Dangers of Ideological Fanaticism

Hello honourable delegates! My name is David Thorburn and I am one of your chairs for the GWC MUN conference 2013. As you no doubt already know, I'm chairing alongside Dan Roberts and Duncan Armstrong-Martin in the Political One committee, and we will make sure that everyone has a really great weekend in our committee, with serious debate and good fun all weekend! This is my second conference as a chair and I've done several as a delegate, so I've got a good sense of how things go. If it's your first time at an MUN conference, don't be scared, just know your country's viewpoints and you'll be fine. I can't wait to meet you all.

What is fanaticism?
According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to be fanatical is to be “filled with excessive and single-minded zeal”. When applied to ideologies of any kind, political or religious, this evidently means an ideology which is not open to new ideas, but obsessively pursues one objective or vision of how the world should be. Fanatical ideologies are incredibly diverse in their worldview, with two diametrically opposed and obvious examples being Neo-Nazis such as Golden Dawn in Greece and Communists. Religious fanaticism can also take many forms, with another obvious example in the hardline Sunni Islam of Al-Qaeda.

With the spread of the Internet and social media it has become increasingly easier for people who adhere to a fanatical ideology to spread it. Bearing in mind the limitations of the fear of possible state surveillance on what people will put online, we must consider that there are many ways for fanatical ideologies to spread, whether through social media sites such as Facebook, or other blogging platforms.

What to do about it?
So how to deal with the problems these fanatical ideologies cause? There is, of course, the obvious answer of “you may not be able to kill an ideology, but you can kill those who follow it.” However, does violent action against an ideology only add fuel to the fires by creating martyrs and allowing the ideology to gain publicity and notoriety? This also goes against freedom of expression and democratic principles.

To use the admittedly rather clichéd, but no less significant example of Nazism, after the crushing of the so-called “Beer Hall Putsch” in 1923, Hitler used his trial for treason to launch a diatribe against the Republican German government of the time and his prison sentence to portray himself as a valiant hero willing to do anything for his cause, gaining much more publicity and thus more followers than he otherwise may have done; also portraying the 16 Nazis who were shot during the suppression of the Putsch as martyrs, using their memory and the Blutfahne, or “blood flag” (the swastika flag carried by the
Nazis in the final march of the Putsch which had become stained with blood when the marchers were fired upon) to attract and inspire new recruits.

With this in mind, would a better course of action not be to debate these ideologies in public, expose their fallacies so that people can be convinced of their lack of veracity? Should we not educate our children to be tolerant and open-minded, hopefully negating the long-term growth of ideological fanaticism?

One example of a group which works to combat ideological fanaticism in the United Kingdom is the Quilliam think tank. On its website, it states that:

“Quilliam seeks to challenge what we think, and the way we think. It aims to generate creative, informed and inclusive discussions to counter the ideological underpinnings of terrorism, whilst simultaneously providing evidence-based recommendations to governments for related policy measures.”

Quilliam works to try and understand the reasons behind radicalisation, raising awareness of issues and grievances among people, often young and disaffected, which contribute to radicalisation and to undermine the arguments of radicalisers by debating with them in public and revealing the underlying flaws in their ideologies and arguments.

**Key issues to consider**
What does your country believe constitutes a fanatical ideology?

What does your country believe should be done to lessen the danger that ideological fanaticism poses to national security?

In your country's opinion, what is the best way of combatting the fanatical ideologies themselves, whether through education, open debate, military action or any other method?

How should these solutions be put in place, taking into account the difficulties often encountered in operating in situations where ideological fanaticism is prevalent?

**What to do now?**
You really should complete a position paper, giving your country's views on this (and all 4 of the Committee topics) if you want to be considered for an award at the conference. It doesn't have to be long, only about 50 words, so it shouldn't take much time to do. Please email your position paper on this topic to me at dpthorburn@yahoo.com by Friday 14th February at the latest (when all your PPs are due). Good luck with writing your resolutions (Remember: you're expected to bring Resolutions on two of the four Committee topics with you), and I'll see you all in March!
Useful Links:

On this topic:

www.quilliamfoundation.org/

www.academia.edu/3073037/Neo-Nazism_and_Neoliberalism_a_Comment_on_Violence_in_Athens_at_the_time_of_Crisis

http://www.againstviolentextremism.org/

https://www.counterextremism.org/

http://extremisproject.org/

For Country Profiles and lots of other useful information:

http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/country_profiles/default.stm

For issues of current international debate:

http://www.newint.org/

http://www.idebate.org/

http://www.amnesty.org/