Fascism

Fascism, populism and conservatism

1 December 2018, by Pips Patroons

The following epilogue was written after the war:

Therefore learn how to see and not to gape.

To act instead of talking all day long.

The world was almost won by such an ape!

The nations put him where his kind belong.

But don't rejoice too soon at your escape —

The womb he crawled from still is going strong.

This warning did not come out of the blue. Here and there, the monster creeps out of its den. Neo-Nazi groups no longer hesitate taking to the streets. They benefit from the general political rightward shift, as embodied by demagogic, populist autocrats like Bolsonaro in Brazil, Duterte in the Philippines, Erdo?an in Turkey, Kaczy?ski in Poland, Modi in India, Orbán in Hungary, Putin in Russia and the incomparable Trump in the U.S. A gang of chauvinist nationalists, enemies of the unions and, if not all of them, harsh/strict neoliberalism.

The idea of solidarity, characteristic of the socialist movement, was tarnished as 20th century rubbish, a leftover from the ideas of Enlightenment progress and the French Revolution. But is this right-populism the trailblazer of a fascist renaissance, or will it rise in a new form of ruling class authoritarianism in altered social and cultural conditions?

What is fascism anyway? From a historical perspective this political form has manifested clear, describable content. In light of that, we should avoid calling each form of authoritarianism fascism -- it's not helpful. More generally, and more to the point, it does not help us gauge the reality of the threat it poses. After all, each society subject to social inequality is characterized by one form of oppression or another. In the following paragraphs I will refer to the account offered by American historian Robert Paxton, specialist in the French Vichy regime of the second world war.

Fascism

"Strictly speaking, as an ideal type, fascism is a mass anti-liberal, anticommunist movement, radical in its willingness to employ force and in its contempt for the upper-class values of the time, sharply distinct not only from its enemies on the left but also from its rivals on the right, traditional conservatives. Where conservatives want social structure to be hierarchical, fascist mass rallies in uniform colored shirts display a leveling egalitarianism before the leader. Economically, fascists make their appeal to the solitary 'common man' against the organized 'interests' of society, from bankers and landlords to trade unions. Where conservatives show distaste for mass participation and prefer government by a few established families, fascists – children of the era of mass politics instead of survivors of elitist nineteenth-century Europe – attempt to marshal mass affirmations. Fascists often prefer a Dionysiac pagan vigor to the social bulwark of established churches. They mock the softness, the conformity, the empty manners of conservatives. Totally devoid of any sentimental conservative attachment to the vanishing Europe of grandpapa, fascists revel in dynamism, change, and a 'new order.'

There are common points, of course: authoritarianism, hatred of liberals as weak-kneed harbingers of leftist social revolution, defense of property. But that common ground tends to be drowned out by discordant clashes of tone and value, especially among fascists enjoying the freedom of those out of power.

The study of fascism is complicated by the fact that no fascist movement has ever reached power on its own terms. None has come to power without being assisted by conservatives, under conditions in which fascists and conservatives mute their differences and undergo a certain amalgamation

in the face of higher interests: achieving office and staving off a communist threat. Conservatives have frequently found the organized mass support and private armies of fascism a welcome ally against the Left; fascists have frequently found conservatives holding the keys to power. Mussolini was financed by industrialists and landowners when his nationalist-syndicalist *squadristi* turned their attention to beating up reformist socialists. It was King Victor Emmanuel III, with the advice of parliamentary leaders, who summoned him to form a government in 1922. Mussolini threatened to march on Rome, but he arrived in fact by Pullman car. Hitler received conservative money and support and was called to power by President von Hindenburg, on the advice of conservatives like Franz von Papen and General von Schleicher. Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera's Falange had only a minor and diminishing role in Franco's military-clerical group that destroyed the Spanish Republic.

All these leaders, upon taking power, headed coalitions of fascist and conservative elements joined together in the common endeavor of obtaining office and preventing communist revolution. All of them, moreover, had to put down opposition from purer-minded fascist ideologues whose radical frenzy had helped them acquire a mass following in the first place. Mussolini had to get rid of his early syndicalist followers like Massimo Rocca. Hitler cynically liquidated Ernst Röhm and Gregor Strasser along with other inconvenient past allies and accomplices in the Night of the Long Knives, 30 June 1934. Franco gradually muted the Falange. No undiluted fascist regime has wielded power.

It helps to set up a spectrum of radical right regimes, ranging from those in which fascists dominated the partnership to those in which conservatives dominated the partnership. Hitler's Germany clearly occupies one end of the spectrum. The Nazi party and the paramilitary organizations eventually broke the power of even such conservative elite groups as the diplomatic corps and the army. In Italy, by contrast, king, church, and army retained sufficient autonomy to regain their independence and overthrow Mussolini and the party in order to make a deal with the advancing Allies in July 1943. Dr. Salazar's Portugal perhaps occupied the other end of the spectrum, in which conservative, Catholic authoritarianism was almost untinctured by mass anti-traditional authoritarianism. The Vichy National Revolution clearly occupied a place on such a spectrum nearer the conservative than the fascist end. Pétain felt himself closer to Franco and Salazar than to Hitler." This, then is the account provided by Robert O. Paxton in his Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944 (1972).

It is perhaps not wrong to name some contemporary movements in Asia as fascist. In Pakistan there are some Islamic movements who have armed gangs that regularly use violence against ideological opponents, particularly leftist parties and emancipated women. Then there is the anti-Muslim movement in Modi's India, where the Hindutva ideology bears fascist tendencies.

Populism

We cannot simply designate right-wing, far-right and populist movements as fascist. The political goals of these groupings differ in their contexts and missions. The interbellum witnessed a struggling bourgeoisie gripped by fear of a revolution by the large socialist and communist organizations. That fear was not unfounded. The economic crisis forced capital's hand into destroying the workers' resistance in order to pull the rate of profit back up. In order to realize this it was necessary to forge an alliance of conservatives with the far right. However, the current situation does not present the ruling classes with a socialist threat. They are instead left to face the contradictions produced by neoliberal globalization, conflicts on the world market and the various consequences these have for the population.

The populist and far-right resistance against these conditions lays the blame not on capital, but on the decaying profiteering elite of traditional party politics. "We are the people, you are the elite," proclaim the populists. "Our leaders are the embodiment of the people and so they are always right."

Populism lives off class contradictions but is devoid of class consciousness, be it of the conservative bourgeoisie or that of the workers' movement. In practice, its ideology is petty-bourgeois. It gives voice to the fears of people who feel threatened by changes in their environment and working conditions, people who feel powerless to do anything about it or about the way their lives' expectations and job security are disturbed. Their reaction is not one of attempting to keep what they have, it is reactionary. They dream of a world where everything was good, despite it never having existed.

Herein lies populism's connection with the conceptual worlds of conservatism, the far-right and fascism. As long as populism is not co-opted by the ruling class, it will remain a marginal, albeit dangerous, tendency. It can only be fought with a consistently anti-capitalist politics, and not with an alliance with the ruling "democratic" elites (useful voting, cordon sanitaire, etc.).

Conservatism

As implied by its name, conservatism stands for the conservation of the political community and its established economic and cultural values as they developed at the end of the 18th century, following the American and French revolutions: the capitalist society. Its liberalism was not pure, seeing as how it also carried remnants of the ancien regime. Just think of how diplomacy was, until quite recently, largely in the hands of the aristocracy.

For as long as possible, conservatism has tried to limit democratic process to the domain of elites: industrialists, financiers, and land owners. They who possess nothing cannot shoulder responsibility: so went the argument against universal suffrage.

Despite differences between liberal and religious elites, where the former

referred to the Enlightenment, which the latter rejected, both defended, in varying degrees and methods, a number of cultural values they believe developed in a natural manner: the traditional family and its structure; patriarchy and the obedience and respect it demands; the subordination of women to men; a certain (often hypocritical) puritanism (sex, drugs); racism (social and biological); positive views on colonial past; repressive politics (law & order, zero tolerance); fear of "the other" (Islamophobia, xenophobia, homophobia, etc.); climate change denialism and opposition to environmental protection. Resistance to abortion and euthanasia, or at least a certain ambivalence to them, are typical to conservatism, allowing, again, for some variations.

Conservatism is scared of the abrupt change that can undermine social relations. It realizes it has to yield to the demands of the popular classes, but it only gives in under pressure. "Change in order to remain the same," as says the prince in Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's The Leopard. As the Irish Edmund Burke, mentor of Flemish nationalist leader Bart de Wever, put it in his criticism of the French Revolution, only calm, historically natural growth can produce acceptable change. Mass democracy does not provide the established powers with any guarantees in the maintenance of the social harmony from which they benefit.

There are voices today that decry the "excess of democracy". The masses are too stupid to know how to best direct society. Populism and fascism are, according to the conservative elites, the consequence of this "excess of democracy". The dreams, which flow from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and point to progress and the perfectability of people, ultimately lead to chaos, civil war and tyranny. Only tradition serves as the basis for the needs of the people, afflicted as they are with evil, wolves under wolves. Conservatism is pessimistic. Its reactionary celebrities includes the likes of Thierry Baudet, T. Dalrymple, Jordan Peterson, among others.

Flanders

Who were the conservative forces in Flanders' recent history? In the first place, it was the Church, which portrayed modernity as the devil's workshop: dancing, film, co-education all had to be banned. Literature was censored, a task carried out by, among others, the Scriptores Catholici, the writers' organisation controlled by the Church. Thousands of young people from Catholic organisations swore never to read anything by Gerard Walschap, who left the Church. These conditions continued as late as the 1950's, when a professor at the Catholic University of Leuven, the critic Albert Westerlinck, argued that quality literature was not possible under puritan Catholic censorship. The city was considered a breeding ground for moral decadence, while rural life accrued praises for its simplicity and godliness, as evidenced by the rural literature of writers like Ernest Claes and Felix Timmermans. The Davidsfonds, the Flemish Catholic cultural society, subjected the titles it published to a morality rating.

The morals of the Church left strong marks on the ideology of Christian democracy and its various "positions", including those of its workers' movement. The Flemish Movement was similarly subject to strong Catholic influence. Today's society is wholly urbanized, stocked with all forms of consumer entertainment. No religious opium is equal to this. Although the Church lost its moral authority in Flanders since about the 1960's, it continues to wage a rearguard struggle against abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality.

In liberal and its associated circles, the conservative reaction is less intense when compared to that of the Church, despite its real strength in some respects. For a long time, socialist circles feared the consequences of women's suffrage, and they defended petty bourgeois morality in matters of marriage, sexuality and education. Having said this, conservative sections in Flanders do not all take a rigid posture towards social change. Christian democracy has accepted the right to abortion, as it has towards civil same-sex unions. This is out of a recognition of reality or a sense of pressure from social movements. In this respect, Christian democracy has lost its political dominance and with it its leadership in conservatism.

The NV-A, the dominant Flemish nationalist neoliberal party, became the most important conservative power, albeit in new circumstances. Bart de Wever's party is deeply neoliberal and subscribes to a pessimistic worldview. It goes about critiquing socially accepted values (on abortion, sex, feminism) in a careful manner so as not to scare off voters. Although it is not a populist party as such, people like Theo Francken do engage in populism on issues of immigration and refugees. One of the reasons behind this was (and is) the need to take the wind out of the sails of Vlaams Belang, which it has partly succeeded in doing for the time being. Historically, the board of this far-right party has a Flemish-national fascist background and engages in populist demagoguery. The NV-A is thus home to a diverse field of far-right views, as seen in the fighting team of Shield and Friends, although this does not serve the party board. Some Flemish nationalists have turned their backs on the NV-A because they realized the party sees Flemish independence as impossible to realize, and so is instead focused on making Flanders into the dominant economic-political power within Belgium.

Flemish nationalism has never been able to break with its ties to the far right ideology it internalized after the First World War. Following the defeat of Nazism, it was granted a marginal role within the People's Union, the post-war petit-bourgeois Flemish nationalist party, which presented itself as a democratic parliamentary party. But the fascist Flemish world continued to live underground, in friends' circles, publications, youth groups, etc. Today, together with other far-right remnants in Europe, the Flemish far right is starting to operate in the open. We must certainly not underestimate them.

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Duterte is reactionary, counter-revolutionary (to the "EDSA revolution"), but not fascist – On Walden Bello's definition of a "fascist leader"

10 December 2017, by Juan Manggagawa

Walden's 4-point definition of a "fascist leader" Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte Is a Wildly Popular Fascist – Now what? only describes an authoritarian, extreme right-wing leader but misses what is unique to fascism. What is specific to fascism as a political phenomena is its ability or aim to organize a mass movement of the discontented middle class and semi-proletariat (ie, unemployed). It is this mass movement with a charismatic/authoritarian figure at its head which is used to intimidate and suppress, including by violent and armed means, its political enemies. Thus fascist movements are necessarily armed or, at the very least, advocate the armed repression of its political rivals.

This definition is by no means original. David Renton, author of Fascism: Theory and Practice, stated that "fascism was best understood as a specific form of reactionary mass politics." The key notion here is the "mass" characteristic to fascism.

Gramsci too, summarizing his first hand experience of the rise and triumph of the very first fascist movement, argued that the novelty of Mussolini was the organization and mobilization of the dispossessed middle class into a mass movement to rival and destroy the labor and socialist/communist movement.

In Duterte's case, there is no mass movement that advocates for his right-wing agenda. Unless you believe that the EJK's [Extrajudicial Killings] are actually done by civilians who have armed themselves to salvage addicts because they were inspired by Duterte's agitation that drugs are the principal scourge of society. But we all know that the killings are done by the police, whether in or out of uniform, wearing masks or not.

Duterte has a troll army but no mass movement. Mobilizing in the streets to defend "Tatay Digong" is qualitatively different from voting for him. We have not seen any of that. Unlike Walden, I don't think Duterte won on the crest of an electoral insurgency but that is another point altogether. Organizing into a fascist DDS (the fans club not the death squad) is quite a level up from merely sharing Mocha's posts on FB or bullying millennial students on social media. An ex-comrade friend opined that there is mass hysteria but no mass movement. Obviously mass discontent is a necessary ingredient to building a mass movement. Yet the hysteria has not led to any form of movement. It is worth remembering that before fascism came to power, it was a militant mass movement first that viciously fought its way to political supremacy.

Kilusang Pagbabago is clearly an attempt to organize a pro-Duterte people's movement. KP can indeed be built but only on the basis of patronage politics. There is no critical mass that is willing to fight and die for Duterte. There is yet no social crisis that can generate such level of political polarization.

KP will have to contend with the same difficulties that progressives have been facing in organizing workers, the poor and peasants in a period of political ebb. Government funds will solve some organizational problems for KP but it will also create others like opportunism. Despite discontent among the working masses, their fighting mood has been dampened by the utter disappointment of people power uprisings and the failures of mass struggles to win decisive victories. Thus in recent years, there is hardly any spontaneous actions among working masses. And if it does arise, it will be spurred on by basic economic issues and not inspired by a call to defend Duterte.

In one article, Renton avers that it is better not to use the term fascist to describe the various authoritarian leaders of today like Trump and Putin since the context is vastly different from the world of the 1930's. [1]

Whether we believe Duterte is a fascist or not, or which definition of fascism is correct, at the end of the day, what truly matters is the relevant and practical question of what is to be done.

2. If Walden, or anybody else, really believes that Duterte is a fascist then they must follow the logic to its conclusion. They must advocate for armed struggle against Duterte's fascism. The only proper way to fight fascism is an armed response. Yet Walden is utterly silent on this urgent task, if indeed "fascism is already in

power in the Philippines."

An anti-fascist front is a necessary but insufficient strategy to combat the threat or reality of Duterte's fascism. Armed struggle is a key component to fighting fascism, if this term is to have any practical meaning at all. At the very least, Walden, must propose the formation of armed self-defense units in the communities to fight the police and death squads. But again nothing about this.

So we can argue all day at Starbucks about Duterte's fascism, but unless someone advocates for an armed answer to it, then we just enjoyed our coffee but nothing practical was reached.

To make it clear. I don't believe Duterte is a fascist and thus I don't advocate for armed struggle against him. The task at hand is the forging of the broadest possible front against Duterte and his policies, the war on drugs, the death penalty, lowering of the age of criminal liability, endo, etc. To organize an armed struggle now will just give Duterte a pretext to curtail civil liberties and even impose a dictatorial rule.

3. Arguing whether Duterte is a fascist matters less than the threat of a Duterte dictatorship. Is martial law or an outright dictatorship just mopping up operations or a walk in park for Duterte as Walden argues? This is the most contentious part of his article. Walden overestimates the breadth and depth of mass discontent and the level of ruling class unity for a Duterte dictatorship and underestimates the sources of support in defense of democratic rights.

A Duterte dictatorship is not a done deal. Indeed there is a clear and present danger that Duterte will swing to an authoritarian rule. He may want to impose one-man rule. But it does not mean he indeed will. Or that the balance of forces will permit him to do so. Materialism theorizes that history is the interplay and interaction of social forces and is not dictated by the will of heroes or villains. Duterte will have to unite the ruling class behind such an authoritarian project, sustain passive support from the people for it, and defeat all organized and spontaneous opposition.

While bourgeois democracy in the Philippines is really brittle and can easily be replaced by authoritarian rule, at this conjuncture there is no compelling motive for the ruling class to demolish the existing political system and replace it with a dictatorship. The costs of such a shift outweighs any possible benefit since there is no credible threat to the ruling system. Why would the elite rock the boat? Unlike the situation before 1972, the Philippines is not sitting on a social volcano.

Can there be a significant opposition to Duterte? It was hard to imagine that before. But since the outrage led by millennial students against the hero's burial for Marcos, this has been settled. The burial protest has broken the terror of Duterte, barely six months into his rule.

There is in fact a reserve army that is able and willing to mobilize against Duterte. Walden acknowledges the opposition from civil society. In class terms, this is the petty bourgeoisie. So the petty bourgeoisie is split, one section passively supports Duterte, and another politicized section has shown it is willing to fight against his policies.

There is no reason that the spontaneous opposition to Duterte cannot be mobilized in a campaign against death penalty, lowering the age of criminal liability and EJK's. These are in fact even more material and urgent issues for millennials compared to the crimes of Marcos. Surely, the politicized middle class will mobilize even more vigorously against any threat of restriction of civil liberties, declaration of martial law or imposition of a new dictatorship.

4. Walden and of course everybody on this side of the Facebook fence welcomes the mass protests against the burial of Marcos. There is probably agreement that it will serve as the starting force for building the broad front against Duterte.

I differ with Walden on his view that the progressives have hegemony over the millennials that participated in the protests. It is wishful thinking on Walden's part to say that progressives are the leading force.

Instead the "yellows"â€"the liberal bourgeoisieâ€"are the most politically influential among the crowd at People Power Monument. Even though Leni, PNoy, Mar were not at PPM, it is enough that the prevailing mood there is defense of liberal democracy against the threat from the Marcoses and Duterte. If opinions were canvassed at PPM, most protesters there would accept Leni replacing DU30.

Given the petty bourgeoisie's vacillating character, it will either follow the lead of the liberal bourgeoisie or the radical proletariat. Unfortunately we have to honestly admit and not gloss over the fact, the left does not have the strength to compete for leadership. At least not for now. We don't have to elaborate on the weaknesses of the different progressive groups, and the working class and other sectoral movements to make this point clear. The question is, how can the working class overcome its limitations so that it can compete for hegemony against the bourgeoisie over the petty bourgeoisie and win the people over to the slogan of system change not regime change? It is a herculean job that falls squarely on our shoulders.

So while the task is to build the broad front against Duterte and unite with the yellows in this, we fight them for political leadership. The tried and tested formula of course is to march side by side without merging. But there is no ready-made recipe for how we can shift from under the shadows of the yellows to the forefront of the struggle.

For the working class to have any chance of moving to the head of the fight against Duterte, it must concentrate on organizing, mobilizing and winning the struggle for urgent demands on jobs, wages, housing, etc. while participating in broader campaigns in defense of democratic rights. As Walden posits, Duterte is weakest on his promises on social programs which no doubt will all be broken on the altar of neoliberalism. The working class must take the lead

in challenging Duterte on these demands and exposing him along the way.

It must also be said that we have a lot of house cleaning to do, to disabuse a significant number within our ranks of their lingering illusions on Duterte. It can't be done by waging a war on Facebook with Mocha (although its part of it). The best way to educate our own mass base and the rest of the working class is by mobilizing them in struggles to challenge Duterte on his promises.

A frontal assault on the issue of EJK is too difficult at this time but must be waged nonetheless. But flanking maneuvers that target Duterte's promises on ending endo, increasing SSS pension, tax reform and such must be pushed to its limits. And even as we want to expose and oppose Duterte on these campaigns, we must also aim to win and for the movement to claim those victories as the product of struggle. For too long, we have been fighting and losing, and that has been a major factor in the demoralization and disillusionment of the working class. Despite their discontent over the hardships of daily life, the baggage of past defeats weigh like an albatross upon the consciousness of the workers. Nobody can say if the workers can arise in time and in unison with the students. So here's hoping we do a better job in 2017 than in previous years.

Tuesday 7 February 2017

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte Is a Wildly Popular Fascist – Now what?

10 December 2017, by Walden Bello

Duterte's campaign to rid the Philippines of drug users and pushers through extrajudicial executions elicited shock even among the most hardened observers. And his now legendary cursing of President Obama as a "son of a bitch"â€"part of an angry farewell to a long-standing alliance with Washington and an embrace of Chinaâ€"upended Asian geopolitics.

Despite his bloody reign, Duterte remains popular, with the latest domestic poll giving him a trust rating of "excellent." What makes Duterte tick? What drives many of his admirers to exclaim that they're ready to die for him?

Fascism comes in different forms in different societies, so people expecting fascism to develop in the "classic" way often fail to recognize it even when it's already upon them. In 2016, fascism came to the Philippines in the form of Duterte, but this event continues to elude a large part of the citizenryâ€"some because of their fierce loyalty to the president, others out of fear of admitting that naked force is now the ruling principle in Philippine politics.

Why Duterte fits the "F" word

At a panel I was part of last August, one month after Duterte ascended to the presidency, there was considerable hesitation in using what panelists euphemistically called the "F" word to characterize the new executive. There is an understandable reluctance to use the term "fascist," undoubtedly because the word has been applied very loosely to all kinds of movements and leaders that depart, in some fashion, from liberal democratic practices.

However, there are a few broad characterizations of a fascist leader that could unobjectionably apply to Duterte. In this scheme, a fascist leader is (a) a charismatic individual with strong inclinations toward authoritarian rule who (b) derives his or her strength from a heated multiclass mass base, (c) is engaged in or supports the systematic and massive violation of basic human, civil, and political rights, and (d) proposes a political project that contradicts the fundamental values and aims of liberal democracy or social democracy.

If one were to accept these elements provisionally as the key characteristics of a fascist leader, then Duterte would easily fit the bill.

A Fascist original

Having said that, Duterte is nevertheless an original sort of fascist personality.

His charisma is not the demiurgic sort like Hitler's, nor does it derive so much from an emotional personal identification with a "nation." Duterte's charisma would probably be best described as *carino brutal*, a Filipino-Spanish term that denotes a volatile mix of will to power, a commanding personality, and gangster charm that fulfills his followers' deep-seated yearning for a father figure who will finally end what they see as the "national chaos."

Duterte is not a reactionary seeking to restore a mythical past. He's not a conservative dedicated to defending the status quo. His project is oriented towards an authoritarian future.

He is best described, using Arno Mayer's term, as a counterrevolutionary. Unlike Hitler or

Mussolini, however, he’s not waging a counterrevolution against the left or socialism. In Duterte’s case, the target is liberal democracyâ€”the dominant ideology and political system of our time. In this sense, he is a local expression as well as a pioneer of an ongoing global phenomenon: the rebellion against liberal democratic discourse that Francis Fukuyama had declared as the “end of history” in the early 1990s.

Counterrevolutionaries aren’t always clear about what their next moves are, but they often have an instinctive sense of what would bring them closer to power. Ideological purity isn’t high on their agendaâ€”they put a premium on the emotional power of their message rather than its ideological coherence.

The low priority accorded to ideological coherence is also extended to political alliances. Duterte’s mobilization of a multiclass base while ruling with the support of virtually all of the elite is unexceptional. However, one of the things that makes him a fascist original is that he’s brought the dominant section of the left into his ruling coalition, something that would have been unthinkable with most previous fascist leaders.

But perhaps Duterte’s distinctive contribution to fascism is in the area of political methodology. The stylized paradigm has the fascist leader or party begin with violations of civil rights, followed by a power grab, then indiscriminate repression. Duterte turns this “Marcosian model” of “creeping fascism” around. He begins with impunity on a massive scaleâ€”that is, the extrajudicial killing of thousands of alleged drug users and pushersâ€”and leaves the violations of civil liberties and the grab for absolute power as mopping up operations in a political landscape devoid of significant organized opposition.

A product of EDSA

Duterte’s ascendancy cannot be understood without taking into consideration the debacle of the EDSA liberal democratic republic that was born in the anti-Marcos uprising of 1986. (It’s named EDSA for the long thoroughfare in Metro Manila where the main actions of the rebellion took place.)

In fact, EDSA’s failure was a condition for Duterte’s success. What destroyed the EDSA project and paved the way for Duterte was the deadly combination of an elite monopoly of the electoral system and neoliberal economic policies with the priority placed on foreign debt repayment imposed by Washington.

By 2016, there was a yawning gap between the EDSA republic’s promise of popular empowerment and wealth redistribution and the reality of massive poverty, scandalous inequality, and pervasive corruption. The EDSA republic’s discourse of democracy, human rights, and rule of law had become a suffocating straitjacket for a majority of Filipinos, who simply could not relate to it owing to the overpowering reality of their powerlessness.

Duterte’s discourseâ€”a mixture of outright death threats, coarse tough-guy talk, and frenzied railing coupled with disdainful humor directed at the elite (whom he called “*conos*,” or cunts)â€”was a potent formula that proved exhilarating to his audience, who felt themselves liberated from the stifling hypocrisy of the EDSA discourse.

Fascism in power

Probably no fascist personality since Hitler has used the mandate of a plurality at the polls to reshape the political arena more swiftly and decisively than Duterte in 2016.

Even before he formally assumed office, the extrajudicial killings began; the elite opposition disintegrated, with some 98 percent of the liberal “Yellow Party” joining the Duterte Coalition; and Duterte achieved total control of both houses of Congress. The Supreme Court, shying away from a confrontation, chose not to challenge the president’s decision to have the former dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, buried in the national Heroes’ Cemetery. A traditional bulwark of defense of human rights, the Catholic Church, exercised self-censorship, afraid that it would be a sure loser in a confrontation with a popular president who threatened to expose bishops and priests with mistresses and clerical child abusers.

A novice in foreign policy, Duterte was able to combine personal resentment with acute political instinct to radically reshape the Philippines’ relationship with the big powers, notably the United States. What surprised many, though, was that there was very little protest in the Philippines at Duterte’s geopolitical reorientation toward China [2], given the stereotype of Filipinos being “little brown brothers” to Washington [3]. What protest there was came mainly from traditional anti-American quarters which evinced skepticism about the president’s avowed intentions.

Here, Duterte again showed himself to be a masterful instinctive politician. While ordinary Filipinos often admire the U.S. and U.S. institutions, there’s a strong undercurrent of resentment at the colonial subjugation of the country by the U.S., the unequal treaties that Washington has foisted on the country, and the overwhelming impact of the “American way of life” on local culture. One need not delve into the complex psychology of Hegel’s master-servant dialectic to understand that the undercurrent of the U.S.-Philippine relationship has been the “struggle for recognition” of the dominated party. Duterte has been able to tap into this emotional underside of Filipinos in a way that the left has never been able to with its anti-imperialist program.

The anti-American comments from Duterte supporters that filled cyberspace following President Obama’s criticism of Duterte’s executions were just as fierce as their attacks on local critics of his war on drugs. Like many of his authoritarian predecessors elsewhere, Duterte has been able to splice nationalism and authoritarianism in a very effective fashion, though many progressives have seen this as mainly motivated by opportunism.

What surprises await The Philippines?

What are the chinks in Duterte's armor? And what are the prospects for the opposition?

One vulnerability is the health of the president. Duterte has been candid about his medical problems and his dependence on the drug Fentanyl, reportedly a strongly addictive substance that is 50 to 100 times stronger than morphine and has the same effects as heroin. The age factor is not unimportant either, considering that the president is turning 72. Hitler became chancellor at 44 and Mussolini became prime minister at 39. For the successful pursuit of an ambitious political project, one's energy level is not unimportant.

More problematic is the issue of institutionalizing the movement.

The force driving Duterte's electoral insurgency has not yet been converted into a mass movement. So Duterte is leaning on Jun Evasco, the secretary of the cabinet and a longtime Duterte aide, to fill the breach by coalescing a "Movement for Reform," which was launched in August 2016. Evasco's vision is apparently a mass organization along the lines of those of the left-wing National Democratic Front, where he cut his political teeth.

This won't be easy since, as some analysts have pointed out, he would have to contend with competing projects from Duterte's political alliesâ€"like the Pimentels, the Marcoses, and the Arroyosâ€"who would prefer an old-style political formation that brings together elite personalities. Needless to say, a political formation along the lines of the latter would be the kiss of death for Duterte's electoral insurgency.

A bigger hurdle would be failure to deliver on political and social reforms. Practically all of the key political and economic elites have declared allegiance to Duterte, so it's difficult to see how he can deliver on his political and economic reform agenda without alienating key supporters. The Marcoses, who still have their ill-gotten wealth stashed abroad; the Arroyos, who have been implicated in so many shady deals; and so many other elites, many of whom have cases pending, are not likely to be disciplined for corruption, especially given their very close links to Duterte. Nor will the Visayan Bloc, which has come in full force behind Duterte, agree to a law that will extend the very incomplete agrarian reform program. Nor will the big monopolists like Manuel Pangilinan and Ramon Ang, who have pledged fealty to Duterte, submit without resistance to being divested of their corporate holdings.

This is not to say that Duterte is a puppet of the elites. Having a power base of his own that he can easily turn on friend or foe, he is beholden to no one. Indeed, one can argue that most of the elite have joined him mainly for their own protection, like small merchants paying protection money to the mafia. The issue, rather, is how serious he is about social reform and how willing he is to alienate his supporters among the elite.

The same goes for economic reform. Ending the increasing contractualization of Philippine employment (or ENDO, for "End of Contract"), one of the president's most prominent promises, is currently bogged down in efforts to arrive at a "win-win" solution for management and labor, and all the major labor federations are fast losing hope the administration will deliver on this. As for macroeconomic policy, any departure from neoliberal principles on the part of orthodox technocrats like Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno and National Economic Development Authority Director General Ernesto Pernia is far-fetched.

Again, the question lies in how convinced Duterte is that neoliberalism is a dead endâ€"and how willing he is to incur the loss of confidence on the part of foreign investors by pursuing a different program.

Social and economic reform is Duterte's Achilles heel, and the president himself is aware that popularity is a commodity that can disappear quickly in the absence of meaningful reforms. Dissatisfaction is fertile ground for the build-up of opposition.

This spells danger for the country in the medium term. Even if he's able to quickly create a mass-based party, Duterte would likely still need to resort to the repressive apparatuses of the state to quell discontent and opposition. This may not be too difficult a course to follow. Having led a bloody campaign that's already claimed over 6,000 lives, the suspension of civil liberties and the imposition of permanent emergency rule would be in the nature of "mopping up" operations for Duterte. It would be a walk in the park.

The elite opposition

Does the opposition matter, though?

The elite opposition is extremely weak at this point, with most of the Liberal Party having joined the Duterte bandwagon out of opportunism or fear. An opposition led by Vice President Leni Robredo, who resigned from Duterte's cabinet after being told not to attend meetings, is not likely to be viable. While undoubtedly possessing integrity, Robredo has shown poor judgment, receptiveness to bad advice, and little demonstrated capacity for national leadershipâ€"and is, in the view even of some of her supporters, largely a creation of Liberal Party operatives who wanted to convert the name of her deceased husband, former Department of the Interior and Local Government head Jesse Robredo, into political capital.

Moreover, her continuing ties to the double-faced Liberal Party and the former administration easily discredit her among both Duterte supporters and opponents.

The left in crisis

This brings up the left.

Duterte's rise to power created a crisis for the left. For one sector of the leftâ€"like Akbayan, the social

democratic party that had allied itself uncritically with the neoliberal Aquino administrationâ€”Duterte's ascendancy meant their marginalization from power along with the Liberal Party, for which they had essentially become the grassroots organizing arm.

For the traditional left, or what some called the "extreme left," Duterte posed a problem of another kind. While the National Democratic Front and Communist Party had not supported Duterte's candidacy, they accepted Duterte's offer of three cabinet-level positions dealing with agriculture reform, social welfare, and anti-poverty programs. They also accepted the president's offer to initiate negotiations to arrive at a final peace agreement between the government and rebellious Communist factions.

For Duterte, the entry of personalities associated with the Communist Party into his cabinet provided a left gloss to his regime, a proof that he was progressiveâ€"or "a socialist, but only up to my armpits," as he put it colorfully during his victory speech in Davao City on June 4, 2016.

It soon became clear that Duterte had the better part of the bargain. As the regime's central policy of killing drug users and pushers without due process escalated, the left's role in the cabinet became increasingly difficult to justify. This dilemma was compounded by the fact that no new land reform law was passed that would allow agrarian reform to continue, there was little movement in the administration's promise to end contractualization, and macroeconomic policy continued along neoliberal lines.

The left, however, found it hard to shelve the peace negotiations, from which they had already made some gains, and to part from heading up government agencies that gave them unparalleled governmental resources to expand their mass base.

Duterte had again displayed his acute political instincts. Knowing that the traditional left was at ebb in its fortunes, he gambled that they would accept his offer of cabinet positions. And having accepted these, he knew, they would find it extremely difficult to part from them. The price, the leaders of the left realized, was their association with a bloodthirsty regime.

The Communist Party and its mass organizations tried to alleviate the contradiction by issuing statements condemning Duterte's bloody policies. But this only made their dilemma keener, since people would ask why they continue to provide legitimacy to the administration by staying on in the cabinet. Unlike Hitler and Mussolini, Duterte brought the left into his regimeâ€"and in doing so, he's been able to sandbag it and subordinate it as a political force. So far, that is.

Whether he's fully conscious of it or not, Duterte's ascendancy has severely shaken all significant political institutions and political players in the country, from right to left.

Civil society mobilizes

Where real opposition to Duterte has developed over the last six months has been from civil society.

A leading force is I Defend, a broad grouping of over 50 people's organizations and non-governmental organizations, that has waged an unremitting struggle against the extrajudicial killings. Another is the coalition against the Marcos burial. While Duterte has painted these formations as "yellow," the reality is that most of their partisans are progressives that are as opposed to a neoliberal "yellow restoration" as they are to Duterte's policies. Others are newer and younger forces drawn from the post-EDSA and millennial generations that have become alarmed at Duterte's fascist turn.

This growing opposition doesn't seek a reprise of 1986, when an uprising toppled the dictator Marcosâ€"perhaps heeding Marx's warning that history unfolds "the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce." It's increasingly realizing that the fight for human rights and due process must be joined to a revolutionary program of participatory politics and economic democracyâ€"to socialism, in the view of manyâ€"if it is to turn back the fascist tide. There is no going back to EDSA.

What the opposition still has to internalize is that opposing fascism in power will not be, to borrow a saying from Mao, "a dinner party." It will indeed be exceedingly difficult and demand great sacrifices. Moreover, there is no guarantee of success in the short or medium term. Fascism in power can be extraordinarily long-lived. The Franco regime in Spain lasted 39 years, while Salazar's Estado Novo in neighboring Portugal went on for 42 years.

Like the anti-Marcos resistance four decades back, the only certainty members of the anti-fascist front can count on is that they're doing the right thing. And that, for some, is a certainty worth dying for.

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The Nation

Walden Bello :A former member of the Philippine House of Representatives, Walden Bello did his doctoral dissertation on the counterrevolution in Chile in 1970-73. He is currently senior research fellow at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies of Kyoto University.

Marxism, the Arab Spring, and Islamic

fundamentalism

10 December 2017, by Joseph Daher

This counterrevolutionary role necessitates a reevaluation of much of the Left's analytical understanding of, and strategic approach to, Islamic fundamentalism. The Left must stake out a position independent of both the existing regimes and Islamic fundamentalists, based on a program of democracy, social justice, equality, and liberation and emancipation of the oppressed.

Why use the term "Islamic fundamentalism"?

Organizations such as the so-called ISIS, [4] al-Qaeda, the various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hezbollah have differences in their formation, development, composition, and strategy. Nevertheless, they share a common political project, despite their significant differences. As Marxist scholar and commentator Gilbert Achcar argues, all variants of Islamic fundamentalism share a common reactionary and sectarian goal of establishing "an Islamic State based on the Sharia" [5]3 that preserves the existing neoliberal capitalist order.

This unites Islamic fundamentalists from their gradualist to jihadist wings. Thus, for example, the former deputy supreme guide of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammad Khairat al-Shater declared in March 2011, following the overthrow of then President Hosni Mubarak:

The Ikhwan are working to restore Islam in its all-encompassing conception to the lives of people, and they believe that this will only come about through the strong society. Thus the mission is clear: restoring Islam in its all-encompassing conception; subjugating people to God; instituting the religion of God; the Islamization of life, empowering of God's religion; establishing the Nahda of the Ummah on the basis of Islam. . . . Thus we've learned [to start with] building the Muslim individual, the Muslim family, the Muslim society, the Islamic government, the global Islamic state. [6]

Similarly, the Lebanese Shia fundamentalist party Hezbollah (founded officially in 1985) has consistently expressed the view that an Islamic state is its preferred political system. It argues, however, that because of the country's political constitutional arrangement that apportions political power by sect and ethnicity, its implementation is impracticable at the moment. That, however, has not prevented Hezbollah from opposing several proposals to secularize the Lebanese state, calling them all anti-Islamic. [7] For example, it has denounced civil marriage as "an implementation of atheism." [8]

Islamic fundamentalist groups use different strategies and tactics to achieve their objectives. As Achcar argues, "Some have a gradualist strategy of achieving their program within society first, and in the state thereafter, while others resort to terrorism or state implementation by force as is the case with the so-called Islamic State." [9] The gradualists like the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, or Iraq's Dawa participate in elections and in existing state institutions. By contrast, jihadists like al-Qaeda and ISIS consider these to be un-Islamic, and turn instead to guerilla or terrorist tactics in the hope of eventual seizure of the state. Among the jihadists, there are debates and divisions on the tactics and strategies to achieve their goal of an Islamic State. In various contexts and historical periods, the different currents have sometimes collaborated and at other times competed and even clashed with one another.

Despite their strategic differences, they all share a reactionary and authoritarian political program and vision of society. This can be seen quite starkly in their attitude toward women. All trends of Islamic fundamentalism promote a sexist vision that endorses male domination and restricts women to subordinate roles in society. First and foremost, they define women's primary function as "motherhood" and, in particular, inculcating the next generation with Islamic principles. They impose clothing and behavior supposed to preserve women's honor and that of the family.

Any straying from such norms and restrictions they consider a concession to Western cultural imperialism. For example, the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has warned against following the Western version of gender equality, saying it has led to corruption. [10] The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood denounced a 2013 UN report that called for the state to recognize marital rape as a crime, ensure equality between men and women in marriage, divorce, and matters of inheritance, and end polygamy and dowry as an attempt to "undermine Islamic ethics, and destroy the family." [11] These "conservative strictures on the role of women," Adam Hanieh argues, "are an integral component of broader counterrevolutionary goals," and rightly concludes that "the position of women is thus a key barometer for the health of revolutionary process." [12]

Islamic fundamentalists hold similar reactionary views of LGBTQ populations. For example, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah accused homosexuals of "destroying societies." He described LGBTQ people as a foreign import that threatened Islamic society with moral deviance and weird lifestyles. [13] Similarly, the Egyptian Salafist Sheikh Youssef Qardawi, who

is a reference point for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, has repeatedly described LGBTQ people as "sexual perverts" and called for their collective punishment, including putting them to death. [14] Finally, Islamic fundamentalist movements have targeted religious minorities in their own countries and promoted sectarian discourses and behaviors against them. ISIS has carried out, for example, campaigns of murder, violence, and repression against Christians, Yazidi, and other religious minorities in the territories it occupied in Iraq and Syria and launched terrorist attacks against Copts in Egypt and Shias in Iraq.

While Islamic fundamentalists are united by this reactionary worldview, socialists must recognize the differences between gradualist trends of Islamic fundamentalist movements such as Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood on one side, and jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS on the other. They are not the same, and socialists must approach them differently.

It is possible to imagine unity in action with gradualist trends in specific contexts for precise and short-term objectives. Socialists could and did work with the Brotherhood in Tahrir Square in Cairo during the eighteen days of mass mobilizations against Mubarak. It is, however, simply impossible to envisage similar collaborations with al-Qaeda and ISIS. In Syria, these groups attacked activists for raising nonsectarian and democratic slogans. [15]

At the same time, socialists should not pursue long-term political alliances with gradualist trends of Islamic fundamentalist movements, especially when they are much larger. The danger in such a situation is that socialists will put themselves under the thumb of a more powerful and reactionary movement, and instead of winning adherents away from it, will at best only provide it left political cover to the detriment of the growth of the Left as an alternative.

Islamic fundamentalism, Islam, and Islamophobia

Socialists should, however, be careful not to conflate Islam and Islamic fundamentalism. Instead we must make a sharp distinction between the religion Islam and fundamentalist groups. If we fail to do this, we risk falling into the Islamophobia fostered by the American and European ruling classes and their media. Islamophobia is a form of religious bigotry mixed with racism directed against the Muslim population.

The imperialist powers have increasingly relied on Islamophobia since 9/11 to justify their so-called War on Terror. They characterized this as a "clash of civilizations" between a "Christian/secular, civilized, and democratic West" and a barbaric and violent "Muslim World." Marxists must challenge such Islamophobia. Instead we must defend freedom of religion, and at the same time the right of oppressed groups to self-determination. In his Critique of the Gotha Program, Marx argued that we must reject state interference in matters of belief and worship. [16] We must, therefore, see rules about the wearing of the veil, whether imposed by fundamentalists or legally restricted in Europe, as a reactionary act that goes against women's right to self-determination.

We also must reject Islamophobic claims that the roots of ISIS, al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and other fundamentalists can be found in the Koran. Such groups and their actions should be analyzed as the product of international and local social, economic, and political conditions in the present time, not as the product of a text written 1400 years ago. Do we explain the US invasion of Iraq by the religious beliefs of George Bush (who reported that God told him in a dream to invade Iraq)? Of course not. We instead explain Bush's war, his motives, and their ideological justification as the product of American imperialism.

It is thus necessary for Marxists to analyze Islamic fundamentalist groups by looking at the contemporary socio-economic dynamics that produce them and see their program as their attempt to provide reactionary solutions to real problems in society. In his article "The Attitude of the Workers' Party towards Religion," penned in 1909, Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin argued that if we do not use this historical materialist method, Marxists would mirror the flawed method of bourgeois ideologists who explain religious belief through the alleged ignorance of the masses or some mystical characteristic imputed to an entire people. [17] Such approaches today lead to an essentialization of "the Other," in this case "the Muslim."

The roots of Islamic fundamentalism

What are the roots of Islamic fundamentalism? The first thing to note is that such fundamentalism is an international phenomenon, not something unique to the Middle East or other societies with predominantly Muslim populations. We have seen the development of similar political currents like Christian fundamentalism, Hindu fundamentalism, and Jewish fundamentalism in Israel, that all have their own peculiar brand of right-wing politics. But none of them, despite their call to return to an earlier golden age, should be seen as fossilized elements from the past. They may employ symbols and narratives from earlier periods, but all these fundamentalisms are the product of modern societies. [18]

It is interesting to note that throughout the world, fundamentalist and conservative religious movements have supported neoliberal policies while advocating increased charitable work, leading some scholars to talk of "a smooth alliance between neoliberals and religious fundamentalists," which could be characterized as "religious neoliberalism." [19]

Islamic fundamentalism grew out of

the Middle East's specific political and economic conditions, where imperialist powers have had an essential and ongoing impact on the region's states and political economy. Following the discovery of oil in the 1920s and 1930s in the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, imperialist powers saw the region as a material prize to be fought over. As Adam Hanieh argues, these powers saw the region as playing "a potentially decisive role in determining the fortunes of capitalism at the global scale." [20]

Western imperialist powers, principally the United States, played a key role in shaping the region's rentier states, especially the Gulf states like Saudi Arabia that generate revenue by renting their oil and natural gas to international oil conglomerates. Since the 1980s, these states have adopted a neoliberal model focused on speculative investment in search of short-term profits in the unproductive sectors of the economy, especially in real estate.

The United States has used its strategic partnership with Iran (until the overthrow of the shah in 1979), Israel, and Saudi Arabia to dominate the region. It backed them to confront Arab nationalist regimes like Egypt under Gamal Nasser, the region's communist Left, and various popular and national struggles, which generally sought greater sovereignty, social justice, and independence for their countries from imperial domination. As part of this effort, Saudi Arabia fostered and financed various Sunni Islamic fundamentalist movements, most particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, to counter the nationalists and the Left.

The United States, with the help of its allies in the region, including Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, pumped billions of dollars into the training and arming of Islamic fundamentalist fighters and groups from 1979 onward. They backed such groups in Afghanistan in an effort to weaken its Cold War enemy, the Soviet Union. Al-Qaeda grew out of this process. American imperialism helped conjure into being the most extremist wing of the Islamic fundamentalism that would later turn on Washington.

Israel used a similar strategy in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip, by repressing the national and progressive forces of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) while it turned a blind eye to the expansion of Islamic fundamentalist competitors. The Iranian Revolution's overthrow of the shah's regime and subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 boosted Shia fundamentalist movements in the region.

The crisis in the Arab nationalist regimes opened space for fundamentalists to flourish. Egypt and other states abandoned their previous radical social policies and anti-imperialism for two key reasons. First, they suffered defeat at the hands of Israel. Second, their state capitalist methods of development began to stagnate. As a result, they opted for a rapprochement with the Western countries and their Gulf allies and adopted neoliberalism, rolling back many of the social reforms that had won them popularity among workers and peasants. In turn, the regimes turned on the Palestinian national movement reaching an accommodation with Israel. At the same time, all the Arab nationalist regimes, and others such as in Tunisia, deliberately supported Islamic fundamentalist movements or allowed their development against leftist and nationalist movements. In Egypt, for example, following the death of Nasser in 1970, the new regime led by Sadat established a tacit alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood against nationalist and progressive forces in the country.

The last significant development that fueled the rise of fundamentalism was growing political rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Each instrumentalized its own sectarian fundamentalism to achieve its counterrevolutionary objectives. First, they used it to divert popular classes from pursuing their own political and socio-economic objectives and, when challenged by popular opposition, tried to divide and conquer it along sectarian lines. Second, they used fundamentalism to mobilize support both within their country and their competitor's bloc to increase their power in the region. These were the modern historical material conditions that gave rise to both Shia and Sunni Islamic fundamentalism.

The class basis of Islamic fundamentalism

The historic social base of Islamic fundamentalism from the dawn of the twentieth century onward is the petty bourgeoisie. Of course, each country's fundamentalist formations have their own particular history, but they do all share roots in various elements of the petty bourgeoisie. In Egypt, for example, it grew among the rural elements of that class that moved to the cities amid the economic and social changes of the 1960s and 1970s. Once urbanized in the 1980s and 1990s, its leadership tended to come from professional layers such as doctors, engineers, and lawyers. It found increasing numbers of adherents among the educated youth left without a future by the regimes' adoption of neoliberalism. [21]

Just like the petty bourgeoisie in general, Islamic fundamentalist organizations are pulled in two directionsâ€"toward rebellion against existing society and toward compromise with it. Either way, their reactionary project offers no solution to sections of the peasantry and working class that are attracted by it. Islamic fundamentalist parties seek to reestablish the Ummah, a religio-political entity that would gather all Muslims and transcend the cleavages that divide them today. Class struggle is therefore seen as negative because it fragments the Ummah.

Over time, the fundamentalists' petty bourgeois leadership has increasingly deepened their ties to the bourgeoisie even as they attempted to preserve their cross-class base of support. Saudi Arabia played a key role in this process. It provided the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and other groups with privileged access to business and employment opportunities during the 1970s and 1980s oil boom. This situation accelerated the process of embourgeoisement of the

fundamentalist movement. More and more capitalists began to play a leading role inside the movement. [22] The Egyptian secret services had identified around nine hundred companies belonging to members of the country's Muslim Brotherhood. [23]

In Lebanon, Hezbollah underwent a similar transformation. Originally it possessed a petty bourgeois leadership and cadres that attracted a popular social base among the Shia middle classes and poor. Over time, a Shia fraction of the bourgeoisie in Lebanon and in the diaspora became increasingly influential in the party. Hezbollah now has a major base of support among Shia businesspeople as well as among the upper middle classes, especially elite professions.

Their increasingly bourgeois funding sources explain the fundamentalists' support for the capitalist system and its current neoliberal regime of accumulation. They receive donations not only from various states, but also private religious donations (the zakat) from private networks made up of bourgeois and petty bourgeois sectors of society. For example, Hezbollah receives massive funding from Iran as well as the Lebanese Shia bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.

Hezbollah also gets "donations from individuals, groups, shops, companies, and banks as well as their counterparts in countries such as the United States, Canada, Latin America, Europe and Australia." [24] With their bourgeoisification, Hezbollah owns "dozens of supermarkets, gas stations, department stores, restaurants, construction companies, and travel agencies." [25] Similar dynamics can be found among some branches of the Muslim Brotherhood. All of this serves to integrate the fundamentalists into the existing order.

The tensions between the fundamentalists' increasingly bourgeois leadership on one side, and its social base in the petty bourgeois and impoverished sections of the peasantry and working classes on the other side, have produced contradictions in their political program and activities. On the one hand, they profess a commitment to equality and social justice that they address mainly through top-down charitable projects. On the other, they advocate neoliberal economic principles and denounce social movements from below, especially the trade union movement. [26]

These contradictions run right through fundamentalism's theory and practice. For example, the founder of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Mustafa al-Sibai, argued "the socialism of Islam leads necessarily to the solidarity of various social categories and not to the war between classes as communism." [27] His 1959 book, Socialism of Islam, put forward the idea that social equality can be achieved by appealing to an individual's moral obligation to donate to the poor instead of governmental and social reforms like progressive taxation, nationalization, and establishing welfare state programs. Sibai's vision for an Islamic socialism was however a purely rhetorical maneuver used to contend with the rising influence of the country's Baathists and Communists. [28]

With the retreat of Arab nationalism and the Left, Islamic fundamentalist thinkers abandoned such radical rhetoric and increasingly stressed that the solution to the problem of poverty lay in a return to Islamic values and tradition. Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of Tunisia's branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Nahda, argued, "We need to emphasize that poverty, in the eyes of Islam, is linked to unbelief," and went on to state, "We (the Islamic fundamentalist movements) are the guarantor of a particular social order and of a liberal economic regime." [29]

A similar trend can be found among Shia Islamic fundamentalist figures and movements. For example, during the Iranian Revolution, Khomeini presented Islam through the lens of social justice, praising the oppressed poor and condemning the rich, the greedy palace dwellers, and their foreign patrons. He used this rhetoric to mobilize the urban populace against the shah's regime.

But after Khomeini consolidated the new Islamic regime and repressed his competition on the left, he abandoned this egalitarian rhetoric to depict the free market as an essential pillar of society and to extol private property. He transformed his definition of "the oppressed" from an economic category describing the deprived masses into a political label for the regime's supporters including wealthy bazaar merchants. [30] He also stressed that the regime sought harmonious relationships between factory owners and workers and between landlords and peasants. The regime even ruled that land reform should not limit ownership, since such restrictions would violate the sacred rights of private property enshrined in sharia.

Neoliberalism and charity

Islamic fundamentalists have supported neoliberal policies and built charitable organizations to fill the vacuum left by the destruction of welfare state programs. They use these to win people's allegiance to their reactionary project. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is perhaps the best example. [31] Hassan Malek, a businessman and ranking figure in the Brotherhood declared in 2012 that the former dictator Hosni Mubarak's neoliberal policies were sound, and that only corruption and nepotism marred their implementation. [32] Recognizing a potential ally, the Cairo investment bank EFG-Hermes set up a meeting in June 2011 between fourteen international investment funds and the Brotherhood's deputy supreme guide Khairat al-Shater. The investors declared that they "were positively surprised to find some of the ideas shared by the Brotherhood to be mostly capitalist in nature." [33]

The Lebanese party Hezbollah has also consistently endorsed free-market policies and defended private property, despite also professing a commitment to social justice goals. Hezbollah has supported policies such as privatization, liberalization, and opening up to foreign capital. It in no way sees these in contradiction to its purported commitment to social equality, despite the poverty these policies have caused.

The fundamentalists have used charitable organizations to address the social impact of neoliberalism. While these organizations cannot overcome poverty, the fundamentalists have used them to win hegemony among sections of the popular classes. Often they have worked out agreements with the state to direct funds into their charitable organizations promoting Islamic principles. [34] In Egypt, as the state has cut back the welfare state, the Muslim Brotherhood has used its huge network of organizations to spread their fundamentalist principles among sections of the subaltern classes.

Similarly, Hezbollah won leadership among Lebanon's Shia population through a combination of consent and coercion. On the one hand, it won support by its provision of much needed services to large sections of the Shia popular sector, and, on the other, through repression of those who defied its moral norms and political dictates. It combined consent and coercion through its domination of the armed resistance against Israel. Hezbollah has thus managed to establish itself and its fundamentalist ideology as the dominant force among Shias in Lebanon.

Geopolitics, Islamic fundamentalism, and the Arab Spring

Imperial and regional powers have used Islamic fundamentalists to increase their influence and diminish that of their opponents in the Middle East. Iran has backed Hezbollah in Lebanon and Shia Islamic fundamentalist organizations such as al-Dawa in Iraq. Saudi Arabia supported the Muslim Brotherhood until 1991, and then various Salafist movements after that. Qatar replaced Saudi Arabia as the Brotherhood's main supporter after 1991 and at the same time bankrolls other Salafist organizations. These capitalist states do not support the fundamentalists for religious reasons but as a way to increase regional power, weaken their opponents, and highjack or repress democratic social movements from below.

For example, Qatar has used the Muslim Brotherhood during the uprisings in the MENA region to expand its political and economic influence in the region. They recognized that the Brotherhood was a safe alternative to the decaying structures of the old regimes. It hoped to replace the old dictators with a procapitalist fundamentalist ally. With these it hoped to stabilize the region after the uprisings and expand its regional role at the expense of other Gulf Powers like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This explains Saudi Arabia's recent push to isolate Qatar.

Imperialist powers have also backed fundamentalists for their own purposes. The United States was favorable to the Brotherhood's election to government in Egypt and Tunisia during the MENA uprisings, seeing them as a way to stabilize and preserve the existing order under a new leadership, recognizing that, in the words of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's Tancredi in The Leopard, "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change." [35]

The United States hoped the Brotherhood would follow the precedent of the Recip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey. Erdogan's regime is procapitalist, sometimes collaborates with US imperialism and certainly does not challenge it, and remains a loyal member of NATO. But the AKP is different from the Brotherhood in significant ways. It is not an Islamic fundamentalist party but a conservative, nationalist, and authoritarian one. Thus, in its first years in power before its crackdown after the recent coup attempt, it managed to win support from liberal and even leftist sections of society for its effort to reduce the army's power in the country.

The AKP also came to power in a nonrevolutionary situation and was able, at least for a time, to establish more stable hegemony over the country. As a result of these differences, the Brotherhood in Egypt and Tunisia was unable to replace the ancien régime or win hegemony among the popular classes. Nevertheless, it is significant that the United States saw the Brotherhood as a possible solution to stabilize the states in Tunisia and Egypt threatened with revolution.

Neither "Islamofascist". . .

The rise of fundamentalism has led to a sharp debate among socialists about how to characterize it and position the Left in relationship to it. Some socialists such as the Egyptian Marxist Samir Amin have characterized the various trends of Islamic fundamentalism, including the Brotherhood, as "Islamofascists."

Amin argues that Political Islam's program belongs to the type of fascism found in dependent societies. In fact, it shares with all forms of fascism two fundamental characteristics: (1) the absence of a challenge to the essential aspects of the capitalist order (and in this context this amounts to not challenging the model of lumpen development connected to the spread of globalized neoliberal capitalism); and (2) the choice of antidemocratic, police-state forms of political management (such as the prohibition of parties and organizations, and forced Islamization of morals). [36]

This definition is so generic that it could be applied to many of the region's authoritarian regimes, including the supposedly secular ones, which oversee rentier economies and advocate conservative religious policies. As such, it is neither useful for explaining fascism nor Islamic fundamentalism. Fascism is far more specific than Amin's definition. Historically, fascism emerges in the petty bourgeoisie during a period of deep social crisis. It aims to protect the middle class against capitalist society's two main classesâ€"big capital and the working class. While it espouses anticapitalist rhetoric, its primary objective is to build a mass street movement to smash the working class and its organizations,

stifle political liberties in general, and scapegoat oppressed populations.

Islamic fundamentalism is not fascist. As Gilbert Achcar explains,

The analogy with fascism disregards major differences between the two currents and focuses only on some organizational features that are common to very different parties based on mass mobilization and indoctrination, including the Stalinist tradition. Unlike historical fascism, the MB did not emerge in imperialist countries in reaction to a workers' movement challenging capitalism and in order to embody a harder version of imperialism. [37]

For example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was founded in 1928 in reaction to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, British occupation, and the spread of secular ideologies and foreign cultural influences. [38] Shia Islamic fundamentalist movements spread from Najaf, Iraq, through transnational clerical networks with the aim of opposing secular and communist ideologies and organizations. This is dramatically different than European fascism.

Moreover, Islamic fundamentalist movements generally aim to unify the *Ummah* regardless of territorial and ethnic limits. They also want to restore a mystified past political system, the caliphate. This is a dramatic contrast to fascist movements, which want to sharply define the nation in ethnic terms and build a new order and civilization.

Fascism is also an inaccurate characterization of jihadist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. Of course they are violent, sectarian, and have a totalitarian vision of society. But they are very different than fascism in their origins and nature. Al-Qaeda emerged as a product of the Saudi, American, and Pakistani support for fundamentalist rebels against the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. Only later did it turn against the United States.

ISIS was born out of the American occupation of Iraq. It grew out of al-Qaeda in Iraq, which resisted both the US occupation and the Shia fundamentalist regime installed by the United States and supported by Iran. It later spread to Syria as it attempted to establish an Islamic Sunni caliphate. These formations are the outgrowth of imperialism and counterrevolution in the Middle East.

They do not have the typical characteristics of fascism. They do not attempt to build mass movements. Neither ISIS nor Syria's former al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, [39] have mobilized mass demonstrations let alone popular struggle of any classes, even when they have faced popular opposition to their reactionary policies. [40] They both operate principally as an army or terrorist network, rather than as a mass political movement with an armed wing.

Based on this misidentification of fundamentalism as fascist, Amin and others have disastrously supported the existing regimes in the region. [41] They do so in the hopes that the state will curb the fundamentalists. This has led to catastrophic results especially in Egypt where many on the left supported General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's coup against the Muslim Brotherhood or even participated in the interim cabinet following the coup d'état in July 2013. [42] Predictably, his rule has led to wholesale repression and denial of civil rights and libertiesâ€"not only for members of the Muslim Brotherhood but also everyone else, including secular revolutionaries.

Similarly, many on the left have backed Bashar al-Assad's regime as the only alternative to al-Qaeda and ISIS. They thus betrayed the Syrian Revolution and became apologists for the regime's counterrevolution that in the main did not target ISIS or al-Qaeda but the revolutionaries, laying waste to the country in the process. Amin and others' tacit or open support for dictators like Sisi and Assad provides them left-wing cover to limit and close the space for democratic and progressive forces to organize. Even worse, it puts a left gloss on the regimes' justification of their repression as a "war against terror" against "extremism," rehabilitating American imperialism's principal justification for their global warmongering.

Socialists should not choose between the two poles of counterrevolution, especially the principal one, the existing regimes. Instead, the Left should oppose dictatorships, their counterrevolution, and champion the defense of democratic rights. In Egypt, for example, the Left, even as it refuses political support to the Brotherhood, should oppose Sisi's repression of it. Why? Because Sisi has used, and will continue to use, its attacks on the Brotherhood as a precedent to curtail everyone's right to organize, including progressive and democratic forces. Thus, to defend the democratic rights of all, including gradualist Islamic fundamentalist movements like the Brotherhood against state repression, is to defend the rights of social movements, the trade unions, the popular classes, and the Left.

Similarly, socialists should oppose war waged by states for imperialist, colonialist, and authoritarian objectives, while at the same time support the right of resistance to imperialism regardless of the ideology of the actors leading it. For example, in the case of wars launched by Israel against Lebanon and the Gaza Strip in the past, socialists should stand in solidarity with the people in these two territories and support the right of resistance, including from movements such as Hezbollah and Hamas.

Failure to do this means one is siding with the oppressor against the oppressed. However, whether in the case of opposition to repression or defense of the right of resistance, this should not translate into sowing illusions in, nor supporting the political project and program of, Islamic fundamentalist formations.

Socialists must understand that siding with the existing order will not challenge Islamic fundamentalism but actually preserve the conditions created by imperialism, dictatorship, and neoliberalism that led to their development in the first place. We can only sideline it as a force by building the Left and social movements for progressive social change. That means socialists have to side with the democratic and progressive groups on

the ground struggling to overthrow authoritarian regimes, build an alternative to Islamic fundamentalists, and defeat neoliberalism and the class inequalities and social oppressions from sectarianism to sexism that it fosters. At the same time, we must oppose all regional and imperialist powers' counterrevolutionary interventions.

. . . Nor reformist and anti-imperialist

Designating Islamic fundamentalism fascist and supporting the existing regimes will only set back the project of building a progressive and independent Left. A minority on the left has attempted to present an alternative to this by characterizing gradualist Islamic fundamentalist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood as reformists and even anti-imperialists that the Left can and should collaborate with in united fronts under certain conditions. Jad Bouharoun qualifies this designation, arguing for example that they are not reformist "in the classical Marxist sense of using reforms in order to attempt to bring about socialism; nor can they be considered of a similar nature to European social democratic parties."

At the same time, he uses the term reformist in a rather elastic fashion that downplays the reactionary character and project of the Brotherhood. Thus, he argues that they are "reformists insofar as they promise their supporters real change through institutionally sanctioned reforms to the existing state." He calls both the Brotherhood and Nasserite leftists "institutional reformists." [43]

Anne Alexander also rejects the analogy with social democracy. For example, she argues that she and others have "never argued that the Brotherhood has either the program or the social base of a social-democratic party. The Brotherhood's reformism is an expression of its internal social contradictions, which pull it constantly between confrontation and compromise with the regime, often despite the wishes of its leadership." [44]

Alexander has also, however, compared Mohammed Morsi to the reformist socialist Salvador Allende of Chile. "Morsi, of course, repeated Salvador Allende's mistake of appointing the man who would overthrow him. Social democratic reformists do all these things, and worse, in moments of profound class polarization and struggle." [45]

Those on the left that characterize the Brotherhood as reformist repeatedly compare it with socio-democratic parties. Phil Marfleet, for example, claims its 2011 political program echoes a "social democratic program worldwideâ€"with the exception of references to zakat and waqf, it might have been a reformist agenda presented by parties across Europe." [46]

Thus, socialists who describe the gradualist strain of fundamentalism as reformist use the term in a slippery fashion, denying the analogy with social democracy while repeatedly using it. In reality, the Brotherhood's 2011 program was far from being social democratic; it was neoliberal. The repeated analogies with social democracy are problematic and confusing.

First, let's be clear what reformism is and is not. Originally, social-democratic reformism believed it possible to use the ballot box to win elected power in the bourgeois state and use it to dismantle capitalism and usher in socialist society. Its leadership did not in general come from the capitalist class but generally from the trade union officialdom and the petty bourgeois intelligentsia, while its membership was overwhelmingly working class.

Their leadership's class origins and especially the officialdom's role as a negotiator with capitalists in union struggles shape their conservative politics and practice. As Marxist Ernest Mandel explains, the reformists defend their own interests when they institutionalize class collaboration. These interests coincide historically with the defense of the bourgeois order. They do not necessarily coincide at every moment with the defense of the immediate interests of the majority, or even the whole of the big bourgeoisie. The reformist bureaucrats want to increase their "share of the cake." [47]

In the specific conditions of the long postwar boom, social-democratic parties and their bureaucratic forms of "struggle" succeeded in providing higher salaries, better benefits, stabilized working conditions, and an expanded welfare state in Europe. But after the onset of crisis in the 1970s, reformist parties increasingly adjusted their policies to this new situation of deteriorated living and working conditions. The labor bureaucracy and reformist politicians in Europe had thus no alternative but to make compromises and concessions to the employers' offensive and to manage austerity policies by capitalist state. [48] Moreover, social-democratic governments have sided with their imperial state in wars and maintained exploitative relations with colonies, semi-colonies, and the less powerful states of the "Third World." More recently, the vast majority of former social-democratic movements have adopted neoliberalism and its policies of austerity.

Despite the many shortcomings of reformist organizations and their counterrevolutionary role at various points in history, it is misleading to compare them with gradualist version of Islamic fundamentalism. Parties and movements like the Brotherhood and Hezbollah have never in their history soughtâ€"or even claimed to have soughtâ€"to gradually dismantle capitalism. The opposite is the case; the gradualists have historically supported capitalism including its current rapacious neoliberal regime of accumulation.

As we have seen, the social origins and composition of the fundamentalists' leadership and membership are very different from social-democratic parties. The fundamentalists' social base is the petty bourgeoisie, whereas social democracy's social base is the working class. Moreover, the gradualists' leadership, as we have seen, has undergone a process of embourgeoisement. Capitalists now

play an increasing and explicit role in these parties and movements.

The gradualists, in contradistinction to even the most neoliberal reformists, promote a conservative, sectarian, sexist, homophobic, and anti-working class political program. The real analogy to European social democracy in Egypt is not the Brotherhood, but the Nasserite politician, Hamdeen Sabahi. Sabahi possessed a reformist program and he made reformist mistakes, notably support of Sisi's coup and repression of the Brotherhood. Nonetheless, he represented the democratic and social aspirations in the 2012 presidential elections. He promised a strong program of social reforms such as the implementation of a minimum and maximum wage, expansion of the public sector to create jobs, re-nationalization of companies, and a one-off 20 percent tax on the wealth of the richest 1 percent of the population. [49] His party, al-Karama, was generally composed of workers, and he found far more support in the workers' movement and their new independent trade unions than in the Brotherhood. In addition, he rejected the Brotherhood's sectarianism and attacks on women's rights.

A closer analogy to Sabahi is the Chilean socialist leader Salvador Allende of the early 1970s. Any comparison of the Chilean reformist to the Brotherhood is misleading. First it ignores the huge ideological gap and the policies implemented by the two actors in power. Moreover, their policy toward the military is drastically different. Allende selected General Augusto Pinochet after an earlier coup in the hope that he was a "legalist" who would respect the neutrality of the army in politics. This of course was disastrously naÃ¯ve.

But it is very different than the relationship between the Brotherhood and the Egyptian army. The Chilean army never played as central a role in the political economy of Chile as the Egyptian army does in Egypt. Sisi's army is the real ruling power and core of the deep state. Morsi and the Brotherhood did not turn to the military in the hopes of staving off a coup; they attempted to form a direct alliance with the army from the first days of the uprising in 2011, knowing very well its political weight and its repressive role over decades.

From the first days of the revolution, the Brotherhood acted as a bulwark against criticism and protest of the military until after the overthrow of Morsi in July 2013. Before then, they denounced those protesting against the army as counterrevolutionaries and spreading sedition. Indeed, Morsi appointed Sisi as head of the army knowing full well that he had jailed and tortured protesters.

The distinction is even clearer when it comes to the respective policies of Morsi and Allende toward mass protests. Allende's mistake was not supporting and building on the popular mobilization of workers in Chile against the bourgeoisie in order to challenge its power in the country. By contrast, Morsi and the Brotherhood opposed and even repressed the popular and working-class mobilizations in Egypt and defended the army.

Morsi certainly never promised or tried to deliver social-democratic reforms like Allende. Thus, Saint-Just's famous saying, "Those who make revolutions halfway only dig their own graves" cannot be applied to the Brotherhood. Instead it would have to be rewritten as "Those who collaborate with the old regime digs their own graves." Despite Brotherhood's efforts at collaboration with the army, it overthrew Morsi. In the end, the army and the Brotherhood represented different wings of the capitalist class, with different regional backers, who could not find an accommodation. The far more powerful army decided in the end to asserts its direct dictatorial rule, to the detriment of all in Egypt.

It is also a mistake to see fundamentalism as some deflected expression of anti-imperialism. The fundamentalists possess a religious conception of the world, notably the goal of returning to a some mythical "Golden Age" of Islam as a means of explaining the contemporary world and providing a solution to its problems. First of all, we should be critical of the notion that the liberation and development of Arab countries depend firstly upon an assertion of an Islamic identity posited as "permanent" and "eternal."

This is reactionary pure and simple, and stands in stark contrast to the genuine anti-imperialist movements of the past. The nationalists and socialists look forward to progressive social transformation of the socioeconomic structures of oppression and domination; the fundamentalists instead frame the struggle as a battle of cultures and religions. They view imperialism as a conflict between "Satan" and the oppressed faithful, not as nationalists and socialists traditionally view itâ€" as being one between the great powers, their capitalist system, and oppressed countries. In this regard, Islamic fundamentalists echo Samuel Huntington's conception of the world as a "clash of civilizations," where the struggle against the West is based upon a rejection of its values and religious system rather than exploitative global relations.

Thus they do not have an anti-imperialist worldview. Indeed, unsurprisingly, both the jihadist and gradualist wings of Islamic fundamentalism have had imperial and regional state sponsors. As noted previously, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan supported Islamic fundamentalist movements in Afghanistan as a tool in their interimperialist conflict with Russia against the Moscow-backed regime in Kabul. The United States funded the production of textbooksâ€"read by millions of Afghan childrenâ€"which glorified jihad and martyrdom. It created Islamic warlords by pouring billions into the country, and flooding it with arms. [50]

The same is true of the gradualists. Far from consistent anti-imperialism, they have cultivated a relationship with both imperialist and regional powers. The Brotherhood was sponsored by Saudi Arabia until 1991 and more recently by Qatar, and it reached a deal with the United States in its brief period in charge of Egypt. Hezbollah is sponsored by Iran and collaborates with Russian imperialism in the Syrian counterrevolution.

The fundamentalists are neither

reformists nor anti-imperialist. To identify their rhetorical advocacy of “reforms” and “fight against corruption” as proof of their dedication to a more open democratic political scene is problematic to say the least. Why? Because these demands are yoked to the implementation of the Islamic state and “an Islamic way of life.” As the former supreme guide Muhammad Mahdi Akef of the Brotherhood declared:

If [we] wish to achieve any progress in our lives, [we must] return to our faith and apply sharia [Islamic law]. . . . The establishment of God’s law is the real solution to all of our suffering, whether it is due to domestic or foreign problems. This [the introduction of sharia] is achieved through the creation of the Muslim individual, the Muslim household, the Muslim government, and the state, which leads Islamic nations and carries the banner of dawa so that the world is fortunate enough to receive the best of Islam and its teachings. [51]

Of course, the gradualist Islamic fundamentalists movements are run through with internal social contradictions between their bourgeois and petty bourgeois leadership and their popular base. But this is true of all elite-run political parties from mainstream capitalist parties to right-wing populist parties throughout the world. The existence of class contradictions within parties is not exclusive to reformist parties. And their existence among the gradualists does not justify calling them reformist.

The gradualists are of course subject to tensions rooted in their contradictory class composition. But we must make a sharp distinction between fundamentalists that use reactionary ideology to win over popular classes, and reformist parties that possess a secular progressive program that, in however compromised a way, express the interests of oppressed classes and groups.

In reality, the various Islamic fundamentalist forces constitute the second wing of the counterrevolution, with the first being the existing regimes. Their ideology, political program, and practice are reactionary and completely opposed to the objectives of revolutionary emancipationâ€”democracy, social justice, and equality. Their policies are repulsive to the most conscious sections of the workers and oppressed groups like religious minorities, women, LGBT people, and others.

Building a progressive alternative

The MENA revolts have suffered defeats at the hands of the regimes, their imperialist backers, and the fundamentalists. They are in a complicated and dire situation, and there are no easy answers for how to extricate them from the grip of counterrevolution. But we must draw some lessons sharply and present at least a preliminary way forward for the Left. This must begin by rejecting any illusions in, and support for, the authoritarian regimes. But it must also reject similar illusions in Islamic fundamentalist forces.

Collaboration with authoritarian states has and will lead to destructive results, reducing significantly the democratic space for workers and oppressed people to organize for liberation. The regimes remain the first and foremost enemy of revolutionary forces in the region. At the same time, Islamic fundamentalist movements offer no alternative. In power or out of power, they also target workers, their unions, and democratic organizations, while promoting neoliberal economics and reactionary social policies. They are also part of the counterrevolution.

Instead of turning to either of these two forces, the Left must concentrate on the building of an independent, democratic, and progressive front that tries to assist the self-organization of the workers and oppressed. Only through this process can our side begin to think of itself as a class with interests in common with other workers and opposed to the capitalists. Progressive politics must be based on defending and encouraging the self-organization of the popular classes with the objective of struggling for democracy.

Workers’ struggles alone will not, however, be sufficient to unite the working classes. Socialists in these struggles must also champion the liberation of all the oppressed. That requires raising demands of rights for women, religious minorities, LGBT communities, and oppressed racial and ethnic groups. Any compromise on the explicit commitment to such demands will impede the Left from uniting the working class for the radical transformation of society.

How should such a Left relate to Islamic fundamentalist forces? While they are indeed the second wing of the counterrevolution, the gradualists do not represent a similar danger as the existing state. When not in control of the state, as they are for example in Iran or Saudi Arabia, they generally don’t have the same destructive capacities as the existing regimes. But that does not mean that the Left should consider them a lesser evil. Treating them as such risks sowing illusions that they are potential allies in changing the political system towards more democratic and social rights. They are not. And thinking they are weakens the Left’s ability to break fundamentalism’s links with popular classes.

What does this analysis mean for strategy and tactics in the struggle? It does not mean that socialists should refuse united action in a particular context for precise demands with the gradualist sections of Islamic fundamentalism. If these actions can advance the cause of the exploited and oppressed, then such tactical unity in action is right and just. The way to deal with organizations with which progressives don’t share much in common beyond a common enemy was summarized by the Bolsheviks over a century ago. Gilbert Achcar summarizes the approach:

Do not merge organizations. March separately but strike together. 2) Do not abandon our own political demands. 3) Do not conceal divergences of interest. 4) Pay attention to our ally as we would pay attention to an enemy. 5) Concern

ourselves more with using the situation created by the struggle than with keeping an ally. [52]

Achcar adds to this,

If these rules are observed, then what remains is for the progressives to prove to the masses that they are as much dedicated to the struggle against the common enemy than the fundamentalists, while resolutely defending the interests of workers, women and all exploited and oppressed categories in direct contrast with the fundamentalists and, often, in opposition to them.[Ibid.]

Tactical short-term alliances can be made with the devil, but that devil should never be confused with an angel. But there should be no longterm orientation on strategic unity with the gradualist fundamentalists. Thus this recommendation of an approach of occasional tactical unity in certain situations is different from a united front strategy, which seeks to unite with reformist and democratic forces who are willing to organize to try to win immediate demands that benefit workers and oppressed groups and increase their consciousness, confidence, and fighting capacity.

Islamic fundamentalists, just as populist and extreme right-wing movements throughout the world, should not be included in this united front strategy for all the reasons laid out in this article. To speak of a united front strategy with these forces is to create illusions in them. Instead the Left must build its own political organization and participate in the struggle for liberation and democracy, sometimes in tactical unity with the gradualists, but always with the eye of winning the exploited and oppressed away from this second force of counterrevolution.

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Fascism and the far right; twenty years on

10 December 2017, by Dave Renton

When I wrote the book, I had gone straight from undergraduate work to a PhD and the book originated as a literature review to accompany a project of mapping out the relationship between fascism and anti-fascism in Britain in the three key periods of 1936-9, 1941-1951 and 1972-1979.

My PhD looked, in a very British History purely empirical fashion, at the second of these periods. I later published a further monograph looking at the 1970s. Whatever the merits or otherwise of my two books on the 1940s and 1970s, they were animated by a key insight, namely that the right has always had to deal with the problem of hostility from the left and that its strategies for dealing with opposition have at certain key moments been central to what the right has been.

Whether that's Mosley's turn to National Socialism in 1934, or his Hegelianism in the 1940s and 1950s or the BNP's electoral strategy in the 1990s – every one of these moves, it can sensibly be argued, did not rise "from within" but principally to address the problems caused by determined opposition.

Similar thinking, of course, informs my book on fascism. Although the focus there is not on British but on generic (Italian, German and post-war) fascism.

A further idea in the book was that if war or genocide were ever to return to the most wealthiest countries of the world this could come about only through fascism. Here, I want to explore today some of the unspoken assumptions that underpinned this belief. One was an unspoken idea that countries such as the United States or Britain had made a long-term shift towards both political and social democracy. For someone who grew up, as I did, in the 1970s it was easy to tell yourself that a society which prioritised health care, pensions, etc, would never except in the very most extreme circumstances adopt a policy of inter-power war or domestic genocide. Of course, even I was a younger I was well aware that there were still wars, but these were exported to what we used to call the Third World.

That could change, I assumed, but only as a result of the emergence of political forces which called publicly for return to genocide and war. And the only political movement which had advocated these as options at any time since 1914 were fascists.

Another idea which lay behind the book was that there were structural limits to the number of political forms which were capable of becoming majority movements. In other words, capitalism gave rise to conservatism, socialism, liberalism, communism and fascism. And there the list ended.

Fascism was a recurring presence in the 1970s, in memory of the 1920s and 1930s when it had taken the feelings of bewilderment and alienation that arose in an epoch of reformist modernisation, and the perceived threat of the far-left, and sought to build against them both a counter-revolutionary alternative. But because the post-war period was an epoch of polarised near-majorities, there was a limited space for ideological diversity.

In the 1970s and 1980s, it was common for commentators to use the term "far right" as a short-hand for mimetic fascist parties formed in conscious emulation of the 1930s. In my book, I am very critical of that language.

One possibility I excluded, however, was a genuine "far right" – i.e. a series of parties, in several countries, working in more or less alliance, who were permanently at ease in a political space which was different both from traditional conservatism and fascism. A party like UKIP, in Britain. Or the victory of Donald Trump.

When I wrote Fascism: Theory and Practice I was interested in how fascist parties had been radicalised to the right. This was a phenomenon which had no other sustained counterpart at any time since the adoption of democracy. We are more than familiar with the process by which legality had tamed outsider movements of the left. IE presented with a dominant politics which was close enough to their own, the socialists had reached a rapprochement existing capitalist elites. And in the 1960s and 1970s something similar happened to the European Communist Parties, most coherently in Italy. And of course there have been several outsider movements of the right which crashed and burned and left no legacy.

Through the early post-war years fascism, irrespective of its different goals and origins, maintained a fascination partly because it had not gone through a similar process of self-domestication but had in fact radicalised in office.

The reasons for fascism's radicalisation were in part internal, there was a tension between fascism's popular base and its reactionary politics and in order to resolve this tension fascism had to promise ever more things to its supporters, i.e. because it couldn't offer them social utopia it had to give them genocide and war. This was the core argument of Fascism: Theory and Practice, that a contradictory political formation might in fact draw energy precisely from its unsustainable, broken nature.

This dynamic was also in part external (and in my book I underestimate the way in which fascism was the product of relationships between rival international parties), i.e. that there was an epoch of emulation and competition in which Hitler copied Mussolini's march on Rome, his influence over other right-wing states in Austria and Spain, etc. He took Mussolini's victories, drew on, and overreached them.

Fascism's energy is why its definition of fascism mattered – because if fascism could be identified, the threat of war and genocide would be averted.

Where I think the anti-fascism I argued in the 1990s was principally wrong is that I failed to see that the historical context had changed. While I borrowed from the left of which I was part the phrase that the 1990s was like the 1930s in a slow motion, there was no analysis behind that phrase, no real sense that for twenty years we had been living in a world characterised not by reforms but by their opposite.

If I was going to begin defining fascism today my starting point would be this: that the age of social reform is over. Whether it ended in 1973 (Chile) or 1979 or 1980, it has been over for an entire historical epoch.

In addition, outside an epoch of social reform, there is no structural limit to the forms of politics which are capable of winning majorities

In an age of social reform, it was possible for reformist parties to bind workers to them by passing laws to increase trade union rights or build social housing, these benefitted specific voters, who would in turn vote for that party. There was a consensus that reforms were desirable and politics was in many countries a contest between two managerial parties who converged on the aim of politics and challenged each other in the realism of competence. This meant that many political systems were in essence two-party competitions between one main social democratic and a conservative party. These was a limited space at each fringe for fascists and Communists, and no-one else.

In an epoch where reforms are being destroyed, the dominant form of voting is negative, people vote against neo-liberal parties which destroy industry, against social democracy which no longer delivers, against incumbent parties. We are no longer in a moment where the forms of politics are limited to a few main options which are reproduced internationally. Instead political forms are splintering. Indeed new forms emerge, of course, on the left as well as on the right.

In addition, the stigma against war and genocide has been radically diminished. We have had wars, Vietnam, Iraq, the constant ongoing war since 9/11. Meanwhile, although no developed country is formally at war some live under emergency regimes in response to the threat of terrorism and in others the threat of Islamism is used to justify the extension of the authoritarian state e.g. deportation regimes that would normally be sustainable only in wartime.

The monopoly of military technology by 5-6 of the richest states means that their inhabitants are never casualties of war, never saw death, and become glib about the consequence of war returning even between major states.

For all these reasons, we are seeing increasing numbers of states – not just in the periphery but also in the global core – whose political instincts are military and authoritarian. Attacks on migrants, refugees, travel bans are the new normal.

The utility of the equation "fascism = war and genocide" was that it was reversible (i.e. only fascism could returns us to an age of horrors). Outside an epoch of social reform, the equation has less use. War may come from other sources.

Fascism was only ever one form of mass, reactionary politics. And there is no particular reason why the reactionary mass movements of the future might not share some but not all of fascism's external forms.

Moreover, because fascism's name still has an overwhelming stigma, a future "fascism" would be far more effective if it emerged on a seemingly brand new basis, with the minimum copying in relation to the past. In consequence, the post-war history of the far right is of a series of attempts to reproduce the dynamic of fascism without needing fascism's surface

forms.

Yet, precisely because the right feels that it has escaped the past and is not vulnerable to the criticism "but you are just fascists", you are starting to see a re-convergence between various aspects of interwar fascism and today's non-fascist right.

Unlike the short twentieth century when the structure of the political system itself put real limits on what forms of politics were achievable, the structural limits of the present against authoritarianism are much less than they were.

The leading figures of the far right are well aware that fascism retains a considerable historical stigma and the further they distance themselves from fascism the more successful they are likely to be. Yet at the same time, they are aware that fascism was a complex and sophisticated reaction to historical opportunities. And that in so far as they want to emulate the rapid, dramatic changes that fascism once enacted, they have a motive for reassembling parts of fascist organisation and ideology.

So we see a return to executive rather than parliamentary rule, to anti-semitism, not from mere nostalgia or mimicry but because these behaviours help the non-fascist right achieve goals which are harder to win if the entire past has to be rejected.

The relationship of the non-fascist authoritarian right to inter-war fascism is therefore always of a dual character, with elements of both disavowal and re-adoption and indeed a constant shuffling between rejection and return.

The theory I am aiming towards is an "anti-fascist" theory of the far-right but I mean by that something very specific.

In the 1970s it was possible to shame a member of the National Front by calling them a fascist, by saying that they were the slaves of a leadership which was both indebted to its past and embarrassed by it. The same approach still worked, to some extent, as recently as the early 2000s. The extent of the contemporary far-right's distancing from fascism means that this approach has lost its edge.

What is needed is a theoretical counterpart to the activist realisation that the crimes of Steve Bannon or Marine Le Pen are not the things that a different generation did before them, but what they will do in future, if only we let them.

Lives running

Is Donald Trump a Fascist?

10 December 2017

Last week, Donald Trump ratcheted up his nativist rhetoric by proposing a ban on Muslims entering the United States. Trump was widely condemned, but despite Ted Cruz's new lead in Iowa, the candidate has only reached new heights in national polls. 41 percent of Republicans now support him, with Cruz a distant second at 14 percent.

Many on the Left have looked worryingly at Trump's rise and have been speculating that he might represent something even more dangerous than the usual varieties of right-wing populism. Could Trump be a fascist? And does the answer to that question even matter from a strategic perspective?

We asked *Jacobin* contributors for their thoughts.

â€¢ Jennifer Roesch is an activist with the International Socialist Organization in New York City.

â€¢ Richard Steigmann-Gall is an associate professor of history at Kent State University and the author of *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity*.

â€¢ Daniel Lazare is the author of *The Velvet Coup: The Constitution, the Supreme Court, and the Decline of American Democracy*, among other titles.

â€¢ Dylan Riley is an associate professor of sociology at UC Berkeley and a member of the *New Left Review* editorial committee.

Jennifer Roesch

Since Trump came out last week and openly called for Muslims to be banned from the United States, the ruling class clearly decided it has had enough and got serious about repudiating him. The New York Times published an editorial denouncing the "Trump Effect," while Jeb Bush's campaign called it a fascist proposal. Hillary Clinton quickly rolled out a campaign appeal thinly disguised as a petition to "stop Trump" and Thomas Friedman lamented that Trump was destroying the United States's ability to build a strong coalition against ISIS.

Unlike in Italy or Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, the US ruling class doesn't face the kind of political crisis that would lead a section of it to abandon its "democratic" forms and resort to fascism. In fact, the bulk of the ruling class sees Trump as a threat to its ability to carry out its political agenda. A poll of millionaires was revealing: Clinton leads the pack with 31 percent of millionaires supporting her.

For these establishment figures, charges of fascism are a cynical ploy to distance their own rhetoric and policies from Trump's open displays of racism and bigotry. But for millions of

people horrified by his hate-mongering, there is a genuine fear about what Trump represents. I am in full solidarity with that sentiment. Trump has given confidence to some of the most right-wing elements in society.

While these elements are not organized into anything like a disciplined fighting force that could serve as the basis for a fascist movement, they do pose a real threat. Witness the recent wave of vicious attacks on Arabs and Muslims. We need to confront this bigotry and build solidarity with those under attack.

But if our side succumbs to panic about Trump, we miss the greater dangers we face. It is the "war on terror" carried out by a Democratic president for the last eight years that has created the breeding ground for racism and terrorism. It is the devastating social and economic crisis wrought by austerity that creates the conditions in which right-wing scapegoating can seem to provide answers. And as long as we remain trapped in the logic of lesser-evilism, trailing the Democratic Party further to the right, we are weakened in our efforts to build the kind of strong, independent left and social movements that could pose a real alternative to Trump.

Richard Steigmann-Gall

I believe fascism can be heard in Trump's ominous declaration: "We're going to have to do things that we never did before … And certain things will be done that we never thought would happen in this country." Even more importantly, the rapturous response of Trump's followers represents a wider fascist "mood" among the American electorate.

When fascism departs from normal political methods, it does so to restore the prerogatives of the beleaguered, once-dominant majority â€" defined ethnically or racially â€" who believes that the nation is "slipping away" from them. Does this come at the expense of parliamentary democracy? Neither Trump nor his supporters call for dictatorship. But it's important to keep in mind that never did historical fascists abolish parliaments outright. They undermine parliaments from within to make them incapable of working effectively, thereby paving the way for a strong man. Trump doesn't require uniformed followers in Congress when ideological allies in the Tea Party are doing all they can to render the legislative branch inoperable.

Fascism insists that the existing political authority is "illegitimate" and offers itself as a parallel authority, complete with paramilitary violence, which will restore the "true" nation against impostors. By articulating the Birtherism [53] found in the Tea Party and Oath Keeper movements, Trump exploits and expands distrust of legitimate electoral politics among disaffected, downwardly-mobile white Americans.

If Trump lacks his own militia, there is nonetheless a violent ethos at his rallies. But also relevant here are the Oath Keepers. A nationwide militia movement, like Mussolini's squadristi, they are composed of veterans who promise to fight an "illegitimate" state and create a parallel authority that "protects" the nation from its own elected authorities. They are not (yet) tied to Trump organizationally, but they represent a similar current of militant â€" indeed militarist â€" radicalism.

When we apply "fascism" as a descriptive category, as most commentators are doing, we risk using external criteria like matching shirts or armbands to form a sterile check-list. But when we apply "fascism" as an analytical category, we understand its past social messages and following, and recognize the danger is poses today.

Daniel Lazare

Trump is not a fascist in the classic sense. There are no brownshirts in the streets, no talk of a revolution of the Right, no attacks on democracy or parliamentarism. Whereas Marine Le Pen heads up a powerful and efficient political apparatus in France, any such party organization is all but impossible in America's eighteenth-century constitutional system. Instead of a movement, he presents himself as an individual â€" Donald Trump, Inc. â€" who will single-handedly knock heads and make the system work.

The more appropriate term, therefore, is Bonapartist â€" a tough leader who positions himself above the fray and simultaneously attacks enemies from the Left and the Right. This is how Trump was able to make mincemeat out of Jeb Bush â€" by savaging him from the left on 9/11 and tearing apart his idiotic comment that his brother "kept us safe."

For that reason, he could do better against Clinton than most people assume by attacking her for backing the invasion of Iraq and for now calling for a Syrian no-fly zone. If he's smart, he'll assail the idea as nuts and will thus succeed in neutralizing liberals who will be unable to disagree. I can see him following Le Pen's lead by promising to speak frankly with Putin, which will also go down well with much of the liberal-left. After all, he and Putin are pretty much cut from the same cloth.

But the important point is that he intends to operate within the constitutional order rather than outside it. Plainly, Trump is more than a flash in the pan like Newt Gingrich or Michele Bachmann. He has moved American politics several leagues to the right and will undoubtedly be even more successful in the event of another ISIS atrocity. If in the White House, he'll function as a classic authoritarian, blustering and bullying and maybe imposing a state of emergency if conditions get hairy enough. But all this would establish him as a precursor to fascism rather than the genuine article.

Dylan Riley

No, Donald Trump is not a fascist, and yes it matters very much that he is not one.

Fascism arose in countries that had mass militant left parties aiming at the transcendence of capitalism, were excluded from the spoils of imperialism, had very large backward agrarian sectors, and possessed very weakly developed capitalist states. Out of this context arose mass party formations of the far right that displayed some organizational and

tactical similarities to the parties of the far left. None of these features obtain in the US today.

The Left, far from being well-organized and militant, is electorally irrelevant. The United States is the only great power left in the world. The agrarian question is non existent, and the American capitalist class enjoys the strongest capitalist state in history. The rise of Trump can be explained by the combined unravelling of the Republican Party, and the utter failure of the Democrats to offer anything to the white working class.

One of the most important class struggles today is unfolding within the Republican Party between the East Coast establishment and the party's petty-bourgeois and partly working-class base. George W. Bush, because of his peculiar biography, was the last figure able really to hold these wings together. Trump's rise is possible only because of the shift in the balance of class forces toward the enragé base.

In historical terms this process of disintegration opens up opportunities for the Left. The collapse of a major US political party, if it were to happen, can only be welcomed. In this context we should reject absolutely the hysterical lesser-evilism implicit in calling him a "fascist"; it is both historically inaccurate and politically disastrous because it plays into the logic of supporting whomever emerges from the Democratic Party primary.

Jacobin

Mutations of Fascism: an interview with Enzo Traverso

10 December 2017, by Enzo Traverso

You use the term "post-fascism" to characterise today's far Right movements. What does this term mean?

Enzo Traverso: The idea of post-fascism firstly serves to characterise a political movement that is shot through with contradictions, and which has an evident fascist matrix â€" for that is its history, where it comes from â€" and in the Front National's case a dynastic line of descent. There is an undeniable fascist hard core in the FN apparatus, its activist base, composed of neo-fascist militants of all generations. They are very active in the FN and hold onto a good part of the organisation. So there is a rift between the organisational reality of this party â€" or even its anthropological fabric â€" and Marine Le Pen's discourse in the media or the public sphere, which is of a xenophobic, nationalist, anti-neoliberal tenor but also comes out of a social Right. Yet if the FN were a neofascist sect, or even a neofascist party, I do not think that it would be considered likely to appear in the second round of the presidential election, or even capable of being France's biggest party. This party is thus clearly transforming, and it is trying to operate a process by which it dialectically transcends its fascist character â€" but without entirely rejecting it. So in order to fight this party, we have to understand what it has become.

But you also talk â€" as the title of your book indicates â€" of the "new faces of fascism"...

Post-fascism is a transitory phenomenon still in mutation, and this term clearly indicates what its matrix is. There is a big debate on "Trump and fascism" in the United States. But we cannot say that fascism is really the main force driving Trump. For her part, Marine Le Pen knows that that is where her party comes from! And that is why she is trying to adapt her nationalist and xenophobic discourse to the present context, including that of the European Union. Today, post-fascist movements advance a nationalism whose targets are no longer â€" as in the 1930s â€" other nations, and in particular European ones, but postcolonial immigration and Islam. This change of targets has a lot of implications because it allows the FN to present itself with a democratic and republican rhetoric. Taking Islam as its target, it characterises itself as the defender of Western values.

Indeed, you explain that while the FN tries to present itself as "just as republican as the others," this is not the case, including in the eyes of the traditional right...

There is a difference of nature, on account of the simple fact that the traditional Right has far more organic links with the ruling élites than the FN has. Today, this party is not the choice of the globalised ruling classes. Yet it today presents itself as the defender of democracies against the threats supposedly bearing down on it, particularly Islam, fundamentalism and Islamic terrorism. And even as the defender of equality between men and women, or of homosexuals! In my view, the fact that it can appropriate republican rhetoric can only stir up questions on the notions of republic and republicanism. There are a certain number of elements in the republican tradition that allowed for this transplant operation. We cannot defend the Republic as if it were a sacred, immaculate entity; for its history is contradictory and includes nationalism, colonialism, xenophobia

and what may be a rather questionable conception of secularism [laÃ¯cité]. This should push us to cast a critical look at the history of the Republic, rather than adopt this history wholesale, in an uncritical fashion.

You speak of a "constellation" of post-fascist movements or formations. What holds it together, and what characterises its component parts?

I speak of a constellation because all these movements present a series of common characteristics, beyond the sometimes considerable differences between them. These characteristics first of all include xenophobia and Islamophobia, and then a rejection of globalisation in favour of a socially regressive and nationalist protectionism. But I speak of a post-fascist constellation also in the sense that these movements have sometimes very different ideological matrices and origins. Certain formations have an explicitly neo-fascist profile, such as Greece's Golden Dawn, or the movements appearing in Eastern Europe these last two decades who seek to revive the nationalist tradition of the 1930s. Some movements in Western Europe like the FN have neo-fascist origins but are trying to evolve by changing their discourse; others have different roots but are converging with this same orientation. Such is the case of the Lega Nord in Italy, UKIP in Britain and Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)… While Trump is also a comparable case, unlike the FN, Lega Nord or AfD he has links with part of the world of finance.

However, you say that if this "post-fascism" in mutation were to take power, it would certainly result in power being practiced in an authoritarian way…

Let's hypothesise that Marine Le Pen does win the presidential election. It is rather unlikely, but given the state of the Right with the Fillon affair we cannot rule it out a priori. The first consequence would be that the European Union would explode. We would doubtless witness a continental political but also economic crisis, with the Euro unable to resist and the EU's social models splintering. But with this disintegration, everything becomes possible! The FN's goal is to take power, and not to try to conquer an institutional legitimacy like that of the classical Right. That is where the danger lies. But the notion of post-fascism implies a mutation that has not yet been complete: it makes it possible that things will evolve in different directions. However, there is no doubt that the FN's project is an authoritarian one: the Republic for which it stands is not the one we have today, for it questions jus soli and a whole series of civil liberties, and it would transform the institutional system into an authoritarian presidentialism, certainly meaning a limitation of counter-powers. Even if all that is still something different from the fascism of the 1930s.

Verso

The Far Right's Leftist Mask

10 December 2017, by Alexandre Afonso, Line Rennwald

In the early 1980s, Jean-Marie Le Pen took pride in being called the "French Ronald Reagan." Likening fiscal authorities to the Spanish Inquisition, the then-leader of the far-right National Front called for a radical scaling back of the French state to its "nightwatchman" functions (army, police, justice, diplomacy). Tax and expenditure was to be cut. Government, he said, should be "taken off our backs and out of our pockets."

Thirty years later, his daughter Marine, who succeeded him as leader in 2011, is calling for the rich to be taxed, criticizing the impacts of global "ultra-liberalism," and arguing that a strong "strategist state" is the only way to fight the increase of inequality.

Across Europe, anti-immigration parties such as the National Front in France, Geert Wilders's Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands, and UKIP in the UK present themselves as the only real defenders of the working class. Much like Donald Trump, they have made significant gains in working-class areas suffering economic decline, and have even overtaken social-democratic parties in working class votes.

To achieve this, many of them have donned left-wing clothing: opposing privatizations, defending welfare entitlements, and advocating for the reigning in of finance. For most of these parties, this is a radical shift from the libertarian agenda they pursued in the past. However, their apparent turn to the left on the economy is largely window-dressing: when voters aren't watching they are often found lining up with business interests and attacking workers' rights.

From the Nightwatchman to the Strong State

The free-market orientation of the European radical right in its early days can be traced back to its leaders' origins. Its politicians tended to rise to prominence within conservative or liberal parties defending the interests

of business and the petty bourgeoisie. Jean-Marie Le Pen was first elected to parliament in 1956 for the party of Pierre Poujade, who championed a tax insurgency on behalf of small shopkeepers against the so-called "fiscal Gestapo."

Wilders, for his part, was a protégé of liberal politician Frits Bolkestein, a proponent of Reaganomics who went on to push for a radical deregulation of the European labor market as European Union commissioner. He is widely remembered for a directive proposing to allow companies to employ workers in one country (say Luxembourg) and pay them the salaries of their home country (say Poland).

UKIP in the United Kingdom is another example that emerged out of Liberal movements. Its founder, Alan Sked, was a Liberal Party member, and stood for Parliament for the party in 1970. He was also an early member of Margaret Thatcher's Bruges Group, founded on the basis of a speech she gave in 1988 arguing that the Tories "had not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level." Befitting its roots, UKIP was initially libertarian, opposing the European Union's development into what it saw as a "super-state."

For anti-establishment parties, particularly in social-democratic Europe, free-market economics once offered an insurgent quality. Lowering taxes, shrinking government, and privatizing public services were advanced as a way to remove power from those controlling the state. In the 1980s, Le Pen saw Reaganomics as an opportunity to challenge the French political elite, which oversaw a large welfare state and government-owned industries.

Geert Wilders, founder of the Dutch Party for Freedom, saw a similar appeal in US-style fiscal conservatism. In 2005, after he defected from the VVD, he went on a study trip to the United States where he met with Grover Norquist, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Libertarian Party.

He recognized limits to how far this agenda could be imported to Europe, but made a connection between his anti-immigrant agenda and tax cuts: since immigration increases demands for social security, he reasoned, cutting it can lower taxes. Because there was no Dutch party advocating radical tax cuts, there was an opportunity for him to combine an anti-immigration and anti-tax agenda, and for his party to appear as more than an anti-Islam fringe group.

But by the time 2011 came around, with the economic crisis in full swing, a similar fact-finding mission for Marine Le Pen had a more limited impact. While she found common ground with libertarian congressman Ron Paul on foreign policy isolationism, she was far less taken by his economic ideas. The National Front's economic program was, by this time, widely divergent from libertarian positions.

Today, it features measures to increase pension benefits for the elderly, cut taxes for the three poorest deciles, increase credits for those on low incomes, introduce price controls on gas and electricity, maintain the maximum working week to thirty-five hours â€" a measure established by the Socialist Party in the 1990s â€" and sanctions for CEOs of large companies who engage in cartel-like practices.

Statements in party manifestos on welfare

The National Front has made the most conspicuous moves to the left of all the radical right parties, but others have also diverged from their free-market roots. UKIP is a striking recent example. Its new leader Paul Nuttall once advocated the privatization of the public National Health Service, writing that "like all state monopolies, it is costly, inefficient, and stuffed with bureaucrats," and that its existence stifled competition. After he succeeded Nigel Farage as leader he reversed his earlier position, committing to keep the NHS public and even making it one of his central issues in the Stoke by-election.

Where once UKIP championed a (regressive) flat tax, and proposed scrapping the state pension system, today it supports progressive taxation, and campaigns to "protect benefits." This reversal fits well with its new electorate. Polling shows that 79 percent of its voters support the nationalization of energy companies, and 73 percent back the nationalization of railways.

How Workers Came to Choose the Far Right

This rebranding of the radical right has occurred at a moment when it is increasingly attracting working-class votes. Blue-collar workers are the social group where Marine Le Pen enjoys the highest level of support (at 44 percent) for the upcoming French presidential election. They constitute the single most important group in the National Front's electorate. This is tied to fundamental changes in patterns of class voting in Europe. For much of the twentieth century, a clear political divide existed between the bottom and the top of the social hierarchy. By and large, the working class voted for social-democratic and communist parties, and the managerial class and petty bourgeoisie supported liberal and conservative parties.

Since the end of the 1980s, however, these class-party alignments have considerably changed. The blue-collar working class has massively deserted the social-democratic parties and opted either for abstention or the radical right on the basis of concerns about immigration and globalization. Throughout the industrialized world, differences in turnout between rich and poor have increased, making low-income groups less attractive for party strategists and, in turn, more difficult to mobilize.

Social-democratic parties in Europe have drawn less and less on the manual working class. In their most successful incarnations they have been able to rely on the votes of the growing base of middle classes employed in the public sector and in

creative industries. More commonly they have become *unsuccessful* "catch-all parties" attracting middling level of support among various classes but without the capacity to mobilize any of them effectively. In the meantime, with center-left parties moving away from them, many working-class voters have turned to parties proposing economic and cultural security through nationalism rather than social democracy.

There are many examples of this change in the link between class and party. Henin-Beaumont, a former mining town in the north of France, had been controlled by the Socialist Party for seventy years. It became the flagship municipality of the National Front when it elected a far-right mayor in 2014. In the former "red banlieues" of Paris, historically controlled by the Communist Party, the FN has made significant advances, even if it is still far from matching the levels of its historical stronghold of the Cote d'Azur and de-industrialized north.

In our research, we analyzed the share of working-class voters in the electorate of radical right parties in seven countries, looking not only at workers in manufacturing and trades, but also at service workers. Lower-skilled jobs in services, often occupied by women, constitute now an even greater share of employment than manufacturing in most countries. Employment conditions in these sectors are usually worse than in manufacturing, where workers can rely on a longer tradition of union mobilization.

In nearly all the countries we looked at, the proportion of working-class voters within the electorate of radical right parties increased over time. Working-class voters now represent between 60 and 75 percent of the radical right's electorate in Austria, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, while they represent only between 44 percent and 54 percent of all voters in these countries. We also found a clear overrepresentation of workers among the electorate of radical right parties in Denmark and Switzerland. The Lega Nord in Italy is an exception, as it is the only party where workers are not overrepresented.

On the other hand, the proportion of working-class voters voting for left-wing parties has declined. In several countries workers continue to be overrepresented among the electorate of the left but today there are often more working-class voters within the electorate of the radical right than among the left.

Share of working-class votes

If one considers in a different but complementary perspective the voting behavior of the working class (and not only the parties' class composition), new patterns of class voting also emerge. Production and service workers give a clear above-average support for the radical right, while this is not the case for the Left. In a [sample>cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/45528/mwp_2017_02.pdf?sequence=1&isallowed=y] of nine European countries, 31 percent of production workers and 25 percent of service workers voted for the radical right on average in the period 2002–2014, while it gathered only 18.8 percent of votes within the population as a whole.

The difficulty of the center-left to mobilize its core electorate is not surprising. The turn of social-democratic parties towards the Third Way policies championed by Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder in the 1990s has left widespread disillusionment in its wake. But the increasing focus on issues of identity has also been a factor, and all the more striking when compared with the recent turn of the radical right to issues of economic security, a reorientation that coincided with their recent success.

Fake Socialism

This leftist rebranding of far-right parties should not be taken at face value, however. There is a gulf between what they *say* and what they vote for. Even when their program and rhetoric claim to defend working people, the radical right often sides with capital when it comes to legislation.

The latest labor reform passed by the French government in 2015 is a good example. It aimed to further facilitate dismissals for business reasons and give more flexibility to companies for wage-setting. Officially, the National Front called for its withdrawal, denouncing it as an attack on the job security of French workers. Le Pen called it another ultra-liberal "diktat of Brussels."

At the same time, its senators fielded amendments to remove representation rights for workers in small firms, remove the obligation to provide training, cut the ability of workers in strenuous jobs to claim early retirement, and cut taxes on extra hours. They then attacked union rights: asking to remove the monopoly of unions in wage negotiations, which would make it possible for firms to negotiate wages with nonunion groups.

In the end, the amendments were withdrawn and parliamentary assistants blamed for them. When unions organized mass demonstrations against the law, Marine Le Pen first called for them to be banned (France was officially in a state of emergency after the Bataclan attack), only later recognizing their "legitimate right to protest." By then, she knew that the majority of her own voters supported the protests.

This double discourse is widespread within the radical right, which claims to represent both workers and the petty bourgeoisie â€” constituencies with opposing interests. In the run-up to the 2010 elections, Geert Wilders claimed that increasing the mandatory retirement age was an issue he would never compromise on. The day after the election, he said that this was no longer a stumbling block to coalition negotiations. Later on, he was reported to have said in private that this gambit was only aimed at pulling support from the Socialist Party among working-class voters.

Even when Wilders claims to represent ordinary people, his party often votes for policies that benefit the rich. For instance, the PVV has been a

strong defender of tax rebates for homeowners. As well as contributing to making Dutch households the most indebted in the industrialized world, this rebate has been shown to benefit the richest 20 percent of households, which benefit to the tune of half of the total tax cut. His party also opposes collective bargaining and union rights. Most Dutch workers are covered by sectoral collective bargaining where the government extends the terms of negotiations between employers and trade unions to be compulsory for all workers in an economic sector. The PVV has proposed to dismantle this system, leaving individuals to negotiate with their employer alone.

This trend is repeated across Europe: in Switzerland, the Swiss People's Party claims to protect Swiss workers from immigration, but strongly opposes sanctions for employers exploiting immigrants. Its MPs have illegally employed asylum seekers without paying taxes. In Austria, the Freedom Party (FPÃ–) supported a raft of laws to weaken the unions and deregulate the labor market while in government between 2000 and 2007.

This should not be surprising for a political tradition which defends an agenda that is hostile to the collective solidarity embodied by union rights and collective bargaining. The type of solidarity that radical right parties advocate is subordinate to nationalist and conservative values. Whereas the Left campaigns for expanding the welfare state, the radical right most often talks about cutting it: limiting social benefits to nationals, or as Wilders's PVV proposed, opposing child benefits for families of more than two children because Muslim families are believed to have more children. When it comes to social entitlements, they have been longstanding supporters of a punitive approach to welfare. The local chapters of the PVV in Rotterdam and the Hague want to force unemployed people to work in greenhouses to replace immigrant workers.

The division between "us" and "them" that the radical right uses when it talks about immigration is transposed in its welfare policies: "us" being hardworking taxpayers, and "them" being immigrants, but also the unemployed and welfare "cheats."

The Limits of Deception

It is clear that the working-class vote for the radical right has increased alongside a shift from free-market to leftish economic platforms. But much of this shift has been rhetorical. In practice, radical right parties in Europe mostly function to convert working-class votes into right-wing policies. Their true pro-capitalist nature only comes to light in cabinet meetings or in legislative committees, when voters aren't paying the same attention.

This game has limits, however. Voters cannot be tricked indefinitely. After its first period in government the Austrian FPÃ– lost two-thirds of its seats. The PVV lost a third after it supported a conservative cabinet committed to implementing wide-ranging austerity. Their electoral support is volatile, and this goes some way to explaining their shift to the left on the economy. Most radical right voters are primarily concerned with immigration â€" and many do not even know their parties' positions on the economy. But if they are ever to move beyond a single-issue demographic, they will need a broader social message.

This rebranding exercise can and must be prevented. The migration of working-class voters to the radical right is an immediate concern for the Left, which must be countered by re-engaging with workers, the historic base of progressive politics. In this sense we should look to examples in Spain and Portugal, where the far right remains marginal, and where left parties have been able to mobilize a strong anti-establishment vote.

Jacobin

The Dangers of Detoxification

10 December 2017, by Jim Wolfreys

Almost every article about Marine Le Pen's National Front (FN) makes some reference to her party's supposed dédiabolisation. Generally translated as "detoxification," this "de-demonization" strategy has more to do with neutralizing attacks on the party than with purifying the organization.

We've heard the media's detoxification narrative over and over: a fringe group has cleaned up its act and joined the political mainstream, becoming a party like any other. The liberal press has been telling itself this story for years, uncritically relaying assertions that the FN has got rid of "the knee-jerk racists," offering up fawning profiles of party figureheads, and imagining that Marine Le Pen took a principled stand against her father Jean-Marie's antisemitism. A recent article described her niece, the profoundly homophobic and racist Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, as "a political star. Beautiful and fervently Catholic."

Countless reports describe the rift between Marine and her father, but very few mention the fact that a â,¬6 million loan from Jean-Marie bankrolled her presidential campaign.

Le Pen's recent claim that France bears no responsibility for the 1942 roundup of over thirteen thousand Jews at a Paris velodrome should

remind everyone taking these detoxification claims at face value that when it comes to the FN, all is not as it seems.

The men, women, and children held at the Vélodrome d'Hiver went to French internment camps and then Auschwitz. The roundup, or *rafle*, is just one example of the collaborationist Vichy regime's active engagement in the Holocaust, which built on a long tradition of organized far-right antisemitism in France. This led to the deportation of an estimated seventy-six thousand Jews. French police and officials conducted the *rafle*, aided by members of the fascist Parti Populaire Français (PPF). The state refused to recognize it as a French crime until more than fifty years later, when President Chirac admitted the nation's responsibility in 1995.

Le Pen defended her statement, saying that she was simply reiterating former president François Mitterrand's and other state representatives' positions. While this is partially correct, it doesn't tell the full story. Why would the leading candidate in the first-round polls, especially one apparently hellbent on cleaning up her party's image, even go there?

The controversy comes just as the mainstream right is trying to reframe the national narrative. Les Républicains candidate François Fillon famously claimed that France should not feel guilty about its former colonies: it did not invent slavery, and it was just trying to "share its culture" with the people of Africa, Asia, and North America. This is part of the Right's broader strategy of ridding itself of its "complexes" and acting "without inhibition," notably by rehabilitating France's imperial past.

The FN has been working on this same project for decades. Its concern, however, goes beyond acting without inhibition: the party also wants to provoke. Indeed, Jean-Marie Le Pen built his notoriety on this, describing the Holocaust as a "detail" of World War II, making "puns" about gas ovens, and asserting that the Nazi occupation of France was "not inhumane." In 1989, when he debated the Jewish minister of immigration, Lionel Stoléru, he responded to the minister's description of police raids to combat illegal immigration with "You could organize a *rafle*"

When Marine Le Pen defended the Vichy regime, she was reacting to today's political context, in which the FN must position itself in relation to an increasingly radical mainstream right. But whenever the Front addresses this period in French history, it evokes its own traditions and origins, embedded in antisemitism and negationism, collaboration, racism, colonialism, and fascism.

The National Front's Fascist Roots

The vast majority of academics and journalists writing on the National Front have avoided giving an explicit answer to one question: how and when did the FN stop being fascist? They implicitly answer it in one of two ways. Some categorize fascism as a uniquely interwar phenomenon, ruling out the possibility of a contemporary fascist formation.

Others point to the organization's new "respectable" image. Both explanations share a basic complacency about liberal democracy: having defeated fascism and eradicated the conditions for its resurgence, liberalism can now absorb and domesticate any "extremist" challenge. This helps explain the eagerness to accept the detoxification narrative.

When the FN formed in 1972, the party leadership consisted of ex-Vichy militiamen, former Waffen-SS officers, veterans of the fight against Algerian independence, and activists from organizations that span the history of French fascism, from the PPF to postwar revolutionary nationalist groups like Jeune Nation and Ordre Nouveau. Even setting aside those who actually fought for the Charlemagne division of the Waffen-SS â€" the last to defend Hitler's bunker â€" you would be hard pressed to find a group with more direct links to the fascist tradition.

The Ordre Nouveau leaders who founded the FN had a clear vision: they wanted to make fascism relevant again. We know this because, for over a decade, the protagonists went to great lengths, in various books and publications, to analyze how revolutionary nationalism might rebuild itself in the postwar period.One assessment summed up the consensus: circumstances had changed, and "[i]f the fascist flame is to burn again, it cannot do so in the same way."

Many of the FN's founders, like Jean-Marie Le Pen's former right-hand man François Duprat, had belonged to Jeune Nation. Dominique Venner, a former member of the paramilitary Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS), which waged a terrorist campaign against Algerian independence, was a leading member of the group. Followers compared Venner's analysis of revolutionary nationalism's prospects to Lenin's What Is to Be Done?.

In 1958, Jeune Nation warned its members not to frighten new or young recruits with subjects that might shock them. For example, they should never mention the *métèque* (foreigner or race) issue in connection with gas ovens, "whatever measures we will have to take once in power." They advised activists to explain that Jeune Nation's revolution would make the nation's enemies pay a heavy price, but there was no need to indicate that it would result in tens of thousands of deaths. The far right has been detoxifying for some time.

These postwar analyses laid the foundation for the National Front. Revolutionary nationalists would have to adapt to new circumstances. Their politics were defined by goals, not means. Identifying with Hitler's and Mussolini's regimes would get them nowhere. The Left represented less of a threat in the postwar period; the state had become stronger and the economy more stable. All this made society less polarized.

Armed mobilizations would no longer lead to power. Far-right activists had to prove that they could run â€" rather

than overthrow â€” the modern state. They needed to break out of their “ghetto” and recruit among broader layers of the population. An electoral front would allow them to reach peripheral supporters and “transform them in our image.”

Victor Barthelémy served as the party’s national secretary in the mid-1970s. A former communist, he had worked for the Comintern in the late 1920s before becoming a leading member of Jacques Doriot’s PPF. In fact, he was serving as the PPF’s general secretary when hundreds of its members took part in the Vel’ d’Hiver *rafle*. After the war he helped run the fascist review *Défense de l’Occident (Defense of the West*) with Duprat and Maurice Bardèche, working closely with Le Pen over Algeria and in the 1965 election campaign. Barthélemy worked with Duprat to establish the FN’s structure, basing it on the PPF model of a centralized party supplemented by satellite organizations.

At Duprat’s instigation, the Front’s platform focused on immigration, stressing economic and social questions rather than issues of racial purity. The organization presented itself as the social, popular, and national right. As Nicolas Lebourg and Joseph Beauregard have shown, Duprat came up with Le Pen’s slogans: “Voters will always prefer the original to the copy,” and the Nazi-inspired, “A million unemployed are a million immigrants too many.”

Jean-Marie Le Pen freely acknowledged that the party included currents that had historically constituted the French extreme right, from royalists to revolutionary nationalists.

Duprat himself did not believe that a nationalist revolution was on the immediate agenda, but he did believe that the Front represented the best way to get to one. Like Bardèche, he played a major role in promoting Holocaust denial, publishing a translation of British National Front member Richard Verrall’s *Did Six Million Really Die*?.

Detoxification

The 2002 election represented a significant turning point in the FN’s development. Jean-Marie Le Pen made it through to the second round, where Jacques Chirac roundly defeated him. Two separate but mutually reinforcing trajectories unfolded in the aftermath of this election: the mainstream right’s radicalization and the far right’s supposed detoxification.

Chirac’s inner circle saw his overwhelming victory as a “May ’68 for the Right” and were anxious to capitalize on it. They believed that they could make secularism, hitherto the Left’s terrain, their own. Chirac set up a commission whose deliberations lead to the 2004 law that banned the hijab in schools, institutionalizing an Islamophobic spiral that shows no sign of relenting, as last summer’s ludicrous burkini ban demonstrated.

Nicolas Sarkozy became the dominant political figure of the first decade of the new century. Some claimed that his 2007 presidential victory showed that he had neutralized the FN by occupying its terrain. Ultimately, however, his hyperactive, authoritarian racism merely legitimized the Front, paving the way for its resurgence in 2012, when Marine Le Pen won the FN’s highest vote to date.

The Front, meanwhile, took the 2002 defeat badly. The party failed to break through the 20 percent barrier in the second round and then performed poorly in the 2007 election. Some leading members saw Jean-Marie Le Pen’s image as a problem. When Marine Le Pen took over the party, she made detoxification a feature of her leadership, expelling some fascist elements and distancing herself from her father’s overt antisemitism. But this rhetorical shift needs to be seen in context. Since 2002, an intensification of three processes have changed the coordinates of French politics.

First, the Socialist Party (PS) has embraced an authoritarian security agenda. France has been under a permanent state of emergency since late 2015. When a Socialist government pushes to incorporate the state of emergency into the constitution and strip French nationality from those convicted of terrorism, the FN’s draconian authoritarianism â€” and the threat it poses to democracy â€” no longer appears so dangerous.

Second, the mainstream right has radicalized. Unable to secure enthusiastic consent for neoliberal economic policies, the Sarkozy agenda focused on issues that boosted the FN: national identity, law and order, immigration, and Islamophobia. The development of a radical social authoritarianism among mainstream right voters was expressed most dramatically in mobilizations against gay marriage in 2013 but also in rising racist attitudes among right-wing voters and an increasing readiness to back the FN in second-round electoral contests against the Socialists.

Finally, secularism has mutated into a tool of bigotry, making racism, particularly Islamophobia, respectable. This goes beyond hate speech and reinforces established tropes in FN propaganda: identifying an enemy within that needs to be isolated and repressed; stigmatizing immigrants and their descendants in cultural-religious rather than in racial terms; designating the *banlieues* as “lost territories” inhabited by unassimilable, lawless, antisemitic, and misogynist potential terrorists.

As Robert Paxton has underlined, themes are less important for fascist organizations than their function. The rightward shift in mainstream politics has validated longstanding features of the French far right’s ideology, but not necessarily in their original form. These include a sense of national decline that requires regeneration through strong leadership and suspicion of an “anti-France,” untrustworthy and unruly elements loyal to a foreign power that demand constant vigilance and policing. We should understand the public distance the FN has taken from antisemitism in this context: when part of the stigmatization and isolation of Muslims relies on labeling them antisemites, the FN simply has no need to detract from this.

In this radicalizing environment, the Front, aided by an indulgent media, has been able to create the illusion of moderation. As Nonna Mayer has shown, while racist attitudes among right-wing voters are on the rise, their radicalization is comfortably outstripped by FN sympathizers (people who vote for the party and identify with it but are not members). More than eight out of ten FN sympathizers describe themselves as racist, three-quarters have a negative view of Muslims, over half express "very strong" antisemitic views, and a third neither consider Jews to be fully French nor object to the phrase "dirty Jew." Indeed, antisemitism among this hard core of the FN electorate has increased under Marine Le Pen's leadership. With detoxification like this, who needs radicalization?

The FN has prospered from wider developments as well, including the return of Cold War myths targeting an "enemy within" and the revival of colonial tropes that depict an unassimilable "other," both of which breed an authoritarian security agenda. Of course, the nation-state has always defined itself by what it excludes, resorting to moral panics and the creation of internal enemies in order to assert its authority in times of crisis. What has changed in modern French politics is the consensus around security and secularism.

By championing a reactionary form of secularism that excludes Muslims, the mainstream right has paved the way for Marine Le Pen to credibly adopt a republican mantle, creating endless possibilities for her party to push for further discrimination against Muslims.

The first presidential debate between the five leading candidates underlined the trap that significant sections of the Left have fallen into by accommodating this drift. The radical left candidate â€" republican nationalist Jean-Luc Mélenchon â€" reminded everyone that he supported Chirac's 2004 ban on conspicuous religious symbols in schools. He then tried to take Le Pen to task for wanting to outlaw the hijab on the street. Did she want the police to scrutinize what everyone was wearing? Le Pen's reply highlighted the scope that republican accommodation has given to Islamophobic escalation: "We already do that in schools."

As far as the FN is concerned, if racism and authoritarian nationalism can be asserted in a respectable republican guise, why do it any other way?

The "catastrophe of the twentieth century," as Domenico Losurdo has argued, was not "a new barbarian invasion that unexpectedly attacked and overwhelmed a healthy, happy society." Fascism developed in an era of mass political confrontation, war, revolution, and colonial expansion. It adapted to fill available space. Its uniforms, elitism, anti-egalitarianism, notions of racial hierarchy, and, later, its concentration camps and mass exterminations, did not fall from the sky â€" they drew on the legacy of imperial and colonial rule that liberal democracy had already normalized.

Fascism did not appear with a fully formed essence or fixed ideology. Its politics were forged in relation to rivals and circumstances. As Michel Dobry has shown, fascism does not simply exist, it develops. Today, the FN is doing precisely what the postwar fascist milieu set out to do in the 1970s: adapt the fascist legacy to the space available to it, reach out to a broad spectrum of voters and then "transform them in our image."

The associative networks and social circles that shape the FN's internal culture, in which deputies and mayors mix with members of extreme-right groups like the Bloc Identitaire and the Groupe Union Défense (GUD), facilitate this process. The Rassemblement Bleu Marine (RBM), an FN satellite organization, allows the party to cultivate relationships not just with high-profile figures like Gilbert Collard and Robert Ménard, but also with the monarchists, revolutionary nationalists, and identitairesoperating in the party's orbit. RBM candidates have included members of the reactionary secular group, Riposte laÃ¯que, which proposes an "Islamectomie" to deal with France's Muslim population.

What Kind of Threat?

In 2013 former Jeune Nation leader Dominique Venner shot himself in the Notre Dame cathedral, evoking the threat to French civilization posed by gay marriage and the "great replacement," a theory popular on the extreme right whereby white European stock is being replaced by Muslim immigrants. Marine Le Pen responded to his death with a tweet: "All our respect to Dominique Venner, whose final, eminently political gesture is a wake-up call to the people of France."

The FN does not have an organized armed wing and cannot mobilize hundreds of thousands on the streets. Does this mean it poses no threat to democracy? Or simply that, like its founders, the party does not believe that the route to power requires an organizational form that can rival the state?

After the Front made its first electoral breakthrough in the 1980s, many expressed concerns about the danger of an FN president with access to the Fifth Republic's various authoritarian aspects. Most worrisome was Article 16, which grants the president the right to take "exceptional measures" when French institutions and territory are considered under threat.

These dangers are much greater today. The ongoing state of emergency gives police the right to conduct raids, seize data, and place individuals under house arrest without judicial authorization. Demonstrations can be banned, curfews imposed, institutions closed down, and the media censored. Human rights groups have warned that such excessive and disproportionate restrictions are leading to a "permanent state of securitization."

The detoxification narrative has obscured the threat posed by the FN in a climate where those implementing the state of emergency are themselves radicalizing. Last year, police officers took to the streets to demand greater protection, security, and resources. They also faced strong criticism for

their particularly heavy-handed response to protests against unpopular workplace legislation. This year, a number of injuries and deaths at the hands of officers have added to the impression that the police believe they can act with impunity.

A lawyer representing a police officer accused of using his baton to rape a young black man â€" an assault so violent that the victim needed major surgery on a ten-centimeter wound to his rectum â€" claimed that the baton had entered his anus "by accident." A police investigation did not find significant evidence of rape. In a television interview about conflicts between the police and minority youth, a union representative remarked that the racist epithet *bamboula* was "more or less acceptable." More than half of France's police force votes National Front.

Some FN members and supporters believe that a coming crisis will require the intervention of an authoritarian force in the shape of their party. Others believe that they can win power through existing institutions, forging alliances with the mainstream right's socially authoritarian and radicalizing elements. These tensions form part of the process of the party's development and that of the extreme right across Europe.

In Italy, Gianfranco Fini's acceptance of alliances with the mainstream led to the eventual absorption of the Alleanza Nazionale into the party system, despite the strong fascist allegiances among the organization's membership. The Front will likely resist such alliances, preserving its credentials as an authoritarian alternative to the mainstream and retaining the potential for both radicalization and absorption.

This process of development, combining respectability with an outsider status, can be interrupted, thrown off course, disrupted by various factors, not least the actions of its opponents. To be effective this is going to require much more than abstract appeals to antiracist sentiment and the values of the Republic.
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