

The great challenge: winning the working class back from ideological irredentism

Twenty theses on Trump, Brexit, Front National, Erdoğan and other marvels

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1. The election of Donald Trump to the most powerful political post of world capitalism was greeted with surprise by the majority of so-called pundits. These people attribute more importance to public opinion polls than the analysis of socio-economic and political forces that shape a certain epoch. Those who echo them on the socialist left are paying the price for having abandoned the method and historical insight of Marxism. I am not saying that the victory of Trump was inevitable. What I am saying is that, whatever the fleeting results of public opinion polls said before the US elections, it was really strange to think that Trump's defeat was a foregone conclusion in the epoch of Brexit and the rise of the Front National in France. The character of the phase of the history of capitalism we are going through determines

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national developments in roundabout and devious ways. Although Trump is a maverick and a novice in the political world of Washington D.C., his trajectory is already locked in with the overall nature of the epoch of the world capitalist system. Trump's victory cannot be assessed on the basis of an analysis of American matters alone in isolation from the dominant tendencies displayed by world capitalism. This is the basic methodological criticism we have of all those who isolate his victory from what is happening in the rest of the world and consequently take his victory lightly, engaging in speculation whether he will, once elected, move to the centre and "normalise". Even worse is the position of those who treat Trump as just another bourgeois politician, perhaps a bit excessive in his language, but nonetheless simply another representative of the bourgeois class and of US imperialism. Whatever the fortune of the Trump presidency, his victory has brought out into the open the power of an extremely reactionary political orientation in the camp of the international bourgeoisie. **The Trump victory is not a specifically American phenomenon, but a clear sign of the barbaric tendencies of world capitalism at the beginning of the 21st century.**

2. Of course, it would be unfair to claim that either bourgeois thinking or representatives of the socialist left are oblivious to the rise of a new reactionary trend in world politics. No sane person can ignore the close affinity between the victory of Trump and the role of UKIP in the Brexit affair. There is constant widespread reference to the possible sequel to the Trump victory in Europe in the course of 2017. There are elections of immense importance in France in April-May of next year and in Germany in the fall, where the power of the Front National under Marine Le Pen and the newly rising Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) will be tested. An even earlier test will be played out in the Netherlands with the Party of Freedom led by Geert Wilders billed to come in first. In Austria the namesake of the Dutch party (FPÖ) has recently seen its hope to place its candidate in the seat of president fail by a slight margin. Sister parties of these three abound all over Europe. Nigel Farage, the *eminence grise* of UKIP in Britain, is enamoured with Donald Trump. Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, Italy, Hungary, Slovakia, Greece, to mention only the more salient cases, each has its own version of this new current in European politics. The several movements in Ukraine, as well as those in Hungary and Greece, do not refrain from using openly Nazi symbols. On a different key, the governments of Vladimir Putin in Russia, Victor Orban in Hungary and the newly elected PiS government in Poland play havoc with the democratic gains of the peoples of those countries.

Europe is not the only continent to turn its face towards this kind of reaction. Asia has its rising stars. From Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey to Narendra Modi on the Indian subcontinent all the way to Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Asia has displayed a tendency to bring forth a brand of leader akin to Donald Trump in style if not in substance. The Middle East is rife with another type of barbaric

movement: the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al Nusra Front bear certain common traits with these political currents, but the phenomenon of Islamic radicalism also bears characteristics so peculiarly tied with the historical specificities of the Muslim world that it would take us too far away from the major theme of this article to try to incorporate those movements in our discussion here. Other movements in the Middle East or in Africa that either claim allegiance or carry out actions similar to ISIL will also be left out of this discussion.

We are, then, face to face with a most important phenomenon of truly international dimensions. **Understanding this new reactionary current in world politics and the ways of fighting it is the single most important task of the socialist movement at this stage of development.**

A rose by any other name would smell as sweet... but fascism stinks!

3. The light-minded attitude of political commentators regarding these currents almost reduces the phenomenon to a banality. The appellations used are symptomatic: “populism”, “extreme right” or “far right”, “racism” or even plain “nationalism” somehow seem adequate as labels to characterise these movements, especially those in Europe. To go over these quickly, “populism” is a tired term used to denote movements extending across the entire political spectrum, bringing together sometimes movements at antipodes with each other, from very progressive to extremely reactionary. Racism is a structural characteristic of imperialist countries in particular and very relevant to the strategy of these currents. However, there are a million shades of racism. Moreover, the fact that racism plays an important part in the strategy of these movements does not mean that it is the essence of their being, their *raison d’être*, so to speak. As we shall see below, racism is in fact a strategic tool used by these movements to create a particular perception regarding the present state of things in the masses of the working population in order to dominate them all the more surely. To draw attention exclusively to the racist nature of these movements thus hides from view the real goal they pursue. If the label “racist” is too general to bring out the *differentia specifica* of these currents, the appellation “extreme right” is even more abstract and loose to pinpoint their concrete characteristics.

All of these and similar labels suppress and hide from view the historical ties of at least the European parties in question to fascism. Of course, the category “neo-fascist” is sometimes used, but it is notable that of late this label has fallen into disuse. It seems as if the closer these parties come to taking power, the less willing commentators are to indicate their historical affinity to fascism. And in a perverse kind of way, the avoidance of the epithet fascist gives rise to abusive recourse to this same concept in cases where this label obscures more than it sheds light on the relevant phenomena. Since any discussion of fascism has been shunned and its usage avoided where it may have been relevant, the concept “fascism” becomes

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vulnerable to being considered a catch-all category and extended to unjustified areas – “Islamic fascism” applied to movements such as ISIL explains nothing and reduces fascism to state repression independent both of class relations and of state forms.

It may be concluded that **all of the appellations commonly used to denote the movements under scrutiny attribute primacy to consequences rather than causes.**

4. To understand why, let us try to see what really forms the essence and the fundamental goal of these movements. For that, we need to go back to the plain language of class analysis, capitalism and its modern avatar, imperialism. At least in three instances, the connection of these movements to the plight of the working class is clear. Donald Trump’s victory was predicated on the support he received from the former industrial heartland of America, what is now called the “rustbelt”, extending from western Ohio through Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin, all the way to eastern Iowa. Brexit was fundamentally a result of the reaction of a powerful trend within the British working class against so-called “globalisation”. And in the case of the Front National in France, the more recent stronghold of the party within the entrenched proletarian region of the north (as opposed to the old constituency of southern France) preys upon the discontent of the working class vis-a-vis establishment politics. These clear cases of working class support for anti-globalist policies provide for us the clue to the essence of the phenomenon. The miserable conditions created by the specific path of capitalist development of the recent decades within the proletariat of the advanced capitalist countries have been exploited by this new current to **divert their attention from class issues towards issues of race and culture.** The solutions proposed by the ilk of the Trumps and the Le Pens are nothing but barbaric ruling class solutions to real problems of oppression and exploitation couched in terms of a challenge to well-entrenched elitist forms of domination by the globalist establishment (represented by the likes of the Clintons in the US and the two main parties of the centre-right and the centre-left in France that Marine Le Pen constantly twins together). **The essence of the new politics is to pit oppressed against oppressed to provide imaginary solutions to one section of the oppressed,** in this case the white European and American against the rest. **Hence racism and anti-globalism are derivative of a project built around a class issue.**

5. The new current carries out this whole operation on the basis of formerly existing ideological-cultural-religious values and practices that were dominant within the mainstream working class culture in the previous “golden period” (the long boom or the “*trente glorieuses*”) before a whole period of multi-culturalism served in a progressive sauce effected a certain erosion on those values and practices. That is why the discourse of these new movements, starting with that of Trump, is thoroughly racist, Islamophobic, “populist”, male chauvinistic, homophobic etc.

For the same reason “politically correct” is out and foul-mouthed political talk is in. This is what I propose to call **ideological irredentism**. In its original usage, irredentism refers to a political programme of reclaiming territory that, for real or imaginary reasons that hark back to some distant or recent past, is supposed to belong to a certain nation or religion. By analogy, I define as ideological irredentism the attempt to resuscitate values and practices that were the basis of socio-economic, political, cultural, religious etc. life in a certain period in the past that, for real or imagined reasons, is considered to be a “golden age” when compared to the bleak and miserable present.

6. As in all ideological programmes that are supposed to form the cement that ties disparate classes and strata together under a certain leadership, **the ideological irredentism of the new period is rid with contradictions both domestically in the case of each single leadership and internationally between the adherents to this overall movement**. These contradictions are variegated and need to be explored in depth, if only to attack the weaknesses of this reactionary movement. Here I will limit my remarks to some selected instances in order to give the reader an idea. Take male-chauvinism for instance. It is on the basis of the observation of Trump’s discourse that I have included this in the list above of values and practices that come to the fore in the programme of the new current. Things are not so simple, however, at least in Europe. There, the needs of the wholesale attack on Muslim refugees as alien to European culture requires, at least to a certain extent, owning up some values of the modern women’s movement. The storm that erupted in Germany around New Year’s festivities, when youngsters suspiciously looking foreign harassed or raped young German women, is emblematic. Even Trump is faced with the same predicament when he characterises Mexicans as “rapists”, among other things. That is only one instance of the contradictions that exist at the domestic level. Internationally, the explosive potential of the conflict is even clearer. Both the mullahs of Iran and the spokesmen of Tayyip Erdoğan’s AKP speak for Islam, but their sectarian self-centredness pits Shia against Sunni, thereby threatening to do more harm to Islam than to others. While the Erdoğan regime in Turkey is bending social mores increasingly towards compliance with Islam, thus suppressing for instance the consumption of alcoholic drinks in a thinly disguised manner, Narendra Modi’s India does the same according to Hindu creeds. The Turkish Islamist zealot will “punish” anyone in the provincial backwaters of Anatolia who does not fast during Ramadan, but will revolt in anger if told that Hindus kill Muslims in Modi’s India because they consume beef! All of this brings us face to face with one aspect of the reactionary, even barbaric, nature of this new current: even independent of its impact on class relations, ideological irredentism divides and pits nation against nation, ethnic group against ethnic group, gender against gender, and worker against worker.

7. The new current shares many characteristics with classical fascism or Nazism. Racism, homophobia, the eulogising of a certain nation or religious community (yesterday the Aryan race, today the *umma*, for instance), the idea that white people or Muslims or Hindus are superior to others, so far implicit in many cases but becoming more explicit by the day, the unpronounced but very real assumption that some races or nations are inferior by their very nature are characteristics that are hallmarks of all kinds of fascism. So is the articulation of questions of class, on the one hand, and race/nation/religion, on the other, which lies at the very heart of this whole project: classical fascism or Nazism was precisely a ruling class project that set out to harness the revolt within the masses against the conditions created by a senile capitalism that promised nearly nothing to the poorer strata of society to a barbaric cause. The anti-intellectualism that is shared by many of these movements (from Trump to Erdoğan) is also a very salient trait, especially in the Nazi variant if not in Italian fascism. However, some decisive properties that are to be found in classical fascism are absent in these new movements. **The most important political difference between these movements and classical fascism is the absence of paramilitary forces**, which played such a prominent role in the rise to power of both Mussolini (the *squadristi*) and Hitler (the SS and the SA). To some readers, this may seem to be a minor difference. If, it might be argued, the party in question is able to rise to power through purely political channels, what importance should be attributed to the absence or otherwise of carefully organised paramilitary bands or hordes of thugs? There are several reasons why a paramilitary wing is of the essence of fascism and not only any other instrument in the taking of power.

First of all, fascism, at least in its classical variant, is not an ordinary bourgeois or petty-bourgeois political movement that takes power without any serious upheaval and maintains its rule without solution of continuity. Like communism that looks to revolution in order to take power, fascism also relies on a rupture, a break in the political system. It is a special type of counterrevolution. Paramilitary troops act as the battering ram of this counterrevolution. Secondly, if a fascist movement were to take power without a paramilitary force of its own, it would have to rely totally on the armed forces and the police of the existing state apparatus. This would curtail the power of the fascist party or movement since a parallel armed structure of its own would endow a fascist government with a source of strength that would counterbalance or even overpower the weight of the traditional repressive forces of the state. Thirdly, and most importantly, paramilitary troops are but the incarnation of a class relationship that fascism represents. Fascism in its classical variant is the destruction of all the centres of resistance on the part of the working class through the counter-mobilisation of the petty bourgeoisie, the lumpen proletariat, and sections of the unemployed in the service of the ailing capitalist system. The petty bourgeoisie being the class that is in a certain sense atomised, fragmented,

parcellaire to use the French term, with little proclivity towards organising, the paramilitary wing of the movement is also the locus of organisation of petty bourgeois reaction to the struggle of the proletariat. All in all, paramilitary activity is much more than a simple military ploy and acts to change the balance of forces between other social and political forces and the fascist camp.

So there are adequate reasons to refrain from labelling the present movements as fascist. However, this certainly is not true for some of the European movements, including Golden Dawn in Greece, *Jobbik* in Hungary, and the *Privat Sektor* in Ukraine, to cite but the most salient instances. These are fascist movements through and through, with a paramilitary base for power, using Nazi salutes and symbols, explicitly referring to classical fascism as their forbears.

8. This does not mean that mainstream commentators and a wide spectrum of socialists are right in their insipid terminology of “populism” or “racism” or “far right”. This attitude simply refuses to recognise the fundamental objective of these movements: what is at stake here is an alternative to class struggle as the solution to the problems faced by the working class, an alternative that takes the form of a reactionary ideology based on racism and the rest. Ideological irredentism has as its goal the suppression of workers’ struggles against capital by substituting for it a struggle between the different components of those same working masses. This is precisely the strategy of classical fascism when faced with the dire situation born of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Hence the extremely reactionary movements in question are bearers of a potential fascism. They are movements that may readily turn into full-fledged fascist current when necessary and possible. They are prefigurations of a 21st century fascism. For this reason, **the most apt label for these movements, in our opinion, is “proto-fascist”.**

The root cause of the rise of proto-fascism: the Third Great Depression

9. The deep economic crisis that set in as a result of the so-called “global financial crisis” of 2008 (2007 in the United States) has been taken up in the most demagogic form possible by the international financial establishment and the most unsatisfactory way by the left. The expression “Great Recession” coined by the then head of the IMF, Dominique Strauss-Kahn had the express goal of ruling out any use of the concept “depression” by conceding on the unimportant part of the expression “great depression”, i.e. the adjective “great”! “Great Recession” is manifestly nonsensical. The term “recession” has been used for decades now to denote a fall in GDP (for at least two quarters, as the convention goes). However, the phenomenon described by the so-called “Great Recession” in no way implies a continuous contraction of GDP over a long period of time. The question (no longer relevant) of whether there would have been a “double dip”, very commonly discussed during the first few years after crisis set in, itself is elegant testimony that we are really not

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talking “recession”, for in order to be able to talk about a “double dip”, recovery from recession must be assumed! In short, the terminology “Great Recession” was intended to bar the way to the D-word! This is precisely the character of the period we have been going through since 2008. This is the Third Great Depression in the history of capitalism.

The concept “Great Depression” does not refer to a specific set of macroeconomic indicators, but to a general state of capitalist accumulation. This is a situation where due to the tendential fall in the general rate of profit, there comes into being a situation of the overaccumulation of capital, with the urge to invest on the part of the capitalist class having been reduced infinitely when compared with the preceding boom. Great depressions are long and extremely painful. The hallmark of great depressions is that accumulation is unable to recover through the readjustment of market signals and processes. The situation is such that a radically new balance of class forces and a deep-going re-ordering of state intervention are needed. Hence depressions immediately set in motion, at the domestic level, a radical questioning of both the class relation of forces and the political and ideological currents pertaining to these relations and, in the inter-state sphere, a struggle over the shrinking world economy including aggravation of tensions and possibility of war.

The First Great Depression was overcome through the restructuring of the whole economy and the state in advanced capitalism to pass over into what was later called “imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism”. The Second Great Depression was superseded through the rise of fascism and Japanese militarism and a new world war. The Third Great Depression also requires tremendous upheaval and restructuring. **Proto-fascism and other barbaric/reactionary movements are products of these pressures engendered by the Third Great Depression.** So is the war in Syria bordering on the Third World War.

This is no coincidence. **These barbaric tendencies are but the expression of the historic limits of the capitalist mode of production.** These limits do not express themselves in linear and uninterrupted decline but in the aggravations of periodic crises, themselves a structural characteristic of the capitalist mode of production.

10. As in the previous great depression of the 1930s, the Third Great Depression has also given rise to contradictory tendencies. The collapse of political stability, an upheaval in the political order, and the growth of political movements at the two extremes of the political spectrum are the typical results of a great depression. **The Third Great Depression has given way not only to the rising trend of ideological irredentism and the proto-fascist movements, but has also whipped up mass social unrest that ranges from powerful strike movements through popular rebellions to revolutions.** Even if one does not count the 2008 December uprising in Greece as a specific product of the depression, the list of cases of mass

unrest and of countries that have acted as host to these is long. The Arab revolutions between 2011 and 2013 were of course the cutting edge of this tendency, leading to political revolutions that were initially successful in Tunisia and Egypt, involved extended struggles in Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria (strictly speaking, in this latter country only during the initial period that extends from 15 March 2011 to the end of that year, the process then degenerating under foreign intervention into sectarian war, the only exception being the birth of Rojava, an autonomous Kurdish entity in northern Syria, in summer 2012), and had repercussions in Morocco, Jordan, and even Saudi Arabia.

These then had echoes on other shores of the Mediterranean, first and foremost in Spain (the *indignados* movement) and Greece, where the struggle against the infamous Troika went through several stages, involving close to a score general strikes, the occupation of Syntagma square in Athens in response to what was happening in Spain and the spectacular “Oxi” in the referendum during the summer of 2015. One should not neglect the camp in Tel Aviv in the same summer of 2011, which focused on the social question. What completed the picture in turning the Mediterranean region into what we have called Red Mediterranean was the popular rebellion in Turkey that started in early June 2013 in the wake of the Gezi events, a revolt that extended across practically the whole country and lasted throughout the summer. There were also important struggles going on in the Balkans during this period, in Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia etc., with its peak in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2014, which clearly stood out as a workers’ revolt exclusively focused on the social question in a country burdened with ugly struggles between its component nations.

Parallel to this fermentation on the three shores of the Mediterranean, great movements erupted in other countries of the world. The two notable examples came from the Americas. The Occupy Wall Street movement erupted in the fall of that magnificent 2011 and spread to around 50 localities in the United States. Although the movement was not massive, it nonetheless achieved the remarkable feat of putting the question of class on the agenda in a country long infatuated with questions of identity politics and provided ammunition for the protest movements of other countries by its rhetoric of 1 per cent enriching itself at the expense of the 99 per cent. The other explosion came in Brazil in the summer of 2013 in reaction to the rise in municipal bus fares and with demands for an increase in social spending in lieu of the prestige projects of the football world cup in 2014 and the Olympic games of 2016. 700 cities joined the movement. The summer of 2013 was in a certain sense the pinnacle of the mass uprisings that had been rocking the world since the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions in 2011. Egypt, Turkey and Brazil simultaneously witnessed gigantic mass movements in the month of June. It is true that in all three cases the end result was total disappointment. Egypt quickly fell prey to the Bonapartist rule of its military leader al Sisi. Turkey went through

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a convoluted process during which its strongman Tayyip Erdoğan came close to being ousted four times only to be saved by his erstwhile opponents at the last moment. The country now pays the price of such choices by a painful process of rising repression. Brazil later changed tack, whereby it was not the mass of the people but their enemies that brought the PT government down.

The revolutionary élan that started in 2011 was gradually replaced by a rise of the left in parliamentary politics. One after another Syriza (which betrayed its mandate from the people immediately after it came to power), Jeremy Corbyn, the new Labour leader in Britain, Bernie Sanders in the US presidential primaries, Podemos, a direct product of the *indignados* movement of 2011, and the electoral rise of the United Left in Portugal and Sinn Féin in Ireland expressed this tendency of increasing protest by the electorate in advanced countries. A similar, but fundamentally different experience was that which emerged in Argentina with the formation of the Left Front (the FIT) in Argentina, a coalition of three revolutionary Marxist parties that was successful not only in the polls but also in leading day to day struggles of the working class.

Hence one should shun a one-sided alarmist view of the state of things in the world at this moment. It is true that ideological irredentism and proto-fascism momentarily have the upper hand, but there is no telling whether the masses will opt, in this country or continent or that, for rebellion or revolution in the not too distant future.

Specificity of the Third Great Depression

11. The trajectory of this two-edged upheaval has been shaped in its more peculiar details by the specificities of the Third Great Depression and the historical environment into which it was born. Two specificities of the present depression stand out.

Previous great depressions opened with financial crashes, those of 1873 and 1929. In fact, it was these financial crashes that triggered the depression in those two cases. This meant, at the same time, that the first two great depressions were immediately preceded by long booms each. In other words, these were cases of boom and bust without an intermediary period. **The Third Great Depression, on the other hand, was preceded not by a long boom, but by a three-decade long period of sluggish growth.** In other words, between the long boom of 1945-1975 and the financial crash of 2008 that triggered the Third Great Depression, there lies a period of a long-drawn out span of slow growth, a thirty-year crisis, which did not turn into a great depression for a long while. Now, in response to this long period of sluggish growth, the international capitalist class staged an assault on the international working class and other labouring strata. This is the notorious period of neoliberalism and globalism. The most significant consequence of this

for the purposes of the present discussion has been the following: **working masses entered the period of the great depression under dire economic conditions resulting from three decades of impoverishment and precarisation. Hence the contradictions that were inevitable under conditions of great depression were raised to a power.**

This in fact is what explains the specific trajectory of the proto-fascist current over the decades. Earlier, before the thirty-year crisis set in, the existence of such movements was confined to one or two countries. France stood out by the success of its Front National under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the father of today's Marine Le Pen, as early as the 1980s, when the impact of neoliberalism and globalism had not yet been felt by the French masses. But as the effects of the neoliberal strategy of the capitalist class made themselves felt, the Front National gained in strength and finally Le Pen qualified for the second tour of the presidential election of 2002 (but lost). It was in the course of these thirty years of creeping precarisation and impoverishment that the different countries of Europe saw their own home-bred fascist or proto-fascist movement rise. However, nothing makes the cause and effect relationship between the great depression and the rise of proto-fascism clearer than the spread of the movement all over Europe like wildfire over the last several years and the increasing success at the polls of many of these movements. The European Parliament elections in May 2014 were a turning point in that the movement succeeded to obtain impressive results simultaneously in all the countries where it was present within the European Union.

Thus Europe and America entered the Third Great Depression already saddled with strong tensions accumulated over the three previous decades.

12. The second specificity of the Third Great Depression was the uneven development between the imperialist countries and “emerging markets”. Even after the so-called “global financial crisis” set in, emerging markets, first and foremost but not exclusively the BRICS, grew at what may even be considered to be galloping rates even though stagnation reigned in the advanced countries. This was what led to the famous “decoupling” thesis. It is true that in the Great Depression of the 1930s as well, developing countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Turkey, Egypt etc. had respectable rates of growth, mostly thanks to the *dirigiste* economic policies pursued by their nationalist-oriented governments, ranging across the political spectrum from Vargas in Brazil to Cárdenas in Mexico and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey. However, despite this deceptive similarity, it should not be forgotten that the share of these developing countries was then miniscule in the overall world economy. By contrast, “emerging markets” have now surpassed the share of the imperialist countries in world production. When this is coupled with high rates of growth for these countries with extremely weak figures for the advanced economies, their contribution to world growth is even greater. Hence in a certain sense, the world economy has been buoyed by the successful performance of “emerging

markets”. This had the result of giving the present Great Depression an **extremely protracted form**. Of late, though, there have been clear signs of exhaustion in the growth rate of “emerging markets” as well, including in the powerhouse of the last several decades, China. **Thus the Third Great Depression promises to deepen. This will only whip up the conflicting tendencies of rebellion and revolution, on the one hand, and of barbaric reaction, on the other.**

Specificity of the historic climate: collapse of the workers’ states

13. The last several decades has seen obsessive concentration by Marxists and socialists in general on new forms of the development of capitalism: “post-Fordism”, “globalisation”, “financialisation”, flexibilisation, mass customisation, “the end of capitalism as we knew it” etc. took front stage. A much more decisive development languished in total neglect by the great majority on the left: the collapse of the experience of socialist construction, or, in other words, **the demise of the bureaucratically degenerated workers’ states in Eastern and Central Europe and in the Soviet Union and the transformation from within in China, bringing about the restoration of capitalism**. Under Raúl Castro Cuba is waiting to join the same route. It is these developments that are of **world-historical, veritably epoch-making importance**.

We cannot enter here into a discussion on the process that finally ended in this downfall. But discuss the consequences we must. The collapse of these degenerated workers’ states has led to a variety of consequences, all with a bearing on our present topic:

1) It has opened hundreds of millions of workers in these territories, on the whole a very well-educated workforce, to the exploitation of both international and newly-formed domestic capital, with the concomitant increase in **competition among workers of these countries and those of the capitalist countries**, contributing to the success of the neoliberal-cum-globalist assault of the international bourgeoisie.

2) It has led to a loss of confidence in collectivist solutions within the ranks of the international working class, left-wing movements, trade unions etc. as a result of the historic defeat of the gains of the October revolution and other revolutions that occurred in the 20th century. The period since the collapse of the workers’ states has been **a historic trough for Marxism** and its programme. Never since the publication of the Communist Manifesto has Marxism undergone such an erosion of its fundamental ideas within the left and the mass movement. Obviously this has dealt a further blow to the international political left, already somewhat in crisis since the ebb of the high tide of the 1968 period.

3) It has opened up **a full-fledged crisis of the so-called “communist” movement**, formed in the wake of the foundation of the Communist International in 1919, but mutated into an outgrowth of the Soviet bureaucracy over time to finally

enter a stage of senility and metamorphosis into a new kind of social democracy under so-called Euro-communism. The crisis that struck this powerful network of working class parties around the world acted as a double-edged sword. On one hand, the movement is finally freeing itself, through what has turned out to be an immensely painful and protracted process, of the dogmas and reactionary politics of Stalinism. On other hand, mass working class parties have been losing all appeal for the working class and undergoing a greenish and sheepish process of transformation into toothless extensions of the established order.

Post-Leninism

14. All these factors have concurred to produce a turn to liberalism and identity politics on the international left. **In the imperialist countries, there has been an increasing adaptation to the liberal agenda. Class politics has been abandoned in favour of an insistence on identities**, themselves divided into further subcategories in a process of *reductio ad absurdum*. The major political platform has been geared towards feminism, gay politics (of course pulverised into LGBTi and going), environmentalism, anti-war activity with pacifist overtones. The only common trait between the different trends has been the denial of the importance of class and class struggle. Concomitantly, working class organising has been abandoned. The question of duties with respect to countries oppressed by imperialism has been reduced to defence of human rights and solidarity with refugees. I am definitely not saying that all this is without value. On the contrary, the struggle for the rights of all the oppressed groups is indispensable. What I am saying is that whereas even the worst Stalinist party (and the same could be said of social democratic parties up to a certain stage of their assimilation into bourgeois society, the date varying from country to country) had a central orientation to the working class and tried to tie in the entire gamut of its policies with that class, the last quarter of a century has seen these formerly working class parties fleeing from that class like the devil.

Furthermore, in Europe, sequels to the parties of the former “communist” movement have become appendages of the EU, covering from the left the neoliberal policies of the social democratic parties when they do not take centre stage themselves to implement such policies (cf. Syriza).

This whole “escape from class”, to use an apt phrase coined by the late Ellen Meiksins Wood, was all the more ironic since the quarter of century that has extended from the dissolution and collapse of the Soviet state to our day has also been a period in which the most protracted assault on the gains and rights of the working class in the history of capitalism was being acted out! The classical fascism of the 1930s was of course a more brutal and violent assault on the working class than neoliberalism. But with the notable exception of Italy, its supremacy lasted no longer than a decade, spanning from the rise to power of Hitler in 1933 to the

Stalingrad debacle of the Reichswehr in 1943. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, has used much more “democratic” methods to attack the working class, but has been supreme in the Anglo-Saxon universe for close to three decades and the rest of the world for a quarter of a century. One cannot but think of the legendary fable of Jean de la Fontaine, where, in opposition to the ant who works the summer long, the grasshopper bides its time away singing and making merry throughout the summer to find itself helpless when autumn hits!

15. In countries dominated and oppressed by imperialism, the left has been characterised, since the early 1980s by a “modernising” ideology of market reforms, an obsessive fixation on human rights, a full-scale integration with imperialist structures, and, in the case of the countries of the Mediterranean and Africa, on the one hand, and of the so-called “transitional” countries of central and eastern Europe, including the former Soviet republics of the Black Sea region and Transcaucasia, an unadulterated adulation of the EU as a model of democracy, peace and fraternity among nations.

Anti-imperialism is definitely out of fashion. It is immediately identified with nationalism and rejected in the name of an abstract cosmopolitanism that is totally divorced from proletarian internationalism, whose days, *dixit* Hardt and Negri, are deemed to be over. Since the advent of democracy is expected from so-called globalisation (an area where many a theoretical head has been broken!), opposition to imperialist countries is regarded as anathema. The investment of the hopes of the left in at first the European Court of Human Rights and later the European Parliament, have now been extended to the European Commission itself and finally ended up in the left bowing to, of all forces in the world, NATO! There are many instances of large sections of the international socialist left siding with NATO, starting from the onslaught on Yugoslavia in the Kosovo war of 1999 and extending all the way to the pitiful support given to the Ukraine darling of the EU and NATO since the coup d’Etat that followed the Maidan events.

16. I propose to call this whole family of movements extending from the former “communist” parties all the way to some that find their origin in the Trotskyist movement “post-Leninist”, for reasons I cannot go into here. Suffice it to say that for the “respectable” left dominated by the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia and what I would call the professoriat, in Europe in particular, an intelligentsia that has to make a living at universities or the art world of biennales and galleries and museums and advertising companies, Marx can still be romanticised as a critic of soulless capitalism and commodity fetishism and the theoretician of “all that is solid melts into thin air”, but Lenin is a no-go zone! Because, you see, Leninism cannot be romanticised and packaged into dreams or fantasies. It is foul-mouthed and uses words such as “imperialism” (does not sound very scientific, does it?) or “smashing the state” or “the dictatorship of the proletariat” (how outrageous!). Leninism is strategy and party-building, and what a party! All this is anathema

to the Western left-wing intellectual and his or her carbon copy in the oppressed countries. Never mind the fact that the whole corpus of Leninist theory and practice is firmly grounded in a correct reading of Marx. Rethinking Marxism is the way out. The Marx of the Frankfurt School or the “joy of being a communist” *à la* Hardt and Negri give our petty-bourgeois intellectual the clues of what is to be done!

Exit class politics from left stage, enter class politics from right stage

17. We thus come to the gist of the matter. As a result of this long-drawn out process, the international left, in its overwhelming majority, has abdicated the duty of defending the working class and the toiling masses against the onslaught of capitalism, whatever the cost may be. With certain notable exceptions, the left to the left of social democracy (the famous “*gauche de la gauche*”) has abandoned all serious, methodical and intransigent opposition to neoliberalism and globalism to the proto-fascist movements. **All serious opposition to globalism, neoliberalism, and increasing inequality and misery is now seemingly the *chasse gardée*, the hunting ground of the proto-fascist or fascist movements.** It is no longer the socialist or communist left that speaks the plain language of the ordinary toiling people as it did one hundred years ago. It is now the proto-fascist movements around the world who address their worries and needs and hence exercise a pretty serious hegemonic influence over the working class. This is what explains Brexit and Trump and Marine Le Pen and Erdoğan.

We know that this is sheer demagoguery. These are all capitalist movements run mostly by capitalist figureheads (see the class background of the Trumps and the Farages and the Erdoğan). In due time, the proto-fascists will attack all the organisations of the working class, with the express purpose of atomising the class. The appointment of Steven Mnuchin as Secretary of the Treasury by Trump, just to take a single example, speaks volumes as to the nature of the new administration. Mnuchin is heir to a bankers’ family, himself a former partner of Goldman Sachs, the emblematic institution of Wall Street investment banking, before going on to establish his own hedge fund and to finally buy up, together with George Soros and Paul Hankson, Secretary of the Treasury of George W. Bush, a bank that is specialised, of all things, in mortgage lending, IndyMac, whose name Mnuchin and Co. changed into OneWest. This OneWest is notorious for its “questionable foreclosures”, to use the euphemism of the New York Times. It is the peak of irony and a perfectly telling incident that Donald Trump, a president elected on a platform that supposedly defends the victims of the “internationalist” wing of the US bourgeoisie, should appoint someone so involved up to his neck in preying on the woes of American working class families who are expropriated and kicked out of their homes by the very vultures of Wall Street.

18. The international left seems not to hear the deafening bells that toll for it.

Revolutionary Marxism 2017

Although it is crystal clear that Brexit is due to the collapse of the living standards of the white majority of the British working class, although it can be proved with mathematical precision that it is the passing over to the Trump side of the traditionally Democratic white working class families of the so-called rustbelt that led Trump to victory, the left still continues to dabble in cultural identity politics. A strategy that relies on defending the rights of women and LGBTi and immigrants and Muslims is being floated. What this means is clearly the acceptance of waging the battle on the grounds that the Trumps and the Farages and the Le Pens and the Erdoğan have moulded, i.e. the battle ground of the races and the genders. The left is adamant in refusing the evident fact that **class politics has come back in the most devious and sinister way possible**. Trump has rejected and assaulted multiculturalism and “politically correct” language and won. The post-Leninist left now regurgitates the old script. “More of the same!” is all they can come up with. **The post-Leninist left perceives the negation of multiculturalism leading to negative identity politics in the very terms of identity politics itself**. In actual fact, the moment of truth has come. **We need to win those workers back, white and racist and macho as they may be!** We have to find the way to do this. Only if we win them over on the basis of class politics will they stop being white supremacist and racist and macho! Only will the **negation of the negation** lead us out of this impasse. The strategy of the multi-culturalist left is self-defeating.

19. We need Leninist parties based politically on the revolutionary programme of Marxism and sociologically on the class-conscious vanguard of the working class in each country. The historical destruction of revolutionary Marxist parties of the initial period of the Communist International, first by Stalinism and later by liberalism, has led to revolution losing out in the first round of skirmishes around the world in the period 2011-2013. We need to rebuild the vanguard of the working class in each country armed with Marxism, enriched by the contributions of Lenin, Trotsky and others.

20. We need a revolutionary International, a world party of the revolutionary proletariat in order to fight against capitalism as a world system. The destruction of proletarian internationalism by Stalinism has left the working class movement without the true agent of emancipation for the oppressed of the world from the yoke of class society. **We need to bring together all the fighting forces around the world to rebuild a communist International.**