

The return of barbarism: Fascism in the 21st century

(1) Historical roots: classical fascism

Sungur Savran

It is no longer easy to deny that fascism has become once again a topical issue threatening to shape the future of humanity. Not long ago, even a decade or two, the term fascism was used and abused to characterise all kinds of regime under the sun that displayed any type or degree of repressive proclivities. Yet no one imagined that a regime akin to the ones ruled by Hitler or Mussolini with their notorious savagery would in the near future become a realistic prospect. Today things have been altered radically.

From the United States and Brazil through the entire European continent all the way to India and the Philippines a plethora of political movements and governments have arisen that are variously referred to as populist, ultra- or far-right, racist, nationalist, authoritarian, autocratic, and exceptionally fascist or neo-fascist. It is ironic that the same people who, in the past, labelled any kind of repressive government “fascist” rather than characterising them more correctly

in most cases as a military, Bonapartist, Caesarist etc. dictatorship, now refrain from using the epithet fascist for the entire family of movements and, more and more, governments that form a nebulous constellation in the horizon, threatening the future of humanity. And yet, since almost everyone is viscerally aware of the lurking danger, the whole world is also asking the inevitable question: “is this fascism or not?”

We have already studied and analysed this newly rising threat to humanity in some previous articles. The most comprehensive of these in the English language is the article that was published in this journal in its 2017 annual number.¹ This was written immediately after the election of Donald Trump in November 2016. It analysed his politics in connection with a host of other movements, in particular the whole family of European parties extending from Marine Le Pen’s Front National (now Rassemblement National) and UKIP during the Brexit referendum all the way to Golden Dawn in Greece, Jobbik in Hungary and Pravy Front in Ukraine. We have also published several articles in Turkish on the same issue, comparing these movements to Erdoğan’s regime in Turkey, with respect to their commonalities, as well as their sharp differences (which lead us to characterise Erdoğan’s regime not as fascist, but “Rabiist”, a form of despotism rooted in the Islamic predilections of his movement, the AKP).²

We have been, for some time, characterising this group of movements as “proto-fascist”. Let us quickly explain what we mean by this. We think that these formations are transitory and transitional forms that act as the channel for the rise of fascism in Europe and elsewhere. On the one hand, they share many of the traits of fascism, in particular that of putting racism and nationalism at the service of directing the grievances of the working classes not towards capitalism through class struggle but to all that is foreign and alien to the “national community”. Thus they strive to replace divisions on the basis of class by national unity among the autochthonous population and chauvinistic hostility to all that is “alien”, from immigrants to Islam. This immediately makes them candidates for being classified as fascism, since this is perhaps the constitutive element in the formation of classical fascism. Preliminary inspection also shows that these movements are quite strong within the petty-bourgeoisie and other middle strata of society, which also indicates a close similarity between these movements and fascist parties of the era of classical fascism.

However, it is also clear that these parties lack some of the distinguishing characteristics of classical fascism. Among these one stands out very clearly:

1 Sungur Savran, “The Great Challenge: Winning the Working Class Back from Ideological Irredentism”, *Revolutionary Marxism* 2017.

2 For the meaning of our concept “Rabiism”, see in English Sungur Savran, “Turkey: Atlanticism versus Rabiism”, <https://socialistproject.ca/2016/07/b1286/>, 29 July 2016.

very few of these movements have built structures similar to the paramilitary organisations that are the hallmark of the classical fascist parties. In fact, those that wield at least a minimal kind of militia are also more overtly fascistic in their discourse and in their usage of fascist symbols, the cases of the Golden Dawn, Jobbik and Pravy Front being the more conspicuous ones.

Our assessment is this: this group of movements are early or precocious forms of fascism that already have the substance of the historical movement but not the organisational forms and weapons of a fully-fledged fascism. In their dialectical development they may, even in the near future, metamorphose into fully-fledged fascist parties. They have the tendency to do so. If political circumstances require and/or allow them to undergo that kind of metamorphosis, then they are very likely to accomplish this. So we are face to face with the rising threat of fascism once again.

This article has been devised to ground this whole thinking in the historical analysis of fascism in its classical variety. We provide an overall analysis of classical fascism of the interwar period of the twentieth century, in particular in its German and Italian varieties. This way we can come to a general understanding of what fascism is and discover, in particular, its place in the historical development of capitalism. This will make it possible for us to study, in subsequent work, the current situation and in particular what we call the proto-fascist family of parties, in particular in Europe, in the light shed by our analysis of classical fascism here.

The main thesis of the article in its entirety will be that fascism is a form of barbarism that is thrown up by capitalism at a certain stage of its development. We will start out by showing that the historic decline of capitalism takes a cyclical form manifesting itself in profound crises called “great depressions”. Fascism is a product of, and an actor within, the drama played out in those great depressions. It presents itself as a solution where none exists and therefore leads to barbaric methods of handling the problem. Thus, we submit, fascism is itself a cyclical phenomenon closely connected to the death throes of capitalism. The recent rise of what we call proto-fascist movements is a clear indication of this cyclical nature.

Let us then proceed to elaborate on and substantiate these ideas.

The cyclical form of capitalist decline

This may be expressed in simple form through three distinct propositions.

Proposition 1: After having developed the productive forces of humanity at a revolutionary tempo, at a certain stage of its development, the capitalist mode of production becomes a barrier to further development. As a result, the epoch of capitalist decline begins.

As is familiar to most readers, the proposition summarised here is a cornerstone of the materialist conception of history that Marx most clearly enunciates in the Preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* published in

1859. Marx formulated the proposition that each mode of production raises, at a certain stage of its development, barriers in the way of the further development of the productive forces by generalising from his observations on the epoch of transition from feudalism to capitalism and expressing it as a general law of transition from one mode of production to another. No doubt, this transition does not occur automatically, but requires the intervention of class struggle and politics. When this law becomes effective, an **era of social revolution** sets in.³

Capital was written with a view to demonstrate that this law is valid for capitalism as well. As opposed to the efforts of bourgeois thinkers to present capitalism as a mode of production that will survive forever, *Capital* purports to prove scientifically that this law applies to capitalism as much as it does to other modes of production.⁴ In an article in English, published in the first issue of *World Revolution/Revolución Mundial*, we strove to demonstrate that the scientific aim of Marx in writing *Capital* was to show how the capitalist mode of production prepares its own demise. We explained there in detail that the fundamental law of motion of capital implies a vast level of socialisation of the productive forces, that private appropriation poses a barrier in the way of this socialisation, and that the contradiction between this socialisation in the productive forces and private property in the means of production places the abolition of the latter on the agenda of history.⁵

Proposition 2: The imperialist stage is the period when the socialisation of the productive forces has reached an advanced level, when it has come into contradiction with the capitalist mode of production, and when the age of socialist revolutions that create the dynamics of the elimination of capitalism has set in.

Lenin's work *Imperialism*⁶ signals the question of socialisation loud and clear. With the help of many an example, Lenin affirms that production in the imperialist stage is based upon socialised productive forces and that this renders socialism a necessity. That is in fact why the subtitle reads "The Highest Stage of Capitalism". The next stage in historical progression is thus socialism, without any intermediary stages in between.

This aspect of Lenin's theory of imperialism has been neglected in favour of the emphasis on the importance of monopolies or the export of capital or the bellicose nature of imperialism. In our own work, we have striven to explain that

3 Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, New York: International Publishers, 1970, p. 20-21.

4 See in particular Chapter 32 of Volume 1 of *Capital*: "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation".

5 "Das Kapital: The Book for Communism", *World Revolution/Revolución Mundial*, No. 1, Autumn 2018, pp. 117-135.

6 V.I.Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism, Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, v. 22, pp. 185-360.

the real significance of *Imperialism* lies, beyond the famous five characteristics, in Lenin's effort to situate imperialism, in Chapter 10 of the book, within the historical development of capitalism and that the socialisation of the productive forces is decisive in defining the place of imperialism in this history.⁷

When the second proposition is combined with the first, it becomes clear that the age of transition from capitalism to communism has already started, which of course implies that the age of socialist revolutions has also set in. This second point was confirmed by the transformation of the Russian revolution of 1917 into a socialist revolution only one year after the book *Imperialism* was published and later by the revolutions that occurred in the footsteps of October.

Proposition 3: The conversion of private property into a barrier in the way of the further development of the productive forces does not manifest itself in an absolute manner. It appears in the form of the aggravation of the economic crises that are a law-like form of capitalist development, economic crises that grow over into great depressions that are ever more threatening.

This third proposition is the aspect of the entire thesis of capitalist decline that has been understood with the greatest of difficulties, one may even venture to say has not been understood in general. The widespread perception is that as the productive forces enter into a contradiction with the relations of production, capitalism rises as an **absolute** barrier in the way of the productive forces, i.e. technology, formation of skills, productivity of labour, quality of the soil, air, the environment etc. The "barrier" thesis is interpreted to imply that capitalism will no longer be the basis of inventions and that scientific advancement and technological innovation will be arrested. We are of the opinion that not a single line to this end can be found in the voluminous writings of Marx and Engels.

Roughly a decade ago, in the immediate aftermath of the event universally dubbed "global financial crisis" experienced in 2008, we contended that the "barrier" thesis manifests itself in periodic or cyclical form, that for the "barrier" to become effective, and not simply a latent tendency, a profound crisis needs to wreak havoc in the world economy and that the financial crash of 2008 was the harbinger of the onset of a new period best labelled, we think, as the Third Great Depression.⁸ It is these great depressions, which last for decades, as opposed to ordinary economic crises, that bring out into the open the truth that capitalist private property has become a barrier against the development of the productive forces. The world economy has undergone a vast level of socialisation and each country, each unit of production, each economic agency has become indissolubly

⁷ See, in Turkish, Sungur Savran, *Kod Adı Küreselleşme. 21. Yüzyılda Emperyalizm*, 2. Basım, İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2011, Bölüm 4: "Emperyalist Aşamının Tarihsel Anlamı", p. 92-99.

⁸ Sungur Savran "Capitalist Crisis or the Crisis of Capitalism?", E. Ahmet Tonak (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on the World Bank and the IMF*, İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2011.

attached to the others. But market regulation, indispensably linked to private property in the means of production, has dragged these units that are now linked to each other through numerous ties into a chaotic crisis. Capitalism can no longer cope with this state of things.

The fact that within the Third Great Depression fascism has also raised its head once again suggests that this political movement is itself a product and an expression of the profound crises tied to the historical decline of capitalism. The fact that fascism once again presents a potential to become a mass movement, albeit under the form of proto-fascism, suggests that this phenomenon itself is a product and an expression of the cyclical depressions connected to the historic decline of capitalism. The Second Great Depression of the 1930s gave us what might be called the “classical” age of fascism with German Nazism and Italian fascism being the most prominent examples. The Third Great Depression, for its part, has so far led to the rise to power of fascism, if only as a coalition partner, in several countries of Europe (Ukraine, Austria, Italy) and opened up the possibility for a fellow traveller to reach the most important office internationally, the White House. This is no coincidence. Fascism is an expression of the absence, within the system, of a solution at this critical juncture that capitalism has brought humanity, an imaginary solution and a real barbarism.

Methodological propositions

Before we move on to our study of fascism, we will add two methodological propositions to the three substantial ones summarised above.

Methodological proposition 1: Fascism is an international phenomenon and its study should proceed from an analysis of the overall international situation.

Fascism develops in waves and has an international character. If the above substantial propositions are true, then these two properties follow from them. Fascism comes in waves because the historic motion and the decline of capitalism are both cyclical. The rise of fascism, it now transpires, has been a product of the crises of the world economy growing over to great depressions. And since great depressions are, alongside the historical decline of capitalism, worldwide phenomena, fascism itself needs to be studied as a world phenomenon.

There are two implications to be made explicit: First, the fundamental causes of the rise of fascism should be sought not in national peculiarities, but in the character of the overall world situation. Needless to say, inequalities of national development are a part of this overall world situation. The uneven development of a totality is but a law of dialectics. But, for instance, it would be misguided to look for the fundamental cause of the rise of fascism in Italy in the archaic socio-economic nature of the *Mezzogiorno* akin to pre-capitalist relations or the primary moving force of Nazism in the Prussian militarist tradition. We are not saying that these did not have any part to play in the success of fascism in these two countries.

We are saying that these can only act as auxiliary or second-order causes.

The second implication is that national peculiarities are, at a general level, instrumental in determining the diversities between the fascist currents and regimes that are born in the different countries. No doubt, the question of the *Mezzogiorno* rendered the agricultural aspect of Italian fascism more prominent than in the Nazi case; no doubt, the reactionary trends in the armed forces bequeathed by the Prussian military tradition made it possible for Hitler to rise under the protection of army officers. We are not saying that fascism will emerge as an identical movement in each and every country. What we are saying is that the determining characteristics of fascism can only be studied on the basis of the general overall situation in the world at large.

Methodological proposition 2: Among the concrete forms fascism takes at the national level, some reflect the decisive characteristics of fascism more directly and loyally, while others exhibit only certain of these fundamental characteristics, and still others share none of these characteristics and hence cannot be labelled as fascist, but are nonetheless close enough to share a kind of kinship with it. If we go even further, some repressive state forms, while not being fascist, may, however, be functioning as fascistoid regimes under the hegemony of fascism.

What is said here obviously bears the mark of what was earlier said about the rise of fascism in waves and the international character of the fascist phenomenon. Reactionary and repressive movements and regimes born of the dynamics of a certain age are not necessarily all fascist in the full sense of the term. But after fascism begins to mark that age and becomes decisive as an international phenomenon, these may themselves turn into appendages of fascism. Examples abound from the 1930s, the decade that served as the hotbed of classical fascism. It is quite controversial which among the repressive and reactionary regimes of that period were fascist and which not. Germany and Italy were indubitably fascist. Other countries are added by many authors. For Michael Mann, Austria, Hungary and Romania were also ruled by fascist regimes at a certain stage.⁹ Trotsky is of the opinion that the Pilsudski regime in Poland bore the characteristics of fascism.¹⁰ However many of the countries eligible to be characterised as fascist in the Europe of the 1930s are just that, there will always remain others that were not themselves fascist but came under the hegemony of the fascist camp, more particularly of Nazi Germany. Take Franco in Spain: His was not a fully-fledged fascist regime, but represents the diktat of a home-grown reactionary regime. At the opposite end, the France of Marshall Pétain or the Norway of Quisling bear the marks of

9 Michael Mann, *Faşistler* [original title: *Fascists*], Istanbul: İletişim, original year of publication: 2004, p. 25.

10 Leon Trotsky, "The Only Road", *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971, p. 282.

the Nazi occupation forces rather than the dynamics of class struggle in those countries. However, despite these differences, all three stand out as regimes that form an integral part of the fascist bloc of countries during World War II, although one cannot characterise them as fascist in the full sense of the word if viewed solely from the angle of their domestic dynamics.

The same methodological principle has another implication. If the fascist regime displays divergences from country to country, if fascist regimes in certain countries manifest the fundamental character of fascism in a clearer light than others, then the study of fascism should, at a preliminary stage, be conducted on the basis of a single country or several countries, rather than “taking an average” of the whole gamut of countries that may be considered as fascist. For the 1930s, the country that is most fitting for this task is Nazi Germany and only in second place can we put the fascist Italy of Mussolini. In 1932, Trotsky starts his extremely important brochure “What Next?” with the following lines:

Capitalism in Russia proved to be the weakest link in the chain of imperialism, because of its extreme backwardness. In the present crisis, German capitalism reveals itself as the weakest link for the diametrically opposite reason: precisely because it is the most advanced capitalist system in the conditions of the European impasse. As the productive forces of Germany become more and more highly geared, the more dynamic power they gather, the more they are strangled within the state system of Europe—a system that is akin to the “system” of cages within an impoverished provincial zoo.¹¹

Germany, that is to say one of the two giants of the period that had been developing industry at a breathless pace (the other being the United States), is separated from the rest of the major European countries by its lack (or rather paucity) of colonies. That is the main reason why its shadow was cast over the two world wars. Next to Germany, Italy pales into insignificance. Hence, it was in Germany that fascism, that deadly contradiction of capitalism, found its foremost expression.

So in the same way as Marx studied the capitalist mode of production with reference to England, where capitalism had assumed the most advanced and pure forms in the mid-nineteenth century, in the same way as the Soviet Union should be the centre of the study of the experience of the construction of socialism in the twentieth century as the locus of most advanced and pure forms of this kind of society, so should Germany of the time be considered as the central territory of the fascist experience so far in history.

In this article, while tracing the contours of the classical age of fascism, we will

¹¹ Leon Trotsky, “What Next?”, *Struggle Against Fascism*, p. 142 (for bibliographic information see next footnote).

dwell first and foremost on the characteristics of Nazi Germany and only later turn to the Italian experience to see if this latter instance corroborates or else refutes the analysis that we have carried out.¹²

Fascism as an escape route from the historical cul-de-sac of capitalism

Fascism emerges in capitalist society under the conditions created by a very grave economic crisis. In Germany, the main laboratory for the classical period of fascism, the rise to power of Hitler and the Nazi party reveals in clear terms the part played by economic crisis in making this possible. The Nazi party was born as a reaction to the revolutionary process that started in Germany in November 1918 and led to the foundation of a short-lived Soviet Republic in Bavaria in 1919. The party gained strength very rapidly between 1919 and 1923. The draconian conditions posed to Germany in the Versailles Treaty signed in the aftermath of the war and the skilful manner in which Hitler harped on this question had a big part to play in this rapid ascent. An additional factor is the *Freikorps* militia established by the war veterans after the Great War, which created a natural environment in which the Nazis and similar movements flourished (and we will see below that a similar process was experienced in Italy). However, the Nazi party declined as rapidly as it rose after the famous failed “Beerhall Putsch” in Munich in 1923. However, it was not the failure of the “Beerhall Putsch” that led to the lack of interest shown in Hitler and the Nazis between 1923 and 1929. The damage created by this was overcome swiftly as the state took this reactionary movement under its wing and released Hitler from prison after a short while. The real reason is that Germany was stabilised with the support extended by international powers, in particular the United States, in the wake of the hyperinflation of 1923, this latter year also marking the end of the revolutionary wave in Germany that had started in late 1918. As long as economic and political stability reigned, the Nazis were condemned to a marginal existence, fighting barely for survival, far from their earlier stellar political success.

The resurgence of Hitler and the Nazis came in the wake of the deep economic crisis, better known as the Great Depression, which started with the New York

¹² While providing information on Germany and Italy, we will not cite sources each time, unless it is a question of very delicate data, a special interpretation or quotations. So we think it would be best to cite our sources at the outset. On Germany, we base our analysis on the following sources: Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler*, London: Penguin Books, 2009; Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015; Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *The Economy and Class Structure of German Fascism*, London: Free Association Books, 1987; Daniel Guérin, *Fascisme et grand capital (Sur le fascisme II)*, Paris: Petite Collection Maspero, 1971; Arthur Rosenberg, “Fascism as a Mass-Movement”, *Historical Materialism* 20.1, (2012), pp. 144-189.

stock market crash of 1929. The same movement that had marked time and waged a struggle for survival between 1923 and 1929 now displayed a meteoric rise and won the hearts and minds of millions of people and in the space of little more than three years, rose to power on 30th January 1933. It should be noted that when conditions became ripe, fascism was able to rise to power with dazzling speed. In Italy as well, a small party was able to grab power in the space of two years. It is true that the Nazis needed a little more time than the fascists of Italy, but, on the other hand, they were able to establish their absolute monopoly of power in much speedier fashion than Italian fascism, almost within a year after coming formally to power, even less if one takes into consideration the capacity to control the levers of power after the notorious *Reichstag* fire, whereas for Mussolini the attainment of absolute control had to wait for four years.

This succession of clearly demarcated periods, i.e. the quick success of the period 1919-1923, the stagnation of the period 1923-1929, and the meteoric rise to power between 1929-1933 under conditions of the Great Depression brings home almost under laboratory conditions the fact that fascism is a virus that flourishes in an environment of crisis, in particular of economic depression. A social phenomenon of world historical proportions like fascism certainly has a complex web of causes. But to reduce it to its bare outline, its primary, major cause is the horrible social crisis born of the Great Depression. All of the fascist movements that were developing and gaining strength around the same time in the different countries of Europe (Austria, Romania, France, Spain etc.) were likewise products of the Great Depression.

None of these managed to come to power before Nazi occupation of the respective countries because it was in Germany that the combination between the post-war social crisis and the onset of the economic crisis, on the one hand, and the contradiction between Germany's economic power and its position in the imperialist hierarchy, on the other, came together to make the German crisis more profound than that of any other country. It might be in order to elaborate somewhat on this last point.

That which rendered Italy and Germany more fragile than all the other major capitalist-imperialist powers first under the circumstances of the post-war situation and then, later and more importantly, in the context of the Great Depression, that which caused a more severe disruption in these countries than elsewhere was the fact that these countries were late in attaining national unification (1866 in Italy, 1871 in Germany) and hence achieving a full take-off in the domain of the development of capitalism, all this resulting in their retardation in the domain of acquiring colonies. Having lost World War I and being burdened now moreover with the humiliation of Versailles, Germany was preparing, so to speak, for fascism and the Second World War. However, without the Great Depression the conditions for what happened later would not have matured.

The economic programme of Nazism offered as a panacea to German society torn apart under the stress of economic crisis pointed in a direction that was an alternative to the so far normal development of capitalism. If we are to formulate this alternative in terms that would be more comprehensible for today's reader, the economic programme of Nazism rose on the basis of a type of self-sufficiency (or in more technical economic jargon, autarchy) as opposed to globalism. We will consciously refrain from simplifying our task here. In the aftermath of the 1929 stock market crash, under the conditions of the Great Depression, the whole world had moved away from globalism. France had turned its face to the so-called Gold Bloc, Britain to the Commonwealth; in the United States, the New Deal of Roosevelt rendered, from capital's point of view, developments within the domestic market of that country more important than the world market. From Latin America (Brazil, Mexico, Argentina etc.) to Turkey and Egypt, underdeveloped countries opened up to new horizons making use of industrial policy and even planning to develop a domestic market for industrial goods in the morose environment of the depression where every country was trying to save its skin.

All this was true and yet the orientation in the economic policy of the Nazis had a **qualitatively different character** from these. To understand why, it would be useful to look at the two different periods of the economic policy pursued by the Nazi government. The autarchy orientation was not adopted wholesale at one go. The first three years of the Nazis in power is distinguished from the period before Hitler seized power by its Keynesianism *avant la lettre*. The policies that the Nazis started to implement immediately in order to raise the level of employment, in particular public investments, the construction of expressways, the establishment of Volkswagen as a state company etc. really represented a different orientation from the economic orthodoxy of the time, which had a marked bias for private enterprise and a deep-rooted prejudice against state intervention in the functioning of the market.

But it was this very orientation that lifted German capital out of the deep stagnation the economy found itself after 1929. It was in line, in particular, with the interests of the powerful metallurgical industry of Germany. Economic policy had been entrusted to someone outside the original Nazi cadres, a certain Dr. Schacht, who had served as the governor of the Central Bank under the previous regime. His main partner was the iron and steel giant Krupp. Despite its quasi-Keynesian orientation, economic policy under Schacht paid due attention to the sensibilities of the globalist wing of German big capital, serving the needs of exporters, attributing great importance to international capital flows, which had saved Germany from its 1923 hyperinflation, refraining from alienating the American financier class, and for this very reason trying to curb the policy of repression against the Jews, lest this damage Germany's reputation on the international arena.

The great turnaround came under the guidance of Hitler himself. This went

so far that the new draft programme, called the “Four-Year Plan”, which aimed for a shake-up of economic policy, was kept secret from Schacht! This plan was devised to restructure the economy in accordance with the needs of an armaments and war policy that stipulated the military revival of Germany, largely disarmed by the Versailles Treaty. The new strongman of the economy was one of the lieutenants of Hitler, Hermann Goering, who had been appointed to the powerful position of leader of the armaments industry. It should not be deduced from all this that the Nazis had shifted to a policy that ignored the interests of the German big bourgeoisie, doggedly pursuing their own politically charged agenda.

For one thing, imperialist expansion was the common demand of all fractions of German monopoly capital. Moreover, the German bourgeoisie was filled with gratitude towards Hitler for breaking the back of the independent workers’ movement in these difficult days of economic crisis. Finally, another great donor to the Nazi party, the electro-chemicals giant IG Farben was totally immersed with its men in both the preparation and the implementation of the Four-Year Plan.

Hence, the divergence of orientation was not between the Nazis and German monopoly capital, but within the ranks of the latter. Despite some temporary disagreements within the bourgeois class, German imperialist capital was now reorienting itself to a new path of capital accumulation. Schacht himself was to be dismissed in November 1937, to be replaced by one of Goering’s men, a certain Dr.Funk.

The crucial point here is that German capital was now freeing itself, in a relative sense of course, from the immediate constraints of the world market. The German economy had been suffering under the caprices of the world market all the way since the end of the war, had fallen prey to the gravest hyperinflation of all history in 1923, and had come near the precipice in 1929, faced with a crisis of over-accumulation accompanied by a social crisis engendered by skyrocketing unemployment. Naturally, in a world where the productive forces have long outgrown the frontiers of single countries and the international economy has become tightly integrated, it is impossible to free a single country from the forces of the world market on a durable basis. The answer of the Nazi regime to this contradiction was to increase the scale. In Nazi terminology, the answer to this question is the *Grossraumwirtschaft*, or in other words, “Large Space Economics”.¹³ Let us now look into how the transition to that kind of economics was effected.

War economics, war as economics

An economy based on armaments and military spending is, before all else,

¹³ Alan S. Milward, “Fascism and the Economy”, Walter Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism. A Readers’ Guide*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

an economy that is fired by public orders for production and delivery. At a time when the world economy was in a deep depression, when even the US economy, after having recovered somewhat thanks to the New Deal, entered a new spell of stagnation in 1937, the German economy had started to face bottlenecks in the areas of capacity utilisation, employment, and supplies of raw materials. Whereas there were more than six million unemployed at the peak of the economic crisis for Germany in 1931-1932, by 1938 the country had attained a level of employment that could be called full employment, with even a scarcity of labour force posing problems to the economy.¹⁴

Full employment naturally gave a bargaining position to the working class and despite the circumstances created by the fascist regime in the trade union and political domains, this made itself felt in roundabout ways. From 1936-1937 on, the social malaise that grabbed German workers revived Hitler's fear of working class revolt, a nightmare for Hitler since the November revolution of 1918.¹⁵ The implication of all this was that in order to satisfy the needs of the working class and avert a head-on clash, the country had to increase, in the domain of agriculture, the supplies of food as well as of raw materials. On the other hand, in order to be able to import foodstuffs and inputs for the industry, the country had to increase its exports, which necessitated new foreign markets. In other words, the economic orientation established by the Four-Year Plan, by its very logic, had to make appeal to "Large Space Economics". Germany needed *Lebensraum* ("living space"). Given the scale and intricacy of modern productive forces in the imperialist era, autarchy was only possible with "Large Space Economics".

To sum up, Germany had to expand outwards. The war economy made economically motivated war a necessity. What set Hitler's vision apart from the previous expansion drive under the Kaiser during World War I was that, rather than setting its eyes on a conquest of British colonial possessions, it was geared towards the absorption of Eastern Europe and, subsequently, Russia (by now a part of the Soviet Union) as the strategic prize of its war effort. This is what Hitler wrote on the topic in the Second Book of *Mein Kampf*:

We National Socialists consciously draw a line beneath the foreign policy tendency of our pre-War period. We take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement to the south and west, and turn our gaze towards the land in the east. At long last we break off the colonial and commercial policy of the pre-War period and shift to the soil policy of the future.

14 See Charles Bettelheim, *Nazizm Döneminde Alman Ekonomisi. Kapitalizmin Çöküşünün Bir Görünümü* [Original title: *L'économie allemande sous le fascisme.*], Ankara: Savaş Yayınevi, 1982, p. 206.

15 This analysis is due to British Marxist historian Tim Mason, cited in Ian Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, *ibid.*, pp. 103-106.

If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her vassal border states... For centuries Russia drew nourishment from [the] Germanic nucleus of its upper leading strata. Today it can be regarded as almost totally exterminated and extinguished. It has been replaced by the Jew... He himself is no element of organisation, but a ferment of decomposition. The giant empire in the east is ripe for collapse. And the end of Jewish rule in Russia will also be the end of Russia as a state...¹⁶

The persistence of Hitler's hopes regarding an alliance with Britain in the prospective war against the Soviet Union, another originality of the Hitler strategy, was consistent with this strategic orientation. If the Third Reich had to fight its deadliest enemy whatever the cost and if the mobilisation of Britain's might alongside that of the Reichswehr was clearly a guarantee for the definitive defeat of Bolshevism, then obviously Hitler could not start his strategic drive for colonies by setting his eyes on Britain's possessions. This was the factor that differentiated Hitler's strategy from that of the Kaiser and moved Germany in its war drive towards the East, however much the Nazis may have cloaked this under the guise of the unity of the German nation and the protection of German minorities.

In the years 1938-39, Germany successively invaded Hitler's home country Austria (the *Anschluss*), Czechoslovakia (the reason adduced was the Sudet region, where a very sizeable German population lived), and Poland (here the excuse was German interests in the so-called Danzig or Gdansk Corridor). This entire drive was the prelude to the formation of the *Grossraumwirtschaft*. With the onset of the world war, the remaining countries of Eastern Europe (Hungary, Romania, the rest of the Balkans) would be added to the list of German colonies.

The character of Nazi colonialism should be understood very well. In addition to pillaging the economic resources (including whole factories transported westwards) of the countries they occupied, the Nazis made the native labour force work like slaves, in the literal sense of the word. One of the mechanisms of control exercised by Nazism over the German working class was the creation of the conditions for full employment and at least a minimal level of subsistence, thanks to the very high rate of exploitation that German monopoly capital established abroad.¹⁷ To put it somewhat differently, not only did German nationalism play

¹⁶ Kershaw, *Hitler*, p. 155.

¹⁷ On the question of the narrowly economic impact of the Nazi regime on the working class, sources provide information that is not always consistent. Since this is not the core of our topic we do not delve into this subject in any depth. However, let us say in summary form that at the beginning the Nazis obliged German monopoly capital by ferociously attacking the gains and wages of the working class, which led to great losses and impoverishment for the German proletariat. But conditions changed to a certain extent when the German economy started to recover from the economic crisis thanks to public investments and armaments expenditure, this leading to a scarcity

a very important part in the rise of Nazism to power, but later it also served as a decisive principle in the achievement of its objectives on the part of German imperialism. The nationalist economic policy pursued was an element that pushed the German proletariat to adopt the position of German citizen rather than the class position of proletarian. In short, it is impossible to understand fascism, in particular the Nazi experience, without understanding the part played by fascist nationalism.

Jews, workers, Bolsheviks

The Nazi goal of establishing a *Volksgemeinschaft* (a national or ethnic community) is, in this sense, indissolubly enmeshed with its economic programme. Neither the claim that Germans belong to a superior race, nor anti-Semitism is the product of Hitler's caprice. The fascist form of nationalism, racism, the demeaning or even decimation of other nations and "races" are all forms of consciousness created by imperialism in response to hard times. The entire gamut amounts to an ideology that monopoly capitalists of single nations in dire difficulty opt for in order to save only themselves when they realise that they cannot save the system as a whole.

Nazi nationalism, rising as it did upon the dogma of the superiority of the German race, had several functions. First of all, it aspired to make hostility to other nations the binding material between classes so that Germany would no longer be divided according to class. Racism was also a most convenient ideology to serve as the rationale for the drive of Germany to bring other European nations to submission. In other words, while Nazism was an opposition force, nationalism was to serve to reshape German society on the basis not of class but of race; once the Nazis gained power it would then function as an ideology that would bring the German nation into a frenetic clash with other nations.

Given the historical development of Europe, anti-Semitism was a natural fellow traveller to this racist nationalism driven to folly. For one thing, from the point of view of the need to substitute class solidarity by the "unity of the nation", an "internal enemy" would obviously be very handy. Anti-Semitism was a powerful instrument in this context, since it made a religious (or racial) prejudice that already existed within the minds of the great masses of people a fundamental prop of the political and ideological orientation.

Secondly, the pillaging of the property of Jews would create opportunities

of labour supply and an upward bend of wages. There seems to be consensus on the upward move, but not on its degree. Whatever the subsequent development of wages, the working day was kept very long throughout, which meant that absolute surplus value production was pushed to very high levels. This last point was stressed by Sohn-Rethel (Jane Caplan, "Afterword", Sohn-Rethel, *German Fascism*, *ibid*, p. 165.)

for Germans from many different walks of life belonging to the “Arian” race. The forcible “Arianisation” of capital and the economy at large, in other words, the expropriation of Jews through both coercive methods and economic means, the expropriation of a people specialised throughout history in the commerce of money and goods, meant that whatever they possessed would soon pass into the hands of “Arian” Germans. There was no reason why German big capital should complain, but this was not all. The property of Jewish shopkeepers and small businessmen was a big reward for the German petty-bourgeoisie, which formed the greatest source of support for Nazism.

However, the “Jewish question” was not confined to Germany. The Jews were a national and religious community that had spread over the surface of Europe, albeit in uneven fashion, and even in America, North and partially South. (They were also a presence on the Asian and African continents, but only marginally.) Hence, Nazism treated the Jews as a Europe-wide problem. For Hitler, the Jews of Eastern Europe, in particular those of Poland and Russia had a vital importance. These were conceived as both the temporary labour force of the quasi-slavery system of labour the Nazis were to establish in those countries and an excuse for dividing the peoples of those countries by casting Jew against non-Jew, thereby winning the latter over to their side. It should be remembered that the most ill-famed concentration camps (e.g. Auschwitz or Treblinka) were located within Poland.

Another use to which anti-Semitism was put to was that it allowed the Nazis to depict the financial capitalists of the US and Britain as actors of the “international Jewish conspiracy” against Germany and thus turn the people’s attention from the workings of world capitalism to a “national” actor of foreign origin and thereby absolve German magnates of suspicion. The pretence of anti-capitalism on the part of fascism is converted here into hostility against “foreign capitalists”. Goebbels can thus say, in a travesty of anti-capitalism, that their aim is that “in the future, Germany is no longer the proletarian of the universe”.¹⁸ There is no doubt that the strong impact of foreign financial capital due to the tribulations born of the financing of the reparations imposed by Versailles on Germany played directly into the hands of Hitler.

Hostility towards the working class is the second element within the Nazi strategy, side by side with racist nationalism. Obviously Nazism does not target each and every worker as such. What it aims to destroy is the entire spectrum of the independent organisations of the working class. In the brilliant insight of Trotsky, Nazism works to destroy all of the institutions of proletarian democracy.

At this juncture the historic role of fascism begins. It raises to their feet those

¹⁸ Cited in Guérin, *Fascisme et grand capital*, *ibid*, p. 80.

(1) Historical roots: classical fascism

classes that are immediately above the proletariat and that are ever in dread of being forced down into its ranks; it organizes and militarizes them at the expense of finance capital, under the cover of the official government, and it directs them to the extirpation of proletarian organizations, from the most revolutionary to the most conservative.

Fascism is not merely a system of reprisals, of brutal force, and of police terror. Fascism is a particular governmental system based on the uprooting of all elements of proletarian democracy within bourgeois society. The task of fascism lies not only in destroying the Communist vanguard but in holding the entire class in a state of forced disunity. To this end the physical annihilation of the most revolutionary section of the workers does not suffice. It is also necessary to smash all independent and voluntary organizations, to demolish all the defensive bulwarks of the proletariat, and to uproot whatever has been achieved during three-quarters of a century by the Social Democracy and the trade unions. For, in the last analysis, the Communist Party also bases itself on these achievements.¹⁹

It was impossible to provide a better, more distinctive definition of fascism in the 1930s. This remained true all the way to the early 21st century. Let us clearly draw the necessary conclusion explicitly: *On the question of the theory of fascism, Trotsky represents the incomparably most advanced position within Marxism.*

The reason why fascism attacks all the positions of proletarian democracy within bourgeois society is the immediate goal of fascism, advanced as a solution to the problems of capitalist imperialism in crisis, to raise the rate of exploitation for German monopoly capitalists in the sharpest degree possible. At the same time, though, it is the realisation that the **organised** working class is the biggest antagonist vis-a-vis a barbarism that threatens the entire world with full-scale catastrophe. As long as the working class, the most organised class of capitalist society outside of the bourgeoisie, a class prone to class solidarity, a class reared in collective action, conserves its own will power in independence of imperialist interests, it will inevitably rise as a potential threat to this kind of political orientation cut of the cloth of nationalism, racism, war, and mass murder.²⁰ We

¹⁹ Leon Trotsky, "What Next?", *Struggle Against Fascism*, *ibid.*, p. 144.

²⁰ The opposition of the working class to fascism continued under forms hard to believe even under the extremely difficult conditions of the Nazi regime. See Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, *ibid.*, pp. 232-34 and 242-44. Anarcho-communist-Trotskyist historian and militant Daniel Guérin narrated the impressions and experiences during his visit to Nazi Germany within the first year of Hitler's rule in the first volume of his book, the second volume of which was devoted to a theoretical analysis of the fascist phenomenon in Germany and Italy in comparative fashion: Daniel Guérin, *La pestebrune. Sur le fascisme I*, Paris: Petite Collection Maspero, 1969. Chapter 14 to 16 of this first volume are extremely valuable as testimony to concrete experiences of resistance to Nazism carried out under conditions of illegality by both social democratic and communist workers. However, this rather short narrative ends with the following episode: when Guérin asks a communist militant

have already seen that the very first function of German nationalism, raised to a power through anti-Semitism and the myth of the “superior race”, is to break up the organisations of the working class that aim to establish collective solidarity all in the name of a new imagined “unity” of the nation.

In a country like Germany, where the working class wielded extremely powerful organisations, both in the area of trade unions and in the political domain, as well as in Italy, where working class organisations closely trailed behind their German brothers and sisters, the atomisation of the class could certainly not be obtained by fiat. That is why fascism brings together all the elements that it can organise from among the popular (or plebeian) masses, starting with the broad masses of the petty-bourgeoisie, but extending to many other classes and strata, such as public employees, who regard themselves, just like the petty-bourgeois, superior to the worker, the unemployed, precarious workers, the lumpen-proletariat, the war veterans etc. It mobilises these masses on the basis of an agitation against the organised workers, harping on their desperation in the socio-economic field under conditions of economic crisis. It establishes paramilitary organisations (the SA and the SS) to break strikes and attack trade unions. It also makes use of the already existing paramilitary organisations of war veterans (the *Freikorps*). (We will see below that Italy has its corresponding structures.)

One of the first Marxists who recognised “the mass movement character of fascism with deep social roots” is the German socialist leader Clara Zetkin, close comrade of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.²¹ Another Marxist who discovered, quite early on, the part played by the petty-bourgeoisie in this mass movement was Antonio Gramsci, one of the leaders of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd’I) during the rise and early domination of fascism in the country:

Because fascism has bred on and flourished on the terrain of this crisis in its initial phase, because fascism has struggled against the proletariat and risen to power exploiting and organising the lack of consciousness and stupidity of the petty-bourgeoisie filled with hatred against the working class which managed through the force of its organising to alleviate the counterblows of the capitalist crisis in its direction.²²

about the future, his interlocutor “sighs in hesitation” and then adds: ““Everything depends on Moscow!”” (Ibid, p. 121). What “Moscow” was to do after May 1933, the date of this conversation, we all know. Due to the criminal policy of the Stalinist bureaucracy, it was only after 1941, when the Soviet Union itself was finally forced to engage in a life-or-death struggle against Nazi Germany that this most powerful fortress of the international proletariat would join the fight to destroy the deadly enemy of the class.

21 Cited in Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship. The Third International and the Problem of Fascism*, Londra: NLB, 1974, p. 51 and 51n. See also Renzo de Felice, *Le interpretazioni del fascismo*, Roma: Editori Laterza, 1977, pp. 158-59.

22 Antonio Gramsci, “La crisi italiana”, *Scritti scelti*, Marco Gervasoni (ed.), Milano: Radici BUR,

The idea that the mobilisation of the petty-bourgeoisie is the core of the strength of the fascist movement lies at the centre of Trotsky's crucial analysis of fascism in the early 1930s.²³ Another early theoretician of fascism and Nazism, the German Arthur Rosenberg also insists on the character of mass movement of this current.²⁴ Still another early analysis provided by the anarcho-communist-Trotskyist historian and militant Daniel Guérin in his comprehensive two-volume study in 1936 also displays the same approach.²⁵ However, despite pointing to the importance of the mobilisation of the petty-bourgeois masses in the struggle against the proletariat, all these theoreticians of fascism are categorical in asserting that fascism is but the unbridled dictatorship of monopoly capital.

It is imperative to dwell on this last point, lest any sceptical approach tends to advance the independence of the fascist movement from the monopoly capitalist class. It will be in order to refer to a foremost historian of Nazism working outside the Marxist framework:

Such scholarship [on Nazism]—both marxist and non-marxist—broadly accepts two structural connections between capitalism and the rise of Nazism. First, it is clear that there was an increasing readiness among powerful sectors of the industrial élite long before the Nazi political breakthrough to discard the Weimar Republic in favour of a more palatable authoritarian solution which would restore profitability in the first instance through repression of labour. Secondly, among an industrial sector in many ways split and disoriented by the economic crisis of the early 1930s, there was an increased willingness in the deepening recession even among sections of industry not especially well disposed towards the Nazis to tolerate at least a Nazi share in government in order to provide the political framework within which the capitalist system could reproduce itself.²⁶

This willingness continued after the Nazis seized power and gradually established a monopoly over government and also later during the war years. The same historian stresses that the German bourgeoisie sustained its partnership and cooperation with the Nazis in their policies of pillaging, exploitation, destruction, and mass murder **to the very end**. There is some opposition even in the *Reichswehr* (the army), but none within the ranks of the bourgeoisie!²⁷

Alfred Sohn-Rethel, benefiting from a special position among Marxist

2007, p. 256.

23 Trotsky, *Struggle Against Fascism*, *ibid.*

24 Rosenberg, "Fascism as a Mass-Movement", *ibid.*

25 Guérin, *Fascisme et grand capital*, *ibid.*

26 Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, *ibid.*, pp. 55-56. Our emphasis.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 76-77.

theoreticians of Nazism since he worked for an economic institution of the big bourgeoisie established by the large conglomerate groups of the country in the 1930s, narrates how the German *haute bourgeoisie*, together with the higher echelons of the state bureaucracy (including, of course, the top brass) formed ruling class policies in cooperation with the Nazis. The incident he recounts takes place at the end of 1935, when there breaks out a fiery debate as to whether the tempo of growth within the armaments economy should be doubled so as to be able to begin the intended assault on the Soviet Union according to plan (i.e. in spring 1939):

The controversy over the acceleration of arms production generated one of the most acute crises that the regime had experienced and, as always at such critical junctures, its inner dialectic became particularly tangible. This dilemma kept all the informed circles within the economy agog: the banks, the managing boards of the big concerns, the directors of the trusts and their political departments, the large-scale agriculturalists and the Army officers from the Bendlerstrasse. It formed the only topic of conversation at the social functions of Berlin high society.

The unique feature of the situation was that what was at stake shook the ruling strata of German high bourgeoisie out of their fatalistic acceptance of events and challenged them to take up a position, — as though the policies of the Reich could be thought out afresh, as if the power handed over to Hitler and his Party could be retracted and the whole development subjected to a complete revision. Suddenly all the sluice-gates of criticism and discussion seemed to be opened. Everything was spoken out loud: the excesses of the Nazis, their incompetence and cocksure arrogance, their outrageous corruptness, their frauds and embezzlements, their crimes, the dangerous nonsense of their Nazi ideology, the madness of their racial policy.

It is not difficult to anticipate the ending this frenzied debate came to. The Führer decides that the armaments tempo will be doubled. There is no longer even a trace of the revolt against the “folly” of the regime within the ranks of the bourgeoisie or the army.²⁸

The Nazis start working on the proletariat while they are still an opposition force. The NSBO (National Socialist Enterprise Cells Organisation) is established in 1928. These cells are more successful in small and medium enterprises than large ones. The Reichstag fire after Hitler has risen to power gives the Nazis a great excuse for starting their assault on trade unions. In the wake of the May Day celebrations, organised by the Nazis themselves, union centres and their

28 Sohn-Rethel, *German Fascism*, *ibid*, pp. 99-101.

property are seized by the government. The Labour Front is established as an organic extension of the Nazi party under the leadership of a loyal cadre, Dr. Robert Ley. Independent unions are gradually shut down between January and October 1934. Workers are regimented in so-called “enterprise communities”, of which bosses make an integral part. This kind of corporatist structure, in which bosses and workers coexist, are more common under Italian fascism. Henceforth, the institution of “arbitration” replaces all kinds of collective bargaining. The independent organisations of the working class are now a thing of the past.²⁹

We finally come to the greatest enemy for Nazism: Bolshevism. The greatest obsession of Hitler’s political life is the November revolution in the immediate post-war Germany. This glorious revolution he regards as the greatest enemy of the German nation. His fear of the working class does not solely derive from his allegiance to the interests of the monopoly bourgeoisie. It is also because he has seen with his own eyes that when the day comes, when a revolutionary situation is born, communism can become a formidable power within the working class. That is why the Soviet Union is seen as the deadly enemy for Nazism. The belief that the destruction of the Soviet Union is the condition for the overcoming of all economic and political crisis for capitalist imperialism is one of the few guiding ideas of Nazism. In this sense, the occupation of the Soviet Union by Nazi armies in 1941 in contravention of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact is, in effect, the execution of the cardinal imperative of the war drive for Hitler.³⁰

Hence, the Nazi occupation of and the rule established over parts of the Soviet Union wield a double significance in contraposition to its other colonies: on the one hand, Russia is the biggest of these colonies, endowed with immense natural wealth and a large labour force. The fantasies that Hitler has conjured regarding the Soviet territory has an air of a belated repetition of the British India story about it. Ukraine and the Volga region will be turned into the grain depot of Europe; poor working class families from Thuringia and poor peasants from the Harz mountains will be settled here as colons to engage in production; the Crimea will become a summer resort in the image of the French Riviera, where Germans will travel in their Volkswagens to spend their summer holidays etc.³¹ On the other hand, the destruction of the Soviet Union implies that by dealing the main enemy the final blow Germany will have secured a guaranteed future.

Interestingly enough, anti-Semitism is put to use even here. In a historical context made possible by the fact that many great leaders of the international

²⁹ Guérin, *Fascisme et grand capital*, pp. 174-78.

³⁰ See Sohn-Rethel, *German Fascism*, *ibid*, p. 95: “the war against Russia had been firmly decided ever since autumn 1935... War against the U.S.S.R. formed the basic military objective for German rearmament.”

³¹ Kershaw, *Hitler*, *ibid*, pp. 628-630.

Marxist movement from Marx to Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg are Jewish, the Nazi administration presents Bolshevism as a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, dealing blows both to Jewry and Marxism simultaneously, and uses each as a reason to strengthen the hostility to the other in the minds of the German populace. But at the same time, we encounter here the weakest link of the comprehensive world view established by Hitler: both American and British financial capital and its arch-enemy Bolshevism are Jewish!

To sum up, anti-Semitism, a rabidly aggressive attitude to the organised sections of the working class, and the paranoia concerning Bolshevism are not secondary elements nor ornamentations that are wilfully developed in order to cheat the people, nor again fantasies divorced from the real struggle, but are fundamental and indispensable elements of the Nazi strategy.

Barbarism

Nazi power is the return of barbarism to the universe of humanity at a stage when civilisation has reached its highest level. The crimes of this regime includes, but goes way beyond, the crimes of the typical imperialist war and bourgeois dictatorship.

The repression, torture and murder that Nazism exercised over its political opponents domestically we can presume to be ordinary crimes, perhaps raised to a power, committed by a capitalism and imperialism desperately fighting for its survival. Had Nazism consisted purely of these, there would have been no need to label it “barbarism”. We could even have called it an extremely “modern” regime!

One has to look elsewhere in order to identify the practices and the conceptions that lead us to define Nazism as a barbarism. First, Nazism represents a return to a pre-social universe, a “state of nature”, in which no rights are recognised except for the strong and the powerful. One of the practices of the Nazis, less commonly discussed, but no less odious for that, is the “euthanasia programme”. All persons deemed susceptible to harm the future of the German race, starting with the mentally disabled, were murdered systematically. On the basis of this practice, started even before the war, the lives of hundreds of thousands of Germans were taken. The victims of the “euthanasia programme” were usually executed in mobile gas units prepared for this purpose. The later mass murder of Jews in gas chambers is nothing but the continuation of a practice started at an artisanal level by means of methods of mass production or rather mass extermination.

The second aspect of the barbarism is of course the atrocities that plagued the Jews. Having promised to solve the “Jewish question” at the level of continental Europe, Nazism proceeded gradually in this area. First, the Jews were made into scapegoats in Germany from 1934 on. During the so-called *Kristallnacht* on the night of 9-10 November 1938, the homes and businesses of the Jews were raided and ransacked all around the country and many cases of mass murder were recorded.

From then on, Germany became a real hell for the Jews. With the occupation of Poland, the deportation of the Jews started. (Later, not only Germany's Jews, but those of the occupied countries and even of Italy, an allied nation, were deported to Eastern Europe.) Poland gradually became the centre of all European Jewry and turned into the centre of the "solution" to the so-called Jewish question. With the occupation of Soviet territories, the Jews of Russia and those of other republics became the victims of a hunting spree. Russian Jews and others will be massacred summarily. The apogee of this kind of cruelty is the mass execution in cold blood of 43 thousand Jews, most of them children and non-combatant women, in 1943, in Babi Yar, Ukraine, in the space of two short days.

At a certain stage of the war, Jews also functioned as slave labour, especially in Poland. Obviously, the most vulnerable part of the population under the Nazi occupation were the Jews. A deep-rooted anti-Semitic tradition in Eastern Europe, in particular in Poland, caused sections of the native Christian population to be friendly to the Nazis and made the Jews doubly vulnerable. This is how a proletariat was created that could not even raise its head under the force of repression.³² The plan was that after the annihilation of the Soviet Union, the Jews would be sent wholesale to Russia and would be used as slaves unto death. But the fact that the Soviet Union did not capitulate before Germany spoiled all of these plans.

As an alternative solution to the Jewish question a country of exile was sought for them outside of Europe. As may be anticipated, Palestine was one such alternative. The fact that the Zionists entered into a bargaining process at this stage and also collaborated with the Nazis is a phenomenon of historic significance, long kept secret but very important for the light it sheds on the nature of the Zionist movement.³³ Another oft-mentioned country of exile for the Jews was the island of Madagascar off the east African coast.

However, the materialisation of this kind of project of exile was nigh impossible. Sending millions upon millions of Jews, men, women and children, to Palestine or Madagascar would have been such a costly venture and logistically so difficult that soon enough the plans were dropped. Even the deportation of Jews from Germany and other countries of Western and Central Europe to Eastern Europe had been carried out with the greatest of difficulties.

In the meanwhile, Poland and more generally Eastern Europe had become, from the point of view of the Nazis, a warehouse for Jews, so to speak. When, in November 1941, Germany declared war on the United States in the footsteps of its ally Japan after the Pearl Harbor incident, when therefore the war henceforth became a veritable world war, the "final solution" was to come on the agenda. There is general consensus among historians that the implementation of the "final

³² Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, *ibid*, p. 76-77.

³³ See Ralph Shoemann, *The Hidden History of Zionism*, Veritas Press, 1988.

solution”, or, in other words, of the Holocaust was decided at a lakeside meeting at Wannsee in January 1942. The gas chambers were now to be operated and the massacre of around 6 million Jews by means of industrial mass production methods would take pride of place in the annals of modern human barbarism.

Thirdly, the combat methods of the Nazi army in the Soviet Union cannot but be labelled “barbaric”. The rules of engagement given to the *Einsatzgruppen*, established outside the command structure of the *Reichswehr*, Germany’s standing army, and put under the hierarchical order of the SS, were unambiguously based on the principle of cold-blooded murder. As a result of these rules that included the immediate killing of Soviet commissars, partisans and Jews, millions of Soviet citizens died in situations where they would have been taken prisoner of war under other circumstances. Permit us to add a symbolic example: the first victims of Auschwitz, the greatest concentration camp of the Nazis were not Jews but Soviet prisoners of war!³⁴ The number of Soviet citizens estimated to have died in the Soviet-Nazi war that lasted from the spring of 1941, when Germany first moved into Soviet territory, to the spring of 1945, when the Red Army entered Berlin, is daunting: 20 million!

Hitler constantly reiterated that Bolshevism would destroy Western civilisation and that the German nation had to prevent this from happening. The Nazis depicted the Bolsheviks as monsters who were still using the “Asiatic” barbarian methods of their ancestors. Today, it is an incontrovertible fact that the force that then brought Western civilisation to the brink of annihilation was the Nazi regime itself, as it is indubitable that barbarism is neither Asiatic or European, but the product of a ruling class that is in the throes of its death agony.

We wish to conclude this section quoting a passage from Trotsky.

Fascism has opened up the depths of society for politics. Today, not only in peasant homes but also in skyscrapers, there lives alongside the twentieth century the tenth or the thirteenth. A hundred million people use electricity and still believe in the magic power of signs and exorcisms. The Pope of Rome broadcasts over the radio about the miraculous transformations of water into wine. Movie stars go to mediums. Aviators who pilot miraculous mechanisms created by man’s genius wear amulets on their sweaters. What inexhaustible reserves they possess of darkness, ignorance, and savagery! Despair has raised them to their feet, fascism has given them a banner. Everything that should have been eliminated from the national organism in the form of cultural excrement in the course of the normal development of society has now come gushing out from the throat; capitalist society is puking up the undigested barbarism. Such is the physiology of National Socialism.³⁵

34 Ibid, p. 141.

35 “What is National Socialism?”, *Struggle Against Fascism*, p. 405.

If we have quoted this paragraph here, the pleasure of sharing with the reader the inimitably superb literary style of its author is not the sole reason for this, although we must admit that has played its part. The year is 1933. Nazism is now in power but has not yet had the occasion to show that unique barbarian face it will disclose in a few years' time. Not in 1933, nor before his death in 1940 could Trotsky have said anything further. He has discovered the barbaric nature of Nazism, that is more than could reasonably be expected. Today, leaning our back on an immense material that is the fruit of decades of research, we can go much further. So we must move forth, warn humanity with all the urgency that the situation requires, organise and fight against the new wave of fascism in ascendancy.

The Italian test

We noted at the beginning of this article, as part of our methodological propositions, that we were going to take Germany as the model country of classical fascism. And this is what we have done so far. But again in the same methodological section, we stated that Italian fascism came in second place after Nazism in understanding classical fascism. Now, we wish to test our argument regarding Germany against the backdrop of the experience of Italian fascism.³⁶

One of the points that make Italian fascism significant is that it is the pioneer. Having come to power on the crest of the October 1922 "March on Rome" of his fascist bands, Mussolini took the political and social life of Italy under his monopoly in the course of the following four years. In a certain sense, Mussolini assumed the function of "role model" for Hitler. The relationship between these two ruthless dictators thus started with a superior position for Mussolini only to be reversed gradually (in line with the place of each country in the imperialist hierarchy and their military might) in favour of Hitler.

From 1936 on, the two countries more and more moved closer to each other, tying the knot with an official alliance in 1939. But due to the clear-cut military superiority of his own country relative to Italy, Hitler displayed constant impatience with his ally (most clearly on the question of the occupation of Greece) and never trusted him in earnest.

³⁶ Just as in the case of Nazi Germany, in the case of Italy as well, in order not to slow down the flow of reading, we will not make a reference to our sources unless we quote a certain passage. Hence we prefer to provide our sources from the outset: Angelo Tasca, *Nascita e avvento del fascismo*, Milano: PGrecoEdizioni, 2012 (original date of publication 1938); Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo. Storia e interpretazione*, Bari: Editori Laterza, 2018; Giuseppe Fiori, *Vita di Antonio Gramsci*, 2nd Edition, Bari: Editori Laterza, 2008; Daniel Guérin, *Fascisme et grand capital*, *ibid*; Arthur Rosenberg, "Fascism as a Mass-Movement", *ibid*; Pierre Broué, *Histoire de l'Internationale communiste 1919-1943*, Paris: Fayard, 1997.

This is not the place to study in detail the rise of Italian fascism, its advent to power and the policies it pursued once in power. What is of interest to us is the following question: to what level is what has been said on Germany above valid for the fascist experience in Italy? There are naturally important differences between the two countries and the two regimes. We will be touching upon some of these below. But on issues such as the socio-economic basis of fascism, the position the movement holds within class struggles in general, and the solutions it intends to bring to the crisis of capitalism, the two countries are almost identical twins.

Let us start by pointing out that post-war Italy is little different from post-war Germany. Italian fascism grew by leaps and bounds as a result of a multi-dimensional crisis in the wake of World War I. Italy had belatedly entered the war alongside the Allies and had, thanks to this, taken its place among the victors. But in a strange way, the Italian people “were to experience the humiliation and crisis of the vanquished although the country was on the winning side and felt that way”.³⁷ To an extent because some of the coveted territory was impossible to recover (from Austria and Yugoslavia), post-war Italy was shaken with a “myth of mutilated victory”. Hence, not unlike Germany’s state of shock as a result of the Versailles Treaty, Italy found itself faced with a social crisis as it came out of the war. The war veterans (the *arditi*) were full of rage against both those who drifted Italy into war and those who remained behind the front.

On the other hand, parallel to the German revolution, the Italian proletariat threw itself into a passionate struggle under the impact of the October revolution. The years 1919 and 1920 were to pass into Italian history as the “*biennio rosso*” (“two red years”). The industrial proletariat, starting with the metal workers of Turin and elsewhere, went, time and again, on strike and organised general strikes, crowned these with factory occupations, and protected the occupied factories with armed workers’ militia. However, due to the shortcomings of Italian socialism, this movement was not to result in a revolution. The end of the *biennio rosso* (fall 1920) coincided with the onset of a profound economic crisis that took Italy into its grip. The crisis created a disruption in Italian society with mass layoffs of workers.³⁸ The proletariat having failed to provide a way out, it fell to Mussolini’s fascist movement to bring an answer to the crisis. Fascism grew by leaps and bounds in the next two years and seized power.

Akin to the rise of Nazism to power within the space of three years, this swift conquest of power had, as its main factor, as Gramsci pointed out in the quotation we earlier made from him, the skilful exploitation by Mussolini of the hatred felt

37 L. Sturzo, *L'Italie et le fascisme*, p. 54, cited in Tasca, *Nascita e avvento*, *ibid*, p. 537.

38 Angelo Tasca formulates the importance of economic crisis for the rise of fascism as a general law: “without economic crisis, no fascism”. (*Nascita e avvento*, *ibid*, p. 554).

by the petty-bourgeoisie in crisis towards the proletariat.³⁹ In the same way as the *Freikorps* in Germany acted as the source of and model for the fascist paramilitary organisations, in Italy as well, the *arditi* of the war veterans acted as a source of inspiration and of human material for Mussolini's base organisations called *fasci* and what were called the *squadri* (bands). To the extent that these were used by the state and the bosses against the big strikes of the *biennio rosso*, they would flourish and advance rapidly. The number of *fasci* was one hundred in June 1920, but would rise to 800 by the end of the year.⁴⁰ By 1922, the fascist party, with its 200 thousand-strong membership, its armed militia, its trade union federation wielding a membership of half a million, and its youth and women's branches, had become the strongest organised force in the country. Tasca formulates in law-like fashion the importance of paramilitary organisations: "Without armed organisations, no fascism."⁴¹

Armed organisation is of capital importance not only in the march to power, but also when in power. Having become prime minister in November 1922, Mussolini found himself seriously challenged in the aftermath of the assassination in 1924 of the socialist member of parliament Matteotti. While the whole of Italy was waiting for his demise, Mussolini managed to hang onto power. Gramsci explains in clear fashion the power of a fascist party in contraposition to other bourgeois parties:

In effect, to imagine that the crisis of the Mussolini government can be reduced to any ordinary governmental crisis is absurd. Before all else, there is the militia, which obeys no one but Mussolini, which places him outside the field of a normal political manoeuvre. A struggle was waged for months in order to overcome the obstacle posed by the militia, but this on an inappropriate terrain. Work was done on the army, the king was discovered, but in the end everything returned to the same point. Mussolini is not going.⁴²

Having survived thanks to this special power, Mussolini had a law passed in parliament in November 1925 that gave him the power to "bring under discipline" all organisations, closed down the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) together with all opposition parties at the end of 1926, and had Gramsci incarcerated, only to be released shortly before his death for treatment in a hospital. As for the

39 Modern historians confirm the observation made by Gramsci. See Gentile, *Fascismo*, *ibid*, pp. 11-12: "Sociologically, this new fascism was the expression of the mobilisation of the middle strata... Moreover, the majority of the leaders of the *Fasci* and the heads of *squadristimo* came from the middle strata: demobilised officers, journalists, professionals, employees, artisans, shopkeepers, students, and intellectuals."

40 Broué, *L'Internationale communiste*, *ibid*, p. 195.

41 Tasca, *Nascita e avvento*, *ibid*, p. 562.

42 Antonio Gramsci, "La caduta del fascismo", *Scrittiscelti*, *ibid*, p. 269.

repression unleashed on trade unions, this goes all the way back to the time before fascism came to power, with the preliminary suppression of the unions of the rural proletariat and the poor peasantry. In April 1926, the fascist regime promulgated another “discipline” law for the unions that organised industrial workers, to be followed by a decision to allow fascist trade unions alone to function. 1926 is also the year when the first step was taken in the direction of corporatism. But corporatism was met with resistance on the part of the bosses (just as it was also in Germany) and could only materialise with a law that was passed in 1934, when fascist unions proceeded to organise in unison with bosses’ organisations.⁴³

The fascist orientation of the Italian economy had to wait for the severe effects of the 1929 crash. Just as in Germany, Italy also adopted the direction of the armaments economy and after 1936 autarchy became the fundamental orientation. In the month of March of that same year, in a speech he made to the “Assembly of Corporations”, Mussolini declared that even in peace time, but *a fortiori* in war time, Italy had to achieve the utmost economic autonomy, adding that war would probably arrive rather quickly. In 1937, a decision of the Grand Fascist Council stipulated that Italy attain the maximum level of autarchy, with the exception of imports for military needs. Italy had by that time already occupied Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) in 1935. In May 1936 in Rome, the erstwhile capital to the ancient Roman Empire, an “empire” was solemnly declared once again and Italy started to implement a policy of expansion towards the Balkans in phased manner. The Mediterranean was declared to be “*mare nostrum*” (“our sea”) once again.

All this shows that Italian fascism, just like German Nazism, turned towards the establishment of an autarchic economy in response to the economic depression that rocked the world market. If there is a difference in the scale of the ventures, this is because Italy is way behind Germany in the imperialist hierarchy and in military might. That is in fact why Germany should be taken as the typical example of fascism that embodies the tendencies that Italy displays as well, only with much more violence. The orientation is the same; there is only a quantitative difference between the two cases.

The most important difference Italy displayed from Germany was that anti-Semitism carried no weight for the fascist regime. If Italy started to repress its own Jews in 1938, that was mostly a result of the rapprochement between the two countries. This does not mean that the Italian regime was not racist in nature. In Italy as well, in order to develop a superior race, the regime had developed a programme for an “anthropological revolution”. It was evident that the effect of

43 For corporatism, more of a force in Italy than in Germany, in addition to our earlier sources, the following may be consulted: Edmund S. Phelps, “Korporatizm ve Keynes: Keynes’ in Büyüme Felsefesi”, Lorenzo Pecchi/Gustavo Piga (der.), *Keynes’e Dönüş. Torunlarımızın Ekonomik Olanakları* [original title: *Return to Keynes: Economic Possibilities for Our Grand Children*], İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2012.

“eugenics” was strong here too. The difference lies only in the fact that the Jews did not form a specific weight in Italian society and that therefore anti-Semitism came on the agenda in belated manner.

Planprinzip oder Führerprinzip!

The significance of fascist barbarism, witnessed more powerfully in Nazi Germany and relatively more meekly in Italy, should by now have become clear. In the age of imperialism, when the productive forces of humanity are organised in the form of units of gigantic dimensions (corporations, so-called multinational companies etc.), often integrated over the entire gamut of industries, when the world economy has connected all nations with indissoluble ties, the market system, based as it is on the independent decisions of each production unit along the requirements of its own interests, a consequence of private property in the means of production, the market system, this system of mutually independent producers of commodities, finds itself periodically in a situation where it cannot respond to the level of integration the system has acquired. In great depressions, themselves a result of the periodic fall in the rate of profit, the market economy has begun to act as a mechanism of crisis propagation or diffusion and as a barrier in the way of the necessary coordination and cooperation for the recovery of the world economy. Whether we are talking of the Great Depression of the 1930s or the contemporary Third Great Depression, when a crisis of such proportions and such geographically widespread reach is born, the world economy becomes a stage for impending catastrophe, where no one knows where the next blow will come from, and world politics turns into a life and death situation, where no actor can think any longer about anything but saving their own skin.

It is this situation that creates the preconditions for fascism. The bourgeoisie, as we can see in the case of the Third Great Depression, continues for a time to pursue the same old policy persistently, with great enthusiasm and bravado, hoping that the entire world system will come out of the crisis unscathed. But in the end, certain national fractions of the world bourgeoisie who feel they are in the direst of situations, who have been cornered by the developments, who have become the weak links of the world order, start to abandon the dream of common salvation, turn to a new kind of solution that promises salvation for that nation alone, and adopt a new ideological, political and (given the circumstances, inevitably) military orientation. The productive forces are crying out for planning. The system, including those national fractions of the world bourgeoisie in question, refuses planning, repulses it hatefully. The plan that cannot be imposed on the entire world system will then have to be made at the national scale. The heyday of the cosmopolitanism of capital is nearing its end; now is the time for fascist nationalism. All plans, not only economic, but political and military as well, will henceforth be made to fit the needs of the beloved “nation”. Every man for himself

and let the devil take the hindmost!

However, productive forces have reached gigantic proportions in such a manner as to make all national boundaries a fetter on economic success. Neither the idyllic world of the countryside, nor the abstinence of the artisan's world rules now. The fascist salvation project of the single nation has to expand its scale endlessly as well. Conquest becomes an imperative! The nation that is trying to save itself through fascist nationalism is bound to take the road of belligerence! Fascism implies war and, ultimately, world war.

But even this does not suffice. For capitalism has already created a single world economy. For fascism to be a solution, it ultimately needs world domination. The dream of Hitler, the most emblematic of all fascists so far in history, the dream regarding the settling of accounts between a Europe dominated by Germany and the United States of America, is, beyond its significance for a sick mind, is based on the intuitive comprehension of the elephantine magnitude of the crisis the world was undergoing at that time. The meaning should be clear: within the parameters of the crisis of capitalism, the market is no longer able to re-establish a working totality of the world economy. Now, that same totality **needs to be forcibly re-established**. The extraction of surplus value through economic methods under the normal functioning of capitalism is now being replaced by a jungle where the extra-economic methods of coercion become paramount. Slave labour, the enslavement of entire nations, genocide, all this is the logical consequence of the rise of fascism, itself the product of the historical decline of capitalism. Imperialism, having colonised far away climes and enslaved distant peoples is now colonising and enslaving nations that are themselves imperialist or acted imperialistically at one time (e.g. the Russians, no longer imperialists now because of the class nature of the Soviet Union). We are here face to face with the negation of capitalism by itself.

Another form of barbarism may be found in the annihilation of all the rights acquired by humanity through arduous struggles. The Nazi regime created a political structure in which all law was repealed and the will of the fascist leaders became the categorical imperative. The apex of it all is the despotism of a single man. Let us leave aside for a moment the working class, whose will was trampled upon by means of torture and execution and the practice of the Gestapo and the SS. The German bourgeoisie and the German intelligentsia, heir to the great social, intellectual, artistic, and cultural legacy of centuries, the grandchildren of Goethe and Beethoven, of Kant and Hegel (not to mention Marx!), abandoned all responsibility in the administration of its country and its own honour and dignity to a one-time corporal, who happened to be a semi-ignoramus, driven to the extremes of folly, obsessed with personal complexes! Is this not a return to barbarism from within the most advanced technique and civilisation?

In order to discover the secret, let us lend an ear once again to our agent within

the German *haute bourgeoisie*, Alfred Sohn-Rethel. After having described the work of the ministries, the aeronautical industry, the economic bureau of the armed forces, and the monopoly corporations within the context of the feverish preparation for war of the Nazi regime around 1935-1936, Sohn-Rethel has this to say:

Everything that was undertaken, whether it was the regulation of agriculture, the production of synthetic raw materials or the systematisation of the entire metal industry, — everything exceeded the narrow horizons of each individual firm, even the largest of them. And wherever an interested party saw his horizon transcended, then his thoughts lost themselves in the maze. At this borderline he no longer thought rightly or wrongly, he no longer thought at all! There began his nightmare. And it was from this nightmare that Hitler must rescue him: ‘The Führer will put it all right!’

This blind faith in the Führer stemmed from the uncontrollable character of the global situation. Thus in the vacuum of real values the Führer was imbued with awesome power.⁴⁴

Let there be no misunderstanding. The urgent appeal of the productive forces developed by capitalism for planning is outside the intellectual toolkit of Sohn-Rethel. He is trying to understand the confidence felt for Hitler on psychological bases. But in fact the picture he is depicting clearly shows how the chaos that drives single actors to desperation in times of crisis in an utterly integrated world should really be subjected to collective planning and how in the absence, even impossibility, under capitalism of such planning every nation feels the need to take refuge in its own Führer or Duce.

The *Führerprinzip* of Nazi Germany, then, is the alternative resorted to in the absence of the planning principle.

Socialism or barbarism!

Our aim in this article was to show that there are inextricable ties between the historical decline of capitalism and fascist barbarism. Faced with the socialisation of the productive forces, themselves products of the capitalist mode of production, the market, in other words the resource allocation method of capitalism, has become a fetter in the way of the advance of humanity. Fascism is the attempt to overcome the barriers set up by the historical decline of capitalism, which manifests itself in the form of profound economic crises (Great Depressions) with periodic intervals, within the limits of capitalism itself. Fascism tries to do this without abolishing the market, within the framework of a market system whose functioning is

⁴⁴ Sohn-Rethel, *Fascist Germany*, *ibid*, p. 104. Our emphasis.

determined by the despotic domination of a single national fraction of the world bourgeoisie rather than the mutual competition of the capitals of many countries. The premise of this method is self-sufficiency or autarchy in the economy. Yet the internationalisation of the productive forces is in fact an indissoluble part of socialisation. Hence, autarchy makes inevitable the expansionism of the single imperialist despot, or in other words, war. The logical conclusion of autarchy in the imperialist epoch is world domination, the replacement of economic methods by coercion.

Thus fascism turns out to be the insanely logical outcome of the tendencies of monopoly capital. We have already seen that the methods it uses in order to achieve world domination (nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, fear of communism etc.) are the very basis of its barbarism. Thus, in its period of decline, capitalism is transformed through self-negation into barbarism.

This means that we reach a conclusion that lies beyond what Marxists have generally advanced so far on the question: it is true that **fascism is the drive of finance capital to smash all the independent organisations of the working class by using the petty-bourgeois masses as a battering ram by making use of their deep grievances.** It is this, but not only this. **This historically extremely specific assault is, in its outward manifestation, the parading of coercion as master on the stage of history as a pseudo-solution to the crisis, trampling upon even the logic of capitalism itself and, in its essence, the institution of barbarism.** Capitalism resorts to barbarism in spite of itself. The definition of fascism is only complete with this second element.

This means that fascism is not one of those states of exception or extraordinary regimes that capitalism has recourse to from time to time. It cannot be compared to Bonapartism, Caesarism, military dictatorship, autocracy etc. Because fascism is **not a form of administration** whereby capitalism finds solutions to its ordinary problems through repressive methods. Fascism is a form of dissolution of human civilisation. It is **a form of dissolution that presents itself outwardly as a solution.**

If all this is true, the answer to the question that has been asked time and again since 1945, that is since the demise of classical fascism, as to whether fascism will rise onto the stage of history once again or not has been answered. As long as capitalism survives as a moribund system, as long as its death agony continues, fascism is bound to come on the stage of history. Whenever its death throes return after a period of temporary relief that may sometimes last for several decades even, fascism will also offer itself as the pseudo-solution to the crisis of capital. Unless revolution does away with capitalism, fascism will show its face as scary as the face of death.

This is the reason why the famous slogan of Rosa Luxemburg is that prophetic: "Socialism or barbarism!" Rosa had first had recourse to this slogan in a text that

she published in 1915 under the title of the Junius Brochure: “Friedrich Engels once said: ‘Bourgeois society is face to face with a dilemma: A turn to socialism or a return to barbarism’.”⁴⁵ Later, on 31 December 1918, at the founding congress of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), during the last important political speech of her life, while putting forth her ideas on the programme of the party, she insisted, without using the slogan itself, that at the beginning of the 20th century not only had socialism become a necessity, but that if victory were not achieved, barbarism was what really awaited humanity:

They [the bourgeoisie] have reached the point that the dilemma that humankind faces today can be described as: either the fall into anarchy, or salvation through socialism. It is impossible for the bourgeois classes to use the results of the world war to find any kind of way out, on the terrain of their class supremacy and of capitalism.

...

Socialism has become a necessity, not merely because the proletariat is no longer willing to live under the living conditions that the capitalist classes serve up to them, but also because, if the proletariat does not fulfill its class duties by realizing socialism, then we will all have to face ruination together.⁴⁶

These words uttered by Rosa only a fortnight before her death are prophetic. Yes, the date is 1918. That is to say, the “Great War” (World War I), with its massacres and genocides, has already occurred and become part of the shared experience of humanity. But it is still not easy to foresee that humanity will face a barbarism on the scale of Nazism. We salute the memory of Rosa Luxemburg in this year 2019, the centenary of her death at the hand of German social democracy and the counter revolutionaries. We also evoke the memory of Karl Liebknecht, audacious co-leader, together with Rosa, of the revolutionary Marxist wing of the German working class movement in the immediate post-war period.

Prophetic or not, Rosa Luxemburg was entirely right. Fascism (Nazism) rose as the concrete image of barbarism over Germany first, Europe next, and the whole world finally only two decades after those words were uttered. And it was socialism that stopped fascism. What vanquished Nazism was the Red Army, the heroic partisan war of the Soviet peoples, the *Résistance* in France, the partisans of Italy, Yugoslavia, and Albania, the *Kapetanios* in Greece, all with a communist

45 Rosa Luxemburg, “Junius Broşürü: Alman Sosyal Demokrasisi’nin Bunalımı” [*The Junius Brochure*], *Rosa Luxemburg Kitabı. Seçme Yazılar*, haz. Peter Hudis/Kevin B. Anderson, Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları, 2010, p. 477.

46 Rosa Luxemburg, “Our Program and the Political Situation”, <https://www.rosalux.de/stiftung/historisches-zentrum/rosa-luxemburg/100-tage-dokumente/englisch/artikel-rl/by-henry-holland/our-program-and-the-political-situation/>.

movement at their core, the Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean communists fighting against the brutal Japanese imperialism. Were it not for socialism, fascism could perhaps have caused a much greater devastation than all that happened.

At the very beginning of the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels predict that in a situation where the contending classes cannot overcome each other, society may face a full-scale catastrophe:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in **the common ruin of the contending classes.**⁴⁷

It is unfortunate that, to the best of our knowledge, the founding fathers did not pursue this seminal idea of “common ruin” in their later work. This task now falls to the younger generation of Marxists, like so many other theoretical tasks that are awaiting to be completed.

Unless socialism is victorious, imperialist capitalism will drag humanity towards barbarism. In the future this may take the form not of anti-Semitism but hostility against the Muslims or other forms. Whatever the ideological cover, if fascism inflicts a heavy defeat on the working class and succeeds in atomising it in a certain country or continent and proceeds to invade the rest of the world, it is clear that it will bring even more ravage and devastation on humanity than that caused by Hitler, given the level of progress reached by the weapons of mass destruction. In the long run, the choice is not between a democratic and liberal bourgeois society and socialism. The choice will again be between socialism and barbarism. When socialism wins, this will be the negation of the negation.

⁴⁷ Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, London: Verso, 1998, pp. 34-35. Our emphasis.