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Far right/Fascism

Fascisation and strategy

- Features -



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Invited by the Rosa-Luxemburg Foundation in Germany to present his analyses, our comrade Ugo Palheta offered to publish the French version of his presentation in our journal. This allows us to revisit some of the fundamentals of his work and to outline points of dialogue with the German left—which is also facing the rise of the AfD and violent racist movements. *Revue L'Anticapitaliste* Review No. 171 (November 2025)

Q: The Macron era seems to be drawing to a close. In your book, "Why Fascism Is Gaining Ground in France," you present a sharp analysis of the fascisation process within the capitalist state and French society. You distinguish between "the current state of fascism" and "the immediate emergence of fascist-type dictatorships" (page 28). But the message is clear: the conditions for fascism are in place in France and other Western capitalist societies. Is France entering a "new phase" of fascisation?

Macron has continued dynamics that have been present in the French political landscape for a very long time, nearly four decades, but he has significantly intensified them. Not only has he accelerated the pace of imposing neoliberal counter-reforms, but he has also greatly intensified authoritarian tendencies, including police and judicial repression of protests, the stigmatization of minorities (particularly the Muslim minority) and the erosion of their democratic rights, the demonization of the left, and the circumvention of parliamentary institutions and civil society actors (particularly trade unions).

The problem he encountered was that his project was immediately unpopular in the country; in other words, it lacked a broad and solid social base, and the working classes, as well as young people, did not remain passive. Macron therefore had to confront mass popular resistance that delayed the imposition of his socially destructive agenda.

It is this resistance and the weakness of his social base (essentially the bourgeoisie and the privileged fringes of the salaried class) that led him to deliberately resort to repression much more intense than any of the governments that preceded him, with a level of state violence probably never reached in France since the Algerian War, with this inevitable consequence: there were two deaths (Zineb Redouane and Mohamed Bendriss) and several dozen people lost an eye or a hand during the Yellow Vest movement in 2018-2019 but also during the revolts in working-class and immigrant neighbourhoods in 2023.

This intensification of repression was therefore a product of the hegemonic crisis that has been deepening in the country for at least twenty years (a crisis encompassing the ideological nature of the neoliberal project, a crisis of political representation, a crisis of political institutions, and a crisis of mediation between the state and citizens). But it also significantly exacerbated the hegemonic crisis, since it brought into sharp focus the absolute refusal of neoliberal-authoritarians to accept any form of social compromise and their choice of violence to compensate for the lack of public support.

This can make it difficult to understand why Macron managed to be re-elected in 2022, despite this weakness. At least three distinct reasons can be cited: the fear of the National Front/National Rally coming to power and the possibility for the centrist candidate to once again (for the last time?) play the "blocking vote" card; a historical weakness of the left, whose electorate has shrunk from around 45 per cent to 30 per cent in 10 years; and the decline of the traditional party of the French bourgeoisie, The Republicans, unable to appear in the country as a possible and credible relay for Macronism.

This is where we stand, and—the same causes producing the same effects—the far right emerges extremely

strengthened from the Macron era , so much so that the most likely scenario for the coming years is a far-right coalition dominated by the National Front/National Rally, dragging along with it, or rather in its wake, a large part of the conservative and liberal right (The Republicans and Renaissance). In this context, the second stage of the fascisation I discuss in the book could begin, which will notably serve to crush the opposition movements that developed under Macron (both social and political, including La France Insoumise).

Q. In the left-wing debate in Germany, there is much uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding the diagnosis and meaning of "fascisation." Often misunderstood, it is simply equated with the rise of the AfD to the dominant position of the political right or with a "Bonapartist situation" leading to the suspension of the liberal-democratic state. Your theoretical and analytical approach is more complex; you analyse fascisation as a multidimensional process of articulating elements/tendencies and the threefold radicalization of the neoliberal power bloc. What are the different elements of fascisation in France, and how can we understand how they are interconnected?

Fascisation minimally designates a process which precedes and above all prepares ideologically and materially the construction of a fascist state, that is to say a state of open war against all protest movements, minorities and popular classes, a state seeking more profoundly to annihilate all forms of dissent and all spaces of counter-power, a state thus atomizing its population and ideologically controlling it, and a state guaranteeing – or rather promising – to revive the accumulation of capital.

The hypothesis here is that a fascist state is not simply the product of a fascist movement seizing power and taking over the capitalist state like a citadel, then transforming it in a fascist direction. Even if the construction of such a state is not the inevitable fate of every capitalist state during a period of capitalist crisis, nor a linear process, it is in this sense a more organic phenomenon, more closely linked to the situation and transformations of capitalism, but also to the politics of the dominant classes (and therefore to its dominant actors, the mainstream parties), not simply the consequence of an electoral victory for the far right or their rise to power within a coalition.

We can distinguish the factors contributing to this fascisation from its vectors and actors. The fundamental factors seem to point to the crisis of hegemony, which is itself a complex product of the crisis of capitalism. It is because capital accumulation encounters limits and blockages, because capitalism stagnates, that identifiable sectors of capital (fossil fuels, speculative finance, agribusiness, military and surveillance industries) will radicalize their political agenda and support (directly or indirectly) far-right movements, tending towards a merger. It is also because of this stagnation that the dominant parties lose their credibility and that the fear of downward mobility spreads among large segments of the petty bourgeoisie (both old and new) but also within the more stable strata of the working classes.

The crisis of hegemony can, in some cases, lead to a pre-revolutionary crisis , but its consequences are generally more or less acute forms of governmental instability and fleeting popular uprisings—that is, without political outcomes or social alternatives—against a backdrop of the historical weakness of the left and the workers' movement. It is from this crisis of hegemony that the rise of the far right stems, feeding on the phenomena mentioned above (stagnation of capitalism, discrediting of dominant parties, fear of downward mobility, etc.), but also on certain underlying transformations of the capitalist state and of the dominant ideology as it is developed and disseminated by the ideological apparatus of the ruling classes (primarily political parties and the media).

As we mentioned above, it is therefore the crisis of hegemony that pushes towards the authoritarian hardening of the capitalist-neoliberal state (increased centralization of governmental power, bypassing of Parliament, criminalization of opponents and increased repression, empowerment of the police, etc.), but also the multiplication of campaigns to demonize racial minorities and the left, sometimes mixed together in the same opprobrium ("Judeo-Bolshevism" in the past, " Islamo-leftism " today).

Q. In Germany, the left tends to contrast "authoritarian neoliberalism," focused on austerity, militarization, and war, with the diagnosis of "fascism." You are one of the first left-wing researchers to have developed a comprehensive theoretical and analytical approach to reflecting on the continuities and discontinuities between the neoliberal state (drawing inspiration from Poulantzas's authoritarian statism) and neo-fascist projects... How do you see the relationship between neoliberal authoritarian statism and fascism?

First, to clarify things, I think it's helpful to revisit what Poulantzas said about neoliberal authoritarian statism as early as the late 1970s. He didn't see it as a new form of state of exception, nor as something that would inevitably lead to such a state, any more than Stuart Hall saw Thatcher's "authoritarian populism" as a preparatory stage for fascism, an antechamber. Nevertheless, there are at least three differences compared to the context in which Poulantzas wrote, which allow us to view the current authoritarian hardening differently and to formulate, in this regard, a hypothesis of fascisation. According to this hypothesis, neoliberal authoritarian statism, under current conditions, has a good chance—if the dynamic isn't stopped by emancipatory forces—of leading us toward fascist-type (or neo-fascist, to be more precise) regimes. These elements are obviously connected to each other.

The first is obviously the polycrisis of capitalism, encompassing environmental (climate change, etc.), economic (stagnation), and political and ideological aspects (crisis of legitimacy, governmental instability, etc.). In these two respects, the crisis is much deeper than in the 1970s, despite a significantly weaker workers' movement worldwide. The second is the presence of powerful far-right movements, which initially developed in the electoral and institutional spheres but also, increasingly, in the streets and in society at large (the example of England seems striking in this regard, but the United States and Brazil are other suggestive cases, not to mention India and Israel). The third is the availability of a mass social base – which does not mean a majority – for this extreme right, not ready at this stage to enlist in these paramilitary structures that we spontaneously associate with fascism, but at least to support, more or less actively, a neo-fascist power and a process of fascisation of the state.

The direction of the process depends not only on the project or ideology of the forces in power, but undoubtedly as much, if not more, on the future depth of the polycrisis of capitalism, unpredictable in its intensity in all aspects (chain effects of climate change, rise of militarism and risk of widespread conflagration, economic and financial crisis, etc.), but also on the intensity of popular resistance. This is clearly illustrated by the situation in France. If the repression of popular movements has been so brutal in recent years and the authoritarian hardening so marked, it is not because of a singular nature of Macronism – compared to other national varieties of neoliberalism – but because the level of mobilization has been much higher in France than anywhere else in Europe, especially since 2016, but also because of the presence of a radical left at a relatively high level (La France Insoumise capable of obtaining scores of 20 per cent in the presidential elections of 2017 and 2022).

All these factors make the situation extremely volatile and unpredictable. Take, for example, the treatment of opponents. The Macron administration has already begun criminalizing opposition movements in France: the administrative dissolution of the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), the country's main anti-racist organization, as well as the Palestine Will Prevail collective; an ongoing attempt to dissolve the Young Anti-Fascist Guard (JU), one of the main anti-fascist organizations; and the announcement of the possible dissolution of the main organization providing solidarity with Palestine (Palestine Emergency). How can we imagine that a government led by the National Rally (RN) wouldn't go further? The former leader of the traditional right, now aligned with the RN (Eric Ciotti), has already stated that La France Insoumise (the main left-wing organization in the National Assembly) should be dissolved...

The most likely scenario, therefore, is that a coalition of forces under the RN's control will simultaneously pursue a deepening of neoliberal counter-reforms, notably to solidify its alliance with big business, and at the same time accelerate its authoritarian offensive to confront a vibrant social protest movement and radical left. The pretexts are easy to imagine: riots in working-class and immigrant neighbourhoods, confrontations with police during street demonstrations, a murder committed by an exile from the Global South, and so on. It is also important to bear in mind

the entire arsenal of exceptional measures already incorporated into ordinary law—that is, into the standard repertoire of state action (and particularly that of the police)—over the past ten years, and which will be immediately available to a coalition dominated by the RN.

Q. You stress the role of anti-Muslim racism. What are the relationships between (anti-Muslim) racism as a structural part of capitalism, the organic forms of racism in the context of neoliberal authoritarian populism (Hall), and the specificities of racism in a context of fascisation? Islamophobia plays a particular role from the point of view of the fascisation process, in the same way as the anti-Semitism of the first half of the 20th century.

It is true that the ideological forms were different: this anti-Semitism contained, in particular, the entire pseudo-biological veneer of the racialism that had developed in the nineteenth century, but also anti-Judaism of Christian origin, and even certain supposedly anti-capitalist commonplaces concerning the power or wealth of Jews, which the German socialist leader Bebel had dubbed "the socialism of fools." But what did anti-Semitism do that Islamophobia does today? Well, it radicalizes the xenophobia and racism that are sometimes described as ordinary, giving them a singular, specifically catastrophist and conspiratorial form, and this form is precisely characteristic of far-right racism.

This racism is particular in that it does not simply say that there are too many Muslims and too many immigrants, that the latter compete with "real nationals", that they pose "problems" (of integration, of living together, of delinquency, of unemployment, of public deficits, etc.).

Far-right racism is essentially based on three ideas:

1- A destruction is underway (the destruction of the French nation or of "Western" civilization), which immediately raises the stakes and justifies the need to act urgently and brutally;

2-This destruction is linked not only to a migratory invasion but more profoundly to a desire for domination which is the act of a radically foreign group (the Jews yesterday, the Muslims today);

And 3- If our nation (or our civilization) wishes to rise from its ashes, to free itself from the tyranny already present or to come exercised by this minority, if it aspires to rediscover its roots, its deep identity and its greatness, in short if it wants to regenerate itself, it must purify or cleanse itself by fighting this group and destroying it in one way or another (either by expulsion or by physical destruction).

This specific type of racism, which stages and justifies a fight to the death, plays a central role in the process of fascisation at different levels (I will mention three).

Firstly, at the individual level, by linking itself to the fear of downward mobility (which itself is a long-term product of neoliberal policies of precarity) and by drawing on a whole ideological foundation inherited from French colonialism and the racism that it has not ceased to secrete in its wake, Islamophobia will shape emotions, desires and ideas that go in the direction not only of white victimization and a national-racial, or civilizational, voluntarism, which claims to have liberation as its aim, even though its main objective is the subjugation of the minority considered both responsible for all evils and seeking to impose its domination.

Next, at the level of what Marxist historians and sociologists call class formation, and specifically the formation of the working class, we find one of the major functions of fascism, namely to politically and ideologically dislocate the

working class. This class is, of course, already segmented, differentiated, and hierarchized by the ordinary functioning of capitalism. But far-right racism solidifies these segmentations, differentiations, and hierarchies; it digs trenches and erects walls, making any form of collective action, any emergence of a class politics, extremely difficult, if not improbable.

– on the one hand by isolating, frightening and often criminalizing in a thousand ways the most oppressed fringes of the proletariat (especially when they take action);

– and on the other hand by leading the most stabilized fringes of this proletariat (what is often called the "white working class") to identify with the dominant classes and the state, in the name of defending the nation threatened in its integrity and even its survival.

Finally, at the state level, Islamophobia is an ideological construct that contributes to legitimizing the erosion of civil liberties and basic democratic rights (through the implementation of emergency laws, states of emergency, etc.), as well as attacks against the left, social movements, anti-fascist groups, and anti-colonial mobilizations. It is on the pretext that La France Insoumise has sided with "Islamists" that it is constantly demonized, just as solidarity with Palestine is delegitimized by being labelled a "communitarian" struggle complicit with "Islamist terrorism." Islamophobia thus occupies a prominent place in the repertoire of right-wing offensives against the left, and particularly against the radical left, aiming to disqualify it and eliminate it entirely from the legitimate political sphere.

So Islamophobia is a fundamental lever used to justify the authoritarian hardening of the state (liberty-killing laws in the name of anti-terrorism or the fight against the so-called "Islamist infiltration"), the demonization of the left, the hunt for migrants, but also a way to legitimize military interventions abroad, whether in the case of France in sub-Saharan Africa or in the Arab world, and therefore the enormous increase in military spending.

Q. In the short and medium term, it is urgent to implement offensive defence strategies (!) against authoritarian tendencies, authoritarian neoliberalism, and fascism. Let us therefore discuss the dialectic between offense and defence (the meaning of antifascism) in the current conjuncture.

Left-wing antifascism—as ideological and political “variants” of antifascism—concerns defence politics, specific historical forms of struggle, and the alliances necessary for the survival of left-wing forces and for “preparing the ground.” Nicos Poulantzas, for example, distinguishes between periods of fascisation and existential defence, periods of radical democratization (crisis of authoritarian regimes and/or hegemonic projects with a strong conjuncture of popular struggle), and revolutionary crises. But how can an effective defence be organized?

You point out that a liberal “alliance of all democrats” to defend the status quo against the right can only be a dead end. It offers no escape from the authoritarian neoliberal dynamic and the slide toward fascism. We agree. Left-wing populism limited to electoral politics will be insufficient in the fight against neoliberal fascism. And neoliberalism in its advanced stages already reduces the scope for reforms, even the most timid social-democratic initiatives. At the same time, the forces in favour of a class-based “united front” approach are weak. And until the crisis of organized, transnational class politics is resolved—and the conditions for a break with the neoliberal state are met—left-wing reformist politics can only temporarily block fascism. But that might be better than nothing. In the long term, the leadership crisis of ruling class factions could offer fertile ground for socialist alternatives.

But the dialectic of the crisis goes even further. If a new cycle of social struggles against neoliberalism and fascisation emerges in the coming years, producing class power from below and placing serious left-wing projects on the national agenda, the danger of a "preventive" neo-fascist counter-revolution would also increase. But it is almost impossible to defeat a united ruling class.

The comrades of the "convergence" project in the United States therefore propose a three-pronged antifascist strategy: 1. Block: organize around a broad antifascist consensus that includes all forces opposed to fascism and authoritarianism, building a counter-power at the city, civil society, and workplace levels. 2. Build a left/progressive bloc envisioning an anti-neoliberal alternative to government power. 3. Build a socialist left within these processes, with a longer-term horizon of radical rupture and transformation.

Q: The struggles in the United States, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom could be decisive... How can we develop the right strategy at the national and transnational levels?

Antifascism is indeed first and foremost a matter of defence, and we must acknowledge that after four decades of bourgeois offensive, we are on the defensive, without deluding ourselves about the revolutionary or pre-revolutionary nature of the situation. Defence begins with physical self-defence against fascist gangs, but also against an increasingly brutal police force within a state undergoing fascisation. This requires strengthening the unity of our camp, coordinating security services, and so on. It continues by actively blocking any street initiatives by far-right forces and, through this, preventing the development of fascist organizations established in cities, rural areas, businesses, universities, and so forth. Nevertheless, it seems to me that antifascism is too often reduced to these dimensions, when it has a much greater political potential.

First, defence also means political self-defence, and therefore the broadest and most unified mobilization possible around democratic slogans aimed at preserving the political gains of the working class and oppressed minorities, and maintaining forms of counter-power or what we might call the infrastructure of protest (unions, neighbourhood collectives, anti-war groups, etc.), all these embryonic forms of popular power. But this can also allow us to raise the democratic question on a broad scale, by putting forward more radical slogans concerning political institutions (challenging all their anti-democratic aspects: upper houses, electoral systems, constitutional courts, etc.), but also racism and the role of the state in racial oppression, the capitalist takeover of the media and the resulting lack of real pluralism, etc.

Similarly, antifascism has historically always raised the question of the means of these defensive battles, as indicated in your question through the idea of "offensive defensive strategies." Certainly, we must avoid getting bogged down in strictly institutional matters because, if the battle is fought solely on this ground, defeat seems inevitable. But in my view, and I believe I am echoing Poulantzas in saying this, it is imperative not to oppose, on the one hand, electoral-institutional means, which obviously include legal battles and all the support that can be found in the law and democratic-bourgeois institutions (which, we must never forget, still record, even in a distorted way, certain previous popular gains), and, on the other hand, the methods specific to the exploited and oppressed classes, to the workers' movement: strikes, occupations, street demonstrations, blockades. It is the combination of these weapons that alone can make it possible to achieve democratic victories, push back the fascist enemy and halt the process of fascisation.

Finally, antifascism has the particular virtue of fostering unity among all emancipatory movements and can thus appear as a unifying force during periods of defensive fascisation. All emancipatory movements, that is to say, not simply the political left and trade unions, but also antiracist, working-class, feminist, LGBTQI+, anticolonial and anti-war, environmentalist, and other groups. In short, all those who feel (and indeed are) directly threatened by the advances of the far right and fascisation. If we fail to mobilize this "subaltern bloc," to use an expression I employ in the book, and to mobilize it not only in the electoral and institutional arena (which was the major limitation of the New Popular Front), but also through the methods of struggle employed by the oppressed, we again stand no chance against the common enemy.

The danger, of course, is that this unity will be forged in haste as a mere tactical manoeuvre, lacking strategic direction, and that we will forget, in particular, this undeniable fact: any left-wing experiment that maintains the status

quo, and even more so that pursues or amplifies neoliberal, racist, security-focused, and productivist policies, will lead to a further rise of the far right. Therefore, the pursuit of unity must not be opposed to the necessary political battle over the question of the project: without maximalism, but without surrender. Within this framework, anti-capitalist forces and the revolutionary left can intervene to lead, mobilize, and clarify, but this can only be achieved through mass, unified action: neither solely on the electoral and parliamentary level (even though this should not be left to bourgeois forces), nor externally in a supposedly omniscient posture of lecturing.

Given the political situation, both in France and on a continental and global scale, it is most certainly from such alliances, initially built defensively, that one can envision a process leading to a government of popular unity, capable of implementing the most urgent measures to break with the neoliberal, racist, security/authoritarian, and productivist consensus (reforms that would still be largely defensive since they would involve reversing setbacks). Of course, if the left were to find itself in this situation in any country, it would immediately face a very intense bourgeois reaction: only a more intense extra-parliamentary popular mobilization, in defence of the governmental experiment of rupture, would then make it possible to stop the bourgeois offensive while also allowing for the possibility of launching its own offensive, in the direction of a break with capitalism.

After all, as Trotsky wrote, "only he who does not limit himself to the defensive, but who, at the first opportunity, is determined to go on the offensive, defends himself well."

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