

Øyvind Strømme

Den sorte tråden: Europeisk høyre radikalisme fra 1920 til i dag (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2013).

Henrik Arnstad

Älskade fascism: De svartbruna rörelsernas ideologi och historia (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2013).

In the spring of 2011 I was preparing to resubmit a revised version of a grant application to the Swedish Research Council. My proposed project was a historical study of fascist movements in interwar Latvia using theoretical concepts developed by Roger Griffin. One of my then superiors, knowing that versions of this proposal had been rejected previously, dissuaded me from wasting my time, since no-one in Scandinavia was interested in fascism.

Soon afterwards, the situation changed rapidly. On 22 July 2011, the 'lone wolf' terrorist Anders Behring Breivik bombed government buildings in Oslo and murdered seventy-seven persons, including members of the youth organization of the then governing social democratic party, in an attempt to trigger a fascistic uprising in Norway. Thereafter theoretical debates about the nature of fascism have gained resonance beyond the Ivory Tower, and beyond even the courtroom where Breivik stood trial. Inherently linked with the rise of islamophobia and anti-immigration parties in Scandinavia, fascism is now a topic that interests many.

The two recent books under review, both aimed at general audiences, reflect this major shift in public discourse. Øyvind Strømme's *Den sorte tråden* [The Black Thread] traces the development and persistence of the radical right (including fascism) in Europe, with a particular focus on Norway. His goal is to locate Breivik within a history of radical nationalist movements that integrates Norway into a broader European context. In his *Älskade fascism* [Beloved Fascism], Henrik Arnstad also argues against a perceived Scandinavian exceptionalism, but, as alluded to in the title, looks instead more closely at the ideological aspects of fascism in an attempt to explain its enduring appeal and continuing ability to inspire the likes of Breivik.

There are certain similarities between the two authors. Both are freelance journalists who have been key actors in framing the public discussions of fascism in Scandinavia since 2011, and both have published well-received books previously. Despite being academic 'outsiders', they have both also received recognition from leading scholars in the field. There are, however, some significant differences. The Norwegian Strømme is the younger of the two, and has already made his name as a commentator on 'counterjihadist' internet milieux;

indeed, he was central to exposing the links between Breivik's ideas and those of the blogger Fjordman (Peder Jensen). Arnstad is older and Swedish. He has also written an acclaimed biography of wartime Swedish foreign minister Christian Günther,¹ and aroused ill-will in Finland with his book *Skyldig till skuld* [Guilty of Guilt],² where he amongst other things criticized that country's memory – or, perhaps, selective amnesia – of the Continuation War.

Both the authors discuss early on Roger Griffin's definition of generic fascism. While it may, at first, seem puzzling that Arnstad and Strømme each try to explain the essentials of the New Consensus for the lay reader, this becomes more understandable if one realizes the role Griffin has had in the debates surrounding Breivik. Not only were his theories mentioned in statements by experts during the Breivik trial, but he also directly enjoyed broad exposure as a commentator in the Norwegian media. Since then, he has regularly been invited to take part in Scandinavian academic and media debates about extremism, nationalism, and terrorism. Arguably, Griffin is at present a more prominent public intellectual in Norway than in his native Britain.

Aside from the shared focus on both Breivik and Griffin, these two books are generally complementary. Strømme's work is a more chronologically-organized narrative that gets better as it approaches the present. His presentation of the *Nouvelle Droite* is solid, and his knowledge of Dutch shows in his discussion of Flemish neo-fascism. As can be expected, he is also strong on internet-based 'counterjihadism' and the Norwegian populist *Fremskrittspartiet* [Progress Party].

By contrast, Arnstad's book is more thematic and analytical, weaving in the ideas of Robert Paxton, Stanley Payne, Kevin Passmore, and other key figures from the scholarly literature on fascist studies. After a description of how Italian Fascism developed, he examines the relationship of fascist ideologies and movements to such topics as conservatism, revolution, modernity, the Holocaust, and gender. Unlike Strømme, Arnstad ranges beyond Europe to include examples from Latin America, Japan, and even fictional Middle Earth. Throughout, Arnstad stresses that essential to any fascism is ideology, particularly Griffinian palingenetic ultranationalism.

Both of these books have their inevitable shortcomings, though. Arnstad is not as surefooted in contemporary events as he is in more historical fascisms. For example, he may confuse more than enlighten lay readers when he states

1 Henrik Arnstad, *Spelaren Christian Günther: Sverige under andra världskriget* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 2006).

2 Henrik Arnstad, *Skyldig till skuld: En europeisk resa i Nazitysklands skugga* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 2009).

that Gennady Zyuganov's post-1991 line for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation can be called 'National Bolshevism'; he is also off target when he calls Alessandra Mussolini a 'porn star'. His occasional references to popular culture also may not be to every reader's taste. Strømme's focus on Norway makes his book somewhat unbalanced; for example, he has not succeeded in integrating the chapter on the Holocaust in Norway very well in the overall narrative. Furthermore, his book is theoretically weaker in that it attempts to grapple with a wider range of phenomena. In the end, Strømme does not convincingly delineate the radical right from the extreme right, and how these categories relate to ultranationalism, fascism, and populism.

Where Strømme's and Arnstad's complementary approaches come into direct conflict is in their assessment of the place of the Progress Party on the political spectrum. Since Arnstad asserts that the most successful fascist movements of today have embraced parliamentarianism as the best way to achieve their palingenetic ultranationalist agendas, he warns that, if not outright fascist, there are at least fascistogenic tendencies within the Progress Party. As an example of this, Arnstad cites the fact that Breivik was active within the Progress Party before he became radicalized and left it for more overtly fascist milieu. This controversial interpretation is generally rejected in Norway, where commentators, Strømme among them, argue that the Progress Party is not a party of the same type as the post-neo-Nazi Sweden Democrats. (As in Finland with *Skyldig till skuld*, the fact that Arnstad is a Swede who critiques Norwegian nationalism is highly provocative for many in Norway.) Instead, borrowing from the ideas of Cas Mudde, Strømme asserts that the right-wing populist Progress Party, long a magnet for disaffected protest voters, has actually acted as a blocker preventing fascist parties from gaining a significant foothold in the Norwegian political system.

To support this hypothesis, Strømme not only points out that radicalized elements like Breivik have tended to leave the Progress Party for more groupuscular extremist networks, he also explains how in its early phases of development fascist-leaning groups sought contact with the party, but soon lost interest.

Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that disturbing tendencies – anti-immigration sentiments, islamophobia, and antiziganism – are represented in the Progress Party today. Furthermore, following the September 2013 elections, these populists now form part of the core of a new coalition government in Norway. The long-term results of this development are not predictable. Arguably, the spectacular rise (and fall) of the populist, anti-immigrant *Ny Demokrati* [New Democracy] party in Swedish parliamentary politics during the 1990s changed the political climate in Sweden enough for the more radical

Sweden Democrats, with their neo-Nazi roots, to become electable in the 2000s. Once in a position of power, could not the Progress Party become attractive for more radical, fascist elements as a 'gateway' or 'enabling' party for accessing greater political influence, even a role in government? This scenario is not as far-fetched as it sounds: In Latvia this kind of entrisism has proven a successful strategy, whereby the fascistic *Visu Latvijai!* [All for Latvia!] movement infiltrated and amalgamated with the flagging national conservative establishment party TB/LNNK, and was rewarded in 2011 by becoming part of the government coalition of an EU member state.

Much of the material covered in the two volumes under review will be already known to researchers in the field of fascist studies. Such persons, however, are not the primary audience that the authors had in mind when writing. Yet, when taken together as a complementary unit, Strømmen and Arnstad offer an interesting historiographical glimpse into how the public discourse surrounding the nature and contemporary role of fascism is being constructed in Scandinavia following the tragedy of 22 July 2011.

Matthew Kott

Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University, Sweden

matthew.kott@ucrs.uu.se