left and what now passes for the authorized Right in the US, I feel deep respect for Marxist thinkers of an earlier generation. Antonio Gramsci, Karl Kautsky, Rudolf Hilferding and Karl Marx were all serious thinkers from whom I have learned a great deal by reading and rereading. I couldn't imagine these cerebral giants would have felt any regard for Elizabeth Warren, Alexandra Occasio-Cortez or Michelle Obama. And they probably would have had even less respect for our "conservative" journalists, most of whom are neither notably conservative nor capable of significant reflection. Interwar Marxists could write perceptively about why Mussolini gained power in Italy or why Hitler was able to impose a brutal dictatorship on Germany. Now anti-fascist discourse has become the domain of Never-Trumpers at the New York Review of Books and of GOP hacks [comparing the Democrats to the early Nazis](#). This plunge into infantilism should be apparent to anyone who stands outside the opinion-industry.

In any case, antifascism is becoming harder to get a handle on because those who bring up the subject are so thoroughly and hysterically politicized. [Fascism and anti-fascism](#) mean what their users decide to make them mean in battling other political partisans. The war against fascism is also routinely brought up when the grievance industry decides to go on the warpath. This leads typically to iconoclastic [fury against offending monuments](#) but also to narratives about the effects of prejudice and about how all unwanted prejudice leads to Hitler and the Nazi Final Solution.

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