

# Rising Above the Herd: Keith Preston's Authoritarian Anti-Statism

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"Perhaps what I champion is not so much the anarchist as much as the 'anarch,' the superior individual who, out of sheer strength of will, rises above the herd in defiance and contempt of both the sheep and their masters."

— Keith Preston, "The Thoughts That Guide Me: A Personal Reflection" (2005)[1]

## Introduction

Freedom from government tyranny has always been a central theme of right-wing politics in the United States. From the original Ku Klux Klan that denounced "northern military despotism" to the Tea Partiers who vilify Barack Obama as a combination of Hitler and Stalin, U.S. rightists have invoked the evil of big government to both attract popular support and justify their own oppressive policies. Witness the rise of so-called National-Anarchism (NA), an offshoot of British neonazism that has recently gained a small but fast-growing foothold in the United States. National-Anarchists advocate a decentralized system of "tribal" enclaves based on "the right of all races, ethnicities and cultural groups to organize and live separately." National-Anarchists criticize statism of both the left and the right, including classical fascism, but they participate in neonazi networks such as Stormfront.org and promote anti-Jewish conspiracy theories worthy of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Anti-statism is a key part of National-Anarchism's appeal and helps it to deflect the charge of fascism.[2]

Keith Preston, who calls himself a "fellow traveler" of National-Anarchism, is in some ways even more dangerous. Preston is a former left-wing anarchist who advocates a revolutionary alliance of leftist and rightist libertarians against U.S. imperialism and the state. Unlike many far rightists who claim to be "beyond left and right," Preston actually incorporates many leftist ideas in his political philosophy and apparently is still in touch with some actual leftists. An intelligent, prolific writer, Preston has established himself over the past decade as a respected voice in libertarian, paleoconservative, and "Alternative Right" circles. His "anarcho-pluralism" represents a sophisticated reworking of far right politics that is flexible, inclusive, and appeals to widely held values such as "live and let live." Unlike most rightist ideologies, it also has the potential to serve as a bridge between a wide variety of rightist currents such as white nationalists, Patriot/militia groups, Christian rightists, and National-Anarchists — and even some left-wing anarchists, liberal bioregionalists/environmentalists, and nationalist people of color groups.

In this article I will outline the major features of Preston's political program, strategy, and underlying philosophy. Although Preston claims that implementing anarcho-pluralism would result in an expansion of freedom, in reality it would promote oppression and authoritarianism in smaller-scale units. Although Preston is an individualist who does not directly advocate the racial determinism and separatism of his friends the National-Anarchists, he has made it a priority to (in his own words) "collaborate with racialisists and theocrats," claiming that leftists who oppose such

collaboration are the true bigots. Digging deeper, Preston's opposition to the state is based on a radically anti-humanistic philosophy of elitism, ruthless struggle, and contempt for most people.

Preston offers a window into the larger issue of right-wing decentralism. This article will trace both the historical roots of the phenomenon and its various branches of recent decades, including libertarian, Christian rightist, neonazi, and Patriot movements in the United States. Preston blends these U.S.-based influences with ideas drawn from the European New Right, a decentralist offshoot of classical fascism, and from German Conservative Revolution figures of the 1920s and 1930s, who influenced but mostly stood outside of the Nazi movement. Preston's own relationship with fascism is much closer than he acknowledges. While he lacks fascism's drive to impose a single ideological vision on all spheres of society, he offers a closely related form of revolutionary right-wing populism. Above all, Preston and his rightist allies embody the main danger associated with fascism — to preempt the radical left as the main revolutionary opposition force.

## **Anarcho-pluralism: Let a hundred authoritarianisms bloom**

Keith Preston is the moving force behind the Attack the System website/blog [ATS] and its affiliate organization, American Revolutionary Vanguard [ARV]. He is a contributing editor at AlternativeRight.com and has written for a number of paleocon and libertarian sites, including Taki's Magazine, LewRockwell.com, and Anti-State.com. Yet his early political years were spent on the left. In "Learning the Hard Way: My Life as an Anarcho-Leftoid," Preston writes that he became an anarchist at age twenty-one and was active for several years in "hard leftist" circles, including the Industrial Workers of the World and the 1989 founding conference of the Love and Rage network, but became alienated by what he saw as the movement's dogmatism and sectarianism. He then joined the Libertarian Party and began to read libertarian and conservative theorists such as Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Murray Rothbard, Thomas Sowell, and Charles Murray. Gradually he developed a highly eclectic political philosophy:

I like to think of my political views as being analogous to an architectural work. Classical Proudhonian-Bakuninist anarchism is the foundation. The classical liberalism of the Enlightenment thinkers and American founders is the soil on which the foundation is laid and modern free market economics provides the overall structural framework of the building. Traditional American populism is the general external design. Ideas on strategy and infrastructure acquired from the militia/patriot milieu are the nails and screws. Traditionalist conservative emphasis on intermediary institutions as a bulwark against the state, Third Positionist and "national-anarchist" criticisms of the pernicious influence of international Zionism and the need for cross-ideological alliances against globalism and those elements of Marxism and Maoism that I find useful comprise the remainder of the interior decorating and external trimmings. Confused yet?[3]

The product of Preston's eclectic synthesis is "anarcho-pluralism," a vision of revolutionary change that centers on replacing centralized nation-states with a diverse array of small-scale political entities. Anarcho-pluralism, Preston writes, "is 'anti-universalist' because it rejects the view that there is one 'correct' system of politics, economics, or culture that is applicable much less obligatory for all people at all times and in all places." Instead, any group of people could organize and govern themselves as they wished, as long as they leave other groups free to do the same. These self-governing units could be based on ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, political philosophy, or cultural practice. This, Preston argues, is "the best possible method of avoiding the

tyrannies and abuses of overarching Leviathan states, and accommodating the irreconcilable differences concerning any number of matters that all societies inevitably contain." [4]

To achieve his revolutionary vision, Preston advocates a broad alliance of all political forces that want to dismantle the U.S. central government. More specifically, he calls for a "pan-secessionist" strategy, based on a coalition of those across the political spectrum who want to carve out separate, self-governing political enclaves free of U.S. government/imperialist control:

Within the domestic US, the ranks of separatists include Christian Identity, Nation of Islam, Aztlan Nation, Christian Exodus, Free State Project, Neteuri [sic] Karta, American Indian Movement, Republic of Texas, Confederate State Project, Black Panthers, Green Panthers, Earth Liberation Front and many others.... A military/political/economic confederation of these various resistance forces would prove quite formidable, particularly when the struggle is taken internationally to include the EZLN in Chiapas, FARC in Colombia, Shining Path in Peru, Peoples' War Group in Nepal, Baathists in Iraq, Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, etc.[5]

This is certainly a broad array of potential partners, encompassing Marxist-Leninists, white separatists, libertarians, neo-Confederates, indigenous rights activists, Christian rightists, Islamic rightists, militant environmentalists, and anti-Zionist Orthodox Jews.

Preston even envisions support for his pan-secessionist coalition from a block of "rogue states." "Preferably, a future revolutionary Russia, perhaps led by the National-Bolshevik Party, leading a confederation of anti-NWO regimes from North Korea to Venezuela, would to some degree play the same role as the old Soviet-sponsored Warsaw Pact as a bulwark against Western imperialism..." [6]

Preston's vision of a pan-secessionist alliance can be seen in embryonic form in the recent series of North American secessionist conventions sponsored by the Middlebury Institute, which is led by bioregionalist author Kirkpatrick Sale. These gatherings have brought together representatives of such varied currents as the left-leaning Second Vermont Republic, ethnically based sovereignty movements in Hawaii and Quebec, and right-wing groups such as the Alaska Independence Party and neo-Confederate League of the South. Preston has helped to promote these conferences and attended at least one of them.[7]

Bringing together left and right against the U.S. state and empire is a central thread running throughout Preston's work, as evidenced in American Revolutionary Vanguard's "Twenty-Five Point Program." Some points in the program borrow from the rightist libertarian or Patriot movements, such as support for building civilian militias to resist "creeping domestic and global tyranny," "common law courts supervised by volunteer juries and private judges," and local currencies based on gold or silver. Other points draw from the left, such as advocating labor militancy, affordable health care, reliable consumer information, tenant organizing, and abolition of jails and prisons. Still other points seem designed to appeal to both leftists and rightists, such as promotion of alternative media, tax resistance, the right to bear arms for self-defense, and opposition to U.S. military aggression against other nations.[8]

Preston often blends leftist and rightist themes in a pragmatic effort to build coalitions. On race relations, for example, he advocates "sovereignty, reparations [for slavery] and amnesty [to most prisoners] for the advancement of the interests of blacks and the elimination of race-based favoritism, affirmative action, ant-discrimination laws, etc. for the advancement of whites." Similarly, he argues that "we should be tough on crime, but equally tough on cops, courts, and laws." This

means a "liberal" position on defendants' rights and prison conditions, but a "conservative" position on the right to bear arms and form private organizations for protection against crime.[9]

Leftist influence on Preston's politics goes beyond tactics and bullet points in a program. His critique of the "partnership between the forces of state and capital" draws largely on the historical work of Gabriel Kolko. Although mostly hostile to Marxism, Preston sometimes discusses it favorably, arguing for example that Marxist analysis of crime in terms of class conflict "has much validity," although it needs "sharp revision" when applied to an advanced industrial society. In discussions with conservatives, he periodically invokes thinkers such as C. Wright Mills, Max Horkheimer, Sam Dolgoff, and others likely to be outside his readers' comfort zone. His essay "What Maoism Has To Offer Anarchism" could have been written by a leftist and cites many aspects of Maoism as valuable, such as its emphasis on criticism/self-criticism, revolution as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event, and the need for revolutionary activists to maintain close contact with "the masses." [10]

Despite all this, Preston's politics are fundamentally right wing with a leftist gloss. Preston has made right-wing circles his political home, embracing the project to build a radical Alternative Right rooted largely in paleoconservatism and white nationalism. While defending his choice to "collaborate with racialists and theocrats," he has called for "a purge, if not an outright pogrom" to drive anti-racist whites, feminists, and queer activists from the anarchist movement in order to "attract more young rebels into our ranks." (He later claimed that critics had taken this statement "way too seriously.") By presenting white separatists and religious rightists as valuable allies in the struggle against U.S. imperialism and the state, Preston misportrays them as positive contributors to social and political change, and obscures or trivializes the harm they do now and the vastly greater harm they would do if given control of autonomous, self-governing territories.[11]

Preston embraces "a philosophical conservatism regarding human nature and the nature of society," whose tenets include "natural inequality of persons at both the individual and collective levels, [and] the inevitability and legitimacy of otherness..." [12] He is harshly critical of the left's egalitarianism and universalism. Instead, he offers an elitist, anti-humanist philosophy that echoes Friedrich Nietzsche, Ernst Jünger, and Ayn Rand:

those who obtain the upper hand in the ongoing power struggle will almost always be the most ruthless, cunning and merciless of the competitors. The wolves will always win out over the sheep. Within the bleak framework of a perpetual war of each against all, there from time to time arises the exceedingly rare individual whom Nietzsche referred to as the "ubermensch." This is the individual of superior will, strength, mind, spirit, discipline, intelligence, intuition, perceptiveness, shrewdness, wisdom, creativity, inventiveness, generosity and other such characteristics that set the human species a half step above the other animals. It is this individual who becomes the "anarch," the "egoist," the one who rises above the perpetual fog in which both the sheepish people and their vicious masters dwell.... It is persons such as these who carry with them the seeds of cultural and civilizational growth. For any sort of human existence to emerge beyond that of the merely animalistic, this type of individual must thrive... [13]

Preston argues further that "the first purpose of any politics or ethics beyond the purely material or defensive" must be to protect and foster these rare, superior individuals, the anarchs. "It is apparent that the political framework most conducive to the advancement of the anarch is some sort of anarchism." In other words, the main reason Preston supports anarchism is not to liberate all people — but to help a handful of superior individuals rise above the bestial mass of humanity.[14]

It would be a mistake to see Preston's elitism as a mask for bigotry against any specific group of people. Still, standard right-wing prejudices periodically creep into his prose. He argues that "multiculturalism will not work out in the long run because human beings are by nature tribal creatures. Feminism will implode because males and females have different biological destinies and therefore different social destinies." He endorses claims that non-white immigrants threaten to destroy Western civilization and argues that white nationalists have many "legitimate grievances," such as racial preference schemes, hate crime laws, and welfare programs that benefit people of color at the expense of whites. He portrays homosexuality as weird and somewhat distasteful but "not a problem" as long as it's kept private; any efforts to challenge heterosexism collectively and publicly are, at best, trivial distractions from the important job of overthrowing the U.S. empire.[15]

Although Preston is an elitist who expresses contempt for most people, he is also a populist. More specifically, his anarcho-pluralism represents a form of right-wing populism — that is, it seeks to rally "the people" against established elites based on a distorted analysis of power that both masks and reinforces oppressive social relations. Right-wing populism offers a plausible target for anti-elite rage that channels it away from a thoroughgoing attack on the oppressive order. Some right-wing populists target a specific ethnic group (such as Jews) or even a specific sub-group within the elite (such as bankers or multinational corporations). Preston targets the state. More precisely, he falsely equates oppression in general with the large, centralized state, in a way that both obscures and promotes other forms of social oppression and political authoritarianism.

In keeping with right-wing libertarian thought, Preston portrays the state as the only significant source of oppression, and sees "corporate plutocracy" purely as a result of state interference in the market economy. It's quite true as he argues that the state has actively promoted the concentration of wealth and economic power, but his assumption that "natural" markets can be separated from "unnatural" state involvement is a libertarian myth. Both state and market are institutions created by human beings, and the two are closely intertwined. Market relations have expanded enormously under capitalism — not in spite of, but largely through, state intervention (forcing subsistence farmers across the globe to become wage laborers, for example). "Freeing" markets from the centralized state would certainly reshape capitalist power, but would not abolish it. Rather, it would benefit certain forms of capital and certain business factions over others.

Similarly, Preston only acknowledges oppression along lines of race, gender, sexuality, or other factors to the extent that these are directly promoted by the state, particularly through formal, legal discrimination against specific groups of people. Arguing that "the state is a unique force for destruction," Preston ignores or trivializes the dense network of oppressive institutions and relationships that exist outside of, and sometimes in opposition to, the state.[16] It is these societally based systems of oppression, not state intervention, that perpetuate dramatic wealth disparities between whites and people of color, widespread domestic violence that overwhelmingly target women, and suicide rates much higher among LGBT teens than heterosexual teens, among many other examples.

Dismantling the central state won't abolish other systems of oppression. It will simply create a power vacuum where they can function in a more fragmented, unregulated way. This is a recipe for warlordism, a chaotic society where anyone with enough physical force can make the rules. As Kersplebedeb has argued, "There is an organic tendency towards warlordism in communities that have tasted capitalism and patriarchy and colonialism. Even oppressed communities." [17] This is a problem if your goal is to dismantle systems of hierarchy and oppression, but not if your goal is to help a handful of superior individuals rise up through ruthless struggle.

Authoritarianism doesn't require a large centralized state, but can operate on any scale, such as a region, a neighborhood, or a family. With no program for liberation except ending big government,

pan-secessionism would foster many smaller-scale authoritarian societies. For example, one of the political currents that Preston hopes to include in a pan-secessionist confederation is Christian Identity. This doctrine, which has been embraced by a number of neonazi groups such as Aryan Nations, holds that Anglo-Saxons are God's chosen people; many Christian Identity advocates also believe that people of color are soulless "mud people" and Jews are children of Satan. Another current on Preston's pan-secessionist list, Christian Exodus, advocates an independent Christian nation based on a right-wing interpretation of biblical law. The Christian Exodus website prominently features the writings and speeches of Matt Trehwella, leader of Missionaries to the Preborn, who has publicly endorsed the murder of abortion providers as "justifiable homicide." A third secessionist current, the League of the South, advocates a society "structured upon the Biblical notion of hierarchy," where "Christ is the head of His Church; husbands are the heads of their families; parents are placed over their children; employers rank above their employees; the teacher is superior to his students, etc." The league's ideal society also "stigmatizes perversity and all that seeks to undermine marriage and the family."[18]

While claiming that anarcho-pluralism would raise the overall level of freedom, Preston himself acknowledges that "there might also be a proliferation of a number of relatively or intensely closed communities, particularly among those operating within the framework of some sort of racial, religious, or cultural exclusivism or some sort of overtly authoritarian political ideology." He has no problem with the idea of "anarcho-feudalism" or "anarcho-monarchism." [19] As far as I know, he has not directly addressed the question of "anarcho-slavery," but it's unclear why this would be any more objectionable.

Preston portrays secession as a voluntary process, in which many varied groups of people decide to go their own separate ways and coexist peaceably side by side. But what does "voluntary" mean in a context where wives are expected to submit to the authority of their husbands, workers to obey their bosses, or homosexuality is regarded as a perversion and a crime? And how long would peaceable coexistence last in the face of absolutist ideologies that are inherently expansionist? The leaders of a Christian Right statelet would believe that homosexuality and feminism are wrong not only within the statelet's borders, but everywhere, and they would feel a religious duty to enforce this belief as widely as possible.

## **U.S. roots of right-wing decentralism**

Preston has invoked the heritage of the American Revolution, claiming that the "highly decentralized, largely libertarian regime" of the Articles of Confederation (1776-1789) — if it had not been replaced by the "state-capitalist class dictatorship" of the U.S. Constitution — would have given us "a decentralized federation of sovereign territories and communities with a worker-farmer-inventor-artisan-merchant dominated economy with localized production for local use," as well as a neutralist foreign policy and moderately integrated ethnic groups coexisting amicably.[20] This romanticized view of the nation's origins hides an uglier reality: Throughout U.S. history, political decentralism has often been a vehicle for intensifying oppression, not reducing it.

The most obvious example of this is the Confederacy's secession in 1861, which was engineered by the South's elite to defend and expand their region's slave-based economy. Contrary to Preston's simplistic portrait of a U.S. ruling class wedded to the central government, different capitalist factions have varied widely in their relationship to federal authority. As historian Mike Davis has pointed out, "in contrast to the geo-financial centralism of other capitalist countries, the dominance of Wall Street has always been qualified by competition with financial centers in Cleveland, Chicago, San Francisco and, more recently, Los Angeles and Houston." Davis notes that regionally based business factions, exercising political power at the state or city level, have repeatedly challenged older capitalist factions for national primacy.[21]

The United States is also distinctive in the degree to which business has taken on what are normally thought of as government functions — including the supposed monopoly of force. Between the 1870s and 1930s — the critical period in the development of U.S. industrial capitalism and industrial class relations — business relied on private armies and police forces more than the state to repress labor activism. During the late nineteenth century, the Pinkerton Detective Agency alone had more men than the U.S. Army. And in thousands of "company towns" across the South, Midwest, and West, a single business either economically dominated or owned outright an entire community, effectively controlling all trade, services, politics, and cultural life.[22] Many of these towns — which were virtually free from any central state oversight — came nearer than anything created by Hitler or Mussolini to the classic Comintern definition of fascism as "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital." [23]

Not only capitalists, but also middle- and working-class white men have engaged in "highly decentralized, largely libertarian" armed activity through much of U.S. history. Volunteer fire companies in nineteenth-century Philadelphia, in Noel Ignatiev's words,

fought continuously over control of territory within the working-class districts of the city or suburbs. Arson was high on their list of weapons: one of their favorite tactics was to set a fire near the territory of a rival company, and then lie in wait to attack it when it showed up; they also extorted money from nearby homeowners who had good reason to anticipate fire if they failed to contribute... [Each fire company] became identified with a particular ethnic group and played an important role in establishing the place of that group within the city.... only the free Negroes were without their own fire company.[24]

In the absence of a strong central state, non-governmental armed organizations have often played a vital role in imposing social order and hierarchy. The citizen militias of the 1990s, the anti-racist newspaper *Turning the Tide* has argued,

are the descendants of the armed settlers who banded together to take land from the indigenous people. They are descendants of the slave posses that enforced the slave codes before there was any law enforcement apparatus. The white supremacist Arizona Rangers who plotted to bomb federal buildings in the '80s are descendants of the 19th century Arizona, Texas, and California Rangers, which developed from lynch mobs terrorizing the conquered Mexican population in the 1840's into the rudimentary apparatus of law enforcement by the Euro-American state in those territories conquered from Mexico.

*Turning the Tide* also cites similar vigilante enforcement organizations in nineteenth-century Missouri, Idaho, and Montana, as well as the 1920s Ku Klux Klan, which "enforced Protestant 'Americanism,' family values, anti-immigrant hysteria, and Prohibition." [25]

These examples of vigilante repression have often been accepted, if not actively aided, by the state. But other repressive forces have worked in opposition to the state. This primarily reflects the United States' history of colonial conquest and system of racial oppression, in which whites of all classes have participated actively but in different ways. For over 300 years, American hostility to "big government" has often been driven by European Americans who wanted freer rein to conquer or dominate people of color without the limitations that central authorities imposed for pragmatic reasons. For example, Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 began with a massacre of Occaneechee Indians by Virginia frontier settlers; the American Revolution was motivated partly by opposition to the Royal

Proclamation of 1763, which banned colonial settlement west of the Appalachians. Both the New York City "Draft Riot" of 1863 and the Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan combined anti-black terrorism with irregular warfare against the established central government. In the 1880s, the white labor movement in the western U.S. was built largely through anti-Chinese racism, including several pogroms. After World War I, even the re-founded Klan often challenged local elites and sometimes aided striking workers. In the 1930s and early forties, a sizeable network of fascist and pro-fascist groups called for overthrowing the government. In the late 1950s, Southern politicians promoted a "Massive Resistance" campaign against federally mandated school desegregation.[26]

Several interrelated branches of right-wing decentralism have grown from these roots. Libertarianism coalesced after World War II among advocates of free market capitalism, who denounced New Deal programs such as Social Security as socialistic. Libertarianism drew on broad-based U.S. traditions of individualism and a mythology of self-reliance associated with the frontier. Yet right-wing capitalists played a key role in funding libertarian institutions such as the Foundation for Economic Education and, later, the Cato Institute. In recent years, corporate-backed outfits such as the American Legislative Exchange Council have been instrumental in promoting the privatization of government functions such as education, social services, public transportation, and prisons.[27]

Libertarianism's development has also been intertwined with the Christian Right. In the 1950s, conservative Protestant organs such as Faith and Freedom promoted a biblically based message of capitalist individualism, which has become one of the central tenets of Christian Right ideology. Hostility to big government has helped to shape one of the most hardline Christian Right factions, known as Christian Reconstructionism. Rooted in Presbyterian theology, Reconstructionism advocates a totalitarian application of biblical law but would administer it mainly through local governments and private institutions, especially the church and the family. This has led one scholar to describe Reconstructionists as "libertarian theocrats." [28] Prominent figures associated with Christian Reconstructionism include libertarian author Gary North; Matt Trewhella of Missionaries to the Preborn; and Howard Phillips, three-time presidential candidate of the U.S. Taxpayers Party/Constitution Party. The secessionist group Christian Exodus is influenced by Reconstructionism.

New forms of political decentralism have also emerged within the white nationalist far right. During the 1980s, neonazi doctrines including Christian Identity and Third Position largely supplanted Klan-style segregationism among paramilitary rightists. Although classical fascists had promoted a highly centralized state, many of the new groups called for fragmenting or subdividing political authority. Aryan Nations, for example, advocated a separatist white homeland in the Pacific Northwest, while Posse Comitatus rejected all governmental authority above the county level as illegitimate. Also during this period, much of the U.S. far right was influenced by Louis Beam's promotion of the concept of "leaderless resistance."

By far the largest recent example of militant, right-wing decentralism is the Patriot movement, which attracted an estimated five million supporters at its height in the mid/late 1990s and has experienced a partial resurgence recently. Encompassing a diverse array of groups and ideas influenced by neonazism, the Christian Right, libertarianism, and John Birch Society-type conspiracy theories, the Patriot movement represented the United States' first large-scale coalition of fascist and non-fascist activists since World War II. The movement developed out of fears that globalist elites were plotting to impose some sort of tyranny on the United States, and many members formed armed militias to defend against an expected crackdown. Although most Patriot groups disavow ethnic bigotry, ideas rooted in white supremacy have circulated widely within the movement, such as bogus constitutional claims that African-Americans hold "14th Amendment citizenship," which is inferior to the "Sovereign citizenship" held by white Christian Americans.[29]



Of these various right-wing decentralist currents, libertarianism is the one that has had the biggest influence on Preston's politics. This is the source of his simplistic claim that the fight against oppression can be reduced to dismantling big government. Preston is neither a white nationalist nor a Christian anything, and his affinity to the Patriot movement is based on militant hostility to globalizing elites, not conspiracism or crackpot legal theories. Yet all of these currents have contributed to a broader right-wing discourse that blends decentralism with a belief in social hierarchy, populism with elitism. Preston's work is important, in large part, because of the ways it touches and blends with these other currents in Alternative Right circles. Moreover, Preston's big-tent approach to radical change supports and promotes all of these currents, and all of them would play a big role in shaping the society he hopes to create.

## **The European New Right**

Another important element in Preston's eclectic politics is European New Right (ENR) ideology. Like Aryan Nations or Posse Comitatus, the ENR is a decentralist offshoot of traditional fascism, but it has gone much farther than these U.S. counterparts in distancing itself from explicit ethnic bigotry. Preston has written that he regards ENR philosophy as one of the best foundations for modern anarchism, and that "more than any other contemporary intellectual current, the ENR has developed a critique of the philosophical underpinnings of totalitarian humanism, as well as a rational response to the question of threats posed by demographic transformation." [30]

The European New Right began in France in the late 1960s with the founding of GRECE (Groupement de Recherche et d'Etudes pour la Civilisation Européene) and then spread to other European countries, among them Italy, Russia, Germany, Belgium, and Britain. Its founders (most prominently Alain de Benoist) began as traditional far rightists who set out gradually but systematically to rework fascist ideology. While classical fascism had relied on paramilitarism and political mass mobilization, the ENR focused on transforming intellectual and cultural discourse. In place of the classical fascist ideal of a highly centralized, authoritarian nation-state, the ENR envisioned a federated "empire" of regionally based ethno-cultural communities. It espoused anti-imperialism, not expansionism, and cultural authenticity, not biological purity. Disavowing fascism and its familiar icons, many European New Rightists have resurrected lesser-known far rightists of the interwar period, notably writers associated with the German Conservative Revolution (a term coined by Swiss far rightist Armin Mohler, who called them the "Trotskyites of the German Revolution"). At the same time, the ENR carries forward traditional fascism's hostility to individualism, egalitarianism, and ethnic or racial mixing, as well as the paganism shared by some classical fascists. [31]

A key feature of ENR ideology is the doctrine that Benoist has called "differentialism." European New Rightists claim to be champions of "biocultural diversity" against the homogenizing effects of globalization and liberalism. They argue that true anti-racism means honoring and defending racial and ethnic differences through separation. (Thus Benoist advocates immigration restriction, although he concedes that a mass departure of immigrants already in France is unrealistic.) Similarly, Benoist and Charles Champetier have argued that true, "differentialist" feminism means defending natural gender differences. Neutralizing these differences represents "a twisted form of male domination" because it requires women to "divest themselves of their femininity." Differentialism also means rejecting the principle of universal human rights as "a strategic weapon of Western ethnocentrism," since all rights depend on cultural context. [32]

Many observers have argued that the ENR's political shifts are intellectually dishonest. Guillaume Faye, a former comrade of Benoist who criticizes him from the right, charges that GRECE's embrace of ethnopluralism began as a "rhetorical ruse" to allow Europeans to defend their identity without being accused of racism. This criticism is seconded by white nationalist Michael O'Meara, author of

one of the few book-length English language studies of the European New Right, who argues that Benoist appropriated "the pluralist principles of contemporary liberalism — to defend Europe from its biocultural enemies." [33]

While Faye and O'Meara argue that GRECE's deception backfired and led it to compromise its anti-liberal principles, critics further to the left point out that the ENR's pluralist rhetoric masks cultural chauvinism and authoritarianism. Anton Shekhovtsov argues that the ENR has turned the UN-recognized "right of all peoples to be different" into an imperative and "a way of legitimizing European exclusionism and rejection of miscegenation." Alberto Spektorowksi notes that while Benoist claims to regard all cultures as equal, he considers technological development to be "authentic" only for Indo-Europeans. Thus "by encouraging other cultures to remain confined in their own culture and their own 'nomos,' [Benoist] condemns them to a 'proud' underdevelopment." Roger Griffin argues that the French New Right remains true to fascism's "fundamental historical mission: to replace the decadence of liberal democracy with a 'new order' in which national/ethnic identities are intensified rather than diluted, and the differences between peoples enhanced rather than eroded." [34] He also warns that any attempt to realize the ENR political vision

would in practice involve social engineering by an autocratic (super-)state pursuing policies of cultural and ethnic homogenization and exclusion. These policies...would deliberately set out to reverse the effects of many decades of liberal pluralism, multi-culturalism, multi-ethnicity, secularization, and individualism. The quest to restore "difference," "identity," and a pagan sense of the sacred on the basis of a claimed xenophilia would inevitably turn nationalism into ultra-nationalism, and introduce measures of social exclusion and ideological indoctrination... [35]

The European New Right has had relatively little impact in the United States, at least until recently. Although the movement resonates with U.S. paleoconservatism in a number of ways, interchange between the two has been limited by the ENR's paganism and anti-Christianity, as well as its animosity toward the United States as the driver of globalization. The ex-leftist journal *Telos* has played a key role in bringing ENR texts and ideas to an English-speaking audience since at least the early 1990s. More recently, National-Anarchists have emerged as another important transmission belt. The ENR was a major influence guiding NA-founder Troy Southgate away from explicit racism toward a more sophisticated "ethno-pluralism," and National-Anarchists have also followed the ENR's lead in celebrating German Conservative Revolutionaries, above all Ernst Jünger, whose later work centered on the concept of the "anarch." [36]

Preston has written that National-Anarchism was his introduction to European New Right philosophy. [37] Among many points of agreement, Preston has embraced the ENR's critique of cultural homogenization and "totalitarian" universalism, and its claim that ethnic separatism — including immigration restriction — is vital for preserving cultural diversity. He also took up the ENR's project to resurrect the work of non-Nazi far rightists from Weimar Germany, citing Jünger as a model of meritocratic elitism and producing an extended study of Carl Schmitt as liberal democracy's most insightful critic. [38] In addition, despite the differences in terminology, Preston's anarcho-pluralist vision closely resembles the ENR's federated empire of decentralized communities.

Preston's main differences with the European New Right center on two issues: religion and liberalism. Most European New Rightists are neo-pagans who long for a "return of the sacred" and denounce Christianity as the root of universalism, egalitarianism, and other ills. By contrast, Preston is a pragmatist willing to work with people of any religious views, who mostly treats his own atheism as a personal matter. Even more importantly, the ENR criticizes not only modern welfare state

liberalism, but also classical liberalism, individualism, and free markets, while Preston embraces all three. These disagreements inform an important difference in their political ideals. While the ENR utopia emphasizes "organic" communities rooted in a specific culture and region, Preston's vision emphasizes individuals choosing the communities they want and not bothering other people.

By blending the ENR's differentialism with American pragmatic libertarianism, and by translating high-brow ENR discourse into more accessible prose, Preston may help to make ENR ideas more appealing for U.S. audiences. Discussions of ENR works and ideas are periodically featured not only on Preston's Attack the System website but also on AlternativeRight.com and other U.S.-based sites. The close ties between the ATS/ARV network and National-Anarchist groups further accentuate the ENR's growing influence in U.S.-based right-wing discussions.

## Why Preston matters

Keith Preston is a right-wing revolutionary whose hostility to the U.S. ruling class is just as strong as his hostility to the left. He calls for dismantling the existing state and replacing it with a radically new political order. This revolution would take political and cultural power away from the representatives of the U.S. ruling class, but it would not directly challenge the systems of capitalism, white racial oppression, patriarchy, or heterosexism, and would promote other (ethnic, religious, and Nietzschean) forms of elitism and social hierarchy. All this Preston shares with fascism, yet he does not share fascism's totalitarian vision, the belief that all spheres of society should be subordinated to one top-down, unifying doctrine. Anarcho-pluralism is a dangerous and deceptive ideology, but rather than impose one comprehensive repressive order, it would foster a multiplicity of repressive orders.

But anarcho-pluralist revolution is hypothetical, while oppression and exploitation are immediate, brutal realities for most people in the United States — not to mention the rest of the world. Given this, why should we care about Preston and his allies? Not because of any imminent threat that they will win power, but rather because they have the potential to "take the game away from the left," as Tom Metzger urged neonazis to do in the 1980s. Don Hamerquist's warning about emerging fascist movements applies equally to Preston-style right-wing revolutionaries: The real danger from such forces "is that they might gain a mass following among potentially insurgent workers and declassed strata through an historic default of the left." [39]

Both sides of Hamerquist's warning — the left's historic default and the insurgent right's potential to attract a mass following that includes the left's traditional base — resonate alarmingly with Preston's own strategic thinking, as detailed in his February 2011 piece, "The State of the Resistance Two Years Into the Age of Obama." First, Preston argues, tellingly, that Obama's election accelerated the collapse of the antiwar and anti-Patriot Act movements, despite the fact that Obama has intensified the war in Afghanistan and continued President Bush's police state policies, because "the antiwar or anti-Patriot Act left was always more motivated by opposition to Bush or opposition to the Republicans than by opposition to imperialism or police statism themselves." [40]

In contrast, Preston notes the emergence in recent years "of a 'permanent opposition Right' that opposes the establishment irrespective of what party is in power and fervently rejects so-called 'movement conservatism' of the Republican Party. The paleoconservative Right first adopted this stance during the Bush regime with its dominance by the hated neoconservatives, and the paleo movement has since evolved into the far more radical Alternative Right." Coupled with this, local groups affiliated with National-Anarchism, Preston's own ATS/ARV network, or related currents have grown significantly since Obama took office. Most of these affiliates "have appeared in areas that are solidly blue [i.e., left leaning], such as New York City, San Francisco, southern California, Ohio, Boston, Ontario, Washington state, [and] Wisconsin... Further, we have experienced grown among

conventionally blue demographics such as African-Americans, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Gays/Queers, Muslims, and others not generally thought of as being part of the American right-wing." (Although the number of people involved is no doubt small, these claims appear to be fairly accurate, and Preston is not given to bluster. I count at least 15-20 blogs and websites for N-A and ATS-affiliated groups in North America, most of which have appeared over the past year or two, along with a larger penumbra of right-wing anarchist, ENR-oriented, and secessionist sites of various kinds.)

In conclusion, Preston argues that "the relevant future political struggles [will be] a kind of intra-Left civil war between the totalitarian humanist establishment and an anarchistic opposition that rejects the left-right paradigm, adopts a populist outlook, organizes among the lumpen elements of urban areas, is primarily though by no means exclusively youth oriented, and is allied politically with more conventionally right-wing populist sectors originating from more conservative or sparsely populated regions, and with revolutionary right-wing elements who have rejected this system in favor of a 'post-America' of more decentralized politics and seceded regions."

Within the context of a broader oppositional right, Preston could well play a critical role in helping to make this strategic vision a reality. His background and outlook put him in an unusually good position to act as a coalition builder. He offers a political voice that is militant, analytically grounded, and strategically coherent. Although closely aligned with the National-Anarchists, his network may also attract some people, including leftists, who are put off by National-Anarchism's more obvious "tribalist" baggage. He is someone to watch carefully.

Like other forms of revolutionary right-wing populism, Preston's anarcho-pluralism calls for a dual response from the left. Part of the response is to expose the oppressive and authoritarian reality behind Preston's claims to be promoting diversity and freedom. The other part — much more difficult but ultimately much more important — is to build a revolutionary left that functions as a serious opposition whether the government is controlled by conservatives or liberals, Republicans or Democrats. Unlike Preston's version of revolution, that means fighting not just centralized state power, but all forms of oppression.

## Notes

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