

# Nazis and the trans question

A member article



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*'Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas, Berlin, Deutschland* [Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, Germany], by Dietmar Rabich, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

I recently saw on Twitter the following meme: on one side, an image of Adolf Hitler, below which was a list of policies that his regime implemented, including assaults on democracy, medical experimentation and so on. On the other side was an image of Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, with an identical list of policies beneath his image. The meme was being circulated by right-wing anti-lockdown agitators, even though there have been no lockdowns in Victoria for over eighteen months. Equating the public health measures implemented by the Victorian Government at the height of the COVID pandemic with the murderous and dictatorial acts of the Nazi regime

demonstrates the extent to which the anti-lockdown mob is politically and historically ignorant, prone to crass stupidity, and incapable of reasoned debate. Yet this indiscriminate use of comparisons with Nazism should not simply be dismissed as the result of ignorant people wallowing in the online pigsty of social media.

One of the results of drawing an equivalence between the acts of a democratically-elected government trying to save lives in the midst of a pandemic and the brutality of the most vicious regime in history is not to exaggerate the sins of the former but to downplay and normalise the evil of the latter. It is hard to know sometimes if this is actually the point of such memes – after all, the proximity of the anti-lockdown mob to the far-right is well understood, and neo-Nazi organisations were known to have attended anti-lockdown rallies. But whatever the intent behind the memes' creators, the effect is to trivialise the crimes of the Nazi regime, and to undermine and cheapen the experience of its victims.

Is not something similar being done by those who liberally and indiscriminately fling the accusation of Nazism at those who have questions about or objections to gender idealism (by which I mean the view that both gender *and* sex are ideas that operate independently of the body and its anatomy)?

My point here is not to debate the merits or otherwise of the various positions on the gender question. Rather, it is to expose the perilous path upon which certain elements of the identitarian 'left' are embarked, and to call for a more rational and constructive approach to the management of ideological differences.

Accusations flung at women (and their supporters) who question some elements, or all, of the gender idealist approach reached a peak after the 'Let Women Speak' rally organised by right-wing British provocateur, [Posie Parker](#), earlier this year. As is well known, a contingent of neo-Nazi men, clad in black and mostly masked, gatecrashed the event, which was being opposed by trans activists and their supporters.

I did not attend the event but, as I understand it, some women who consider themselves thoroughly left-wing did attend, primarily because they felt that the spaces for public discussion of any views questioning gender idealism are becoming extremely rare. Knowing Posie Parker's reputation and politics, I think that it was unwise for any progressive person to attend the event. However, I am not a woman whose every attempt to make the case for a feminism that recognises the importance of sex as distinct from gender, or raise questions about how to manage the

intersection of sex-based rights and gender-based identity, is howled down with accusations of 'hate speech'. So I will not condemn.

Nor will I condemn all those present at a rally to which neo-Nazis showed up as sharing the same views as those Nazis. As I have already noted, neo-Nazis regularly turned up to anti-lockdown rallies, but I do not think that all those who attended those rallies shared their views. Some no doubt did. Many, especially those from migrant backgrounds, did not. Many things drove people to those rallies, and while I deeply disagreed with them, I can understand the frustration that might have caused some to attend. Winning them away from the right-wing organisations and manipulators that have tried to harness their distress and frustration would not be advanced by calling them Nazis.

Authoritarianism does not allow for nuance. It tends to favour simplistic arguments and prefers to divide people into camps – those for us, and those against; us and them. It responds to challenges with abuse and repression. It requires conformity, especially in thought. This conformity of thought makes it hard for authoritarians to incorporate alternative perspectives into their world view. It also makes it hard for them to comprehend that amongst those they count as opponents there might also be a diversity of views.

There is no doubt that amongst those who question trans ideology is a prominent ideological tendency that is conservative, if not reactionary, and often motivated by bigotry that sometimes descends into hatred. This tendency rejects the challenge to gender stereotypes represented by the trans movement. It defends patriarchal conceptions of sex and gender roles, often defending male dominance and female subservience. While these days it sometimes cloaks itself in a discourse of 'women's right to be heard', it is fundamentally an anti-feminist right-wing movement that seeks to sustain the economic, political and social status quo, including 'traditional' sex and gender roles. The contemporary far-right, including neo-fascist and neo-Nazi organisations, often share these views with anti-trans reactionaries, just as historic fascist movements were usually characterised by highly patriarchal views of gender roles. This is not to say, though, that all those who espouse conservative views around gender roles are fascists or Nazis. They are not.

It should not require stating, but apparently does, that not all those who question gender idealism adhere to this reactionary tendency. Those who are disparaged as

‘TERFs’ would find themselves in almost complete opposition to what gender traditionalists and reactionaries believe. Indeed, most radical feminists have spent their political lives struggling to break down traditional views of the position of women, fighting to shatter the cage of traditional gender roles that have imprisoned women. These women were the first targets of the reactionary right, and still are. None of what radical feminists say can be construed by any rational and historically aware person as being remotely related to fascism or Nazism. To suggest that it can be is to demonstrate either a complete lack of ideological or political knowledge, or a complete disdain for fascism’s victims and those who have fought in the past or who fight today against the far-right. It is not only intellectual laziness and ideological authoritarianism to accuse those who question gender idealism of being Nazis or Nazi-adjacent. It also has the effect of trivialising the radical evil of Nazism, and reducing the significance of the experience of the Nazis’ victims, just as the anti-lockdown mob have done.

In Europe today, far-right parties like France’s *Le Rassemblement National* and Poland’s *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* espouse economic, workplace and social welfare policies that are, to a considerable extent, *to the left* of those espoused by social democratic parties. However, they wish to see the benefits of those policies – the jobs, the better wages, the social security benefits and pensions – secured for a French or Polish population that is narrowly defined in nativist, if not explicitly racial, terms. I, too, share some of these views on economic and welfare policies, though I do not share the socially conservative, reactionary and nativist frame. Does that make me liable to be tarred with the same brush as *Marine Le Pen* and *Andrzej Duda*?

My point is that it is possible for there to be progressive *and* reactionary positions on what appears at first glance to be the same policy. It is only by examining in good faith and by reasoned thought the various positions that one can understand their differences, which may amount, in fact, to radical divergences. Reactionary opponents to the trans movement reject it because they wish to preserve existing (or return to older) gender relations that privilege men. Radical feminists reject the way that gender roles are used to subordinate and oppress women, and so challenge the trans movement for a number of radically different reasons (including for how its anti-materialism privileges the social construct of gender over the biological reality of sex), and wonder how allowing men to self-identify as women advances the cause of women’s liberation. These are two very different ideological positions on sex and

gender, and to equate them both with Nazism is simply wrong, as well as shutting down any debate before it could even begin.

This latter point is important. The effort by the gender idealist movement to shut down all debate or even questions about the intersection of women's sex-based rights and trans rights seems to me to have only one real parallel in contemporary politics – the effort by far-right Zionist forces to brand every criticism of Israel as a form of anti-semitism; a position which has been criticised, of course, as being itself a form of anti-semitism.

I am reluctant to say anything that is other than condemnatory of the vile men who paraded as neo-Nazis in Melbourne. But it must be said that their intervention in the 'Let Women Speak' rally was a piece of strategic genius. If one of their objectives was to further stoke the flames of division within the left over issues of gender and sex, they succeeded brilliantly. It is a great pity that the bait was taken so readily by those foolish enough to tar everyone with the same brush. In doing so, they have indiscriminately wielded the bludgeon of 'Nazi' against those who have, in truth, fought against discrimination of all kinds. In their resort to hyperbole, fear and false equivalence, they are at one with the tactics employed by the anti-lockdown mob.

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A guest post by

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