

# A FAILURE OF DEFINITION

## *Inconsistency and Slanted Interpretation in Academic Discussion of the BNP and Britain's "Far Right"*

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### ABSTRACT

*This article examines the current usage of the term "far right" among commentators on the subject, and finds they have employed this term in a very arbitrary and highly inconsistent way. The article focuses on a relatively recent essay by Catherine Fieschi which terms Britain's "far right" a failure, and which received notable media coverage. It will be argued, drawing upon such writers as Bobbio, Mudde, and Ignazi, that the term "far right" is a useful and meaningful term in academic discourse. It will be argued that Britain's "far right" can only be seen to have failed, in a European context, if like parties are not compared and differences in political system and culture are ignored. Thus, it will be argued that Britain's "far right" is only a failure because its parameters are inconsistently defined.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the last few years much has been written both in academic discourse and the media on the apparent rise of the "far right" in Europe. While some of these discussions have emphasized the success, even if limited, of the British "far right" (e.g.: Eatwell, 2000), many have judged the British "far right" a failure in comparison to its European counterparts (Eatwell, 1998, 2000; Griffin, 1996). In the same period, this alleged failure has been stressed even more one-sidedly in the considerable media discussion of this issue. The "far right" is of great media interest, and it is hardly unknown for academics working in this field to be interviewed in newspapers and, otherwise, to have their findings conveyed to a much wider audience than scholars in other areas, even of politics, might expect. It is an example of this strain of academic political discourse which is of interest to us here. I will focus on an article by political scholar Catherine Fieschi (Fieschi, 2004), due to the influence it has had on public understanding of the issue. Fieschi's piece received wide media coverage in the British broadsheet the *Guardian* and by the BBC in June 2004 after its publication by the Fabian Society. Similar arguments about the performance of Britain's "far right" have been expounded by other political scholars, for example Roger Griffin (Griffin, 1996).

I will demonstrate the inconsistencies behind such thinking and the implicit methods employed, whether purposefully or not, to cast doubt on the achievements of the British "far right" without justification. This essay will first define the term "far right," examining the disputes over how to define it. In applying the term, it will draw upon two contrasting styles of definition. It will maintain that in assessing the "far right," it is important to distinguish between parties that are "fascist" and parties that are merely "far right." It will maintain that Fieschi's failure to do so casts doubt on the usefulness of her comparison of the strength of the British "far right" to that of certain other European countries. It will also argue that, in a European context, it is inconsistent to fail to consider the UK Independence Party and Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party as possible movements of the "far right." It will further argue that, in assessing the success of the British "far right," one should account for the electoral system and alter one's assessment accordingly. I will focus on Fieschi's article but, in so doing, will criticize an array of other examples of research in this field.

### THE TERM "FAR RIGHT"

There has been much academic discussion of the usefulness of the term "far right." In her lengthy discussion of what she terms "far right extremists," Fieschi neglects to define the term at all.<sup>1</sup> When one considers the politicized way in which the term has been used by the British media, it might be suggested that this is something of an oversight. To give one example, the UK Independence Party was not termed "far right" in the mainstream press until the 2004 European parliamentary elections, when it looked as if it would be successful (Hinsliff, 2004). Fieschi is not alone in this oversight. Griffin, in his analysis of the BNP, assumes that it alone represents the British "far right" (Griffin, 1996).

Other academics, however, have seen the need to examine the conceptual difficulties with the term. In *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right*, Davies and Lynch argue that the boundaries that demarcate conservatism, the "far right," and fascism are somewhat difficult to define (Davies and Lynch, 2002: 1). This difficulty is especially remarked in the way that "far right" parties can often adopt traditional left-wing notions, in what the authors term the "revolutionary" right. Davies and Lynch define various European parties as either "far right," "populist," "fascist," or even "ultra-nationalist," but are always aware of the conceptual difficulties in so doing. Some scholars have questioned the usefulness of the term "far right," or "extreme right," in examining parties like those Fieschi examines (the BNP, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Front National, and so forth). Betz prefers to call many of them "radical rightwing populists," because, he suggests, very few clearly fit all the manifold criteria that one might expect to find in a "far right party" (Betz, 1998: 2). He further suggests that these parties are too "pragmatic" and "populist" to be label "far right" as he understands it (p. 3). Mudde argues

that it is insufficient simply to label a party "populist," since this relates to a style rather than a set of beliefs (Mudde, 2000: 13). I would concur, and would further suggest that since there are surely radical right-wing parties that are "populist" and those that are not, the term "far right" would be a useful term, if used cautiously and with an awareness of differences within the category. Some thinkers, famously Jean-Paul Sartre, have questioned the utility of the entire left/right dichotomy.

A persuasive defense of the term "far right" has been submitted by Piero Ignazi. He traces the origin of the left/right using findings from anthropological research. Traditionally, the right is linked to the desire for stability, while the left to that for change, just as the right has generally been understood to be affirmative, while the left has been perceived as negative (although it might be argued that this is no longer the case). Ignazi highlights two approaches to the use of these terms. One is the institutionalist approach, which suggests that terms such as "right" and "left" are blank, tendentious labels without any clear meaning. The other is the essentialist approach. This approach, concurred with by Ignazi, suggests that left and right can be divided by their attitude toward how equality is perceived or how power relations are perceived. Ignazi admits that there still remain difficulties with this terminology but, in general, argues that the terms, if used cautiously, are useful and do carry meaning (Ignazi, 2003: 6, 9-11).

One of the most significant defenses of the left/right dichotomy has been that of another Italian, Norberto Bobbio. Bobbio examines the origins of the dichotomy and deals systematically with the various criticisms of the approach. He argues, for example, that the view that the terms "right" and "left" are no longer useful due to a perceived "crisis in ideology" in itself reflects an ideology. He demonstrates that the presence of ecological parties does not undermine the spectrum but rather crosses the spectrum and looks at the possible tendentiousness that might explain parties that claim that the dichotomy is no longer of use. Bobbio emphasizes that the dichotomy is relative and can become deeply complex, as in deciding the right and left poles of a communist party. He also refutes the argument that the totalitarian crossover between fascism and communism undermines the utility of the spectrum, because they are extreme responses but with differing underlying ideologies (Bobbio, 1996: 3, 5, 14, 23, 30).

Many thinkers have argued that the spectrum position of a party should be understood with recourse to what Mudde has criticized as a "shopping list" of factors. In many respects, this conception of the "far right" is an alternative to Bobbio's. This view would assess a party by looking at its attitude to various issues, the selection of which differs slightly from scholar to scholar. However, Mudde finds that, in general, scholars agree that a "far right" party should, to varying degrees, be "racist, xenophobic, desire a strong state and be anti-democratic" (Mudde, 2000: 10-11).<sup>2</sup> Bobbio finds this difficult. He argues that it is not

useful to be too specific: Some parties of the right, for example, are religious, while some are not. He argues that few parties will reflect the entirety of such a lengthy list of factors. Thus, he favors a broader definition. Parties should be placed on the spectrum according to their views on equality and hierarchy. He refutes the view that the scale should relate to "injustice," arguing that it is issues of equality that underlie this issue. The "far right" tends to be "antiliberal" and "antiegaltarian" in general, but Bobbio, naturally, emphasizes that it would be simplistic to make of this a rule. The Dutch anti-immigrant politician Pim Fortuyn, for example, was liberal in the sense that he wanted to maintain Holland's liberal society but reactionary inasmuch as this was the established Dutch society and significant, it might be argued, in Dutch national culture. No group, Bobbio stresses, is so simply categorized, but I think he produces at least a useful guide. My only difficulty with Bobbio is his implication that a libertarian party would be "center right." He fails to develop this, omitting consideration of whether an extreme libertarian party would be "far right," which would appear to follow (Bobbio, 1950: 53-54, 79).

Overall, however, I think that Bobbio successfully defends the left/right dichotomy and thus the usage of terms such as "the far right" and "the extreme right." Equally, however, I would suggest that it is useful to distinguish between groups on the "far right" that are "authoritarian" and groups that are libertarian when both are perceived to be on the "far right." Indeed, referring back to Davies and Lynch, it might be useful to distinguish between those that have clear or recent "fascist" roots – whether in some objective fashion or in the media/public perception – from those that do not. I will return to this point below. I also think that the term "far right" is preferable to "right-wing populist," which has been employed to refer to the same parties (Griffin: 2002). Populism, as has already been noted, is a style. Thus, in a comparative context, a center-right party – such as the Conservatives – could be "right wing" and "populist." This does not, we might suggest, render it necessarily comparable to the Austrian Freedom Party or the Vlaams Belang. As I have already indicated above, the term "far right" is also useful as a broad category – within which "radical right-wing populist" can be included – including parties that might not be seen as "populist."

The terms "right" and "left" – as binary oppositions applied to political groups – are useful precisely because they are meaningful to people, even if they are not necessarily consistently employed. They will continue to be used and, thus need to be used as logically as possible. In the remainder of the essay, I will examine the way in which the term "far right" (or similar terms) has been employed when examining political parties in continental Europe. I will draw upon Bobbio's conception but I will also employ aspects of the list offered by Mudde, as I appreciate there is no single agreed definition. I will demonstrate that, among certain prominent academics, the usage has been extremely inconsistent, and will suggest means of rectifying this.

### THE FAILURE OF THE BRITISH "FAR RIGHT"

It would appear, in light of the previous discussion, unnecessary to dismiss all discussions of the "far right" as academically unworthy, whatever the motivation might be for their production. Such discussions have made a contribution to the study of politics and human belief systems more generally. Thus, it is important that such discussions make appropriate comparisons. In this regard, there are a number of difficulties with Fieschi's discussion of the failure of the British "far right." This view is asserted throughout a specific discussion of the British National Party (BNP). Again and again, the terms "far right" and BNP are used synonymously, as exemplified in the following quotation:

Firstly, the far right sells newspapers: headlines about secret meetings held to stave off BNP threats – such as that which provided *The Guardian's* front-page lead on the 13th of May – are so much sexier than council tax bands, so much more appealing than getting one's head around the proposed European constitution.

One might ask precisely why the BNP, and its apparent failure, is seen to point to a failure on the part of the British "far right." Other commentators, in assessing the success of the British "far right," have, like Fieschi, drawn upon the BNP and its forerunner the National Front. Indeed, some have pointed especially to the successes, at least in terms of numerical support and influence, of the National Front (Eatwell, 2000: 172). Others have pointed to the Front's success in terms of moving mainstream politicians, such as Margaret Thatcher, to address immigration issues in the late 1970s (Messina, 1989: 128). Yet Fieschi, in comparing the BNP to European parties, regards it as a failure.

### THE BNP AND EUROPEAN COMPARISONS

The main difficulty concerns the European parties that Fieschi compares to the BNP. Eatwell points out that the chief problem with the BNP lies in its perceived "fascist" connections and recent history (Eatwell, 1998: 152). There are many small "far right" parties in Europe against which this allegation can be made. Such German parties as the National Democratic Party (NPD) and German People's Union (DVU) might be seen to exemplify a fascist nexus. Like the BNP, both have some regional support, especially in Saxony and Brandenburg (BBC: September 20, 2004), but little national influence. The BNP's policies, if not "fascist," are certainly highly authoritarian. It perhaps does not do justice to a party that has considerable support to attempt to a summary of the most salient points of its manifesto, but a brief summary would nevertheless be useful. The BNP advocates the revocation of all race relations legislation, an end to all immigration, paying all "nonwhites" to return to their nation of racial origin (having previously advocated forcible repatriation), and government promotion of British culture (and only British culture). At the time of this writing, nonwhites have not been permitted to join the BNP. The

party would ban abortion in most circumstances, leave the European Union, reintroduce hanging, and, while not banning homosexuality, would end any public promotion of it (BNP, 2001). Thus, drawing upon both Mudde's list and Bobbio's conception of equality, the party would appear to be "far right." However, the party is, it would appear, considerably more authoritarian and has more tangibly "fascist" roots (its former leader was the late John Tyndall, who openly expressed Nazi sympathies) than any party to which Fieschi chooses to compare it. The fact that it will not allow "nonwhites" to join renders it openly interested in race in a way that parties such as the Front National are not. It might even be submitted that, rather than compare it to a party such as the Lijst Pim Fortuyn, it should be compared, in a Dutch context, to the Center Party, which has no representation in the national legislature, even under a system of pure proportional representation with no cutoff point. In looking at such a party we can, I suggest, see the usefulness of Davies's and Lynch's distinction between "fascist," "far right," and so forth.

However, Fieschi further compares the BNP to parties that are palpably of the libertarian kind, lacking any "fascist" roots. These include, as indicated, the Lijst Pim Fortuyn, whose homosexual former leader advocated an end to Muslim immigration because it threatened Holland's tolerant society. Equally, Fieschi compares the BNP to the Danish People's Party, which doesn't even advocate ending immigration, but simply demands less immigration and integration of foreigners into Danish society. Naturally, comparing the BNP – as *the* "far right" in Britain – to parties of this kind makes the British "far right" appear unsuccessful. The FN came in second in the 2002 presidential election and holds seats in the European and regional parliaments. Under a short-lived proportional system, it had considerable representation in the French national assembly (Eatwell, 2000: 172). The Lijst Pim Fortuyn came second in the 2002 Dutch general election, while the Danish People's Party is the third largest in the Danish parliament. Naturally, the BNP's local council seats (albeit an increased number in the May 2006 local election, leaving them as the official opposition on Barking and Dagenham Council in East London) and five percent of the national vote at the 2004 European election render them something of a failure in comparison, and Fieschi emphasizes this point.

In the 1999 European elections the BNP received under 1 percent of the vote, in the 2000 London Assembly election, 3.2 percent. The only half-decent successes are the current council seats in Burnley and results in three constituencies in the 2001 general election, where it managed to pass 10 percent of the vote (Oldham West and Royton, Burnley, and Oldham East and Saddleworth). Drawing comparisons between this and the scores in France, Austria, the Netherlands or Denmark seems hasty and counterproductive.<sup>3</sup>

But the British "far right" appears to be less of a failure if similar parties are compared at a European level. Thus, we might agree with Fieschi that comparing the BNP to parties in "France, Austria, the Netherlands or Denmark" is indeed

"hasty and counterproductive." To a great extent, the BNP is more openly racist than these parties, and has only recently developed from what might be understood as something comparable to a fascist party.<sup>4</sup> Hence, though I can accept that, in a broad sense, it and parties such as the Lijst Pim Fortuyn are "far right," I think that comparing the BNP to parties in Europe further to the right of those cited by Fieschi would be a fairer comparison. Naturally, it appears that the British "far right" (if defined as the BNP) is a failure if this party is compared to Lijst Pim Fortuyn. But these are very different parties. If it is compared to the Center Party, the "British far right" becomes somewhat less of a failure.<sup>5</sup> Naturally, though, I accept that the BNP has made many attempts to move away from its "fascist" roots under Nick Griffin.<sup>6</sup> Its recent increased vote and one government ministers horror that her constituents were not frightened to openly support the BNP might be seen to demonstrate this (BBC: April 16, 2006).

### THE UK INDEPENDENCE PARTY AND THE "FAR RIGHT"

Fieschi makes a point of not terming the UK Independence Party (Britain's "Get Out of Europe," Conservative breakaway party) as "far right."<sup>7</sup> The UKIP is understood, instead, to express "anti-European" feeling, "nostalgia," and "populism."

UKIP offers a blend of nostalgia and nationalism. It sells itself as a party of ordinary people, for ordinary people who are fed up with what is depicted and experienced as the double-talk and treachery of professional politicians. We have seen this before. It's called populism. And it is a far more powerful and efficient political weapon in liberal democracies.

However, the UKIP is clearly a right-wing party, to the right of the "mainstream right" Conservative Party. Indeed, the UKIP's policies — far stricter than the Conservatives on issues such as immigration and multiculturalism — could be seen to place them to their right in terms of attitudes to equality. The UKIP, indeed, advocates very similar policies to the Danish People's Party, and an argument could be mounted for terming them "racist" — because they are anti-immigrant — and xenophobic, as anti-European Union. It is perhaps not controversial to claim that such a party draws upon British nationalism. Fieschi prefers to term it "populist," as distinct from "far right." However, the UKIP only appears to be as "populist," in Fieschi's terms, as the DPP or the LPF, both of which Fieschi understands to be "far right." The UKIP advocates withdrawal from the EU, the maintenance of their country's traditions, and a stop to immigration, claiming that "Britain is full." One might suggest that they have escaped the "far right" label because they emphasize anti-Europeanism rather than opposition to immigration. Roger Griffin examines the ways in which the UKIP is "neo-populist" (a term he uses for all the parties that Fieschi discusses). He maintains that the UKIP is "at heart a single issue party driven by hostility to Britain's membership of the EU" and should not be included

in an analysis of the "far right" (Griffin, forthcoming: 5). However, while the UKIP emphasizes its anti-Europeanism, its policies, in many other respects, are very similar to those of such parties as the Danish People's Party. Thus, it is inconsistent not to term the UKIP "far right" if, like Griffin, one terms the DPP "far right." Second, drawing on Bobbio's definition and that of Ignazi, a party does not necessarily have to be "anti-immigrant" to be "far right." But, returning to Bobbio's definition, the UKIP is certainly right-wing, and to the right of Britain's main right-wing party in its attitudes to issues of equality, such as the treatment of immigrants. This would seem to render them "far right," at least in comparison to the Conservative Party.<sup>8</sup> The UKIP has been relatively successful. Though it has no Members of Parliament, perhaps due partly to Britain's electoral system, the party received sixteen percent of the vote in the 2004 European parliamentary elections and won twelve seats in the European Parliament, finishing third among all British parties. This would render the UKIP as successful as the Danish People's Party, were it to fight a general election under the proportional representation system used in the European elections.

### THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Hence, if one compares like with like in terms of European politics, the British "far right" appears to be a little more successful than first assumed. If one looks at the percentages of the vote received by comparable "far right" parties in an election fought under the proportional representation system — British parties appear to be as successful as their supposed counterparts in Europe. In comparing the BNP to European "far right" parties, Fieschi relates the failure of the British "far right" Britain's different institutions and traditions — including the "first-past-the-post" (or winner-take-all) electoral system — which curtails the "far right" and pushes it to the extremes.

Britain simply does not offer a fertile terrain for far right parties. It may suffer from some of the same ills as other western democracies (low electoral turn-out, painful post-industrial transitions, anxieties resulting from poorly managed diversity issues in ethnically mixed areas) all of which contribute to what some have termed "the politics of resentment," but the differences in institutions and traditions are more significant than the similarities. The first past the post electoral law and its majoritarian party system delivers majorities and oppositions — thus curtailing the available space for parties on the extremes of the spectrum.

Having admitted this, Fieschi goes on to pursue her argument that the British "far right" is a failure. I have considerable difficulty with this. An alternative strategy would have been to accept that it is very difficult for the "far right" to be elected in Britain, and thus assume that its popularity should be measured in other ways. Making this assumption implies that the party is rather successful: As of 2006, the BNP held forty-four council seats (out of thousands in England) under a system that renders it very difficult for their candidates to

be elected.<sup>9</sup> The BNP received sixteen percent of the vote for Oldham Council in 2003, but won no seats on it. Had the BNP fought the election under a system comparable to those on the Continent, it would, despite the perception that a vote for them is wasted, have considerable representation on numerous city councils on which they currently have none. Thus, the fact that the BNP has any seats at all – and especially its status as the second largest party on one council – is a considerable achievement, and in fact implies greater popularity than would a similar showing by a party campaigning under proportional representation.

Moreover, in a system in which it is very difficult for the BNP to gain seats, it would be prudent to measure its success in other ways than representation. Media coverage might be one way of doing this, as it shows influence. The media attention surrounding the BNP's 2006 local election campaign, in which it more than doubled its representation, was very considerable, with national newspapers, such as the *Sun*, instructing their readers not to vote BNP. This instruction was, of course, ignored in more areas than ever before.

#### THE CONSERVATIVES AND THE "FAR RIGHT" IN BRITAIN

Second, the fact that the British electoral system essentially polarizes politics between two parties does not mean that the "far right" will be pushed to the extremes of British politics. Griffin makes the point that it is far more likely that those who, in a country with proportional representation and coalition government, might join a "far right" party would instead join Britain's Conservative Party (Griffin, 2002: 9). The significance of the "far right" in the Conservative Party is indicated by many other commentators. Messina, in examining racial issues in British politics, looks at the election of a perceived "racist" Conservative candidate to the safe Labour seat of Smethwick in the 1964 general election. This is seen as evidence of "far right" attitudes at least in elements of the Conservative Party.<sup>10</sup> The popularity of anti-immigration politician Enoch Powell within the Conservative rank and file is understood to lead to the same conclusion. Moreover, Messina provides survey evidence from the 1980s to demonstrate the presence of perceived "extreme right-wing" attitudes among Conservative Party members. According to a 1983 survey, 14 percent of Conservative Party activists wanted nonwhites to be repatriated and a quarter thought that Britain would be a better country if it were all-white. These attitudes may now have changed somewhat, but they point to the way in which the Conservative Party has, at least historically, been able to contain what might be perceived as a "far right" element. Hence, in assessing the success of the British "far right," an understanding of the success of the Conservative Party is integral (Messina, 1989: 34, 39, 131).

The Conservative Party has been highly successful in the latter half of the twentieth century, governing Britain continuously between 1979 and 1997. In this period, certainly, party policy was generally understood to be relatively

Euro-sceptic. But the Conservative Party, as a broad party, has a left and right wing. The success of the British "far right" might be assessed by influence of those on the right of the party. To give a more recent example, Iain Duncan Smith (Conservative leader 2001-3) was widely understood to be from the "far right" of the Conservative Party and brought various members of this group into his shadow cabinet. Before his election as leader in 2001, various substantiated allegations of links among his supporters to the magazine *Right Now!*, perceived as a "far right" magazine (Anon.: August 28, 2001), and to the BNP were made in the British media (BBC: August 24, 2001). In 1995, 89 of just over 300 Conservative MPs voted for John Redwood to replace John Major as Conservative Party leader. Redwood advocated positions on both Europe and social policy considerably to the "right" of Major. Many of Redwood's supporters were also members of the Monday Club, a group within the party which, at that point, advocated voluntary repatriation for immigrants. Since the 1997 general election, many former Conservative MPs, feeling that the Conservative Party has moved leftwards, have joined the UKIP, whose leader is the former Conservative government minister Roger Knapman. Roger Griffin concurs with this analysis of the Conservatives, claiming that, "The principal party political outlet for populist racism (in Britain) is the Conservative Party itself" (Griffin: 2001). Quite why Griffin, in other works on the far right, chooses only to term Britain's most extreme right-wing grouping "far right" is thus debatable if the Conservative Party is, in essence, an umbrella group for all strands of the right. Hence, if we assume that Britain's electoral system pushes activists toward joining either the Conservative Party or the Labour Party, then the influence of the "far right" should be understood by the influence of "far right" views within the Conservative Party. I do not wish to suggest that this influence is substantial, but there certainly has been support, and relatively recently within the party, for anti-European and anti-immigration policies that might be termed "far right" if advocated by a party outside of the mainstream. However, Britain's recent local election delivered higher votes than ever for parties other than the "mainstream" Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat Parties.

#### IAN PAISLEY AND THE DEMOCRATIC UNIONISTS

Various parties in Northern Ireland might also legitimately be termed "far right." Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party is certainly to the right of the Conservative Party or the Ulster Unionists. This party, which broke away from the Ulster Unionists, has had MPs since 1970. Currently, it is the largest party in Northern Ireland (BBC: May 6, 2005) and received the highest vote for the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont. Steve Bruce, a sociology of religion expert on Ulster Loyalism, points out that, unlike the Ulster Unionist Party, the DUP advocates no change in Northern Ireland's relationship with Britain and staunchly supports the Protestant majority and Protestant power in Ulster.

It advocates what Bruce calls “aggressively resolute unionism” (Bruce, 1994: 21). The DUP has even received a Conservative defector: Andrew Hunter, an MP who left the Conservative Party in search of a more right-wing alternative. He subsequently stood for the DUP in the Northern Ireland elections. In Northern Ireland, parties tend to be labelled: Loyalist (like the DUP); Unionist (like the OUP); Nationalist (Irish Catholic moderates); or Republican (Sinn Fein). Griffin summarizes this distinction, arguing that, “Most mainland UK citizens square them with the myth of a land of moderation by the simple psychological ploy of subliminally editing out the whole of Ireland” (Griffin, 2001: 5) in constructing their understanding of Britain. The political system in this part of Britain is certainly distinct from those of continental Europe. But drawing upon our definition of “far right,” this grouping would appear to be somewhat successful in Northern Ireland.

As such, we might suggest, a politician like Ian Paisley is in some respects comparable to Pim Fortuyn and other politicians highlighted by Fieschi. Fortuyn, to give just one example of a European “far right leader,” was accused of stirring up feelings in the Netherlands against immigrants, and specifically Islamic immigrants. In a Dutch context, Muslim immigrants are a disempowered minority, demonstrating, it could be argued, at least a “right-wing” attitude towards equality. Paisley has been accused by various commentators of openly espousing profoundly anti-Catholic views. Gerry Kelly, a Sinn Fein Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, accused Paisley of inciting a campaign against Catholics (e.g., Kelly, 2003), while the same allegation has been made by many socialist commentators (e.g., Horgan, July 1997).<sup>11</sup> Steve Bruce has likewise argued that Paisley and his party are virulently anti-Catholic in their pronouncements (Bruce, 2000). He also terms Paisley a “virulent critic of liberalism” (Bruce, 1994: 18). Were Paisley to direct his opposition toward immigrants, he might well be termed “far right” in the mainstream media. Indeed, Bruce argues that Catholics and Protestants in Ulster are effectively separate ethnicities — one British and the other Irish (Bruce, 1994: ch. 5). As such, Paisley certainly draws upon nationalism and, it could be argued, something comparable to xenophobia if Ulster’s communities are seen as separate ethnicities. More broadly, while the UUP can be seen to represent the empowered (Protestant) community in Ulster, the DUP is extreme in comparison. The DUP opposes equality and favors the political status quo in Ulster with much more stridency than the UUP. They would thus be congruous with Bobbio’s understanding of a “far right” group.

## CONCLUSION

The reason for the apparent failure of the British “far right,” in comparison to European “far right” parties, has little to do with many of the factors cited in Fieschi’s essay. Fieschi is able to claim that the British “far right” is a failure because of the implicit way in which she defines the British “far right.” The

British "far right" is simply understood to be the BNP. However, there is a strong argument for claiming that such an understanding of the "far right" is both unproductive and inconsistent. It is unproductive because comparing the BNP (as Britain's "far right") to, for example, the Lijst Pim Fortuyn does not allow us to conclude that the "far right" is considerably more popular in Holland than in Britain, as Fieschi does. This is because the BNP, unlike the LPF, is more extreme and closer to what might be termed "fascist," even if the BNP is trying to become "neo-populist." It is inconsistent because, drawing upon a number of definitions of the "far right" (and similar terms) and examining those parties Fieschi terms "far right," the United Kingdom Independence Party would appear to be "far right." Fieschi, and others, deny that the UKIP is "far right," despite terming very similar European parties "far right." The UKIP appears to be congruous with many definitions of "far right" and is a somewhat successful party in terms of representation. Fieschi's interpretation is also inconsistent, because, while she admits that Britain's political system is unlike Europe's and makes it difficult for the "far right" (BNP) to achieve representation, rather than take this into account and adjust her assessment accordingly, she dismisses the BNP as a failure. One might counter, as I have above, that for the BNP to have achieved the kind of results it has under the first-past-the-post electoral method would render it far more successful under proportional representation—at least at a local level—and thus comparable to some of its European counterparts. Fieschi also fails to take into account, in understanding the British "far right," the extent to which voters sympathetic to parties like the BNP are likely to cast their votes for more electable, less radical, Tory candidates in a first past the post system. Following this argument, we have noted that the "far right" has, at various points, been somewhat influential within the Conservative Party. Indeed, various other commentators have made this point. Furthermore, Fieschi entirely ignores, in assessing the British "far right," the politics of Northern Ireland and the extent to which a party such as the Democratic Unionists might legitimately be seen as "far right" in terms of such politics. In fact, the DUP is the largest party in Northern Ireland.

Fieschi's essay serves as a good example of why the British "far right" is considered a failure in comparison to Europe; like Fieschi, many commentators tend only to focus on the BNP, while they may allude to the historical "far right" connections of the Conservatives. The UKIP and the DUP are excluded from the discussion. I would simply submit that future essay collections in which "radical right," "far right," or "extreme right" European parties are compared would do well to examine the UKIP and even the DUP in the British section rather than simply focusing on the BNP, and, of course, to take the electoral system into account and adjust criteria for "success" accordingly. Then, I would submit, a more accurate assessment of the "far right" in Britain would be conveyed both to international scholars and the voting public.

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### ENDNOTES

1. It might be argued that Fieschi is an expert on the French “far right” and that, as such, one should not draw upon her article in critiquing discourse on the British “far right.” However, Fieschi has chosen to write an article on the British “far right” and one should assume that she would not have written it and allowed it to be published without an extensive knowledge of the area.
2. It might be difficult, of course, to prove a party is “anti-democratic,” as most “far right” parties would stringently deny this. But the other qualities appear easier to demonstrate.
3. The BNP’s performance in the 2005 general election was an improvement on 2001, with it saving many more deposits around the country, and winning 17 percent of the vote in Barking. See “BNP Sees Marginal Increase in Votes” (BBC: May 6, 2005). In the 2006 local election, it gained new seats on councils throughout England and exceeded even its own expectations. See “BNP Doubles Number of Councillors” (BBC: May 5, 2006).
4. As recently as 1994, the BNP’s national rally hosted Claude Cornilleau, then the leader of the “National Party of France and Europe,” who condemned Jean-Marie Le Pen as a traitor to his race (BNP Rally, 1994, video recording obtained from the BNP in 1996).
5. Indeed, the fact that the England First Party, which split from the BNP because it was too liberal, won two seats on Blackburn Council (a northern industrial town) under first past the post in the 2006 election really does demonstrate the success of the British “extreme right” (Bartlett: May 5, 2006). This has only been reported in the local media.
6. In 2004, Le Pen attended a BNP rally, or “Anglo-French Dinner,” for the first time.
7. UKIP leaders strenuously deny the party is “far right.” This is perhaps because of the stigma attached to the label. It should not stop them being assessed as such. Mudde points out that the Dutch Center Party is generally acknowledged as being “far right,” yet it claims to be centrist (Mudde, 2000: 7).
8. The same could be said of Robert Kilroy-Silk’s Veritas Party. Kilroy-Silk, a former UKIP MEP and sacked BBC chat-show host, formed this breakaway UKIP group in 2005. He took with him UKIP’s two London Assembly members.

9. France's national legislative elections use a form of first past the post in which the election has two rounds. This has, to a great extent, kept the FN out of the National Assembly. It only achieved national representation during a brief period in which a form of proportional representation was used. It has, however, a substantial regional presence. French regional elections employ proportional representation, using a regional list system. Nations such as Holland, Denmark, and Austria all have some form of proportional representation for national elections.

10. Of course, I am not suggesting that similar attitudes do not exist in elements of other "mainstream" right-wing parties in Europe. I would simply like to suggest that Britain's electoral system renders "far right" parties a less attractive electoral option. BBC journalist Angus Roxburgh implies that the now former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi is "far right," but within Italy he, or his party *Forza Italia*, would seem to represent the center-right. (Roxburgh, 2002: 135).

11. A number of left-wing commentators, e.g. Steve James, have explicitly termed the DUP "far right" (James, 2003).

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