

ANTISEMITISM POLICY TRUST

Special Briefing



CULTURAL MARXISM:
An Antisemitic
Conspiracy Theory?

Front cover: Diego Rivera, 'Man at the Crossroads'

The text and illustrations may only be reproduced with prior permission of the Antisemitism Policy Trust.

Published by the Antisemitism Policy Trust, copyright © 2020

Antisemitism Policy Trust is a registered charity (1089736) [England] and company (04146486) [England and Wales]

Introduction

The phrase “Cultural Marxism” has been labelled a conspiracy theory “with an antisemitic twist”¹ and has recently been employed in public discourse by politicians and others. It is often used, without antisemitic intention, to describe liberals, progressive movements and others. However, in reality, it is a shadowy term openly used by antisemites, neo-Nazis and others with nefarious intentions.

Certainly, the term Cultural Marxism has been used in an academic context. Few would suggest that Dennis Dworking’s work, *Cultural Marxism in Post-War Britain*, is an antisemitic tome. Beyond academia, some use the phrase as a colloquial analogy for political correctness. The phrase itself has roots in social theory, but more often than not is now code for a Jewish conspiracy. Therefore, we strongly recommend that those in public life choose their words more wisely.

Historical Roots

There is a murky history to the phrase Cultural Marxism. Some suggest that the term originated in the shadow of the 1917 Russian Revolution, by theorists pondering the cultural capacity of other countries to revolt. That thinking was developed by amongst others, Herbert Marcuse. He was one of a group of intellectuals in the inter-war period that, tired of war and seeking an optimistic political outlook, came to study at the Institute for the Study of Marxism at the University of Frankfurt which eventually, through the vision of its pupils, became known as the ‘Frankfurt School’.² Marcuse and colleagues investigated Marxism not only in respect of control of the means of production, but of culture too.

Disillusioned by Western culture, Marcuse sought both to mobilise people for social action, and to challenge and perhaps destroy many cultural mores. In the midst of this work, Hitler’s rise to power forced Marcuse and his Jewish colleagues, the so-called Frankfurt School, to flee to America, where their thinking developed further. Marcuse became an inspiration for the hippy generation, developing a line of thinking which in over-simplified summary, saw the political right as pathologically problematic, and western culture as fundamentally flawed. So, pleasure was recommended alongside, and then instead of, work, washing was spurned and so on.

Marcuse went further still, suggesting negatives as positive. Tolerance by way of accepting but challenging contrary ideas was, in fact, “repressive tolerance”. So, right-wing groups and thinking was to be censored in favour of a “liberating tolerance” for minority groups. Through this intentional irrationality, cultural capital would undergo a renaissance, so the theory went. Given the benefit of the doubt, this might be the philosophical phenomenon some in public life are discussing, which put in a modern context might include the no-platforming of right-wing campus speakers.

The Frankfurt School itself has become, as social psychology professor Richard Lichtman of the Wright Institute has called it, “a convenient target that very few people really know anything about... it takes on a mysterious cast and translates as an incomprehensible, anti-American, foreign movement that is only interested in undermining the U.S... The idea being transmitted is that we are being infected from the outside.”³ The school itself, which as outlined above, called for a variety of freedoms, including sexual freedoms and more generally liberal attitudes against traditional values,⁴ has become a reinvention of the antisemitic conspiracy theory of the Jewish corruptor, conspiring to undermine society.⁵

1 <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/cultural-marxism-catching>

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankfurt_School

3 <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/cultural-marxism-catching>

4 <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/cultural-marxism-catching>

5 <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Antisemitic-imagery-May-2020.pdf>

Cultural Marxism also has a darker heritage. The feeling that there had been a cultural, and moral collapse in Germany prior to 1933, fed the populism of the Nazis. Kulturbolschewismus (cultural bolshevism) and Jewish bolshevism were used as explanations by the Nazis for a supposed plot to spread sexual, political (communist) and other revolution throughout the Weimar Republic and the west, and to weaken and attack German culture as part of a wider international conspiracy. This idea, building on Mein Kampf and the antisemitic Protocols of the Elders of Zion, has survived, developed, and is now used to suggest that the Jews in the Frankfurt School, Jewish people, other minority communities, or anyone with progressive beliefs are, as communist sympathisers, conspiring through media and academic domination to implement cultural Marxism and undermine western culture or Christian values.

Antisemitic Dogwhistles

Certainly, the term 'Cultural Marxism' has been appropriated by groups across the far-right, including the BNP. The truth appears to be that nowadays it is used by individuals and groups both on the 'alt-right' and beyond that by far-right extremists and antisemites. It has been used in comment in mainstream papers in the UK, formed part of a dossier scribed by a (now former) member of the US National Security Council,⁶ is repeatedly cited by antisemitic agitators and fed the murderous manifesto of Norwegian terrorist Brevik and, in fact, of the Christchurch terrorist too.⁷

'Cultural Marxism' can be used in various ways but more often than not, is now a code for Jewish plot.

White supremacists cannot, by their nature, accept defeat, and their failure to have ideologically overcome the civil rights movement is blamed on, amongst others, the Jews. So perhaps it is unsurprising that antisemitic 'cultural Marxist' conspiracy theories re-emerged in the 1990s through attacks on Marcuse and others, amongst white nationalists. Wikipedia suggests Cultural Marxist conspiracies find their origins in the Tea Party movement, elsewhere articles point to US far-right politicians such as Pat Buchanan and William Lind, or organisations like the La Rouché movement.

There are those that do not believe the word to be problematic, on both the left and right of the political spectrum⁸⁹ but in truth, 'Cultural Marxism' has become a tainted phrase and at worst, feeds the tendency to rail against 'the other' through a conspiracy theory linked directly back to antisemitism.

Whatever the intention of those using the phrase cultural marxism, it will be received as a code by far-right antisemites. To that end anyone using those words has a duty to explain why they do so, and to educate about the associated dangers. Public figures must consider this dogwhistle, even if not blowing it.

6 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/08/10/heres-the-memo-that-blew-up-the-nsc/>

7 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/mar/26/tory-mp-criticised-for-using-antisemitic-term-cultural-marxism>

8 <https://twitter.com/FraserNelson/status/1110794539239919616>

9 https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10161793543445604&id=659605603

Antisemitism Policy Trust Special Briefings

**ANTISEMITISM
POLICY TRUST**

**Special
Briefing**

**THE EFFECTS OF
HOLOCAUST DENIAL**

**ANTISEMITISM
POLICY TRUST**

**Special
Briefing**

May 2020

**ANTISEMITISM
IN THE TIME OF
CORONAVIRUS**

**ANTISEMITISM
POLICY TRUST**

**MYTHS AND
MISCONCEPTIONS
ABOUT JEWS**

**ANTISEMITISM
POLICY TRUST**

**ANTISEMITIC
IMAGERY AND
CARICATURES**

The Antisemitism Policy Trust's mission is to educate and empower parliamentarians, policy makers and opinion formers to address antisemitism. It provides the secretariat to the British All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism and works internationally with parliamentarians and others to address antisemitism. The Antisemitism Policy Trust is focussed on educating and empowering decision makers in the UK and across the world to effectively address antisemitism.

Contact APT



www.antisemitism.org.uk



[@antisempolicy](https://twitter.com/antisempolicy)



Antisemitism Policy Trust



mail@antisemitism.org.uk

The Antisemitism Policy Trust is a registered charity (1089736) [England] and company (04146486) [England and Wales]