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Trends. Haider Hypocrisy

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The United States (US) and members of the European Union (EU) have applied significant political pressure (comprising both explicit and implicit threats) to Austrian government, business, and media leaders because of the public announcement that the People's Party and Jorg Haider's Freedom Party would form a new government. This is the case even though the two parties represent a significant majority of the Austrian population based on recent free and democratic parliamentary elections.

At Issue are comments made through the years by Mr. Haider that (1) Nazi SS officers were victims, not criminals, and were decent people of good character and true to their convictions who deserved honor and respect; (2) the Third Reich had an orderly employment policy; and (3) concentration camps were punishment camps (with the implication that) inmates deserved punishment. Also at Issue are beliefs and allegations that Mr. Haider's party is xenophobic, fascist, and anti-Semitic.

Yet the following observations might lead to questioning the apparent righteous indignation of the attackers. First, the attackers have had and still have their own problems with elements of xenophobia, fascism, and anti-Semitism. In fact, elements of the attackers' governments and/or political opposition have at times aided, abetted, or tolerated such elements. (A case in point is when the National Alliance joined the Italian government in 1994.) Second, the attackers have maintained or have attempted to maintain friendly relations with governments that have accomplished and/or continue to accomplish far worse--e.g., in matters of human and civil rights--than anything to which a future Austrian government avec the Freedom Party might aspire. Third, some of the political attacks are being effected as "damage control" for domestic and other international problems. Fourth, a host of conscious and unconscious psychological needs so prevalent in public political posturing--e.g., via the "shocked, shocked" response style, cognitive dissonance reduction, and the defense mechanism of projective identification--are at play in this situation as well.

Mr. Haider has been politically successful not only because of putative racism and ethnocentrism and the like but through focusing on senses of entitlement of the powers that be that seem to place them above the need and will of the people. Are not the US and the members of the EU just adding to Haider's success through the same means? (See Batson, C.D., et al. (1999). Moral hypocrisy: Appearing moral to oneself without being so. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77, 525-537; Batson, C.D., et al. (1997). In a very different voice: Unmasking moral hypocrisy. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72, 1335-1348; Cohen, R. (February 2, 2000). If democracy is not enough. The New York Times, p. A12; Fried, C.B ., & Aronson, E. (1995). Hypocrisy, misattribution, and dissonance reduction. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 21, 925-933; Rosenwald, G.C. (1985). Hypocrisy, self-deception, and perplexity: The subject's enhancement as methodologic al criterion. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 49, 682-703; Schmideberg, M. (1957). Hypocrisy, detachment, and adaptation. Psychoanalytic Review, 44, 401-409.) (Keywords: Austria, Ethnocentrism, European Union, Freedom Party, Jorg Haider, People's Party.)