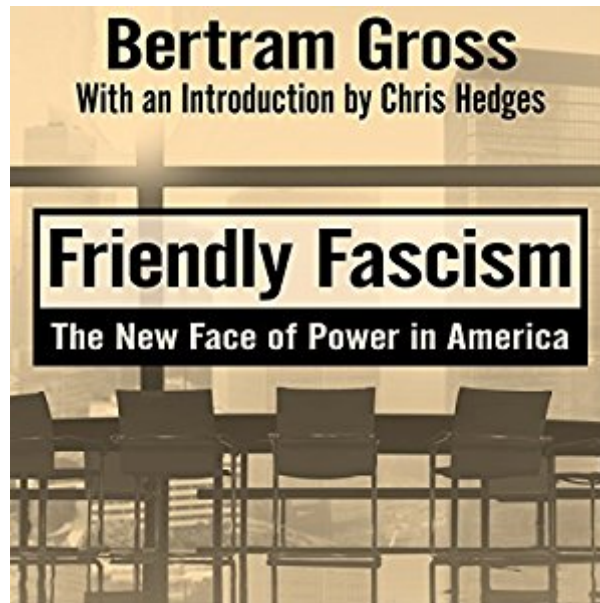


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Friendly Fascism: The New Face Of Power In America



Synopsis

A look at corporate authoritarianism that William Shirer called, "the best thing I've ever seen on how America might go fascist democratically." In 1980, US capitalist politics wore a "nice-guy mask", a troubling disguise to cover up a creeping despotism in which the ultra-rich and corporate overseers were merging with a centralized state power in order to manage the populace. This immanent corporate authoritarianism threatened to subvert constitutional democracy. But unlike the violent and sudden usurpations that led to fascism in the days of Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese empire builders, this new "smiling" American breed of fascism was gaining ground through gradual and silent infringements on the freedoms of the American people. First published over three decades ago, *Friendly Fascism* is uncannily predictive of the threats and realities of current political and economic power trends. Author Bertram Gross, a presidential adviser during the New Deal era, traces the history and logic of declining democracy in First World countries and pinpoints capitalist transnational growth and inappropriate responses to global crises as the sources of late 20th-century despotism in America. Gross issues ever-urgent warnings about what happens when big business and big government become bedfellows - chronic inflation, recurring recession, overt and hidden unemployment, the poisoning of the environment - and simultaneously proffers a practical shift of perspective that could help US citizens build a truer democracy. He imagines an America in which heroes are no longer needed and the leadership is a group of non-elitists who "recognize the ignorance of the wise as well as the wisdom of the ignorant".

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Is it surprising that this obscure book is suddenly number two in sales in its category as this review is being written one week after the election of Donald Trump? Fascism is a loaded word, and this book, "Friendly Fascism" attempts to analyze the fascist currents in modern democracies with some degree of scholarly removal so that we can look rationally at the state of our society. Gross was showing how many elements of Fascism were firmly embedded in American Society in the 1980s. While the historical context of the book is not up to date, the analysis is still very relevant. The book gives the reader some understanding of Fascism and its history, so that the reader can identify and resist the Fascism of corporativism. If one were to apply Gross's analysis one might say that the election of Trump was not the election of a potential Fascist to turn American Society Fascist. Instead, the dissatisfaction that led to Trump's election was probably driven by deep dissatisfaction with economic hardship and income inequality that to some extent was a result of fascistic elements already present in our country. For those of us struggling to come to grips with what is happening in the US, this book is illuminating and well worth reading. I have found it compelling. The ideas in it are not new to me - they have been picked up by other, later, writers like Chris Hedges. But the historical context on the whole is quite good, and for me I felt that it did - oddly - give me some comfort.

American Fascism will not necessarily come wrapped in a cross, a hammer or a death's head. It will not be promoted by single agency or a single leader. It will arise organically from numerous interlocking institutions and, really, we may not even notice it. Visions of military dictatorships and police states in which millions of citizens are systematically harassed are not likely to materialize. As Gross says, the average German under Hitler did not worry about a visit from the gestapo. The average German was glad to have work and bread. Equating Nazim with fascism is a bad idea. Fascism does not need to be racist, religious or even nationalistic; Mussolini's party claimed nearly 5,000 Jewish members, many of them high ranking and well respected. Yes, there were some rabid antisemites, but one must remember how prevalent antisemitism was in Europe and the United States at the time. Corporatism, the close collaboration of government and business, is the hallmark of fascism. To think of it in other terms tends to mislead. Brutality, bigotry and tyranny existed before the black shirts. Fascism endures because it is a political representation of basic human wishes. It is, in Gross's words, "the adaptive hydra." The same can be said for democracy's promise of freedom

and socialism's promise of equality, but these are both airy ideals compared to "blood and soil" or "empire" or "law and order." Nationalism is concrete, selfish and sincere. It is based rooted in fear and the need for self-esteem. Freedom and equality seem ambiguous and pointless by comparison. Fascism appeals to human beings on an emotional level. Gross's vision poignant and perhaps inevitable. Yet we can never know what the future holds. It is an old book with a few dated ideas (like the continuation of the Cold War into the 90's and 2000's) but it is more relevant than ever. This is not an easy read and one should approach it with some background knowledge of classic fascism, business, mass media and political science. It is not an absolutely unavoidable fate, but it seems very probable. Nevertheless, neither I nor anyone else can accurately predict the effects of advanced technologies of the future will have upon our species. This is a book about America, but it is applicable to any sufficiently advanced democracy. I doubt censorship will be a character of the new fascism; the problem is not the lack of quality information or an abundance of misinformation, but the apathy and organizational ineptitude of the general public. Life is good in America. It's likely to remain good. Huxley's Brave New World seems a more likely future than Orwell's 1984.

This book is a little dense in some parts and even though the editor did a good job I think he could've done better. Still, it's an interesting read, especially because of the corporate Propaganda themes, its lobbies and strong ties with the government. The book is a great source to feel and understand the zeitgeist due to it was first published almost 30 years ago. The author was an insider in the government during those days, so thanks to that, we also get a pretty good context and descriptions of that time. If I could describe the book then I would say it's a dystopian mix of Orwell and Huxley, but with the Corporation as "villain" instead of the Government. But at the end of the book and in a kind of pessimistic/realistic way, the author gives us a little hope describing some trends that could save the day. Bertram thinks it's going to be difficult to fight against this "faceless oligarchy" because the average joe will be prey of the creeping normalcy bias (and brainwashed) and that the more prepared, informed citizens (and even the dissidents) will be reduced, deceived and deflected by a co-optation strategy. There is no doubt that the author was right in some trends, behaviors and descriptions of today, but I think that he was very influenced by the mood and worries of his time, so some of his analysis don't apply anymore or were wrong. Nonetheless, some of his warnings have much relevance today and should be considered. The positive things he sees (and not without a lack of buts) are the communications technologies, the "humankind's long history of resistance to unjustified privilege" and the growing proliferation of community and civil groups.

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