

The meaning of the storming of the Capitol

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The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth — i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.

Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, Thesis Two

The series of events of 6th January 2021 in the United States that culminated in the storming of Congress is, to refer to a metaphor Lenin used in an entirely different context, “a flash of lightning which threw more of a glare on reality than anything else.”¹

The whole world, including the overwhelming majority of the international

¹ V. I. Lenin, “Speech Delivered at the All-Russia Congress of Transport Workers March 27, 1921”, *Collected Works*, v. 32, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, p. 279.

left-wing movement, reformist, left-liberal, postmodern, Stalinist, centrist, or even revolutionary, was astonished to see unruly masses attack the Capitol building, that citadel of “American democracy”, and fight the police that tried, somewhat half-heartedly, to defend the members of the US Congress from the fury of the fringe elements of that crowd. To most people, this was like a bolt of lightning from a blue sky.

This is the kind of development that we had warned against in June 2019, in two articles written to assess the results of the elections to the European Parliament and in particular those of the so-called “populist” movement in the different countries of the European Union. In a concluding section titled carefully “In the wink of an eye”, this is what we had to say on the future of this movement that we refused to call “populist” in favour of the appellation “proto-fascist”:

Disciplined, fed with the lowliest ideological garbage, entranced by the feeling of superiority that derives from the erstwhile colonial feats of European civilisation and of their own country, full of rage against the immigrant and the refugee, who, they believe, has robbed them of their job, housing, educational and healthcare services, a crowd full of missionary zeal. The only missing thing is their militia, their paramilitary forces, their bands of thugs. But this is precisely why we do not label them as fascists, but *proto*-fascists. That they can overcome this lacuna in the wink of an eye has been demonstrated in Charlottesville, Virginia in the events of summer 2017 or in the German cities of Chemnitz and Köthen last autumn or in the chain of events in which black immigrant farm workers were attacked (and occasionally killed) in Italy after Salvini came to power in a coalition government last year.

6th January was precisely that kind of incident raised to a power, an earthquake that came “in the wink of an eye” for the unwary and the unprepared. The 6th January storming of the Capitol “threw more of a glare on reality than anything else” with respect to the emerging fascism of our time.

However grotesque might have been the action in many of its aspects, whatever weaknesses haunted the initiative taken when compared to its ultimate goal, the obstruction of Biden’s presidency and the return of Trump to the White House, this was an attempt by paramilitary forces to take political power into their hands and bring in their revered leader by violent means.

Many on the right and left hurry to call this “fascist” because what happened amounted in their eyes to a coup d’Etat. But not all coups are fascist, far from it. No, it was because the Trump movement already had the characteristics of fascism in the process of becoming that the assault of the mob is a lightning that threw a glare on the world situation, beyond the American context. This instantaneous conversion of the deniers of Trump’s fascism is thus an indication of their earlier confusion.

The debate is now over. It can and must be said with certitude that the family of movements that harp on the nationalism and nativism of the masses and try to impose a new and entirely different orientation to the politics of their country in at

least the United States and a multitude of European countries can best be understood as an original form of emerging fascism. That scourge of the interwar years of the 20th century has come back to haunt the world once again, albeit following a different trajectory in its struggle for power.

This is a painful defeat for the “populism” school, as well as the soft left in America who, starting with the Democratic Socialists of America, did not even suspect that we are passing through extraordinary times and bet all their stakes on the vote for the candidate of the Democratic Party. It is also a stinging warning to those in the so-called Trotskyist camp, whether post-Leninist, centrist or revolutionary Marxist, who stubbornly denied the rise of fascism up until that fateful day when the development of practical life refuted their preconceptions.

This article is made up of two parts. In the first part, we will draw a balance-sheet of the previous debate on Trump and his European counterparts, the Le Pens and the Salvinis. In order to do this, we will start by pointing out the *specifically fascist* aspects of the storming of the Capitol. We will then engage in a polemic with the dominant bourgeois school of thought on this question, the school that bases its analysis of these movements on the concept of “populism”. This will be followed by a critique of those Trotskyists that denied the fascist orientation of the movements in question, including Trump himself.

In part two, we will move on to a materialist analysis of the conditions that led to the emergence and strengthening of these movements, which we will henceforth call “proto-fascist”, a choice that will become clear in the course of the article. We have earlier explained why these movements have a fascist substance but not yet a fully fascist form, i.e. why they should be considered to be at an incomplete stage of their becoming.² What we will do in the second part of the article is to *deepen* that previous analysis as to why the substance of these movements is fascism by bringing in a discussion of globalisation and deglobalisation.

We will conclude by taking up as concisely as possible the question of the strategic orientation indispensable for Marxists, that is, if the proletariat and its potential allies are to defeat the rising threat of fascism in the 21st century.

1. The end of a controversy³

As mentioned in the introduction, we have been arguing for a long time now

² We are referring to the two instalments of our article published in this journal under the title “The Return of Barbarism: Fascism in the 21st Century”, published in two instalments: “Historical Roots: Classical Fascism”, *Revolutionary Marxism 2019* and “The Rise of Proto-Fascism”, *Revolutionary Marxism 2020*.

³ There is no exact place for the following thanks to our comrade Burak Sayim, so we undertake it at the earliest occasion. Conducting his graduate studies abroad and thus being much more exposed to publications in the field, he has supplied us over the years with material on the post-fascist movement in France, Italy, and even the United States. We are thankful to him for this, not least because of his very judicious choice of books.

that Trump's position on the political spectrum is akin to the so-called "populist" or "far right" family of movements in Europe and that all of these together should be characterised as "proto-fascist" movements, an appellation much more accurate than "populism". The qualification "proto" derives from the idea that fascism by its very nature thrives on the basis of an armed force of its own and therefore needs paramilitary forces that support the movement. Since Trump, any more than the European movements in question, did not wield paramilitary forces of his own, "proto-fascist" was an appropriate characterisation of his place on the political spectrum. We do not go into detail here on this question as we have explained this point extensively in an earlier writing.⁴

The 6th January events have shifted the terrain radically. On that day several organised paramilitary groups took part in an assault on one of the symbolic centres of power of the country. This is then the *moment of transition of the Trump movement from a proto-fascist stage to the stage of full-blown fascism*, despite the weaknesses and the shortcomings of the movement. We are not saying that the transition has been completed. We are saying, though, that the transition has started. Let us look into the matter in greater depth.

Many on the left content themselves by referring to the traditional white supremacist movement of America, aiming at the defence of the superiority of the white race in the wake of the emancipation from slavery of African Americans, in order to explain the rise of a racist and fascist right in recent years. It is true that white supremacism in America is, both ideologically and practically, a natural breeding ground for a homegrown fascism. But that is all. The present ideological and practical movement for the defence of the white majority of America is a totally renovated movement that has marginalised the KKK and other such outfits that served racism for a century.

Fascist troops come from the shadows

The prehistory of this new movement goes back all the way to the Tea Party, which arose as a radical fringe movement within the Republican Party around the time of the onset of the Third Great Depression that was born of the so-called "global financial crisis" after the collapse of the Wall Street bank Lehman Brothers on 15th September 2008. (In America, the so-called "subprime crisis" had already started in 2007.) The Tea Party did not survive long although it laid the basis for the formation of a new radical right movement from within the Republican Party.

At the same time as the Tea Party, more patrician in its composition than today's Trump supporters,⁵ rose the different ideological currents and movements that were

⁴ See, in addition to the articles referred to in the previous footnote, the following, which is much more focused on the Trump phenomenon itself: "The Great Challenge: Winning the Working Class Back from Ideological Irredentism", *Revolutionary Marxism 2017*.

⁵ See Roger Eatwell, "Populism and Fascism", *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Cristóbal Ro-

to provide the ideological and organisational bases for the constellation of forces that later coalesced around Donald Trump after 2016. The alt-right (“Alternative Right”) is the more renowned of these. This movement is really a loose coalition of forces that were in constant communication and interaction, but did not provide an organisational home to rising fascism. It was very important, though, from the point of view of the ideological formation of a multitude of people. This was mostly an online movement made up of different components (the hard-core alt-right, the so-called “alt-light”, neo-Nazis, conspiracy theorists, the violent fringe etc.) that reached out to a great number of people.⁶

The Alternative Right was born around the same time as the Tea Party when a certain Paul Gottfried silently formed his Mencken Club in 2008. He later turned his mantle over to Richard Spencer, who became one of the foremost intellectual representatives of the movement. Among other influential bigwigs of the movement may be named Curtis Yarvin (Mencius Moldbug), a Silicon Valley entrepreneur turned philosopher, Nick Land, a British philosopher,⁷ Theodore Beale (Vox Day), Milo Yiannopoulos, and Alex Jones, radio host and web site founder. Another remarkable figure is much more of a celebrity because of his role as campaign manager and later chief presidential advisor to Trump, Steve Bannon of the web site Breitbart (founded in 2005 but taken over by Bannon after 2011).

The salient characteristics of the alt-right may be summarised in the following manner. The most commonly shared ideological position is white nationalism or supremacism. However, there is a new aspect to this racism in at least some of its proponents: Spencer, perhaps the most heeded intellectual of the movement and others have defended not a classical type of supremacism where the “white race” rules over the rest, but a kind of segregation that culminates in the defence of separate political entities for the different races. This is coupled with the idea that there is a “white genocide” that has been going on for a long time, not through the use of violence, massacres etc. but through immigration, multiculturalism, integration and intermarriage. The alt-right insists that race and culture are inextricably connected to each other. This does not mean, though, that there are no ethnic genetic bases for the differences in the make-up of the various races. Human Biodiversity (with the entire paraphernalia of IQs etc.) is very much in vogue. Added together, all this implies that the white race deserves to live separately from the rest.

A second and vitally important theme is the struggle against the ordinary conservatism within the Republican Party or even against the so-called “neo-cons”

vira Kaltwasser et al. (eds), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 462.

⁶ In what follows, the information provided about the Alternative Right comes from the following source: Mike Wendling, *Alt Right. From 4chan to the White House*, London: Pluto Press, 2018. We will only cite page numbers when we are quoting someone or providing specific data such as statistics.

⁷ It should be noted that the alt-right is not confined to the United States, but is a more general Anglo-Saxon phenomenon that has spread from that country to others such as Canada, Britain and Australia. Wendling, *ibid*, p. 8.

(neoconservatives) that were dominant under the Bush junior presidency of 2001-2009. Some alt-righters (the Mencken Club crowd) do not shy away from owning up the term “paleo-conservatives” as opposed to “neo”. And others (Curtis Yarvin) proudly call themselves “neo-reactionary” (NRx) or “Dark Enlightenment”. Dark indeed! Yarvin is very explicit on the centrepiece of his worldview: “democracy is bunk”. And he is not alone in his assessment. Nick Land, the British philosopher seconds him: “The single most provocative element in his thinking is the fact that he breaks with the ideal of democratic government.”⁸

All this is the forerunner of the fight that Trump will later wage against the traditional wing of the Republican Party. The manifesto-like text, “An establishment conservative’s guide to the alt-right”, which Milo Yiannopoulos penned with another co-thinker starts thus:

A specter is haunting the dinner parties, fundraisers and think-tanks of the Establishment: the specter of the “alternative right”. Young, creative and eager to commit to secular heresies, they have become public enemy number one to beltway conservatives—more hated, even, than Democrats or loopy progressives.⁹

Despite the awkward attempt to ape Marx and Engels’s *Communist Manifesto*, or perhaps precisely because of that, one can see easily that luminaries of the alt-right conceive of their movement as a trailblazer initiative on the right.

The third point that should be emphasized is the conspiracy mongering of the alt-right as a political tool. Conspiracy theories were a leitmotif during Trump’s term in office, ranging from attempts at making people believe that the entire story of a mass shooting at a school was a total hoax, presumably to convince American people that gun ownership is noxious, through different stories about the Democratic Party organizing child-sex rings, and all the way to the immensely popular QAnon, again based on paedophilia involving the Democratic Party. The political core of the conspiracy theory industry, though, is the idea that the US is being ruled by a “deep state”, an idea repeatedly circulated by Trump. This theory is a simple but useful ploy that deflects the attention of large swathes of the American people from the real culprits, of course, the capitalist class and their hangers-by.

If what has been indicated so far (rabid racism, frank hostility to democracy at large and an eye-dazzling irrationalism) has not convinced those who tend to think of these ideologues of the proto-fascist movement are not “populists” but rather fascists, let us move our lens a bit closer so that we can see the smaller type. Although Richard Spencer says that the separation (or “segregation” in Milo Yiannopoulos’ words) between the races that will make it possible to establish pure race political entities need not involve violence but could be “peaceful ethnic cleansing”,¹⁰ it

8 Ibid, pp. 31 and 35.

9 Ibid, pp. 118-120. “Beltway conservatives” are conservatives that are part of the Washington DC Establishment.

10 Ibid, pp. 22-23.

might be instructive to look into what he has to say of the “European Declaration of Independence” of Anders Breivik. Breivik is the Norwegian extreme right-winger who murdered in cold blood 77 people on a sunny day in 2011, 69 of them teenagers, with one as young as 14. “We should most definitely study Breivik’s ‘European Declaration of Independence’” said Spencer. Later, when a certain Kevin McDonald, another important ideologue of the alt-right, opined on Breivik, writing “it must be said that he is a serious political thinker with a great many insights and *some good practical ideas on strategy*”, Spencer responded by writing “Kevin McDonald has made an excellent start”.¹¹ Need one look for further evidence that these are not choir boys absorbed in pure intellectual ruminations?

There is no reason, then, to be taken aback when the self-same Spencer, at the end of his keynote speech at a conference of one of the institutions of the alt-right one week after Trump’s election, shouted “Hail Trump, hail our people, hail victory!” The delegates dutifully rose and raised their right hand in honour of the new American *Führer*!

Some readers may retort that this type of lunatic fringe may be found in all societies at all times. We would like to remind them that Bannon’s web site Breitbart was a tremendous success with 3 million page views per month and that Alex Jones, the arch conspiracy-peddler, had a total number of readers and listeners (on his radio show) that reached 8 million souls!¹² The success of 4chan, 8chan, /pol/, r/The_Donald, all alt-right sites on the internet, is phenomenal. Thus, we are not talking about a marginal current or trend, but a mass phenomenon.

It may not have escaped the attention of the careful reader that in the discussion so far there has been no reference to anti-Semitism. This is because the alt-right is of one mind in its hostility to immigrants in general and to Muslims in particular, but is divided on the Jewish question, with some of its prominent representatives, first and foremost Bannon and Spencer, even celebrating the idea of the “Judeo-Christian Western civilisation”. However, another wing is rabidly anti-Semitic and distasteful joking about “gas chambers” etc. is commonplace on the digital platforms of the alt-right. So, it should not come as a surprise that in one of his attacks on Hillary Clinton during the electoral campaign, Trump adorned the caption on his tweet “Most Corrupt Candidate Ever” with a meme consisting of a pile of cash and the Star of David. This was an unmistakable reference to Jewish money, was a racist piece of propaganda through and through and was greeted with massive rancour, upon which the tweet was withdrawn in two hours. It later transpired that the whole thing was taken over, lock, stock and barrel, from an alt-right web site. Hence, the anti-Semitism aspect is also present in the ideology, although not achieving unanimity. The circle is thus closed.¹³

If the alt-right is more of an ideological current or multiplicity of currents, the

11 Ibid, pp. 24-25. Emphasis added.

12 Ibid, pp. 107 and 168.

13 Ibid, pp. 175-179.

movement of “Patriots” that mushroomed after the onset of the Third Great Depression in 2008 promised to cater to the need for street power in the future. Let us quote at length from a well-researched article published on a broad left-wing web site, written in 2011 on this movement:

The radical right grew explosively in 2011, the third such dramatic expansion in as many years. The growth was fueled by superheated fears generated by economic dislocation, a proliferation of demonizing conspiracy theories, the changing racial makeup of America, and the prospect of four more years under a black president who many on the far right view as an enemy to their country.

...the movement came roaring back beginning in late 2008, just as the economy went south with the subprime collapse and, more importantly, as Barack Obama appeared on the political scene as the Democratic nominee and, ultimately, the president-elect. Even as most of the nation cheered the election of the first black president that November, an angry backlash developed that included several plots to murder Obama. Many Americans, infused with populist fury over bank and auto bailouts and a feeling that they had lost their country, joined Patriot groups.

The swelling of the Patriot movement since that time has been astounding. From 149 groups in 2008, the number of Patriot organizations skyrocketed to 512 in 2009, shot up again in 2010 to 824, and then, last year, jumped to 1,274. That works out to a staggering 755% growth in the three years ending last Dec. 31. Last year’s total was more than 400 groups higher than the prior all-time high, in 1996.¹⁴

At the beginning of Trump’s term in office, there was no known relationship between him and any of the paramilitary organisations. An important watershed was the Charlottesville, Virginia events in the summer of 2017. Many far right and white supremacist groups came together in a supposed show of strength and to honour the memory of confederate generals, i.e. the defenders of slavery in the epoch of the American Civil War. Although one of their ranks drove into the crowd of counter-demonstrators and killed a young woman that belonged to the anti-fascist groups that had come to protest, Trump said “there were some very fine people on both sides”, thus sending a message of sympathy to organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan or the American Nazi Party! This was the meek opening note of his effort to bring, to use his terms, the MAGA (Make America Great Again) people out on the streets as a force in his struggle for supremacy.

After a long interlude, the first steps were taken during the storming of state governors’ offices by white armed groups demanding an end to the lockdown established in order to struggle against the pandemic. The instance that stood out was the Lansing, Michigan case, where the storming group was armed to the teeth. Although they did not make use of their guns, they nonetheless threateningly attempted to storm the building of the governor’s office but were stopped in time.

The turning point came during the gigantic mass movement protesting the

¹⁴ Mark Potok, “The ‘Patriot’ Movement Explodes”, SPLC (Southern Poverty Law Center), <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2012/patriot-movement-explodes>.

George Floyd murder and demanding the defunding of the police in the summer of 2020. Slowly but surely a kind of low-intensity civil war developed between, on the one hand, Black Lives Matter and the other organisations that supported the movement and, on the other, the dispersed bands of white supremacists, armed to the teeth. The incident in Kenosha, Wisconsin, where a very young white supremacist killed two and wounded one demonstrator was a veritable test case. Trump commented on it by saying that the young murderer had found himself “in a very difficult situation”, thus justifying his brazen crimes.

More and more Trump called out to the MAGA forces to take to the street. We do not yet know whether at this stage his aides were already sounding the paramilitary groups that were ideologically on his side. The evidence that has been leaking to the press after the 6th January events certainly make that a very reasonable prospect.

During the first presidential debate with Biden, the moderator tried to get out of Trump his refusal of cooperation with these violent right-wing groups. As an example, the moderator dropped the name of the band “Proud Boys”. Trump’s response was chilling: “Proud Boys, stand back, stand by”!

On 6th January, we know from all evidence available that, among a motley and unruly crowd, there were the much more organised paramilitary groups acting in organised fashion. Proud Boys, Three Percenters and Oath Keepers were there, possibly alongside other, lesser-known groups. Not only that but evidence has been leaked that shows that many of Trump’s close collaborators, advisors and former advisors, starting with Roger Stone, Steve Bannon, two collaborators of the latter, and Trump military advisor former general Michael Flynn and others worked hand in glove with these groups.¹⁵

Proud Boys had Roger Stone, Trump advisor, speak in Florida at a rally organised by themselves before 6th January in order to protest against the “stealing” of the election by the Democrats.¹⁶ Stone was also spotted together with members of the Oath Keepers on the morning of 6th January, before the rally at which Trump was to speak, in front of a hotel where apparently both sides had spent the night.¹⁷ In effect, it now turns out that all three organisations, Proud Boys, Three Percenters and Oath Keepers provide many prominent Trump allies and aides with personal security service. Oath Keepers and Proud Boys serve as security to Roger Stone, Proud Boys also to Matt Gaetz, a House member from Florida, and Three Percenters to Marjorie Taylor Greene, a house member from Georgia, both loyal Trump allies.¹⁸

15 “Longtime Trump Advisers Connected to Group behind Rally That Led to Capitol Attack”, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/longtime-trump-advisers-connected-groups-rally-led-capitol/story?id=75261028>.

16 “FBI Finds Contact Between Proud Boys Member and Trump Associate before Riot”, *New York Times*, 5 March 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/53ketaat>.

17 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/02/14/us/roger-stone-capitol-riot.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>.

18 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/29/us/republicans-trump-capitol-riot.html>.

It should be noted that Oath Keepers in particular is an organisation that brings together former servicemen and former police officers. This seems to imply that Oath Keepers is a paramilitary organisation that has undisclosed ties to certain agencies of the US government.

This is confirmed by circumstantial evidence of other types. The Kenosha killer was encouraged that night, along with other armed white vigilantes, by the police, one officer saying: “We appreciate you guys, we really do”. More tellingly, after having killed two young people, this young man later falls into a state of panic and tries to deliver himself to armoured police vehicles. Although others on the street yell to the police making it clear that this guy has just murdered two people, several police vehicles simply disregard this and pass by!

This guy had been, tellingly, a member of a “Public Safety Cadet Program” recruiting teenagers. After the murderous events, the police department took down the information on its web site concerning this program! This is the kind of program that police departments use to recruit young aspirants to help the police in their struggle against blacks and anti-fascists!

On the other hand, the role of Proud Boys seems to be very significant during the storming of the Capitol. This is how the *New York Times* recounts the evidence:

At least six members of the organization [Proud Boys] have been charged in connection with the riot, including one of its top-ranking leaders, Joseph Biggs. Mr. Biggs, a U.S. Army veteran, led about 100 men on an angry march from the site of President Donald J. Trump’s speech toward — and then into — the Capitol building.¹⁹

The video message that Trump meant for the assailants that stormed the Capitol is perhaps the most revealing in its tone. After asking them to “go home with love and in peace” he says, “we love you” and “remember this day forever”.²⁰ This is very clearly an invitation to work together again on such occasions in the future!

All this shows that not only have “armed patriot groups” or more succinctly paramilitary groups have finally taken to the streets in the United States, but also that at least three of these groups are now *closely and organically linked to the Trump leadership*.

This is why we say that the Trump leadership has now begun the transition from the “proto-fascist” stage to the “fascist” stage. This is also why we think we can characterise the storming of the Capitol as a *fascist* attempt to control, albeit temporarily, one of the centres of power of the United States.

19 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/26/us/proud-boys-capitol-riot.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>.

20 “After Pro-Trump Mob Storms Capitol, Congress Confirms Biden’s Win”, *New York Times*, <https://tinyurl.com/sepxx3sj>.

The storming of the Capitol on 6th January is akin to two incidents in the international history of fascism. For one thing, it is similar to Mussolini's march on Rome in 1922, though much more disorganised and chaotic.²¹ On the other hand, from the point of view of its outcome it is more comparable to the storming of the parliament by the "Leagues" in France in 1934. Although the March on Rome was not a well-organised event, Mussolini was handed power by the King on a golden platter because of the political balance of forces. This obviously does not fit the Trump case. But in France the action taken by the Leagues did not succeed in obtaining any positive results. In that sense the French case seems to be more similar to the 6th January than the Italian.

Those who denied all along the idiosyncratic fascist character of Trump now call the incident a fascist undertaking and Trump a fascist. But not every violent attack on the centres of power by a mob is fascist. This rash judgment thrown at the last minute is the price to be paid for ignoring for years on end the fascist strategy of Trump. If you disregard the fascist nature of a political force, you do not have to inquire about his extra-parliamentary strengths and weaknesses and do not even notice the rapprochement between the paramilitary "patriotic" organisations and the fascist leader. When the big event comes about, you are at a loss to explain it and simplistically call a leader you have denied is a fascist by that name simply because he has attempted to use forcible methods in order to remain in power.

No, what makes Trump and the storming of the Capitol a fascist attempt is, primarily, the fascist substance of his political stance and, secondly, the collusion of his government with paramilitary forces blindly loyal to him.

The triviality of the label "populism"

The lightning of 6th January of course struck a severe blow to the platitude of "populism" repeated *ad nauseam* by bourgeois theoreticians and journalists alike and parroted by many writers on the left. This school of thinking, which obscures much more than it clarifies, does not even come close to predicting such a violent outcome in its analysis of the movements we are discussing. In fact, some of the literature focuses on the question of whether the "populist radical right" is a threat to democracy or, on the contrary, a corrective!²²

Let us start our discussion on populism by pointing out that "populism" is a "political *Kampfbegriff* (battle term) to denounce political opponents".²³ We have

21 See our "Trump's Abortive March on Rome", <http://redmed.org/article/trumps-abortive-march-rome>.

22 Jasper Muis & Tim Immerzeel, "An Overview and Assessment of Current Scholarship on Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe", Paper Presented at the ISPP Annual Meeting, Warsaw, July 13-16, 2016, p. 10ff.

23 Cas Mudde & Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 1. The authors refuse this attitude and believe that their definition of "populism" does not fall into this category, but nonetheless admit the common criticism thus made.

no qualms regarding the waging of a battle on certain categories of political formations. The problem with “populism” being a *Kampfbegriff* is that naming a political formation “populist” in order to attack it implies that the whole operation smacks of disdain for the “people”. It is, more precisely, a point of view that regards society through the lenses of the ruling classes. If it is indeed a *Kampfbegriff*, it implies that pursuing a policy that favours the people is undesirable.

This is confirmed by the fact that for many the term is still marked by the meaning attributed to it in the early 1990s. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, the authors we have referred to earlier, formulate that specific definition of populism by two economists, Rudiger Dornbusch and Jeffrey Sachs as “a type of irresponsible economic policy, characterized by a first period of massive spending financed by foreign debt and followed by a second period marked by hyperinflation and the implementation of harsh economic adjustments ... ‘populist economics’ refers to a political program that is considered irresponsible because it involves (too) much redistribution of wealth and government spending.”²⁴ The term within the parentheses, “(too)”, reveals the entirely upper-class prejudice that marks the term. Author after author feels obliged to refer to that same conception of “populism”.²⁵ And it is as well to remind the reader that Jeffrey Sachs, whatever his ideological stance is now, was, at that time a rabid partisan of “shock therapy”, not only in Latin America, but also in so-called “transition countries” such as Poland.

The resilience of such an approach is further confirmed by the fact that a widely popular economist of our day, Daron Acemoğlu, also subscribes to it. Whereas Sachs and Dornbusch were separately writing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Acemoğlu, together with his co-authors had the following to say about populism in as late as 2013: “the implementation of policies receiving support from a significant fraction of the population, but ultimately hurting the economic interests of this majority”.²⁶

This prejudice becomes even worse when the use of the term “populism” is not confined to the family of extreme right-wing political formations that we are discussing, but broadened to cover “left-wing populism” as well, a term variously used for Syriza of Greece, Podemos of Spain, or La France Insoumise of France. Whatever our criticism of these parties, and they are many, these parties are progressive forces that put forward programmes of redistribution in favour of the working masses and the downtrodden, even though they invariably do not implement these programmes when in power. To pair them under the same appellation of populism both shows disdain for reforms in favour of the working population and is an insult to these parties, which certainly do not deserve to be in any manner associated with

24 Ibid, p. 3-4.

25 See for instance: Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al., “Populism: An Overview of the Concept and the State of the Art”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (eds), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 31; Kurt Weyland, “Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach”, *ibid*, p. 75.

26 Quoted in “Populism: An Overview”, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

the rabidly racist parties that are categorised as the “populist radical right”. This becomes confusionism even if this may not be the intention.

This meaningless placing of totally incongruent movements within the same category immediately brings to mind the history of the concept. Throughout modern history, the concept has been used for totally disparate political currents and formations, from the Russian Narodnik movement and the small peasant-based American populism of late 19th century to the Latin American family of leaders and parties such as Getúlio Vargas in Brazil, Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico, Juan Perón in Argentina and others in smaller countries that represent a special kind of alliance between different classes at a certain threshold of economic development in their respective countries, not to mention its little-known usage by some left-wing thinkers for the period between 1960-1980 in Turkey. Hence “populism” was already an overworked and tired concept and to extend it to these extreme right-wing family of parties really makes it sound totally hollow.²⁷

But this is not the end of the story. Different authors cite such examples that the discussion may be said to border on the grotesque and the absurd. Let us go no farther than the Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser book to see some examples. These authors place between the earlier generation of populists in Latin America we have already mentioned and the later generation of the Bolivarian movement such as Chávez (and now Maduro) in Venezuela, Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador another generation of “populists” including names such as Fernando Collor of Brazil (an opportunist and a careerist who was impeached at the end of two years in office for corruption), Carlos Menem of Argentina (an enemy of the people who imposed the neoliberal strategy on Argentina, which then prepared the ground for the popular revolt called the *Argentinazo* of 2001), Alberto Fujimori of Peru (the author of an *auto-golpe*, who had to flee Peru while he was president, but was finally extradited to the country to be convicted for crimes against humanity during his struggle against the guerrilla movement Shining Path and later for embezzlement).²⁸ This is risible. These minor accidents of Latin American history can have nothing in common with such giants as Cárdenas, Perón or, more recently, Hugo Chávez that have left their indelible mark on the history of that continent with an eventful history. Nothing whatsoever.

The Arab revolutions of 2011-2013 in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen are considered to be populist simply because their major common slogan was “The people want to bring down the regime!”²⁹ This is beyond all comprehension!

²⁷ This is granted by the authors of the two books that are considered to be the pioneers of the theory of populism. See Ghita Ionescu & Ernest Gellner (der.), *Populism. Its Meaning and National Characteristics*, Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1969, “Introduction” and Margaret Canovan, *Populism*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981, “Introduction”. We will not go into the place of the concept “populism” in the work of Ernesto Laclau, which really does not even come close to the rest of the literature and is a product of his very special methodology.

²⁸ Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, *ibid*, p. 30-31.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 40.

Still another absurdity concerns the Marxist movement as populist. This is so grotesque that it would be worthwhile to quote: "... the labor movement often employed Marxist ideas to construct a frame, in which the business community was portrayed as the common enemy and the workers were depicted as the aggrieved population." Class struggle is thus subsumed under populism.³⁰ A dubious honour!

Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser then excel in the art of bringing together movements that are the product of entirely different contexts and barely have any resemblance to each other under the rubric "populist": Die Linke of Germany, Solidarnosc of Poland of yesteryear, the PRD of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in present-day Mexico, and even Lukashenka of Belarus.³¹

Another major problem with the "populism" literature is the fact that the focus is mostly not on the socio-economic and class context, but on the "populist" movements themselves and the political environment they find themselves in. As if the harm done to economic science by the fixation on supply and demand were not enough, this populism literature divides the factors that have an impact on the success or failure of the political formation under scrutiny to a supply side and a demand side. The demand side is, roughly, what could be regarded as the socio-economic context and the various societal forces in action. The supply side is how the formation in question behaves politically towards the mass of people. This in turn consists of a set of outside and inside factors. The literature tends very clearly towards the supply side when studying populism, dwelling on the ideological and the organisational aspects, the latter including leadership, which for obvious reasons are very important in the case of "populist" parties. Thus, the populism literature also displays the broader tendency observed in state theory at this beginning of the 21st century of treating the vicissitudes in the trajectory of states *in isolation from the general dynamics of social life*.

The "populism" literature is built on such shaky grounds that its foremost proponents cannot even agree on what the term denotes. It seems there are three different conceptions of populism. The first regards populism as an ideology that divides society into "two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,'"". However, since there is a claim to a multiplicity of types of populism, the idea is introduced that this is a "thin-centered ideology". As opposed to "thick-centered" or "full" ideologies, populism as a thin-centered ideology "almost always appears attached to other ideological elements".³²

The second conception regards populism as a strategy. This is a "political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly

30 Ibid, p. 47.

31 Ibid, respectively pp. 54, 89, 90, and 92-93.

32 Ibid, p. 6. See also Cas Mudde, "Populism: An Ideational Approach", in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, op. cit.

unorganized followers.”³³ Finally, the third conception considers populism to be a socio-cultural phenomenon or a matter of style in politics.³⁴

It is not the ideology that is thin but the conceptions. It is interesting to note that both the ideology definition and the strategy definition are watered down immediately after the first definition is given. In Mudde’s case the idea that populism as ideology cannot stand on its own and has need of other ideologies to survive is embedded in the original definition of the concept. On the other hand, Weyland, the theoretician of populism as strategy, admits the use of other strategies alongside populism.³⁵ All in all, populism seems to be a concept that cannot stand on its own and needs to be propped up by other ideologies and/or strategies. Such a weak concept is hardly adequate to define and describe the phenomenon that we call proto-fascism, since this movement is a major determinant of our time and will in all probability shape the future of humanity.

The idea that classical fascism of the 1930s was not similar to what is described as populism, an idea that is quite widespread in this literature, it seems, is patently wrong. Hostility towards the elite and the defence of an ordinary person’s common sense attitude were part of the overall ideological ethos of the Nazis. In his article written to compare fascism and populism, Roger Eatwell explains the attitude of the Nazis towards “high culture” in the following manner: “‘When I hear the word ‘culture,’ I reach for my gun,’ which is often misattributed to the leading Nazi, Hermann Göring. In fact, it comes from a play written in 1933 by the Nazi intellectual Hanns Johst and a better translation is: “When I hear the term (German High) Culture, I remove the safety catch from my Browning.”³⁶ Despite this evident fact, many proponents of the populism school insist that fascism cannot be considered populist at least in the anti-elite sense.

Witness for instance what Weyland has to say on this issue: “Despite the force of personal leadership, Mussolini’s fascism and Hitler’s National Socialism do not count as populism; ideological fervor prevailed, whereas populism is fully personalistic and therefore, following the leader’s whims, more pragmatic and opportunistic.”³⁷ It is Weyland who insists that populism is a strategy. But even though he admits that fascist leaders use this strategy, he excludes them from the domain of populism simply because they have a “thick” ideology, to use an expression borrowed from the populism literature. The natural conclusion to draw would be that “populism” is ideology-free! Perhaps simply a matter of careerist leaders pursuing a certain strategy. This is how flimsy the basis of the populism literature is.

To sum up, populism is a hollow concept that should be discarded from the

33 Weyland, op. cit., p. 74.

34 Pierre Ostiguy, “Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, op. cit.

35 Weyland, op. cit., p. 75.

36 Eatwell, op. cit., p. 472.

37 Weyland, op. cit., p. 75.

idiom of the socialist and communist left. To mimic bourgeois political scientists and journalists in depicting such an important movement as the proto-fascist family of parties and movements is to capitulate before the dominant ideas of bourgeois academia. Insisting on calling the proto-fascist movement “populist”, even with the qualifying “radical right” serves only one thing: it hides from view the fascist substance of the movement in question! A mighty danger!

The debacle of the “fascism denial school”

It is not only bourgeois political science that simply was not able to see the rise of fascism in a form different from the 1930s, but bearing the same substance under that unfamiliar guise. The left in general disregarded the warnings of the very few Marxists who sounded the alarm. This unfortunately included the main currents that have their roots in what is considered to be Trotskyism. Among the latter, those that were deeply immersed in the social forum movement of the 2000s and its liberal wishy-washy politics, such as the former United Secretariat and the current called International Socialists (more commonly recognised by their characterisation of the former Soviet Union as “state capitalist”) are naturally in the forefront of what we call the post-Leninist left.

So it should come as no surprise to find a very good representative of what we propose to call the “fascism denial school” in an article of 2019 in *International Socialist Review* written by David Renton.³⁸ Engaging in a critique of Renton’s ideas is no shadow boxing. Renton is an expert on fascism, has written an entire book on the question,³⁹ writes often on what we call the proto-fascist movement. He has published many articles on this question in *Jacobin*, the publication of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Given the fact that the DSA is the largest grouping in America that calls itself socialist, this is especially important for our purposes in this article. Moreover, the article that we are going to debate is used as education material on the question of Trump and fascism by at least certain chapters of the DSA. So David Renton is no straw man but a valuable adversary.

And yet his ideas are puzzling indeed, to say the least. He has some bold statements on the question that we ought to quote for the reader’s benefit.

Donald Trump, Steve Bannon, and Nigel Farage are not fascists. Even Marine Le Pen’s electoral success has depended on a forty-year project in which the Front has repeatedly distanced itself from fascism.

...

Today, by contrast, the major right-wing parties of the contemporary world (i.e., Trump, Le Pen, Farage, Modi, Orbán) share no ideological loyalty to Hitler or Mussolini.

38 David Renton, “What Is Different About Today’s Far Right?”, *International Socialist Review*, Issue No. 112, Spring 2019.

39 David Renton, *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto, 1999).

...

Fascism was therefore distinguished from conservatism not by the former's racism or sexism (for these ideas were also part of the mainstream right), but by the extent to which fascists organized against parliament, against previous ruling elites, and promised to allow a new set of people to rule.

From this perspective, the most important parts of the contemporary far right are poised between conservatism and fascism. The likes of Farage or Le Pen or Trump do not propose to purge the state but rather to rule through its existing institutions. They have not created armies of followers in order to supersede liberal democracy.

The first paragraph we have quoted gives us the gist of Renton's argument. These leaders are not fascists. The others offer the reasons for which Renton holds this opinion. Let us then turn to the reasons the author cites to assess the correctness of his main thesis.

The idea that the leaders enumerated "share no ideological loyalty to Hitler or Mussolini" is doubly superficial and patently false. This may be true for some of them, but it certainly is not true for the family of movements as a whole. Let us first see why it is doubly superficial. How would Renton test his proposition that these people "share no ideological loyalty to Hitler or Mussolini"? The first way to verify this would of course be to go through all the statements and utterances of both these leaders and their parties and followers. This is an arduous task, but fortunately need not be undertaken since there is nothing to be gained by doing that. To reach from the premise that these leaders have never publicly sworn allegiance to Hitler or Mussolini the conclusion that they have not been inspired by or do not aspire to be like or do not wish to put in practice some at least of the policies pursued by those two historic leaders of fascism is nonsensical. Hitler and Mussolini are still, to a great extent, anathema in the Western world and it is therefore very understandable and common sense that even if any of these leaders felt loyalty to their ideas and practice, they would not say it out loud!

This may be proved by looking at the evidence *a contrario*. Let us cite four striking examples, two of them from France. First, it is rather surprising that the specialist on fascism that he is, Renton nonetheless is not aware of a sign of ideological continuity that Le Pen the father wished to establish between the fascist movement in Italy (the MSI-Movimento sociale italiano) and his Front National. Ironically, and very handily for our purposes, before he turns to the present-day movement, Renton spends some time in trying to show that the MSI presents itself as explicitly a follower of Mussolini's ideas and ideals. In contrast, he then goes on to say, today's movement displays no loyalty to Hitler or Mussolini. Well, if the MSI is a fascist party, and we agree with Renton it is, then it is enough to compare the logo that Le Pen's Front National adopted during its foundation with that of the MSI (see figure 1).⁴⁰ The FN logo is a precise *replica* of the MSI logo. Both are representa-

40 Valérie Igounet, *Le Front National. De 1972 à nos jours le parti, les hommes, les idées*, Paris: Seuil, 2014, p. 140-141.

tions of the tricolour flags of their countries with only the Italian green replaced by the French blue! Can there be a more explicit declaration of loyalty to a politician, another country's dictator to top?

Figure 1: Logos of Front National and the Italian fascist party MSI



Second, Le Pen the father, the provocateur he is, declared publicly at a certain point that the Nazi gas chambers “are a small detail of history”. That caused an uproar of rage and horror to a level never seen before or since. Many within the Front National regarded this remark as a gross mistake, though Jean-Marie Le Pen seemed not to think so even after the fact. What concerns us here is that this instance of historical revisionism (or *négationnisme* in French parlance, that is to say Holocaust denial) created an immense backlash unprecedented until then. Just imagine what reaction would be forthcoming had Le Pen said he adores Hitler. This clearly shows the cost these leaders would have to pay for expressing “loyalty” to the historic leaders of fascism.

The third example is from Italy. Research has shown that in the elections of 2018, where the Lega of Matteo Salvini was extremely successful, the party’s results were perceptibly better in areas where the MSI had scored well under the First Republic, especially at the elections of 1976.⁴¹ Naturally, this proves neither “loyalty” to Mussolini on the part of Salvini nor an organisational continuity between the MSI and the Lega. It does show, however, an ideological and political kind of affinity between the two parties and deals a blow to Renton’s idea that the present-day parties are totally alien to the classical fascist tradition.

41 David Allegranti, *Come si diventa leghisti*, Milano: UTET, 2019, p. 171.

The last example is even more damning for Renton's argument. In 2014 a racist movement emerged in Germany called Pegida (Patriots of Europe against the Islamisation of the West). The movement was very successful and staged mass demonstrations against immigration, especially in the cities of the former Democratic Republic. However, in January 2015, Lutz Bachmann, the leader of the movement, shared a personal photo of his with a Hitler moustache on social media. This raised extreme rage in the country. Pegida's prestige collapsed overnight. Even the recently formed party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), which has taken over the relay from Pegida since, would not sit down and talk with Pegida leaders lest they themselves fall into the same cesspit as Pegida in the eyes of the German public. Now we pose some questions to Renton: did Bachmann become a Hitlerite overnight? Was he not the leader of a very popular far-right movement before this incident? Could he not have continued his ascending political career had he not committed this stupid mistake? The answers to all these questions are obvious. Renton reasons as if he were talking about some people in the confessional. They have to be open and frank. No, we are talking politics!

The second reason why we say Renton's reasoning is vitiated by superficiality is precisely the fact that he disregards the indirect evidence with regard to the affinity present-day proto-fascism has to classical fascism. We have already explained carefully in the pages of *Revolutionary Marxism* that many of the parties that belong to this family of parties in Europe have clear roots in the fascist tradition of their own country.⁴² (America has never had a serious fascist movement, so one cannot look for historic antecedents there.) Jean-Marie Le Pen formed a disciplined party out of the remnants of all the different fascist parties and movements and traditions of France. The remark he made regarding the Nazi gas chambers is telling with respect to his outlook on that experience. It is astounding to find Renton exonerating the party (today the Rassemblement National under the daughter Le Pen) of any kind of loyalty to the father's ideas simply because Marine Le Pen is astutely and consistently pursuing a policy of "*dédiabolisation*" (a cleansing of the image of the party) in order to break through the *cordon sanitaire* the other bourgeois parties have formed around her party. We would have thought that this political ruse was intended for the gullible sectors of the French public, but apparently Marxists have fallen for it, too. Jörg Haider of Austria explicitly referred to Hitler when he thought it would bring gains to him. The Fratelli d'Italia, an ally of Salvini, is a direct descendent of Mussolini's fascist party.

For all these reasons the idea that the leaders enumerated by Renton do not feel any loyalty to Hitler and Mussolini is false. Take Modi. The RSS, the paramilitary political force working hand in glove with Narendra Modi's BJP, was directly inspired by Hitler's paratroopers.⁴³ Unlike many of the parties of Europe, the BJP-RSS outfit in India is not even proto-fascist, but fascist *tout court*. What importance

42 "The Return of Barbarism: Fascism in the 21st Century: (2) The Rise of Proto-Fascism", op. cit.

43 For an excellent analysis of the BJP as a fascist party, see Burak Gürel, "Historical Roots, Current Manifestations, and Future Prospects of Fascism in India", *Revolutionary Marxism* 2020.

does the question of whether Modi feels allegiance to Hitler, the fascist leader of a country with a totally different position in the world system and with a totally different social structure and political traditions, bear? To pose loyalty to Hitler and Mussolini as a criterion for the fascist character of a political formation displays an astonishing superficiality of thought, fitting for movements and thinkers who have long been moving away from Marxism!

Perhaps this pitiful argument gives us the opportunity to point out a common fallacy of those coming from a Marxist background and are part of the “fascism denial school”. Reflecting, in his very last uncompleted article before his death, on the politics of Marxists during the Second World War and relating that politics to the Leninist policies pursued during the First World War, Trotsky said that the new war was a continuation of the first, but that continuation does not mean repetition.⁴⁴ In a similar vein, although we consider that today’s proto-fascist movement is a continuation of classical fascism in substance, there is no reason to expect that it will be a repetition of it also in its forms of appearance and development. All arguments put forth of the form “but Salvini is no Mussolini” or “Le Pen’s party bears no resemblance to the Nazis” are fallacious to the core. It is only by analysing the essential characteristics of fascism and using those as the criteria that one can evaluate whether today’s movement is substantially, if not yet in form, fascist or not. Analogy cannot replace scientific enquiry. The procedure that we have adopted in looking into this question is based on this understanding of the scientific method. We first analysed the *indispensable* elements that form the phenomenon called fascism on the basis of the laboratory that we call “classical fascism”⁴⁵ and then developed our reflection on the present-day movement on the basis of those elements, thus eliminating from the analysis all secondary, accidental, historically specific traits one may find in classical fascism.⁴⁶

The second reason that Renton advances for denying that today’s movement is fascist is more serious: what distinguishes fascism according to him is that “fascists organized against parliament, against previous ruling elites, and promised to allow a new set of people to rule”. There are here obviously three different things that fascists are said to organise so let us take them up one by one. Leaving the question of parliament as the decisive criterion Renton uses to the end, let us first look at the other two. That Trump, to take just one example, was fighting against previous ruling elites is simply undeniable. He raised the banner of struggle against the “globalists” from day one. He said he was fighting against the “deep state” or “the swamp”, that the overwhelming part of the American mainstream media was the “enemy of

44 “The present war, as we have stated on more than one occasion, is a continuation of the last war. But a continuation does not signify a repetition. As a general rule, a continuation signifies a development, a deepening, a sharpening.” L. Trotsky, “Bonapartism, Fascism and War”, *Writings of Leon Trotsky [1939-40]*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1977.

45 “The Return of Barbarism: Fascism in the 21st Century: (1) Historical Roots: Classical Fascism”, op. cit.

46 “The Return of Barbarism: Fascism in the 21st Century: (2) The Rise of Proto-Fascism”, op. cit.

the people”. That this criterion has seeped into Renton’s argumentation simply goes to show that those who drift away from Marxism do not only lose their capacity to delve into the depths of society, but also their habits of rigorous thinking.

The other point about promising a new set of people to rule is again a very loose kind of formulation. But if this refers, in the case of classical fascism, for instance to the replacement of the Jews in socio-economic and professional positions, there is again no doubt that, *mutatis mutandis*, Trump did fight against the domination of the establishment of the East Coast and the West Coast over American social, political and cultural life.

But much more important than these two is the question of parliamentary democracy. This is the crux of Renton’s whole reasoning. He says: “The likes of Farage or Le Pen or Trump do not propose to purge the state but rather to rule through its existing institutions. They have not created armies of followers in order to supersede liberal democracy.”

This entire argument has collapsed like a house of cards in the light of the storming of the Capitol! With respect to creating “armies of followers in order to supersede liberal democracy”, Renton’s claim was shattered, first, with Trump’s call for MAGA to come out during the George Floyd demonstrations, secondly, with his position on paramilitary forces expressed in the laconic formula “Proud Boys, stand back, stand by”, and, thirdly, of course, by his and his aides’ role and intervention in the storming of the Capitol, by everything that we recounted in the first section of this article.

That Trump “proposes... to rule through the [state’s] existing institutions” is an argument that has been demolished by the very fact of the storming of the Capitol. This is all very self-evident and needs no elaboration. It clearly demonstrates that Renton and his co-thinkers, in effect the overwhelming majority of the post-Leninist left, were so myopic as not to even suspect that this could happen in America. All Marxist analysis is for the purpose of throwing light on the future so as to be able to determine the best course available for the working class in order to further its interests and prepare the ground for revolution.

But seen from the point of view of an analyst’s blindness, there is perhaps even worse. After all, every Marxist can err in predicting the future. Of course, if the error concerns this or that secondary question (who will win the elections or will the strike in a certain factory be successful or not etc.), it is very common to go wrong because the more concrete the event one is trying to know the outcome of, the more uncertainty there will be by the very nature of things. But if the mistake is on the overriding tendencies of a certain epoch, then errors may become unforgivable. There can be only a handful of fateful occurrences comparable in importance to the rise of fascism. So the mistake in this case is unpardonable. However, still it must be admitted that it is easier to go wrong on the future than on the past.

David Renton did not even turn and look at what happened in Germany in the towns of Chemnitz and Köthen in the fall of 2018. Since his article appeared in

the spring 2019 issue of the journal and since this is not a refereed journal, we can safely assume that six months is a period long enough to draw conclusions from that event. There was a mini uprising of neo-Nazis on that occasion. The details of the event need not detain us in this context. What is, though, of capital importance for our purposes here is that the AfD gave protection and shelter to the openly Nazi thugs who hunted and beat immigrants and leftists on that day.

Similarly, the parties in Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Finland that belong to the family of movements under discussion open their lists to elements of Nordic Resistance, which is an openly fascist formation with armed militias.

In the light of this kind of evidence, which points to original and roundabout relationships between the political and military wings of a fascist movement, one truly wonders how people like Renton can be so cocksure about the non-existence of “armies” and the obliging acceptance by the leaders in question of the sacrosanct “institutions” of parliamentary democracy.

Everyone can make mistakes. The point is this: we are expecting *all* who claim to be Marxists, but belonged until recently to the “fascism denial school” to draw the conclusions of 6th January in America and make a serious self-criticism. Their denial has already been a disservice to the international working class, in particular in Europe and America. Five precious years were lost in the United States without taking the necessary precautions in the face of the rise of fascism and organizing in accordance to that calamitous prospect. An even longer period (at least since the Euro elections of 2014 when the question is taken at the level of the EU) has been squandered in Europe as well. Those who refuse self-criticism will be positively choosing the path of acting as misleaders to the working-class and the oppressed. We are determined not to spare a word in fighting their harmful influence in the international proletarian movement.⁴⁷

A case that fits beautifully Marx’s second thesis on Feuerbach.

2. Historical conditions of the rise of fascism in the 21st century

Having settled the truth regarding the controversy on the nature of the present-day far right (proto-fascist) movement on the basis of the litmus test of practice, we can now move on to delve deeper into the nature of this family of movements regarding the substance of their politics. The reader of our earlier pieces will remember that we base our claim that this substance is of a fascist character on the position and programme of these movements when faced with the *concrete present-day contradictions of world capitalism*. We would like to elaborate further on these contradictions, in particular on the basis of the concept of “deglobalisation”, which

⁴⁷ Let us hope that Renton brings his act together without delay so that he does not commit the same kind of blunder for European countries. In 2019, in the light of the elections to the European Parliament he declared Marine Le Pen and Salvini to be “The New Mainstream” (<https://jacobin-mag.com/2019/05/european-parliament-election-far-right-parties>).

is fully relevant to the politics of proto-fascism, but which we have not so far, in our analysis of the movement, had a chance to take up and relate to our reflection on this movement.

In this part of the article, we will look at the two-tiered nationalism/racism of the proto-fascist movement and relate these two tiers to the concrete conditions of the epoch we are going through. Our overall aim in this foray into the nationalism/racism of the movement is to remind the reader that this is not any old nationalism but is deeply marked by the circumstances of our times, plays a determinate role in the politics of the movements in question and is the privileged method chosen by these movements in looking for a solution to the irresolvable contradictions that beset capital at this historic juncture. This nationalism/racism is class struggle. Superficially regarded it looks as if it were a contradiction between nations at different levels. This is how proto-fascism presents it. As a matter of fact, it is a struggle between the different classes. What seems to be a struggle between nations is intra-class struggle and what seems to be a struggle within nations is inter-class struggle.

Nationalism for the patrician: The bourgeois backlash to globalism

The racism and nationalism of the proto-fascist movement is very commonly discussed in terms of the racism that has gripped the native population of the advanced/imperialist countries vis-à-vis a variety of groups including but not limited to Muslims, blacks, other coloured peoples, Latinos, Jews, the Roma etc. This is a very definite rising trend and should certainly be taken very seriously, one to which we shall come back presently. But there is another kind of nationalism (not yet transformed into racism) that is as important in the rise of the proto-fascist movement as the more pervasive and more closely scrutinised racism and nationalism widespread in society. This is the nationalism of the upper classes, the nationalism of sections of the bourgeoisie as a reaction to globalism. We first look at this aspect of the question.

“Deglobalisation”

A very important phenomenon of the post-Global Financial Crisis period from 2008 on, that is to say of the period of the Third Great Depression is what is commonly called “deglobalisation”. This is a definite trend that is, nonetheless, underestimated and under-studied.

It is common knowledge that the much-praised process of “globalisation” was predicated upon rapid growth of almost all kinds of international economic activity such as foreign trade, foreign direct investment (FDI), portfolio investment, international credit and other types of financial flows, mergers and acquisitions at the international level, as well as cultural, touristic, migratory and other types of movement of populations at the international level. The onset of the Third Great Depression, in the same way as the Great Depression of the 1930s, caused a rapid shrinking

of all these magnitudes, after which there was a very perceptible stagnation or in certain areas further decline that has lasted up until the present day.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that world trade fell headlong immediately after the onset of the depression. The average ratio of imports to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) declined by 18 per cent in the first three years of the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s while the damage was much higher in the Third Great Depression, when the decline was 31 per cent in three years.⁴⁸ FDI growth also dropped perceptibly and remained at a level way below its pre-crisis levels.

Financial globalisation also took a serious blow. A member of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England had this to say:

International capital flows fell sharply during the crisis and show no signs of recovering to the levels seen pre-crisis. Cross-border financial flows for these countries (scaled by the size of their economies) are now as “globalized” as they were in the year 1983. ... UK cross-border financial exposure has not only stopped increasing, but fallen by 23% (or almost 440ppts of GDP) since its peak, so that it is currently at its level in late 2007.⁴⁹

The speaker concludes that financial deglobalisation is a more accurate description today than financial globalisation.⁵⁰

There are other indicators of deglobalisation. One of the symptoms is the fact that regional economic integration activities has stalled.⁵¹ It might even be said that there is constant retreat on this score. On the other hand, the World Trade Organisation, which was saluted as a great achievement and placed side by side in importance with the World Bank and the IMF is now so devoid of function that it might even be abolished.⁵² There is also a decline in the circulation of populations for purposes of tourism or migration.⁵³

The reasons for deglobalisation are still under scrutiny and are being debated in the relevant literature. Authors who have a longer-term view and a broader horizon engage in a comparison with the Great Depression of the 1930s, taking the point of view that such a retreat is a normal behaviour of the world economy under great

48 For the figures quoted see Peter A. G. van Bergeijk, “On the Brink of Deglobalisation... Again”, *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, v. 11 (1), 2018, p. 61. For general information on decline in foreign trade see also Cristina Constantinescu et al. “Does the Global Trade Slowdown Matter?”, *Journal of Policy Modeling*, 38 (4), 2016 and Alicia García-Herrero, “From Globalization to Deglobalization: Zooming into Trade”, Bruegel, 2020.

49 “Financial ‘Deglobalization’?: Capital Flows, Banks, and the Beatles”, speech given by Kristin Forbes, Member of the Monetary Policy Committee, Bank of England, 2014, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/speech/2014/financial-deglobalization-capital-flows-banks-and-the-beatles>.

50 Ibid, pp. 3 and 5.

51 Peter A. G. van Bergeijk, “On the Brink of Deglobalisation”, op. cit., p. 64.

52 García Herrero, op. cit., pp. 41-42.

53 Ibid, p. 34 and Charts 6 and 7.

financial duress.⁵⁴

However, the analysis does not stop there. A first distinction needs to be made between cyclical and more structural factors. Whatever the impact of cyclical factors, the drop in income is not the true determinant of the fall in foreign trade or the other indicators. Trade has been growing much more slowly because the relationship between trade and growth in income has changed. According to Constantinescu et al., “the elasticity of world trade to GDP was larger than 2 in the 1990s and declined throughout the 2000s.” Today it is smaller than one.⁵⁵

The impact of the new tendency is not uniform across different industries. This provides the clue for the most important factor of all, so we will quote extensively:

The trade slowdown was concentrated in the manufacturing sector. A finer decomposition reveals that manufacturing sub-sectors witnessing the largest declines in growth are those with greater vertical specialization... In the 1990s, there was a strongly positive relationship between the two, with trade in the most vertically specialized sub-sectors seeing much faster rates of growth than in sub-sectors where GVCs [Global Value Chains] are less developed. Then in the 2000s, while trade growth fell across the board, the largest declines were in precisely the sub-sectors with higher degrees of vertical specialization, such as the manufacture of radio, televisions and communication equipment (-10 percent) and manufacture of electrical industrial machinery (-6 percent).⁵⁶

We thus arrive at a very delicate point. The main problem arises, it now appears, from dysfunctionalities in global value chains (or global commodity chains). Since the rapid expansion of such chains in the period that extended from the 1980s to the 2000s was of capital importance for so-called globalisation, a setback in this area may deal a great blow to that phenomenon, way beyond any cyclical movement. A report by the Bank of International Settlements engages in an attempt at explanation for this development:

Long production chains are more efficient but may be more susceptible to shocks. Production processes involving multiple shipments of goods across borders tend to take more time and require larger inventories at any point in time. This can make them vulnerable to disruptions, for instance to financial shocks that affect the availability of credit and working capital. Indeed, theoretical work by Bruno et al (2018) indicates that longer production chains are particularly sensitive to changes in financial conditions.⁵⁷

54 Harold James, “Deglobalization: The Rise of Disembedded Unilateralism”, *Annual Review of Financial Economics*, 10, 2018, pp. 220 and 232; van Bergeijk, op. cit., pp 61ff. James draws attention to the fact that financial fragmentation and renationalisation of banks are also common to the two periods.

55 Constantinescu et al., op. cit., p. 2.

56 Ibid, p. 9.

57 *Globalisation and Deglobalisation*, BIS Papers, No. 100, December 2018, p. 9.

Inspection of Table 1 will show that the length of production times for commodities that are part of global value chains are incomparably longer than commodities produced for the domestic market and those that are produced for export without crossing of borders during the production process, i.e. are produced with local inputs of the exporting country. Hence given the overriding importance of products produced through global commodity chains in the period of so-called globalisation between the 1980s and the onset of the depression, the problem is substantial and promises to keep the world economy in a state of stagnation for a much longer period.

Table 1: Response of production lengths to financial tightening

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	
				Response to 1 % pt increase	
Length of production activities	Sample mean	Sample mean of yearly changes (modulus)	EMBI spread	dollar REER	
Total	2.11	0.035	-0.0028*	-0.0000	
Domestic	1.76	0.037	-0.0035**	-0.0004	
Traditional trade	1.92	0.044	-0.0060***	0.0011	
GVC	4.04	0.053	-0.0088***	-0.0022**	

The annual sample from 1995 to 2009 includes 35 sectors in 10 EMEs (Brazil, China, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Korea, Mexico, Poland, Russia and Turkey). See World Input-Output Database (www.wiod.org) for details on sectoral classification. Traditional trade includes goods produced domestically without using imported inputs, and shipped to a foreign country for final consumption, while GVC activities involve goods crossing national borders for production purposes. The production length measures used in the regressions are a simple average of the corresponding forward- and backward-looking production lengths (see Wang et al (2017b) for details). All left hand-side variables are winsorised at the 1% and 99% level to reduce the influence of outliers. "EMBI spread" denotes the country specific EMBI spread. "dollar REER" denotes the US real effective exchange rate.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 (based on robust standard errors clustered at the country level). The list of controls includes share of capital, high-skill and medium-skill labour, GDP deflator and CPI inflation (current and lagged value), policy rate (contemporaneous and first difference), real GDP (level and growth rate), sectoral value added and gross output (level and growth rate), policy rate (level and first difference). Country-sector fixed effects and time fixed effects are also included in each regression.

The myth of “globalisation”

Having established the reality of so-called “deglobalisation” basing ourselves on a specialist literature, we can now turn to a discussion of the meaning of this phenomenon. To be able to do this properly, we must ask for the patience of the reader for a detour on the true nature of “globalisation”. What we will say may sound counter-intuitive at first sight, but we are of the firm opinion that the concept “globalisation” refers to a myth. We have been advocating this view since the early 1990s, that is ever since the concept entered large-scale circulation and now think, after the full cycle of globalisation and deglobalisation has been experienced, that our view has been fully vindicated.⁵⁸ Because we do not wish to drift away too

⁵⁸ We have published a book on the question in Turkish: *Kod Adı Küreselleşme. 21. Yüzyılda Em-*

much from the central topic of this article and because we wish to focus on the attitude of the proto-fascist movement to globalisation, we present the parts of our article in English concerning globalisation as an Appendix. The reader can see there for themselves whether our claim regarding the practical verification of our views on the question is valid or not.

Let us quickly summarise the criticism we have been levelling at the theory of globalisation. This concept was, until the earthquake of the onset of the Third Great Depression, almost unanimously taken to be based on the following four propositions from extreme market liberals all the way to Hardt and Negri in their once fashionable book *Empire*. To summarise: (1) Globalisation is an inevitable product of the new technological universe. (2) It is hence unstoppable and irreversible. (3) The nation-state has become absolutely meaningless as an entity with respect to the economy. (4) The epoch of imperialism is over. We refute each of these propositions one by one in the text we provide in the Appendix. Let the reader decide for themselves.

However, we would like to bring two points to the reader's attention lest the Appendix seems too much of a burden to read. The first point has to do with the fact that in rebutting the idea that the process called globalisation is technologically determined, we do not of course deny that new technologies, for instance the advances in transportation (containerisation, jet aircraft, motorways etc.) or communications (digitalisation, telecommunications etc.) have facilitated the internationalisation of manifold facets of the economy, but counter the idea that the impact of new technologies is direct, automatic and irreversible. We clearly explain that were it not for the deliberate policies of states regarding liberalisation in the areas of trade, finance, the capital account and convertibility, FDI etc., there would have been no globalisation.

After three decades of ideological garbage thrown upon all of us, the Bank of International Settlements, one of the most important pieces of the multilateral architecture of international financial institutions, has now come to our side (and one is tempted to say to its senses):

Probably the most important factor behind globalisation has come from the reduction in protectionist measures. Indeed, several central bank notes point to a consensus that export-led growth models have outperformed import substitution... Many EMEs [emerging market economies] in Asia adopted export led growth models as far back as the early 1960s, opening their economies and experiencing high growth rates. By contrast, trade liberalisation in Latin America came relatively late... These varied experiences suggest that removal of regulatory barriers has probably been the primary source of globalisation.⁵⁹

peryalizm [Code Name Globalisation. Imperialism in the 21st Century], Istanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2nd printing, 2013. For a summary of our views in English see Sungur Savran, "Globalisation and the New World Order: The New Dynamics of Imperialism and War", in Alan Freeman & Boris Kagarlitsky, *The Politics of Empire. Globalisation in Crisis*, London: Pluto Press, 2004.

59 BIS, *ibid*, pp. 14-15. The reference to "several central bank notes" is due to the fact that this text is the introduction to the presentations made by the central banks of a very large number of

The second point has to do with the claim of the inevitability and irreversibility of globalisation. The idea then defended vociferously was that globalisation would move forward unstoppable as a Juggernaut clearing up the terrain from the relics of the old and nothing could arrest its march. Here is one aspect of what we said in our article in English regarding this question:

Not only is ‘globalisation’... not inevitable, but it is ridden with such contradictions that it is likely to collapse in the not too distant future. Here we can only point to these, leaving an elaboration to other occasions. There are at least three sets of such contradictions. First is the series of contradictions of the world economy specific to the age of ‘globalisation’. ... Against the background of the depressive phase of the long wave that the capitalist economy is going through and the sea of debt and overcredit in which all economic units are floating, this dialectic of the national and the international creates a constant threat of financial collapse and a depression of the classical type. ... Were the virtuality of such a generalised collapse to come about, it is beyond doubt that the world economy would again be fragmented into mutually hostile blocs, which would mean the total demise of the strategy of ‘globalisation’.

This article was published in 2004. Only four years later, in 2008 (and even as early as 2007 in America), the financial collapse came, resulting in a great depression as predicted and a progressive fragmentation (“deglobalisation”) of the world economy that put an end to globalisation.

Proto-fascism is the response of sections of the bourgeoisie especially in the imperialist countries to this fragmentation.

Had the much-vaunted theory of globalisation been correct and had the world been going through an *irreversible* process of globalisation, proto-fascism could not have emerged as a force. So once again we see that correct Marxist theory serves to prepare the proletarian movement for the events of the future and “globaloney”, as some leftists angrily called the concept of globalisation, simply misleads. Once again Marx’s second thesis on Feuerbach holds!

The patrician war on globalism

Our enquiry into the economic logic behind deglobalisation has led us to the conclusion that there exist very serious economic dynamics related to global commodity chains behind this process. In a sense, this discovery goes to confirm our oft-expressed idea that the wound opened up by the Third Great Depression is profound and is here to stay for a long time. If that is the case, then it should come to no one as a surprise that states across the board should move to protect their national capital fraction and their domestic market against the disruptive forces of the world

countries at a symposium organised by the BIS. The “notes” in question are the written version of their presentations.

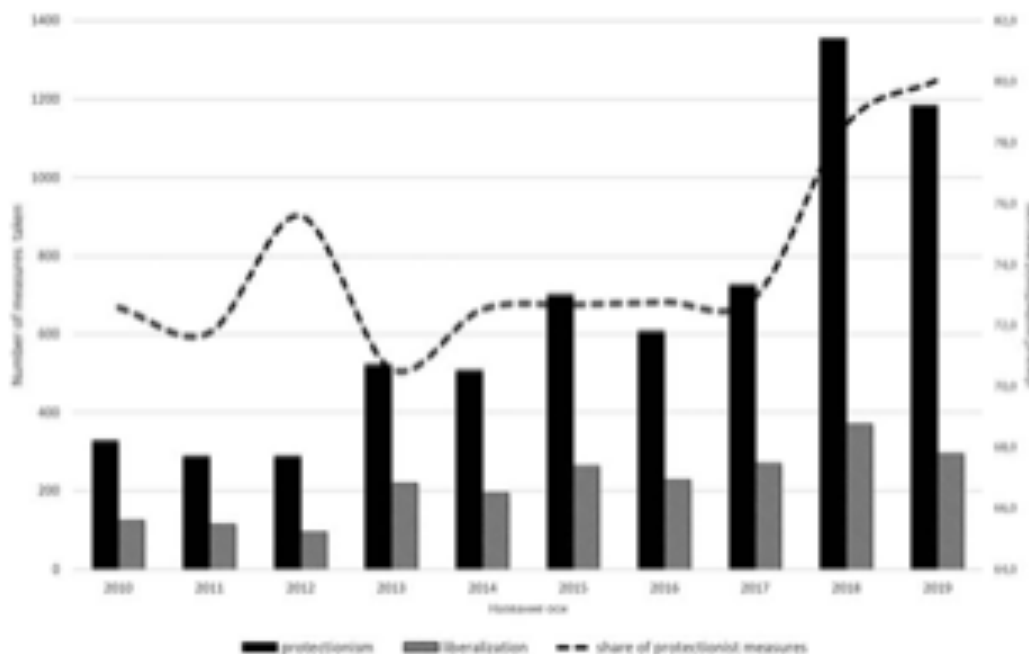
market.

Indeed, the literature on deglobalisation concurs that economic factors alone do not explain the process of deglobalisation. Many commentators point out that state policy is an extremely vital factor behind the move away from the rapid worldwide integration of the so-called “globalisation” period. This is what a major proponent of the deglobalisation thesis has to say:

In the current geopolitical and geo-economic context, the need, however, emerges to refocus research towards the political economy of protectionism, trade uncertainty, national economic security concerns (see van Bergeijk et al., 2017b) and the creation of physical barriers to trade and migration in the form of walls.⁶⁰

The most striking aspect of this move away from the liberalisation policies of the pre-2008 period is the revival of protectionism after several decades of persistent trade liberalisation. Three fourths of the measures taken by governments with respect to foreign trade in the decade after the onset of the Third Great Depression are of a protectionist nature! (Graph 1)

Graph 1: Regulatory policies measures of states in foreign trade, investment and migration in the world.



These restrictive measures focus on anti-dumping policies, import tariffs, quantitative restrictions, stimulating the local production through public procurement

⁶⁰ Van Bergeijk, op. cit., p. 68.

and government lending.⁶¹

Most deglobalisation commentators even contend that Trump and Brexit should be considered more of a symptom than the cause of this move away from globalist policies as the economic policies that feed deglobalisation started in some cases from 2008 on.

It is tempting to see today's new turn toward protectionism as a haphazard consequence of the narrow outcome of the 2016 US presidential election and the victory of Donald Trump. But in reality, the seeds of deglobalization were planted much earlier, and the Trump election is as much a symptom as a cause of a destabilizing global development. Like earlier episodes of globalization under strain, the outcome will depend on a political dynamic.⁶²

Although this way of referring to Trump and Brexit as a “symptom” does have its utility in pointing to the important fact of a worldwide tendency toward state protectionism across the board, one does need to be very careful in deciding at what point quantity is transformed into quality. For there is definitely a qualitative difference between, say, Donald Trump's approach to the world economy and the dynamics behind the Japanese-South Korean protectionist brawl of recent years, predominantly a product of serious political differences. Let us now try to understand in what sense Trump's policies differ from ordinary, partial and fragmentary backpedalling on globalisation.

To do this, we need to first understand the gravity of the situation the international bourgeoisie has found itself facing with the onset of the Third Great Depression. We already know that globalism was the policy around which the world bourgeoisie had closed ranks in order to load the burden of the crisis that had started in the mid-1970s on the shoulders of the working class and the labourers and thus to overcome the quasi stagnation of the world economy for a new take-off on that basis. For three decades (from 1979, the year of Thatcher's rise to power to 2008, the year of the global financial crisis), the entire bourgeoisie of the planet had progressively come to join hands to implement the neoliberal *cum* globalist policy strategy. This strategy had indeed achieved the atomisation of the labouring masses and the setting in motion of a race to the bottom within the international working class. What is more, partially (but only partially) as a result of the hegemony of the neoliberal ideological assault and the rise of what was called “market socialism”, there had come about the collapse of the bureaucratic workers' states in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union alongside a more top-down controlled restoration of capitalism in China and Vietnam.

Despite the boon offered by the former and the windfall represented by the latter,

61 Oleg Komolov, “Deglobalization and the ‘Great Stagnation’”, *International Critical Thought*, v. 10 (3), 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21598282.2020.1846582>, pp. 3-4.

62 James, op. cit., p. 220. For the same concept of “symptom” used for Trump see also Peter A. G. van Bergeijk, *Deglobalization 2.0. Trade and Openness During the Great Depression and the Great Recession*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2019, pp. 1-2.

world capitalism was not able to overcome its 30-year crisis. The most important part in this failure was surely played by the fact that capitalism has been in decline since the dawn of the imperialist epoch. Great Depressions of the imperialist era are in fact precisely the outward manifestation of this decline, which itself is but the result of the contradiction between the socialisation of the productive forces and the private nature of property in the means of production under capitalism. At the stage in which the productive forces have reached a formidable level of socialisation, when no productive process can be isolated from others, where all depend on all others, central planning is called for. But private property precludes the establishment of central planning as the general regulating principle either at the national or international level.

Thus, with the onset of the so-called global financial crisis, the international bourgeoisie was left looking into the abyss. Thirty years of crisis resolution policy had simply gone bankrupt. Despite the success of the neoliberal strategy in weakening the ranks of the working class and impoverishing the labouring masses all around the world and despite the collapse of the arch-rival “communist bloc”, the world economy was now in *worse condition than before!* This is what led to a serious stock-taking in the bosom of certain sectors of the bourgeoisie after 2008.

The progressive fragmentation of the world economy suggests to this fraction (or these fractions) of the bourgeoisie that the totality of the world economy is in a hopeless situation, that no matter how much liberalisation is attained and how much sacrifice is imposed on the working population, it will not fully recover and succeed in creating a new period of long boom. In such times, the other fundamental contradiction that besets the capitalist world economy comes into play. That contradiction involves, against the patently false ideologizing of globalisation theory, the tension, irredeemable within the framework of the capitalist mode of production, between the progressive integration of the world system under capitalism and the persistent reality of the nation-state. As collective salvation moves farther and farther away on the horizon, a growing section of the bourgeoisie of each country turns to the idea of salvation at the national level.

In imperialist countries this takes the form of fascism. The reason for this is easily explicable. Imperialist countries need the world economy for the healthy functioning of their immensely developed productive forces. Although this new set of policies starts as a project for salvation of the national economy and the national fraction of capital, at a certain stage of the healing process the policy necessarily has to turn outward. Since salvation together has already proved impossible, this outward turn will necessarily take the form of the imposition of the will of several countries on others, whether these others are themselves imperialist or whether they are nations already subordinated to imperialism. This is the substance of Trump’s economic policy. This is the meaning of “America first”. This is the motive behind what we have, in our earlier work, called the revival of the “*über alles*” syndrome wherever the proto-fascist movement has raised its head (“*préférence nationale*” in France, “*prima gli Italiani*” in Italy etc.) This is what we mean by the return of

barbarism in the 21st century. This is why we insist that the *substance* of this movement is fascist.

Let us finish this discussion by bringing in what this new orientation of certain fractions of the imperialist bourgeoisie implies for class struggles. The fascist project of salvation requires the crushing of the organised working class doubly, both for extracting the highest surplus to revive the activities of the national fraction of capital in the first phase and for reordering the totality of social and economic life for the requirements of war in the second phase. From the point of view of the working class, then, fascism is a very special type of authoritarianism unlike any other. Fascism is the dismantling of all independent organisations of the proletariat, economic and political, revolutionary or reformist.

For all these reasons, proletarian policy has to situate fascism on a different plane from other movements and ideologies of the bourgeoisie.

Nationalism for the pleb: Racism as intra-class struggle

*Una mattina mi son svegliato, Pisa ciao,
Massa ciao, Siena ciao ciao ciao*⁶³

Neither nationalism, nor racism, nor any other similar political ideology can sufficiently describe the distinguishing characteristics of the present-day family of parties that we are discussing. “Nationalism for the patrician” was born as a solution to the irresolvable contradictions that beset capitalism in our day and condemn it to a virtually endless economic crisis of vast proportions. “Nationalism for the pleb” is no less related to this same crisis. This nationalism or racism is in fact an ideology propagated by the proto-fascist movement in order to gain over the working and poor population to the cause of fascism by replacing the true actor, capitalism and the bourgeoisie, responsible for their plight under the conditions of the deep economic crisis of capitalism, by a bogus enemy in the person of the immigrant, the Muslim, the coloured populations, the Roma, and at times also the Jew. Thus it is empty chatter to say “Le Pen is a nationalist” or “Salvini is a racist”. So many ruling class members, including, of course, leaders of ruling class parties, are already racists that this kind of statement simply cannot go to the heart of the matter in defining the political stance of the two politicians in question. Only that nationalism and that racism that is organically linked to the irresolvable economic crisis of world capitalism is a distinguishing trait of the proto-fascist movement. Only when nationalism or racism is inextricably linked to class struggle does it become a defining characteristic of fascism. All other discourse on nationalism or racism is condemned to remain idle in this context.⁶⁴

63 Legend on the back of the T-shirt of the Lega mayor of Pontedera, a small town in Toscana that was, until recently, a fief of the tradition of the Italian Communist Party (Pci). Obviously refers to the renowned song of the Italian *partigiani*, “Bella Ciao”.

64 Which also implies that not all nationalisms should be condemned equally, although racism is by

In other words, the racism of the proto-fascist movement is devised to convince the “native” or “majority” worker that immigrant populations and racial/national minorities are responsible for their suffering. It is they who steal the jobs of the native worker, pillage the resources of the institutions that were built to serve the needs of the native family, sow the seeds of fighting and crime in the neighbourhood where the two populations live side by side, in short make life hell for the native working population.

Naturally, one does not, each time the question arises, automatically find racism related to and mingled with the adverse socio-economic consequences that the immigrants or Muslims or minorities supposedly inflict on the native population. But there are certain moments when the relationship is unmistakable and undeniable. Those moments bring out the *essence* of fascist racism or nationalism. If at other times the discourse focuses exclusively on racial or national characteristics, one should always remember that all this is done with a view to reinforce prejudices against immigrant communities and the other minority groups.

Let us see two instances of those moments when the essence of fascist racism comes out unmistakably, both from France. One of the first slogans of the Front National was the following: “1.000.000 chômeurs, c’est 1.000.000 d’immigrés en trop.” In other words: “One million jobless means one million immigrants too many”. (See figure 2) This slogan had a long life. In fact, the figure came to be increased as the economic crisis began to be felt much more seriously. The reason was that the slogan brought out the quintessence of fascist racism and spoke successfully to the worries of the native French worker.

Figure 2: Posters of the National Front provoking the jobless and the immigrants against each other



The other example is not a propaganda slogan but a well-established principle of

definition repulsive to those fighting for total emancipation.

the Front National: “*la préférence nationale*” (national priority). This declares clear and loud that under the Front (now of course the Rassemblement) social services and the like will in priority be provided for the native French and only subsidiarily to immigrant populations. Here again race and nation are inextricably linked to a discriminatory way of treatment meted out to immigrants and other minorities.

The same is true for Trump. When he attacked Muslims as “terrorists” and Mexicans as “rapists”, his purpose was to give the (white) American worker and farmer the message that as opposed to what had been happening for decades, under his presidency their needs and demands would receive a much greater welcoming. More generally, his protectionism, i.e. his measures in the domain of foreign trade, his adverse behaviour with respect to free-trade areas such as the Trans-Pacific and even the long-established NAFTA, and his infamous Mexican wall are also aimed at strengthening the impression in the American worker and farmer that Trump’s first priority is their economic well-being.

Losing the working class to fascism

That this strategy of diverting the frustration of the working class from the real culprit, that is to say the capitalist class, towards immigrants and minorities has worked is very obvious. The very high level of support received by many of the proto-fascist parties in Europe, the success of Brexit, the winning of the US presidency by Trump in 2016 and the very high number of votes he received in 2020 (74 million, which is higher than all previous winning candidates) and his lingering popularity all go to show that, overall, the flame lit by Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1972 in France has resulted in a conflagration across Europe and over the Atlantic in North America. There is no doubt that the wager has been paid back.

However, the left around the world has still not comprehended the true dimensions of the danger that is accumulating on both sides of the Atlantic. What is occurring under our very eyes is not only the strengthening of a fascist threat. Worse still, that threat is feeding on the support extended by working class and the rural poor to these parties. We have been warning about this for the last five years at least, ever since Trump was elected in 2016 thanks to the swinging of the vote of a part of the white working class under duress in the battlefield states of the Rust Belt, where the industrial working-class cities, towns and districts thriving several decades ago have now become an endless wasteland.⁶⁵ The same goes for Britain where it is the regions of the country where so-called globalisation has wreaked havoc most that voted *en masse* for Brexit.

When we come to continental Europe, we find the same scene. To turn our eyes first to France, here one finds several elements that make the Front National (now Rassemblement National) the party best organised within the working population and the poor. The most serious is the political conquest that the Front has accom-

65 See our “The Great Challenge”, op. cit.

plished in the heart of the industrial (and also mining) regions of France. The paradigmatic case is the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. This is a region that boasted a proletarian culture of the first order and used to be a fortress of the French Communist Party and the Socialist Party, the social democracy of France. It is now a citadel of the Front. Hénin-Beaumont, a proletarian city *par excellence* has been the laboratory of Marine Le Pen in her effort to win over the French working class since 2007.⁶⁶

In this city in the midst of mining country with a proud history of socialist and communist organising one can still come across a plaque with an inscription that reads “The French Communist Party, the Hénin Liétard Branch (followed by the sickle and hammer), to the memory of our comrade Joseph Fontaine, the first victim to fascism, killed 11th April 1934”. Today 45 per cent of the *workers* (not of the population at large) vote for the Front National.⁶⁷

The author we have just quoted, Sylvain Crépon, recounts case after case of workers that come from a militant left-wing background that are now members of the Front.⁶⁸ A certain Laurent Brice, son of a metalworker father and a mother who worked as a maid, grandson of a closed pit miner, all politically engaged in the Communist Party, turns to Marine Le Pen’s party at age 16. He is not an exception but a very typical case. Over time the region has lost its mine pits and its metallurgical industry and has become a gigantic shopping mall. The Front is the only party that has fought the delocalisation of the factories to other regions of France or abroad, while the parties of the left vote in parliament for subsidies to the enterprises that move elsewhere. Many former militants of both the so-called Parti Socialiste (PS) and the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) have turned to the Front in disgust at the politics of their former party. There are those who have been militants of their unions and of the PS until they were 50 years of age and then desert that party to join the Front.

These militants reproach the PS for having adopted a liberal line that can hardly be distinguished from right-wing parties. They also point out that the party machine works to distribute posts, opportunities and benefits to the supporters of the party in the municipalities. Research shows that whenever the PS captures a municipality there is a jump in the flow of new militants to the party. Henri Weber, a former Trotskyist who later joined the PS has this to say in an extremely frank document: Many of the members do not become militants but are either allies or “obliged to become members”: parents, friends, municipal workers, people who receive assistance of various kinds from the municipality. These people are largely apolitical but captive voters. They receive their membership card in return for a vote to the PS. Other testimonies show that mayors and municipal councillors raise their own

66 See, for a source full of useful information and abounding in first-hand interviews with both rank-and-file workers and unionists Sylvain Crépon’s *Enquête au coeur du nouveau Front National*, Paris: Nouveau Monde éditions, 2012.

67 Ibid, pp. 110 and 112.

68 For what follows the reader may beneficially consult Crépon’s book, pp. 116-152.

salaries whenever they find the opportunity to do so and accumulate various posts so as to be paid several salaries at once. To the extent that one considers the PS a working-class party, which we do not since the 1980s, this is a clear and concrete picture of a workers' bureaucracy flourishing not in a workers' state but within the institutions of the bourgeois order.

This may not be true for the bourgeois party that the PS has become, but for the PCF, this is precisely the situation. Because the sole *raison d'être* of this party has become more and more the preservation of its turf in the unions, in particular within the CGT, and some of the municipalities it is still keeping under control, for pretty much the same reasons as what was said above for the PS, the reproach to this party is more a matter of its unchanging policy of an alliance with the PS in each election, in an effort to keep its municipalities and its overall support so that it can protect its trade unions. Some workers, in their testimonies in Crépon's book, call the PCF "the lapdog of the PS".

Having listened to so many testimonies of workers who have abandoned the PS and the PCF and joined the Front, Crépon reaches the following very significant conclusion:

In a context in which the PCF collapsed after the Berlin Wall underwent the same fate and while the PS has deserted social struggles in favour of ethical struggles around the question of anti-racism, the popular layers of the private sector started to feel as if they were orphans of the parties that were supposed to represent them. ... By increasingly abandoning the ideological struggle on social questions, the parties of the left may have led people to think that these no longer formed a true alternative to social injustices. In this context, the discourse of the Front National, which has become more and more focused on social themes, which proposes a solidarity not of a universal kind but one based on national, or even ethnic, foundations, which denounces, in a particularly aggressive manner, the "elites" and the "affluent", was able to arouse a far from negligible response in the eyes of layers whose situation was made more and more precarious.⁶⁹

Crépon is no Marxist. Unfortunately, the picture he has discovered gropingly is still a mystery to many a Marxist. Woe to those who still brag that they are leftists and have abandoned the defence of the masses exploited and oppressed by capitalism to a Parisian millionaire whose world outlook can only be characterised as retrograde and repulsive.

Let us remind those who still close their eyes to the truth by leaving the field of micro sociology to turn our eyes to the broad picture. There is no escaping the truth: the part of the working class vote in the overall performance of the Front has been steadily rising over time: 17 per cent in 1988, 21 per cent in 1955, and 23 per cent

69 Ibid, pp. 150-151. Our translation from the French original.

in 2002. The latest figure we have is from 2014 and it is a whopping 35 per cent!⁷⁰ That is why one of the leaders of the FN once dared to say that the FN had become the largest working-class party in France!

We would ask the reader to keep this fundamental fact in mind as far as the concluding part of this article, since this will be a centrepiece of our arguments concerning our discussion on the political strategy of the left in the face of the proto-fascist movement.

The other aspect is the more diffuse layers of the poor in France. The new geography of poverty in France has been laid bare by the Yellow Vests movement, which shook France for more than a year and subsided only with the pandemic. Those who looked at that movement superficially dismissingly attributed the movement to the petty-bourgeoisie, pointing to the fact that the main grievance of the participants was the raise in petrol prices the Macron government imposed for purposes of struggle against climate change. The Yellow Vests rebelled because they lived in regions the French call “*les zones périurbaines*”, and therefore had to commute to work every day in their car. Those who are not familiar with the new urban setup concluded from this that these people had to be the “middle classes”. This is a great mistake. Yes, the Yellow Vests included many who owned their small businesses, but it also encompassed the wage workers of small businesses. Both categories lived in zones that are at a considerable distance from their workplace because they cannot afford the high rents in the bustling city centres and have fled the so-called “*cités*”, where, depressed by the lack of services and overpowered by unemployment and poverty, native and immigrant populations live in constant tension. And because of the inadequacy of public transport, these people have to commute to work in their car. “*Périurbain*” sometimes translates into English as suburban, which is totally misleading sociologically and is really best rendered by expressions such as “outer urban” or “outlying urban”. This is the new geography of poverty, on which the party of Marine Le Pen has been feeding for a long time.⁷¹ This, let it be said in passing, is why the Yellow Vests movement was such a difficult movement to situate on the political spectrum.

As a last point, let us draw the reader’s attention to the important role that the youth play in the activities of the Front. Not only does the Front recruit a lot of young people and educate them along the lines of its own ideological orientation. It puts them up as candidates in local elections even when they are as young as twenty years of age and this not exceptionally but on a wide scale.⁷²

The Lega of Matteo Salvini in Italy is the other success story of recent times.

70 Ibid, p. 135, footnote 2.

71 See Christophe Guilluy, *La France périphérique. Comment on a sacrifié les classes populaires*, Paris: Flammarion, 2014, for a very clear exposition of this new geography, remarkably prescient given that the book was published four years before the Yellow Vests movement started.

72 See the research done by a journalist: Charlotte Rotman, *20 ans et au Front. Les nouveaux visages du FN*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 2014.

From a party which, using the name Lega Nord under Umberto Bossi and defending the rights of Northern Italy against “bureaucratic” Rome and the “parasitic” South, which crumbled under the burden of scandals at the beginning of the last decade, received a mere 4 per cent of the popular vote in 2013 and was regarded as moribund, Salvini created a sister party for Marine Le Pen, now called only “la Lega”, dropped the agenda of federalism and played to the same kind of fears and worries in the native Italian population. On the basis of this new programme, the Lega received 17 per cent of the popular vote in 2018 to become the junior coalition partner in government, during which thanks to his astute moves serving his party’s anti-immigrant agenda, Salvini’s popularity rose immensely. In the elections for the European Parliament in 2019, the Lega doubled its share of the vote to come in first with 34 per cent.⁷³

The situation in France is more and more the reality for Italy as well. Looking at the larger picture already gives one a foretaste of the micro sociology of these electoral victories. One should note that the Lega has traditionally been supported by the petty-bourgeoisie of the North and its funds come from some powerful magnates of Milan, Turin, Genoa, and other Northern cities. Thus, the petty-bourgeoisie still has an important part among the electorate of the party. However, in the recent period, after Salvini transformed the party into a proto-fascist party, the Lega received quite a high number of votes from the working class, in particular, interestingly enough, of large enterprises. (The only layer of the working class that still resists the Lega drive are the public employees.) In this, only the Movimento 5 stelle (the Five Star Movement – M5s), that spineless catch-all party without a straightforward political programme, surpassed the Lega.⁷⁴ This holds out the prospect of even more workers flowing towards the Lega in the future as Salvini will possibly grab a large share of the remains of the M5s when that party in all probability gradually dwindles to a fraction of its earlier strength (25 per cent during its first electoral foray in 2013 and 33 per cent in 2018). One might add, in an anticipatory gesture, that the party has grown lately in the so-called “red regions”.⁷⁵

Yet it is only when one zooms into the details and obtains a close-up that one can discover the real dimensions of the catastrophe. Let us start with a general assessment of the change in the political orientation of the regions that voted left in earlier times. The Istituto Cattaneo, a think tank, writes this about the four regions, Umbria (capital city Perugia), Marche (capital city Ancona), Emilia Romagna (capital city Bologna) and Toscana (or Tuscany, capital city Florence), that persistently voted

73 For an excellent analysis of the Lega and more generally of the state of Italian fascism today see Burak Sayim, “The (Still) Resistible Rise of Salvini”, <http://redmed.org/article/still-resistible-rise-salvini>. See also our overall assessment of the elections to the European Parliament, in which Salvini’s Lega takes pride of place: “The Proto-Fascist Menace in Europe”, <http://redmed.org/article/proto-fascist-menace-europe>.

74 Gianluca Passarelli & Dario Tuorto, *La Lega di Salvini. Estrema destra di governo*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2018, pp. 57 and 86-88.

75 Ibid, p. 26.

left in the past:

In the four regions that were once painted politically “red” from 1948 to 2018, the centre-left parties have lost close to 30 percentage points, passing from 59.2 per cent in 1968 to the present-day 30.1 per cent. The electoral domination of the left and centre-left has thus come to an end.⁷⁶

It is more and more the Lega that benefits from this vertiginous decline of the left and the centre-left. One cannot imagine the dazzling success of the Lega in these once “red zones”. The author of the book we have just quoted points out that, for Pisa, a persistently left wing-city until very recently, the Lega raised its share of the vote in 2018 to close to 25 per cent, whereas its share was a meagre 0.35 per cent only five years before, in 2013. In other words, it jumped from being an almost non-existent force to the position of the first party! The personal stories recounted by Allegranti are each witness to a tragic development that makes Pisa a microcosm of the headlong plunge and the moral bankruptcy of the Italian or even the European left.

There are people who say clear and loud, “I am still a communist but I vote for the Lega.”⁷⁷ There are people whose grandfather was a *partigiano* fighting the fascists in the 1940s and so when the grandson joined the “post-fascist” Alleanza nazionale in the 1990s, he simply could not go home, but now the whole family votes for the Lega because “Now the only radical force that opposes the system in Tuscany, but also at the national level [is] the Lega”.⁷⁸ There are people who have been members of the most left-wing union confederation of Italy, the Cgil, for 36 years (and are still members) but now support the Lega.⁷⁹

And how do they explain this seeming contradiction? By the fact, for instance, that the other Matteo, Renzi, leader, until 2018, of the Partito democratico (Pd), the main successor to the once mighty Pci, the Italian Communist Party, was the architect of the so-called “Jobs Act”, which did away with article 18 of the Italian labour code, an article that had been targeted by the bosses for decades simply because it provided for a relative job security. For his part Salvini was against this!⁸⁰ And also because while the Fornero Act, which raised retirement age to 67, was the product of the Pd, Salvini stood against it.⁸¹ They also point out that the Pd can receive the vote of only the rich neighbourhoods.⁸² And they also express a kind of raw and unmediated class hatred about the Pd politicians: “that left, wearing red t-shirts and

76 David Allegranti, *Come si diventa leghisti. Viaggio in un paese che si credeva rosso e si è svegliato verde*, Milano: UTET, 2019, p. 167. Here and in later quotations the translation from the Italian original is ours.

77 Ibid, p. 73.

78 Ibid, p. 81.

79 Ibid, p. 127.

80 Ibid, p. 128.

81 Ibid, p. 131.

82 Ibid, p. 37.

a Rolex on their wrist, has nothing left of the left in them”.⁸³

It is important to know that it is definitely not the working class that has abandoned the left in Europe.⁸⁴ It is the left that has consciously abandoned the working class. In Britain, at the turn of the millennium, Tony Blair consciously tried to move Labour away from the unions and turn it into something similar to the Democratic Party in America, even tried to rename it as “New Labour” to convert it into a party of the progressive petty bourgeoisie, more focused on identity questions than working class grievances. In Germany, SPD leader Gerhard Schröder, Chancellor between 1998-2005, struck up a cosy alliance with Tony Blair to declare together a manifesto titled “Europe: The Third Way” or “Die Neue Mitte” (“The New Middle”), which was a clear turn away from class politics and towards neoliberalism.

In France the turn to neoliberalism had already been effected gradually under the two-term presidency of François Mitterrand (1981-1995). However, another incident at the beginning of the 21st century is extremely telling. A think tank (Fondation Terra Nova) close to the PS brought out a report in 2005. The report observed that the left had lost the support of the popular classes. However, it did not defend a line that would win them back! Its recommendation was to turn to new sociological groups: graduates, youth, women, and minorities. *Identity politics* par excellence!⁸⁵ Finally, in Italy the Pci, the largest communist party of Europe, which received one third of the popular vote at the summit of its popularity in the early 1980s, liquidated itself, was called, tongue in cheek, “*la cosa*” (the thing) for a while in the early 1990s, successively changed its name to the Democratic Party of the Left, Democrats of the Left, and finally the Democratic Party, shedding any links to the left, in words and in deeds.

We will not go into the details of what happened to the far left. The generalisation may safely be made that an overwhelming part of the far left also turned to an amalgam of identity politics and what is nowadays fashionably called “eco-socialism”. So everything was played out in front of the eyes of the world. This process was accompanied, in the field of ideology and left-wing theory by, first, an entire panoply of arguments designed to show that the working class (or the proletariat) had either evaporated or lost its political importance, secondly, that identity politics on the basis not of a person’s objective material position in the web of social relations but on identities everyone themselves choose was the most correct politics, and third, Leninist revolutionary politics and in particular a vanguard working class party of the Bolshevik type was *passé*. All of this together makes up a new kind of non-class left that we have been calling “post-Leninist”.

Now the world realises more and more that it was the Trumps and the Le Pens and the Salvini who have won the working class over. Working class politics, kicked out of the door by the left, has come back through the roof in an unrecogni-

83 Ibid, p. 22.

84 We are not mentioning America since there has never been a mass left party in that country.

85 Crépon, op. cit., p. 126.

sable guise. Some revenge!

What is to be done?

The writing of this article up to this point was done before 21st April. At that point, we decided to write only a concluding section on the policies we thought would be appropriate in order to fight this danger of approaching fascism. We postponed the writing of this section due to the intensity of other duties. At that stage something interesting occurred. The reader is aware that the fundamental reason why this article is being written is to convince the reader that the storming of the Capitol on 6th January in the US forms a turning point in the rise of 21st century fascism. But just as 6th January confirmed the views we had put forward since 2016 on the rise of fascism in the US, the new developments that occurred since 21st April have already confirmed this thesis of a turning point in the rise of fascism, even before the article has been finished.

On 21st April, an incident happened of which the reader of these lines is probably aware. They may, however, be at a loss to understand its significance fully. 20 retired generals in France, joined, according to their claim, by up to a thousand lower ranking officers, published a statement in a far-right magazine called *Valeurs Actuelles*. The statement had as its main axis the threat of a civil war and a coup d'Etat, targeting the descendants of immigrants within the working population, which the generals without qualms called "hordes" living in the *cités* of France.⁸⁶ A moment ago we looked at the date on which we had interrupted the writing of this article, leaving the concluding section to later, and sent the article to the editorial board by email so as to be assessed collectively. Both were 21st April! What a coincidence! The events of the period since that day shows that fascism has raised its ugly head in ever more ugly ways not only in the US but also in Europe.

Several other incidents occurred in France after the publication of that statement. First, it was the turn of a group of young officers to publish another statement in the same magazine, supporting their elders. Then a small trade union of the police made an appeal to the government for harsh measures as a reaction to the anonymous assassination of two members of the police force. The recommendations were, first, to create check-points of exactly the same type that Israel used against the Palestinian population with the purpose of controlling the "hordes" targeted by the retired generals and, secondly, the use of the same methods in the fight against drugs as the Philippines and Brazil, i.e. summary executions. The last significant development was the demonstration organised by the police unions on 19th May. Here, a host of politicians, starting with the major representative of the Macron

⁸⁶ For details see "Putschist French Generals Threaten Civil War: Prepare the Workers' Movement for the Riposte", <http://redmed.org/article/putschist-french-generals-threaten-civil-war-prepare-workers-movement-riposte>. Readers of the French language may consult the entire text here: <https://www.valeursactuelles.com/politique/pour-un-retour-de-lhonneur-de-nos-gouvernants-20-generaux-appellent-macron-a-defendre-le-patriotisme/>.

government in competing with the party of Marine Le Pen in reactionary political positions, Gérald Darmanin, Minister of the Interior, participated and supported with their speeches.

The fact that in one of the two leading countries of the EU (the other is Germany) a military warning has been publicly voiced, including an explicit threat of a coup d'Etat, and its recurrence at another level within a matter of ten days, and the fact that the government is invited to join the list of countries notorious for their utter contempt for the fundamental rights of their citizens must be seen in itself as a “wake-up” call.⁸⁷ The threat of a putsch demonstrates what state of restlessness many sectors of the ruling classes in imperialist countries find themselves in and what kind of orientation is in gestation in the bosom of those ruling classes as a result. But there is another aspect, one that is even more interesting for the framework we have drawn in this article.

Marine Le Pen immediately published a message of support to the generals' *pronunciamento* threatening a putsch, a civil war and “thousands of deaths”! Naturally, she distinguished herself from the generals' approach by adding that the problems correctly identified by the venerable military leaders had to be solved through “democratic” methods, that if she were to be elected president of the republic in the elections of spring 2022, the road to a solution would be opened, that a government of National Unity would be handy for the task. She also invited the putschist generals to join her party! And all this despite years of efforts at “*dédiabolisation*”, i.e. a struggle against the demonisation of her party. And that is not all. It later turned out that the spokesperson of the retired generals, a certain Jean-Pierre Fabre-Bernadac, had in earlier years contributed to the security personnel of the Front National.

The proto-fascists seem to be even stronger within the police force. That Marine Le Pen was behind the demonstration organised by the police unions on 19th May is a secret around the block. And recently a survey conducted by a serious institution brought out the fact that fully three fourths (74 per cent) of the active police force intended to vote for Le Pen in the coming elections.⁸⁸

In short, as if 6th January were not sufficiently grave, there has now surfaced in France what we might call the “21st April syndrome”. While the Trump movement in the US has demonstrated that the transition from proto-fascism toward fascism *tout court*, embodied in the subversive activities of the armed militia working hand-in-glove with Trump himself and his aides, has started, in France, although the movement of Le Pen still has no visible paramilitary forces, her already con-

87 The revolutionary organisation that we support in France used precisely that expression in its statement on the issue.: <https://www.gercekgazetesi.net/uluslararasi/kalk-borusu-caldi-darbe-tehdid-dine-karsi-birlesik-isci-cephesi>

88 “Chez les policiers la tentation grandissante du vote RN”, *France-Inter*, <https://www.franceinter.fr/amp/chez-les-policiers-la-tentation-grandissante-du-vote-rn>. We thank our comrade Burak Sayım for having drawn our attention to this fact as well as another one on in Italy, the latter being taken up below (see footnote 92).

siderable popularity within the police force has now been fortified by the remarkable support she has received from the armed forces, thus implying that despite her absence from the streets, she commands a powerful momentum within the regular forces of repression, which may be used *in extremis* to batter the fortress of the existing parliamentary regime.

If France's retired generals raise their voice, what reason would stop their counterparts in the US? There, too, 124 retired generals and admirals, calling themselves "Flag Officers 4 America", also published a manifesto on 12th May. The statement bore the traits of the former president. The generals go so far as to question the results of the elections that brought Biden to the White House, cast doubt on the Biden's health, not only physically but also mentally, and defend Trump-like policies by pointing a finger not only on China, but also Iran as threats to the national interests of the US, finally castigating policies that are migration- and environment-friendly.⁸⁹

To sum up, fascism hops from continent to continent finding encouragement from audacious moves made in other countries. In our opinion, the danger is serious in all three countries taken up in this article. The huge government expenditure the Biden administration has engaged in implies not the birth of a new Keynesian turn but the following: the globalist wing of the US bourgeoisie is dead scared that growing layers of the people will turn their face to Trump. The "buy American" policy⁹⁰ pursued by Biden and Janet Yellen's efforts to establish a common minimum level of corporate tax valid for every country are sure signs of the new administration keeping their distance from extreme globalist policies, so much vilified by Trump while he was in power. This already shows the dent Trump has made in the by now already antiquated Washington Consensus of yesteryear. It has to be added that there has not yet been a clear break with Trump's migration policy and the sanctions and protectionism against China are still in place. All this is due to the fact that Trump is still going very strong. From the beginning, we pointed to his lack of both a party loyal to him to the end and a paramilitary organisation as his major weaknesses. We even called him a "maverick fascist" in the initial stages of his rule precisely for these reasons. This characterisation was wholly correct in the earlier phases. However, the situation has now changed. Trump has both established unquestionable authority over the Republican Party and has won the loyalty of several paramilitary bands. He may not even have to wait for four years. If Biden, the oldest president to be elected in US history, should die or fall so ill as to withdraw from office (or should be deemed unable to serve by some institution), it is extremely doubtful that a certain Kamala Harris, selected vice-president of Biden for pure glitz, a fresh-

89 "More Than 120 Retired Generals and Admirals Wrote to Biden Appearing to Back a False Election Conspiracy and Questioning His Mental Health", *Business Insider*, <https://www.businessinsider.com/former-generals-admirals-letter-question-election-biden-health-2021-5>. For the text of the declaration, see <https://tinyurl.com/me3une33>.

90 "Biden, like Trump, Embraces the 'Buy American' Folly", *Boston Globe*, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/03/10/opinion/biden-like-trump-embraces-buy-american-folly/>.

woman in Washington politics lacking well-established connections either in the beltway or in the world of industry and finance, can rule the United States in these unprecedented times face to the wolf that Trump is by now. (Let this be said with some caution, as one should always be mindful of the surprise factor in politics.)

In France, Marine Le Pen has already taken the entire country hostage ideologically and politically. The government of Macron, a politician originally from the Parti Socialiste (PS), supposedly a party of the left, and one that then donned the mantle of liberalism, is now competing with the party of Le Pen in the sphere of reactionary politics, in strengthening policy brutality, in hostility to Islam (widely misnamed as Islamophobia), in discrimination against immigrant populations, in trying to show the left as Islamophile (the so-called “*Islamogauchisme*” of the intellectuals and academics is an invention of Macron’s Minister of Higher Education). We dealt earlier with the state of the armed forces and of the police. A lot of confusion and confusianism exists on the left, where some popular intellectual celebrities writing in their extremely popular web sites and blogs create a lot of misguided impressions about Marine Le Pen, either whitewashing this extremely dangerous politician or at least creating all kinds of false images about her.⁹¹ When we bring all this together with the results of opinion polls, of which one of the most recent ones attributes the intention of vote for Marine Le Pen in the second round of the presidential election next spring to 48 per cent of the electorate, assuming that the other candidate is Macron, the gravity of the situation is clear for all to see.

Coming to Italy, the country is in the grip of an economic depression at the national level since the beginning of the new century, i.e. even from before the worldwide depression started in 2008. Its GDP is lower today than it was as at the beginning of the millennium! It is the country with the highest debt stock in Europe (2.6 trillion dollars or 150 per cent of its GDP). Various coalition formulae have been tried among the different parties since the 2018 elections, but all have collapsed after a while. Early elections cannot be held because all other political forces dread seeing the Lega or still another proto-fascist party, the Fratelli d’Italia, win. It is for this reason that a “technocratic” government under the premiership of Mario Draghi, until recently the governor of the European Central Bank, has been formed, with parties also giving ministers to the government. The manoeuvres made by Matteo Renzi, a previous leader of the Partito Democratico, the inventor of the notorious Jobs Act, an avid partisan of the EU, and leader of a small party nowadays, were decisive. Renzi could have had only one objective in bringing down the coalition government of which his party was an element with the purpose of paving the way for the Draghi government. The European Union, immediately before these manoeuvres by Renzi, had revealed that it had set aside the lion’s share in the pandemic support fund to Italy (750 billion euro or 900 billion dollars). The endgame is easy to discover: After this gift from the EU (this historic moment for Italy came after the appointment of a previous prime minister of Italy (what a coincidence!)),

91 See Philippe Corcuff, *La grande confusion: Comment l’extrême droite gagne la bataille des idées*, Paris: Textuels, 2021.

Paolo Gentiloni, as the Commissioner for the Economy), Draghi is expected to use the opportunity to effect a recovery of the Italian economy, thus bringing about an atmosphere of relief to the Italian people, who will then become, it is expected, less sensitive to the unceasing diatribes against migration by Matteo Salvini or to the vitriolic language of Geogia Melone, the leader of the Fratelli, and less impressed by their rhetoric against the EU since the EU funds will have made life easier for them. And Draghi will then use his newly won prestige to be elected president of the republic in 2022 and will firmly stand in the way of Salvini's access to the position of prime minister.

In our opinion, *the dominant globalist wings of the Italian bourgeoisie are testing, with firm support from the institutions of the EU, their last opportunities to overcome the crisis the country is going through before a veritable tremor hits Italian society*. At present (early June 2021), opinion polls show that the first two parties of Italy are the two proto-fascist parties!⁹² As Salvini is losing altitude, the Fratelli are on the rise. The reason may be that perhaps because it has a more complicated and variegated history than the Fratelli and thus harbours a greater number of distinct tendencies or perhaps out of a conjecture that the Draghi government may be weakened more easily from the inside than remaining outside, Salvini has joined the government. This may have created in the eyes of the more extreme supporters of proto-fascism the image of indecision on the part of Salvini. Whatever the causes of the destiny of the two parties taken singly, the fact that together they seem to be receiving the support of roughly 40 per cent of the electorate (21.5 per cent for the Lega and 19 per cent for the Fratelli) may be considered an extraordinary feat on the part of proto-fascism.

It then transpires that the struggle against fascism assumes a vital importance in these countries (or other similar ones we have not taken up in the context of this article in order not to increase the length of the article to unmanageable proportions). What are the methods to be adopted for a successful struggle against fascism? We will try to be very concise in this respect, presenting our reasons for every recommendation we are making in the most summary manner so that the difference of the line we are advocating from the line pursued by the majority of the left can stand out in stark form.

- The socialist left must *abandon identity politics* which results in the conquest of ever new layers of the working class by the fascists, should *turn its face to the working class*, and take up the issues and challenges of class struggle whole-heartedly.
- This kind of orientation will only be possible within an all-encompassing Marxist theoretical and ideological framework. Only in such a framework will it be possible to avoid the pitfalls of working-class corporatism or

92 https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2021/05/28/news/sondaggio_youtrend_fdi_secondo_partito_supera_pd-303169678/.

economism and adopt the Leninist policy of the hegemony of the working class on other labouring classes and non-class categories of the oppressed. *A return to Marxism is a categorical necessity.* Not out of dogmatism but because this is a matter of life or death!

- Knowledge and awareness concerning Marxism has regressed to such low levels that whoever hears the appeals made in the previous two bullet points thinks that this is a call for the abandonment by the socialist movement of non-class categories of the oppressed. Quite the contrary. Not only is the struggle waged by each of these categories (the oppressed races and nations, the oppressed groups of faith, women, gays and trans people, other categories that may be specific to certain geographies) invaluable when seen from the vantage point of the total emancipation of humanity, but from the proletariat's point of view it is necessary to win them over to its side in order to overwhelm the bourgeoisie in its striving for the conquest of power. (Obviously, there are other social groups, in particular other exploited and oppressed social classes or fractions thereof that need to be won over as allies. What these are changes from geography to geography.) The struggle of the oppressed was not born with post-modernism and its identity politics! It existed spontaneously before post-modernism on a widespread scale. What post-modernist identity politics has brought is the break of the oppressed with the proletariat. Every category started to concentrate on its own turf. *The struggle now to be waged in the bosom of all oppressed categories is the understanding that the alliance with the proletariat is a fundamental condition of emancipation.*
- The main objective of fascism is to smash all independent organisations of the working class, be they trade unions, political organisations or other types of associations and be they revolutionary, reformist or class-collaborationist. The antidote against fascism is, therefore, the mobilisation of the working class in unity. This is all the more important since fascism organises petty-bourgeois masses in the form of paramilitary forces and the working class needs to organise for self-defence. Hence a *workers' united front against fascism* will be the most effective tool in fighting fascism. It is necessary to try to bring all political and economic (trade union) organisations of the working class in such a front.
- As today considerable layers of the working class have come under the influence of fascism, the bringing together of the workers' movement and creating a pole of attraction for these layers as well as the ideologically confused layers of the petty bourgeoisie thrown into misery in all countries first by the vagaries of the Third Great Depression and later by the impact of the pandemic is absolutely necessary. The workers' united front is a dire

need. Every party should be able to pursue its programmatic objectives, every union its own struggle in such a front. ***To march separately without confusing the banners and to strike together*** is the fundamental goal of the workers' united front.

- Fascism cannot attain its goals without the instrument of armed militias. This implies that at a certain stage of the struggle between fascism and the front defending the independence of the organisations of the working class will inevitably take violent forms. If such is the case, then ***workers need to learn methods of self-defence, including the use of arms***. This aspect of the struggle against fascism makes it imperative for the workers to learn martial arts, best provided in the bosom of trade union organisations within the workers' united front.
- ***The political organisations of the working class should, in all countries, keep away from parties that pompously pretend to be of the "left" but are, in fact, the mouthpiece of the well-off modern petty-bourgeoisie and an instrument of the capitalist order.*** Parties such as the Parti Socialiste in France or the Partito Democratico in Italy have long ceased to be working-class parties, even of the reformist type. Many workers move closer to the proto-fascist parties precisely as a result of their resentment and rage against these parties. Real working-class parties must avoid going to the working class hand in hand with such parties. If they do not avoid them, this will heap on them the responsibility of the accumulated wrong these parties have done to the working class.
- A corollary of this is to ***keep away from the Democratic Party in the US.*** The Democratic Party is simply an instrument of the US bourgeoisie and, more specifically, of Wall Street. It is the safety valve the entire bourgeoisie uses when the Republican Party fails to rise to its needs. This is why the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is so harmful since this organisation has for decades carried out its political work inside the Democratic Party and is pursuing this orientation as a strategic choice. However, the policy to be adopted vis-à-vis this organisation needs to be more nuanced than that conducted against the Democratic Party at large. In dealing with the various manifestations and attacks of fascism, there needs to be a united front attitude with this numerically strong but organisationally loose force. The organisational and strategic weaknesses of the DSA come out clearly at each turn of the class struggle. However, revolutionary Marxists should not stand by idly as thousands of young and sincere activists are "normalised" within the straightjacket of the bourgeois party that the Democratic Party is. It is a task of the primary order to force towards a confrontation the Democratic Party and the DSA and, as an extension of this, the leadership of the

DSA and the rank and file of that organisation.

- Fascism has, at the present, brought together a powerful social bloc under its own roof (as may be seen from the tremendous support these parties receive at each election). Defence on the part of the workers' united front of all the rights and interests of the oppressed groups that fascism is preparing to attack is of capital importance. It goes without saying that within the masses of the white working class there is a great number of people who lack any sympathy for or indeed feel totally hostile to these groups. This policy of alliances then requires great finesse in weaving common links that seem to run counter to common sense at first sight. However, it should never be forgotten that *common struggle draws fighters of different ideological orientation closer*.
- As important as it is to open up to the oppressed, to ally with them and base the strengthening of the working-class bloc on the struggle of these sectors as well, it is positively harmful to try to win everyone over, irrespective of the interests that they truly represent. In other words, when it comes to bourgeois forces, it becomes damaging to the cause of the working class to link up with bourgeois parties since this will scarcely meet the needs of the masses and will, on the other hand, erode their willingness to fight the necessary battles. In the 1930s, in particular in Spain and France, the setting up of what was called a Popular Front, including the "left" or "democratic" wing of the bourgeois parties in each country, precisely when the working class and the peasantry had started a socialist revolution in the former country and when the largest strike in history had been organised in the latter, generated exactly this kind of result. *The idea of a Popular Front*, which represents an alliance with the bourgeoisie at the moment when the working class and its allies have taken the road of struggle, *should be disparaged in the eyes of the masses. The Popular Front and the Workers' United Front are two very different, even opposing, tactical lines*. The latter represents the unity of the workers and the oppressed whereas the former stands for the unity of the workers and the bourgeoisie. Even the seemingly most democratic wings of the bourgeoisie will tomorrow pass over to the camp of fascism when things get extremely rough. Such is the nature of the period that all classes finally have to make the most radical decisions and choose their camp.
- The period we are going through is one in which history is once again oscillating between fascism and revolution. The workers' united front should by no means be reduced to an "anti-fascist broad front". A defensive tactic today, this front may very well turn into a springboard for an assault towards the taking of power tomorrow. *The goals of the class struggle cannot be*

divided rigidly into a succession of independent and distinct stages (e.g. bourgeois revolution vs. proletarian revolution, “struggle for democracy” vs. struggle for socialism etc.). The dialectic of history has proved much more contradictory and hurried at times. The developments witnessed within the flow of the two world wars in the 20th century alone are extremely instructive: defensive to the extreme throughout both wars, the proletariat passed to offense immediately after a certain moment, when an almost imperceptible set of changes came into play. The result was its coming to power in many a country! Hence a defensive line today may very well turn into an offensive one tomorrow.

We opened this article with a quotation from Marx’s “Theses on Feuerbach”, namely Thesis Two. That is how we wish to end it.

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth — i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.

Up until now, what we have tried to show in this article was that recent developments in the real world, by proving “the this-sidedness” of the idea of the rise of fascism, has brought to an end the controversy over 21st century fascism. But this is not sufficient. Those who cannot fathom the profundity of Thesis Two (and of the materialism of Marx and Engels) may think that the “practice” that Marx is talking about in Thesis Two simply relates to what is happening around us. This is not true. In this thesis, Marx really sets the bar very high: what he means to say is that every “thinking” *must make itself the reality of the world* in order to be proved as true. More specifically, he proposes that we test the alternative propositions of whether what we are face to face with today is fascism or a more ordinary kind of authoritarianism by putting both propositions to the litmus test of practice. In other words, who is right and who is wrong will have to be proved, according to Marx, by each side *proving themselves superior to the other in defeating this monster*, whether fascist or simply “right wing populist” for instance. In more mundane terms, he challenges both sides by saying “stop mere chatter and start to act”!

In other words, Thesis Two cannot be correctly grasped in isolation from the rightly famous Thesis Eleven: “Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.” To take *the reality outside of us* alone would be missing the specificity of Marxist materialism. It would have been adopting Feuerbach’s “passive materialism”, i.e. the way of thinking that the “Theses on Feuerbach” sets out to criticise and supersede in the first place! This would have meant falling into the trap against which Marx had already warned in Thesis One:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism - that of Feuerbach included - is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism -- which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such.

If we are not to commit the very mistake which pre-Marxist materialism made, the real criterion of the discussion, we must admit, ought to be displaying the practice that would be capable of defeating the barbarism that fascism is threatening humanity with. Revolutionary Marxism has so far been much more prescient in identifying and warning the world about the 21st century variant of the fascist virus than post-Leninism. What has been proved by the present article consists simply of that. The ultimate criterion is, though, to defeat fascism and establish socialism in order to eradicate the threat of fascism and barbarism once and for all.

In other words, proletarian revolutionary practice.

Appendix: Analysis of the concept “globalization” in the heyday of liberal myths on the phenomenon (2004)

Source: Sungur Savran, “Globalisation and the New World Order: The New Dynamics of Imperialism and War”, in Alan Freeman & Boris Kagarlitsky (eds), *The Politics of Empire. Globalisation in Crisis*, London: Pluto Press, 2004

The use of the term ‘globalization’ to characterise advances in the integration of the world economy immediately confronts theory with the task of defining what is new in capitalism and which structural characteristics of the older capitalism still hold sway. For ‘globalization’ is but one element in that series of theoretical concepts such as post-Fordism, post-modernism, the information society etc. that form the basis of the overall claim that the nature of society and the economy have undergone such complete transformation that all conceptual frameworks hitherto utilised to understand the world have now become wholly inadequate for the task. The end of everything from history and work all the way to capitalism itself has been loudly and proudly proclaimed. There is no doubt that certain traits of capitalism as a world system have indeed changed. But the indispensable task of any theoretical effort to understand the present world is to separate the reality of *change within continuity* from the myth of *total transformation*. We will then start out with a critique of the myths of ‘globalisation’ theory.

‘Globalisation’ as technological fatality

The advances in the internationalisation of capital and the integration of the world economy in the recent period have been codified within the framework of the bourgeois liberal theory of ‘globalisation’, whose assumptions and conclusions were later adopted unquestioningly by many on the left (most notably by Michael

Hardt and Antonio Negri in their much acclaimed *Empire*). ‘Globalisation’ theory has become so influential that it is now common sense, so to speak, for the thinkers of and spokespeople for the establishment, its major ideas being circulated in the popular media in the form of incontrovertible dogma. The core of this theory can be summed up in four major propositions: (1) ‘globalisation’ is the direct product of the recent wave of technological progress, that is of the new information and communication technologies; (2) ‘globalisation’ is an inevitable and irreversible process; (3) the new integration of the world economy has rendered the nation-state obsolete as a historical category or, in more restrained versions of the theory, paved the ground for this; (4) it has opened up a new stage in the historical development of capitalism distinct from the imperialist stage. None of these propositions can withstand the test of a confrontation with the facts of present-day world capitalism.

It is certainly true that the widespread application of new information-processing and communications technologies and new materials to the spheres of production and circulation have opened up fresh horizons for the mobility of capital. But this in no way warrants a jump to the conclusion that it is this development in productive forces exclusively and in unmediated fashion that has set in motion the whole new process of economic integration on a world scale. Behind this integration lies a host of factors, which are of a socio-economic and political nature. Some of these factors will be taken up later on. Suffice it to say, at this stage, that were it not for the successful attempt of the international bourgeoisie to establish neoliberalism as the hegemonic strategy of economic policy and to progressively provide for the unfettered circulation of money, commodities and productive capital since the era of Thatcher and Reagan starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s, no amount of technological change would have brought about the present level of economic exchange in the international arena. Thus the thesis that ‘globalisation’ flows directly from technological change, without the mediation of socio-political factors, reveals itself as a crass kind of technological determinism. It is indeed ironic to see bourgeois liberal theory committing the very sin it has constantly accused Marxism of in the past.

The thesis of inevitability and irreversibility in fact flows directly, if somewhat implicitly, from this technological determinism and therefore stands or collapses with it. It is enough to ask why the IMF goes to such pains to impose liberal policies consonant with the ‘realities of globalisation’ on each country it has dealings with or why the WTO has to have recourse to round after round of negotiations in order to liberalise world trade to see the absurdity of the claim of inevitability and irreversibility. At a more general level, the irreversibility argument evacuates human agency from the unfolding of history, treating the latter as a process ‘without a subject’ bound by iron laws. The masses have refuted such a view of history, voting with their feet against ‘globalisation’ from Seattle to Genoa, from the streets of Paris in 1995 to the Parque Centenario in Buenos Aires in 2001-02.

The third claim with respect to the growing obsolescence of the so-called nation-state is a much more complex question. It is based, among other arguments, most importantly, first, on the irrelevance of national borders in the face of global forces

and flows of economic exchange, and, secondly, on the supposed ‘multinational’ or even ‘transnational’ character of capital itself. The idea that, with the tremendous increase in international flows of money, commodities and productive capital, national borders have lost their meaning and that the world economy has become a uniform and homogeneous entity is both theoretically fallacious and inconsistent with facts (and, in fact, with the economic recipes that flow from ‘globalisation’ theory itself).

Certain traits that derive from the very essence of statehood such as a national currency, the existence of a public finance system, a specific labour relations regime and an overall economic structure distinguish the economic territory of each nation-state from the others. (Note that we are not simply referring to uneven development in general: these are factors that distinguish between *states*, as opposed to other factors that are the consequences of pure uneven development and distinguish economic *regions* from each other, including within the borders of a single state.) The first three of these factors contribute specific effects that go into determining three key economic variables (namely the rate of exchange, the rate of interest and the wage rate), which typically (along with other specificities) set out a differential path for each national economy within the overall context of the current forces of the world economy. The latter is thus by no means a uniform and homogeneous whole.

Quite the contrary: the capitalist world economy presents itself as an integrated whole with tendentially ever-increasing cross-border flows, separated, however, into national domains with specific characteristics of their own. It is not a ‘smooth’ space (Hardt and Negri), but a closely knit patchwork of national economies. That this is so is confirmed by the irreducible fact that diversities between the different national economies are one of the fundamental determinants of the investment decisions of the so-called ‘multinational’ companies. Investment is but the mediated form of the accumulation of capital, itself the central process of the capitalist mode of production. Hence the laws that determine the spatial development of this key process are indissociably linked with the continuing existence of the so-called nation-state. As much is admitted by the advocates of ‘globalisation’ theory itself when they advise governments to harmonise their economic policies with the requirements of the ‘global economy’ in order to be able to attract foreign capital, which is but a roundabout way of admitting the specificity of national economies and the difference national economic policy can make.

This brings us to the second major proposition behind the claim regarding the obsolescence of the category nation-state. According to this second argument, capital no longer has ‘national allegiances’: so-called ‘multinational companies’ (MNCs) or ‘transnational companies’ (TNCs) are said to have no interest in any single country, since capital seeks nothing but profit and these companies do this at the world level. The terms ‘multinational’ and, *a fortiori*, ‘transnational’ are clearly misnomers for this type of company. There are very few among these whose capital is jointly controlled by capitalists of different nations (some prominent examples being ABB, Unilever or Royal Dutch-Shell - even the case of Daimler-Chrysler is

deceptive notwithstanding the name, for this company is clearly controlled by the German partner). The overwhelming majority are companies effectively controlled by capitalists of single nations, or, in the case of Europe, where cross-border centralisation is occurring at an increasing pace, of the new European proto-state. In principle, each nation-state in question protects and supports the companies that originate in it as against foreign companies, according to a well-defined strategy that is based on a 'survival of the fittest' pattern, so that some companies are sacrificed at the altar of the general interests of national capital. A wealth of empirical material can be adduced to show that this is the case. The sight of so many governments scrambling for a piece of the cake for their national companies in the so-called reconstruction of Iraq should have reminded the theorists of globalisation that nation-states still represent the interests of their own capitals. The role assumed by US and EU authorities in the competition between their respective national (or supranational in the case of the EU) capitals is another clear example. The French newspaper *Le Monde* carried the following headline in its issue of 19 June 2001 (p20): 'The European Commission wishes to act as "legal shield" to Airbus'. The subtitle read: 'In an interview given to *Le Monde*, Pascal Lamy, European Commissioner for Trade, explains that the European constructor needs Europe in the face of the American menace. He denounces the political deviation of the General Electric-Honeywell merger.' In place of the misnomers 'multinational companies' or 'transnational companies' then, one can propose a more adequate terminology, 'companies with international activity', with the fitting abbreviation of CIAs.

All this goes to show that at the present stage of the development of the capitalist world economy, so-called nation-states still have considerable weight within the world economy and define distinct sub-units within this integrated whole. But irrespective of the validity of all these arguments, nation-states are of paramount importance for capitalism for another entirely different reason: each nation-state is still the locus of class power. Whatever the degree of influence international organisations (say the IMF or the World Bank) have on the policies followed by different states, this influence still has to be relayed into the domestic policies of each country by the state in question. The ruling class of each nation has to consolidate its rule at the national level. Conversely, the conquest of power by the working class and the oppressed masses still has to make its debut on the national arena. It is true that such conquest, wherever and whenever that may be, will meet with sanctions and aggression by the imperialist powers (by the other imperialist powers if the country in question happens to be one that is at present an imperialist country itself), but that does not negate the fact that this intervention will have to fight *a new state* that has at its disposal the means of an army to defend itself. In any case, outside intervention against the conquest of power by the working masses has been a constant of the history of capitalism from the Paris Commune through the October Revolution to Cuba and Nicaragua, and cannot be considered a *differentia specifica* of the present period.

The final claim that the imperialist stage has been transcended thanks to 'globalisation' is perhaps the most insulting of all to the collective intelligence of the

masses when considered in the light of the crystal-clear fact that inequality between nations has, if anything, greatly increased within the last several decades thanks to the functioning of the system of ‘globalisation’. Neither does this claim hold water at the theoretical level. All the characteristics of imperialism depicted by the classical Marxist theory of imperialism, developed by Hilferding, Bukharin and Lenin, with significant contributions by Luxemburg and Trotsky, are truer today than when formulated at the beginning of last century. Gigantic units of capital (called *monopolies* at that early stage) organised as large groups bring together the power of financial and industrial capital and diversify into all spheres of the valorisation of capital (named *finance capital* by the pioneers of the theory of imperialism). They thrive more than ever on the *export of capital*, which has not only become the characteristic feature of world capitalism but has even gone on to subsume the export of commodities under its logic (witness intra-firm exchange of goods and services as a constantly rising proportion of international trade). Giant banks and companies compete to carve out profitable shares in the four corners of the world, and imperialist states are in a constant but temporarily muted struggle for control over bigger portions of the planet. For various reasons, it can even be claimed that the Leninist theory of imperialism is now more relevant than it was when first propounded. To cite a single example: at the beginning of the twentieth century, competition between the capitals of the imperialist countries took, in principle, the roundabout form of investments in the subordinate countries, whether colonies, semi-colonies or independent nations. Today, on the contrary, the overwhelming part of both foreign direct investment and portfolio investment flows between the imperialist countries themselves, with the corollary that the struggle is now played out not only in the regions outside the imperialist heartlands (although that also rages on as never before), but in the respective homes of the capitals in question.

At the stage we have reached, we feel entitled to state clearly that the specific theses of bourgeois liberal ‘globalisation’ theory are mere fancies and that the imperialist nature of capitalism has hardly changed at all. It is now time to turn to the new reality, of which ‘globalisation’ theory is but a symptom and a refracted image.

Globalism as capitalist assault

Despite the continuity in the inner nature of the world system of imperialism, it is hardly deniable that, since the late 1970s and early 1980s, there is much that is new in the concrete forms of functioning of the world capitalist system that deserves attentive study. The dismantling of barriers in the way of cross-border flows of money, commodities and productive capital, accompanied by extensive privatisation of state enterprises, and even of infrastructural establishments, the abrupt or gradual erosion, depending on the case, of social services, through cuts, commodification or outright privatisation, the penetration of the private sector into governmental functions, especially at the municipal level (conceptualised under the high-sounding label ‘governance’), the flexibilisation of the labour market and the rapid spread of lean production techniques, have all added to create an entirely new set-up

with tremendous consequences for the balance of forces between the classes at the international and national levels. In order to come to grips with this new situation and explain the dynamics behind the panoply of new instruments deployed by the international bourgeoisie, we have to take into consideration three developments of a world-historical nature that have stamped the recent period with their indelible mark.

Foremost among these is the rise of what I propose to call, for lack of a better alternative, *mega-capital* as the dominant form of capital within the last half century. In contradistinction to earlier forms, this form of capital, embodied in what is popularly known as ‘multinational companies’, distinguishes itself by the fact that it plans for and organises its process of valorisation over the entire globe, buying labour-power, raw materials and other inputs, carrying out production and selling its commodities wherever it is most profitable to do so within a single all-encompassing strategic plan. The obverse of this is that the interdependent activities of the sub-units of mega-capital are spatially separated and diversified into a great number of regions and single countries. Thus a fragmented world economy with innumerable barriers in the way of flows of money, commodities and productive capital is, by its very nature, inimical to the interests of this form of capital and contradicts and constricts its free development. Hence the intense pressure exercised by mega-capital, as the most internationalised form of capital, to break up and dismantle what appears to it as rigid barriers that stand in the way of its unfettered circulation and profitable valorisation. Mega-capital, in collusion with financial capital in search of the highest return on monetary investment, is thus the major moving force behind the rapid adoption of neoliberalism (‘free market’ policies), and ‘globalisation’ as a specific variant of neoliberalism, as the dominant strategy of the international bourgeoisie over the last two decades of the twentieth century. In the last instance, neoliberalism can best be summed up as the attempt by mega-capital to create a world in its own image.

However important it is to lay bare the social force behind ‘globalisation’ and neoliberalism, a vulgar (i.e. non-Marxist) understanding of the category ‘capital’ may still lead to a kind of conception where the adoption of the new strategy of ‘globalisation’ can be seen, in pure functionalist tradition, as the adaptation of the superstructure of economic policy to the shift of the fundamental structures of world capitalism. This kind of conception would not only hide from the view the myriad contradictions, hesitations and frictions within the process of adaptation in question, converting it instead into an imaginary smooth process, but much more importantly perhaps, would conceal the class nature of the new strategy, the very essential fact that the adoption of the neoliberal cum ‘globalisation’ strategy is in effect a class assault by the international bourgeoisie against the international proletariat and the working masses at large. For ‘capital’ is not simply a sum of money in search for self-expansion; its self-expansion is at bottom tributary to the extraction of surplus labour from the direct producers, primarily but not exclusively the proletariat. It is not a thing but a social relation. And whenever it is a question of making capital more profitable, the reverse of the coin is to change the balance of forces

between capital and the working class in favour of the former. Hence, to the extent that neoliberalism and policies in the service of 'globalisation' cater to the needs of the worldwide maximisation of profits for mega-capital, they are, *ceteris paribus*, an assault on the power, however limited, of the working class, and concomitantly of other classes and layers of direct producers, to protect themselves from further encroachment by capital.

Here it would be in order to bring into the analysis the second factor that has gone into the making of neoliberalism and the strategy of 'globalisation'. With the onset of the depressive phase of the long wave of capitalist development in the mid-1970s, relations between the classes changed dramatically. Faced with the fall in the average rate of profit, itself the decisive cause of the depressive wave, capital gradually moved to attack the positions that had been gained, albeit to an unequal degree in different countries, by the working class and the large labouring masses of all countries in order to raise the rate of surplus-value and hence of profit and thereby lay the ground for renewed stable capital accumulation. In all major crises, the space for compromise between the contending classes narrows down and the antagonistic nature of the relations between the classes is revealed for all to see. Hence the ruthless drive of capital to remove forms of protection for the working classes that had, for reasons we cannot go into here, accumulated over the decades. From partial tolerable concessions, at times acting as partial guarantees for its class rule, these had now, with the turn in the situation, become so many barriers to be overcome.

Workers employed by the public sector formed the backbone of the trade union movement in every country without exception; hence the public productive sector had to be destroyed through privatisation. (There were, of course, other reasons why the bourgeoisie pushed for privatisation.) Public services (the so-called 'welfare state') created solidarity among the great masses of people and inhibited competition between workers and so had to be dismantled through a combination of budgetary cuts, commodification of services and privatisation. The same went for certain municipal services, which were abandoned to the pressure of the market through 'private-public co-operation' and so-called 'governance'. Hard-won legal rights in industrial relations were attacked through forms of 'atypical' and 'contingent' work and the new reality of 'flexible work' translated into labour laws wherever capital managed to get the upper hand in the legislative process. The overall objective was to dismantle the trade union movement, legal protection for labour, social protection for the great masses, the state productive sector and anything else that acted to partially counter the forces of the market so that competition would be driven up, worker would be pitted against worker and the working class would become atomised and defenceless.

It is in the context of this wide array of measures to create competition between individual workers and groups of workers that the true meaning of 'globalisation' can be understood in its full import. 'Globalisation' is the strategy that aims to pit national sections of the international working class against each other. 'Globalisa-

tion' is the drive initiated by the international bourgeoisie to create a race to the bottom by re-establishing the full force of competition between countries and their working classes and masses. It is, then, true that 'globalisation' is an attack on the nation-state, but only from a certain angle. 'Globalisation' tries to dismantle every facet of the existing nation-states that, over a certain period, had come to act as a bumper mechanism to tame the wild forces of market competition and create a defence for the working class and the masses at large. But 'globalisation' exercises, and can only exercise, this impact on nation-states with the active consent and participation of the ruling classes of each state in question, even in those countries dominated by imperialism. For this kind of change acts not only in favour of the bourgeoisie of the imperialist countries; it also changes the domestic balance of forces within the dominated country in favour of the ruling classes at the expense of the working masses. Imperialist super-exploitation is concomitantly reinforced.

Where 'globalisation' theory goes astray is to present this erosion in certain facets of the nation-state as an undifferentiated general process of obsolescence for the nation-state as a whole. The picture that emerges obfuscates the fact that all so-called nation-states actively pursue policies that favour the capitalist class, both international and domestic. 'Globalisation' theory also triumphantly declares as consummated a process that is progressing in a very contradictory manner, with immense frictions, sometimes moving forward in great leaps and bounds, but at other times proceeding in a very hesitant manner, even at times halted by forces of various kinds. It is here that one can discover the real ideological function of the theory and ideology of 'globalisation': by declaring general, completed and irreversible a process that is only partial and only at its initial stages, 'globalisation' theory and ideology act to disarm the great masses of working people and dissuade them from entering into struggle against what is in fact of matter a capitalist assault on their positions. This, though, is not the only factor that works to weaken the mass struggle against 'globalisation' and neoliberalism in general. Here the third of the world-historical factors we are discussing has played an equally pernicious role. The collapse of the bureaucratic workers' states in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the ensuing rampant process of the restoration of capitalism over this whole area, along with creeping capitalist restoration in the People's Republic of China, have taken their toll on the workers' movement and the struggle of the masses in various ways. On the one hand, these events have reinforced the capitalist assault on everything that belongs to the public domain; on the other hand, they have destroyed, or at least tremendously weakened, the hopes and aspirations of the great masses of people for a different and better future. We will have to return to other aspects of the significance of the collapse of the bureaucratic workers' states in the next section on the NWO.

We can now draw a partial balance sheet on the basis of our discussion of the myth and reality of 'globalisation'. The bourgeois liberal theory of 'globalisation' posits the onset of a new stage in the development of the world economy beyond imperialism that is indissociably linked to the demise of the nation-state. To that extent, 'globalisation' theory is in fact dealing with myths. It is for this reason that, all

throughout this chapter, the term ‘globalisation’ has been written in inverted commas. The critics of the bourgeoisie and its policies should not, in my opinion, treat ‘globalisation’ as a legitimate theoretical concept that depicts an objective process. The time-tested Marxist concept of the *internationalisation of capital* is a much better choice to describe what is happening in this area.

On the other hand, it is certainly true that, with the purpose of creating an untamed competition between the national sections of the international proletariat and other labouring masses, the international bourgeoisie is trying to dismantle those facets of the existing nation-states that, under the conditions of a prior period, acted as buffer mechanisms of protection for the working masses. This is part and parcel of the neoliberal strategy and, to that extent, is a reality. In order to distinguish the myth from the reality, the latter may conveniently be called globalism. ‘Globalisation’, then, is a false theoretical concept that acts as one of the dominant elements within present-day bourgeois ideology. The strategy of *globalism*, on the other hand, is a living material force to be fought in practice.