

The return of barbarism: Fascism in the 21st century (2) The rise of proto-fascism

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Fascism has raised its head once again at this beginning of the 21st century.¹ However much the intellectuals of the bourgeoisie and its media try to hide the fact, when fascism shows its ugly face everyone recognises it. When, 75 years after Nazism was defeated in Germany, a racist kills nine people for reasons of hate and the circumstances of this massacre are questioned by millions or when fascists attempt to start a pogrom against immigrants in the cities of Chemnitz and Köthen or when neo-Nazis chant out loud “National Socialism! Now! Now! Now!”, no one in their right mind doubts as to the real identity of these people. When, hordes of white supremacists, having raided Charlottesville, Virginia in the United States

¹ This article was originally written for the Turkish edition of our journal, *Devrimci Marksizm* and published in its issue No. 38 of Spring 2019. It has been translated (by the author himself) without any changes to the main body of the text and therefore is a bit dated at times, as it necessarily does not cover the changes that have come about in the course of the last twelve months. We have tried to make up for this in two ways. On the one hand, we inserted some new footnotes in order to bring the reader up to date on certain issues or countries. On the other, we have added as an Appendix our overall assessment of the elections to the European Parliament held in May 2019, published on the web site RedMed (www.redmed.org) in the wake of the elections.

in order to defend pro-slavery Confederate generals, display their affiliation under labels such as the American Neo-Nazi Party or the Klu Klux Klan, no one questions who they are. Everyone knows. Behind euphemisms such as “Alt-right”, everyone sees through the true nature of these fascists.

But when the fascists or the Nazis do not disclose themselves so blatantly, it becomes necessary to recognise who they are, to discover their nature, to situate them precisely, and to understand what kind of threat they represent for the future of humanity. Alongside the vacuous term of “populism”, other appellations are put into use in the bourgeois media, such as “extreme right”, “racist”, “nativist”, “nationalist”, or even “neo-fascist”. Everyone immediately understands which currents are being discussed. Everyone knows who the “nationalists” are in Italy that are a constant threat to migrant labourers or who the “populists” are if it is a question of the European elections. But these terms are not used for a scientific characterisation of the parties in question. In fact, these terms are simply insufficient to do that. For, leaving aside the appellation “neo-fascist”, none of these characterisations are sufficiently concrete, sufficiently descriptive, sufficiently distinctive as to the nature of the phenomenon at hand.

Our objective in this article is to conduct a scientific analysis of this current that has its centre in Europe, but has nonetheless spread to the rest of the world, to identify its main characteristics, to examine future prospects and to advance ideas about how to fight it. In doing this, the analysis displayed in the first instalment of this article published in the previous (2019) issue of this journal will be of guidance to us.² The knowledge provided to us concerning classical fascism there will be used to understand these movements developing in the early part of the 21st century.

If we leave aside the obsession of bourgeois intellectuals and the left-wing intellectuals who slavishly follow in the footsteps of the former with so-called “populism”, there remains a different kind of conceptual laxity that is common to broad sections of the left. This is a common characterisation of all repressive regimes or strongman politics or racist movements under the same general heading. When people start to talk about Marine Le Pen in France or Bolsonaro in Brazil, they immediately skip all the way to Putin in Russia or Orbán in Hungary or Erdoğan in Turkey or even Duterte in the Philippines. There is no doubt that these governments (or “regimes” when that term applies) have much in common with those we are discussing and with fascism. The common elements are obvious at least regarding rights and freedoms and, more generally, law. But to ignore their differences and collect them in the same basket may imply a lack of understanding of the real nature of these other movements and an underestimation of the threats posed by the proto-fascist movements. We are simply leaving outside of the purview of this article the series of countries named from Russia all the way to the Philippines above. We are simply abstracting from them. It is necessary to decide on each case on the basis of its own merits and come to a conclusion as to whether that specific case belongs to the same family as those movements that we consider to be a manifestation of

² Sungur Savran, “The Return of Barbarism: Fascism in the 21st Century. (1) Classical Fascism”, *Revolutionary Marxism* 2019, <http://www.devrimcimarksizm.net/en/revolutionary-marxism>.

the rise of fascism. Rather than do that in this article, we will focus on the genuine instances of the current that we wish to examine.

In the same vein, it is quite common to see the *takfiri* movements³ (such as Al Qaeda or Islamic State) in the Islamic world in the same light as these currents we are talking about and label them “Islamic fascist”. Taking into consideration the fact that in our day and age, political formations in the Islamic world are the product of a specifically determined itinerary deeply marked by the relations of this world to that of Christendom or more generally the West, we will refrain from such reductionism that is not sufficiently concrete in its treatment of the object at hand and, furthermore, represents total abstraction from the class basis of fascism.

We have thus delineated the borders of our object. The political family we will dwell upon is, in our opinion, a series of movements that are historically linked to the fascist movement. This is not any old repressive or nationalistic movement. The phenomenon that we wish to discover is the resurgence of fascism on the stage of history. We can investigate the question of whether the regimes or movements that we propose to leave aside are related to fascism or, even if they are not historically linked to it, will become connected to it in the future only when we have reached clarity on this question.

We can then start to examine the family that we are interested in.

Panorama: Europe

In the wake of the defeat of Nazism and fascism at the end of World War II, movements that remained loyal to this current dragged on their existence as organisations that were largely isolated and marginalised from the rest of society. There existed movements in diverse countries that dedicated themselves to the principles of Nazism or fascism and at times they conducted their political business in the open, but were, at other times, banned from politics. Some of these were able to make themselves heard more successfully than others. For instance, the *Movimento sociale italiano* (Msi-Italian Social Movement) made its presence felt for half a century. In Germany, where Nazism was remembered no less than as a trauma, the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD-National Democratic Party of Germany) tried to create a kind of revival on the basis of a unification of a series of grouplets. In Britain, the British National Party (BNP) made itself heard after the 1980s. However, these were really ***forms of survival of the doctrine in organisational disguise***. Their capacity to carry on politics on the national scale was limited.

The first instances of success in the effort to overcome marginalisation came in France and Austria. In France, the *Front National* (FN-National Front), established by a veteran of the Algerian war by the name of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the early 1970s, started to have some impact on national politics from the early 1980s on.

³ The word “*takfir*” implies declaring others infidels. The *takfiri* movement is that movement which takes upon itself to decide whether a person or a community is Muslim or infidel, irrespective of how that individual or community perceives and defines itself. This means that *takfirism* sees Muslims who do not live in conformity with ***its own*** conception of Islam as infidels.

That the initiatives taken by François Mitterrand, who was elected twice president of the republic and ruled France for 14 years between 1981 and 1995 with the support of the French Communist Party, in order to divide the right had a part to play in this resurgence is a widely accepted opinion. Le Pen was a politician who not only was a French racist through and through, but proved his affinity to Nazism by his full-fledged historical negationism, almost denying the Holocaust (“*un point de détail de l’histoire*”).

In Austria, on the other hand, the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ – Austrian Freedom Party), whose roots go back all the way to the 1950s, made a leap forward towards the end of the century after having remained marginalised for long. Its leader Jörg Haider was someone who was loyal to the “cause” to the degree of making positive references to Hitler from time to time. The FPÖ raised its share of the vote swiftly from the late 1980s on and Haider was elected governor in his own *Land* and would also be sent to the federal parliament.

Both parties made a breakthrough at the turn of the century. In 1999, FPÖ came second in Austrian elections and set up a government with the traditional right-wing party of the country. This created a serious malaise both within Austria and abroad and especially within the European Union (EU). Haider was forced to renounce the leadership of the party. Later when Haider formed another party because of discord within the FPÖ itself, the latter stopped for a time to pose a threat.

As for the FN in France, the party made a big leap forward in the presidential elections of 2002. Jean-Marie Le Pen managed to receive the highest number of votes after traditional rightist Jacques Chirac in the first round and thus was able to stand in the second round for the first time. However, being able to raise his share of the popular vote from 17 per cent to only 18 (in quantitative terms from 4.8 million to 5.5 million) he lost the elections by a distant margin. One has to conclude from the evidence that the support given to Le Pen at this stage was exclusively from a hard core racist minority of the country and that he was isolated from the rest of society, as he was not able to attract much additional support from other sections of the population.

In other countries of Europe, parties within the sphere of attraction of fascism did not make their presence felt in this period. More generally, the following should be said: the pre-2008 period is the *prehistory* of the movement in Europe. The real history started with the crash of the Wall Street bank Lehman Brothers in September 2008 and the onset of the Third Great Depression.

The first advances came in Hungary and Greece. As we know, Hungary is a country that entered the path of capitalist restoration in 1989 after decades of existence as a bureaucratically degenerated workers’ state and at a certain stage was admitted to the EU along with other central and eastern European countries. The economic disruption and poverty created as a consequence of capitalist restoration had already created an explosive situation in this country. The challenging circumstances that sprang up with the onset of the Third Great Depression pushed the youth and a growing part of the population at large rapidly to the side of fascism. As an explicitly fascist party that wields a paramilitary militia called the Hungarian Guard and propagates a historical narrative of the origin of the Hungarian people

on the basis of an ideology of the original fatherland called “Turan”, Jobbik made a big leap forward from 2010 on. Since then it has been receiving approximately 20 per cent of the popular vote. (Significant change has come about in Jobbik in recent years, which we will be touching upon below.)

Although Greece certainly was not confronted with the kind of disruption that was experienced by former workers’ states, it is nonetheless the country that has suffered most in Europe the consequences of the Third Great Depression and been crushed under the weight of its foreign debt and the diktat of austerity by the EU. Of the two “nationalist” parties of the country, LAOS (the People’s Orthodox Revival) was established in 2000 and soon managed to send representatives to parliament. However, another “nationalist” party, the Golden Dawn, accusing LAOS of betrayal, adopting ideologically a much more radical stance, and, with its paramilitary bands, posing a vital threat to migrants, refugees and leftist militants, was strengthened rapidly as a result of the economic crisis that scorched Greece from 2010 on. In 2012, LAOS lost its seats in parliament and Golden Dawn entered parliament triumphantly as the third biggest party of the country.⁴

One has to be very clear here. Jobbik and Golden Dawn do not only display the characteristics of fascist parties in the ideological and political spheres, but also create a sense of permanent, albeit slow motion, civil war using their paramilitary militia. They unabashedly claim Nazi symbols. In other words, with the onset of the Third Great Depression, the movement has, in Hungary and Greece, turned towards openly owning the fascist heritage, with at least a difference of degree from France and Austria. It would not be incorrect to say that this sheds light on related parties in other countries that cannot go so far as to claim that heritage openly, but do refer to it occasionally. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to ignore the difference between the two wings of the family.

We can sum up what has been said so far in the following manner: movements that have their origin to differing degrees in fascism or Nazism made remarkable inroads in political life, first in two countries at the turn of the 21st century and then in two other countries after 2008. However, these were still isolated cases. A leap forward across the entire continent, an explosive development in other words, came about for the first time during the 2014 elections to the European Parliament. In tandem with this development, there occurred a rise in a European country that was not a member of the EU, Ukraine, during the Maidan events of summer 2014.

In the European elections, three such parties came first in their country: the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in Britain, the Front National in France, now under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the daughter of the founding father, and a far right party in Denmark called the Danish People’s Party. There was also very rapid growth of racist and far right nationalist parties in many other countries.

As for Ukraine, within the mass movement in the Maidan events that ousted the

⁴ Since the writing of the original article, Golden Dawn has suffered at the hands of the electorate and lost its seats in parliament in 2019. Moreover, its leadership is being prosecuted for different crimes.

pro-Russian administration of the country, the paramilitary striking force consisted of several fascist parties. These were openly fascist parties that claimed the Nazi symbols of the Bandera movement that became prominent under German occupation during World War II. When the Maidan movement succeeded in bringing down the previous administration and a transitional government replaced it, some of these parties became coalition partners in that government. This was the first experience in power of openly fascist parties on the European continent since the fall of Hitler! (That some leftists dared call the Maidan events a “revolution” gains a grotesque allure in the light of these facts.)

The second leap forward of the overall movement after 2014 came in 2016, when, in the wake of the hegemonic role played by the UKIP at the Brexit referendum in Britain, Donald Trump was elected that November president of the United States. The later developments in the two countries diverged widely: the charismatic leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage, disappeared from the scene and his UKIP became irrelevant for British politics for a while.⁵ (Tommy Robinson, leader of a much more radical fascist movement, somewhat increased his clout benefitting from this temporary absence.⁶) In contrast, the victory in the US presidential elections gave both Trump, whose political stance we have been calling “loose cannon fascism”, referring through that not only to his temper, but also the fact that he has no disciplined party behind him to accomplish the tasks he sets himself, and the Alt-Right movement, the new racist, white supremacist, pro-imperialistic right-wing movement of recent years a lot of leeway to further their agenda. (We are not leaving the US behind. We will come back to it in the second section of the article.)

Since 2016 the movement has been growing and spreading towards the rest of Europe in uninterrupted fashion. (There are times when, as in the presidential election in France in 2017, because very high precocious expectations develop within the movement, there comes about a serious sense of defeat if those expectations are not met. However, what really counts is not the variable psychology both in friend and foe, but the growth in the objective strength of the movement in time.)

The veteran and best-established representative of the current, the FN in France, put up its leader Marine Le Pen as candidate in the the presidential elections of spring 2017, who received the support of a full one third of the French electorate in the second round against Emmanuel Macron. Public opinion concurred that she put up an extremely bad performance in the television debate on the eve of the second round. And because expectations were so high, this was experienced as a defeat in

5 Since the writing of the original article, Nigel Farage has come back. Britain was unable to leave the EU, going through a chaotic process for three long years. That is why it had to participate in the European elections of May 2019. Farage, already an MEP (Member of the European Parliament), used this opportunity to set up a makeshift list called Brexit for these elections. He came in first once again, receiving 31 per cent of the vote. But his rise proved once again to be short-lived, as Boris Johnson, the Conservative leader who is also passionately pro-Brexit stole the show by winning the snap parliamentary elections at the end of the year.

6 Probably trying to repeat Farage’s success and steal the show, Robinson participated in the European elections. But since Farage also entered the fray and showed a very strong standing, Robinson’s support seems to have evaporated.

some quarters within the party and outside. We consider it as extremely significant that *one French voter in three* voted for this ultra-nationalist and racist candidate.

General elections were held in the Netherlands at around the same time as the French presidential election and the FVV (Freedom Party) of Geert Wilders came in second. Again, there was disillusion in party ranks because the party had climbed to first place in public opinion polls after the blatant racism it had propagated during the large migratory wave of 2015. Probably under the impact of this disillusionment, at the elections for the Senate in March 2019, another racist party called the Democracy Forum (FvD) under the leadership of Thierry Baudet took the first place and the vote for the FVV declined.

The FPÖ in Austria, after having been eclipsed momentarily in the wake of Jörg Haider's split, has now recovered. In the presidential elections of December 2016 (in Austria a largely ceremonial post), the candidate of the FPÖ, Norbert Hofer, lost to the candidate of the Greens by a hair's breadth. This obviously means that the candidate of a party related, to say the least, to fascism in one way or another, managed to receive the vote of *one Austrian in two!* The FPÖ came in third in the general elections held at the end of 2017. The traditional right-wing party the ÖVP, which had earlier been reprimanded when it formed a coalition government with Jörg Haider, now delivered, in a coalition government under the premiership of its 31-year old leader Sebastian Kurz, very important seats, such as the interior, foreign affairs, and justice, to the FPÖ, this time with a very weak protest accompanying the formation of such a government.⁷

Developments in Germany followed a different path. Germany was the country with the weakest results for the movement in the European elections of 2014. This was because there was yet no party in sight. This may probably be explained by the long-standing trauma that Nazism has wrought on the German people. However, precisely in that same year of 2014 a racist movement emerged in Germany: called Pegida (Patriots of Europe against the Islamisation of the West), the movement saw the light of day in Dresden and staged powerful demonstrations against immigrants, particularly in the regions of the former East Germany. The movement suffered a great debacle before engendering a political product. The incident is telling: Lutz Bachmann, the leader of the movement, shared a personal photo with a Hitler moustache on social media in January 2015, which raised extreme rage in the country. As Pegida's prestige collapsed, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD - Alternative for Germany), a party that had been formed recently, even refused to sit down and talk with Pegida leaders.⁸

7 The situation has changed radically since the writing of the article. The FPÖ leader was caught red-handed in a scheme of political corruption and the party lost quite a lot of voters in elections and had to exit government.

8 For a detailed overview of Germany, see Kurtar Tanyılmaz, "Almanya'da Faşizmin Ayak Sesleri" (in Turkish), *Devrimci Marksizm*, No. 38, Spring 2019. For an analysis of the situation after the European elections of May 2019, see, by the same author, "Implications of the European Elections: the Crisis of the German Bourgeois Democracy", <http://redmed.org/article/implications-european-parliament-elections-crisis-german-bourgeois-democracy>.

Founded by college professors, receiving serious support from several quarters within business and media, the AfD came in third in the general elections of 2017 and became a decisive force in German political life. The professors were kicked out of the party, more plebeian elements taking the party's administration over.

An event of vital importance occurred in Germany in September 2018 in the formerly East German cities of Chemnitz and Köthen, when thousands of fascist militants, wielding openly Nazi symbols, carried out a rehearsal of a pogrom against immigrants and leftists. These hordes, who did not even bother to hide their affinity to Nazism, were protected by the “gentle”, “civilised”, and “pliable” militants of the AfD!

The Italian situation is quite complex. In the past the representative of fascism in Italy was the Msi we have already mentioned, a party that had been established after the war by partisans of Mussolini and survived until the 1990s. Today the picture is radically different. The main actor now is the *Lega* of Matteo Salvini. This is a transmutation of the *Lega Nord*, a regionalist party that defended at least autonomy if not full independence for the rich north of Italy. It has now banished the qualifying “Nord” from its name and adopted a nationalist, racist, anti-EU line. The new *Lega* obtained a very successful result in the elections of March 2018. Its leader Salvini became deputy prime minister and (significantly) minister of the interior in a coalition government with the M5S, a hodge-podge newcomer without any serious programme binding its militants or grassroots supporters. Having gone into the coalition on the basis of the 17 per cent vote the *Lega* received in the elections, Salvini pursued racist and anti-immigrant policies, which, in today's conditions raised his standing in opinion polls to at least twice that.⁹

There are other parties in Italy from the same family. One of these is the *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy, ironically led by a woman leader), established in 2012. This party participated in the 2018 elections in the same bloc as the *Lega*, but received a much smaller share of the vote. Then there are parties that do not refrain from running in the elections but accord priority to street politics. *Forza Nuova* (New Force) and *Casa Pound* (the Pound House, after the famous American poet Ezra Pound of fascist inclination) are indubitably cut of fascist cloth.

In Nordic countries as well, organisations that belong to the same family have been growing recently. Perhaps in similar fashion to Italy, these should be taken up at two different levels. At one level stand parties that are actively present in the domain of parliamentary politics and have gained success in recent years. We have already spoken of the Danish People's Party. The Swedish Democrats received 18 per cent of the popular vote in the general elections of September 2018 and became a third force on the political spectrum alongside the social democratic-socialist bloc, on the one hand, and the bloc of “bourgeois” parties, to use the terminology

⁹ Since the writing of the article, Salvini has left government. There is now an M5S-Democratic Party government in power. Salvini is in opposition waiting for his turn. The *Lega* came in first in the European elections of May 2019. See Burak Sayim, “The (Still) Resistible Rise of Salvini”, <http://redmed.org/article/still-resistible-rise-salvini>. We will of course have to wait and see how the Coronavirus pandemic will reshape the Italian political scene.

peculiar to that country. In Finland, the True Finns party, having become several years ago one of the four biggest parties of the country for the first time, later split into two parties, one relatively moderate and one extremist. The moderate wing has almost evaporated with the extremist party coming in a very close second to the social democrats, having received 17.5 per cent of the popular vote at the general elections of April 2019.

A totally different kind of organisation is emerging at the other level. Nordic Resistance is a movement that is organizing only as a street gang. It does not engage in parliamentary politics itself, although it will use like-minded parties more amenable to parliamentary politics as a front, a shell, so to speak, at least in some countries. For instance, before the latest elections, there were two members of the Nordic Resistance in the Swedish parliament that had been elected on a Swedish Democrats ticket. There are also widespread rumours that the Swedish Democrats extend financial support to Nordic Resistance.¹⁰

For a long time, Spain remained the exception among the large countries of Europe with respect to the emergence of this type of party. This was rather startling for those who are familiar with the plethora of extreme right movements that haunted this country in the 20th century and the despotism of an extremely reactionary Franco administration that lasted from the late 1930s all the way up to the mid-1970s. However, a local election in the autonomous region of Andalusia in December 2018 gave a new party, Vox, 11 per cent of the popular vote and 12 seats in the regional parliament. Vox displays all the typical characteristics of the family of parties we have been talking about, but also an extreme Spanish nationalism in reaction and hostility to the Catalan independence movement. It is no coincidence that the new party won its first electoral victory in Andalusia. This is a region mired in poverty and the Third Great Depression has left deep scars there. The rate of unemployment still hovers around 21 per cent.

The political party system in Spain is already undergoing a crisis: it has not been possible for almost three years now to form a reasonably stable government in the country. The country went to the polls at the end of April 2019 for general elections for the third time in four years. Vox made a great stride forward and raised its share of the popular vote to above 10 per cent and obtained 24 seats in a parliament of 350 seats.

This type of party is on the rise in many countries that are not in a decisive position for the overall politics of the EU or of Europe at large: Belgium, Slovakia, Bulgaria and many other Balkan countries have entered the fray and have seen similar movements reach a certain threshold.

The European elections to be held at the end of May 2019 will, in all probability, represent a new apogee in the march to victory of this current.¹¹

¹⁰ For much more on both Nordic Resistance and the Party of True Finns, see Muzaffer Ege Alper, "EU Elections in the North: The Victory of Anti-Immigration over Anti-Austerity", <http://redmed.org/article/eu-elections-north-victory-anti-immigration-over-anti-austerity>.

¹¹ See Appendix 1 for an overall assessment of these elections.

Panorama: the US, Latin America, Asia

It is predominantly in Europe that this family of far right movements has shown its ugly face in the era of the Third Great Depression. There are many different reasons for this: if one of these is the fact that this continent is the original fatherland of classical fascism and Nazism and therefore has carried on some of its traditions in subterranean fashion, another is the fact that Europe has emerged as the weak link of the world capitalist system in the context of the depression.

However, the phenomenon did not remain confined to this continent, but was observable on others as well, albeit with a lag. The movement obtained its biggest victory in the United States of America, the country with the most powerful economy and military in the world. In our opinion, Donald Trump is a representative of this movement, naturally displaying certain characteristics peculiar to America. Because we explained this fully in an article published in the first issue of *Revolutionary Marxism* immediately after Trump was elected, we will not go into any details as to why we think Trump bears a relation of kinship to this family of movements. The present article is, in a certain sense, a sequel to that one and the interested reader, we venture to say, might find that earlier one useful as well.¹²

We will only summarise the gist of our analysis on Trump so as to make the case intelligible in the context of this article. From day one, even before the elections, we labelled Trump the “loose cannon fascist”, an expression more readily comprehensible in Turkish than in English. The essence of this characterisation lies in the fact that although Trump ran and got elected on the Republican ticket, he is in fact a magnate-turned-politician *without a party*. Fascism is an organised movement, the business of a party that is well-organised and disciplined. That is why his rise to power without fully relying on the strength of that kind of party, something due to the peculiarities of American political traditions (of which the so far undented absolute domination of the two-party system is the most significant), should be considered as an anomaly. A more psychological sense of the term “loose cannon fascism” is an allusion to the character of the man since he has proved to be quite unpredictable from day one. This is certainly related to the personality traits of the man himself, but requires, as a precondition, the more objective sense of the term. To put it in a nutshell, the unpredictability is connected with the loose relationship between the man and the party.

In the political orientation of Trump, one sees the influence of other political currents rather than mainstream Republican views. One of these is the Tea Party movement that was born within the very same Republican Party as a product of the Third Great Depression. Although this far right current was not ultimately successful as a political project, it nonetheless left its mark on the general political atmosphere of the party and the country. The second ideological-political source is the new trend called “alt-right” (the “alternative right”), a trend that is through and through imperialistic and white supremacist in its outlook. One name deserves

12 Sungur Savran, “The Great Challenge: Winning the Working Class Back from Ideological Irredentism”, *Revolutionary Marxism* 2017, <http://www.devrimcimarksizm.net/sayi/revolutionary-marxism-2017>.

special mention here. Steve Bannon, one-time editor of an “alt-right” news web site called Breitbart News, was chief advisor to Trump both during his election campaign and in the first few months after he took office and had great influence on his policies. His departure from the White House without any signal of tension with the president has remained shrouded in mystery to this day. But thanks to this departure, we have obtained one of the strongest pieces of evidence as to how Trump had a relation of kinship to the family of movements in Europe that we have been dwelling upon in this article. After having abandoned his post in the White House, Bannon concentrated his whole political clout towards recasting these European parties and trying to turn them into a weighty political actor on the continent.

It must be added that Trump’s conduct in office has confirmed our characterisation as well. He has taken steps to fulfil his electoral promises regarding Muslim peoples (a travel ban imposed upon passengers travelling from certain Muslim countries) and to build his cherished Mexican wall, even going so far as to declare a temporary state of emergency in order to force the US Congress into ceding to his demand of funds for the wall. If he manages to erect a wall on the Mexican border or any other system to the same end, this will be a memorial to his undeniable racism. His positive attitude towards the camp of far right movements gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia in the summer of 2017, among the ranks of which, it must be emphasized, stood the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazis, clearly attested to his ideological inclinations. But the most important indicator of his kinship to fascism is his economic policies. We content ourselves with a simple assertion here as we will come back to this point in more detail below.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, let us note two caveats here. Although the concept “loose cannon fascist” is in the end a metaphor, in effect we do not regard Trump as a full-fledged case of fascism, any more than the other movements we are examining in this article. When we reach a complete overall characterisation of these movements below, it will become clear how we situate Trump himself. The second caveat has to do with the “loose cannon” aspect. The metaphor here refers primarily to the fact that Trump is not the leader of a well-disciplined fascist party. We by no means imply through this concept that he determines his policies according to his personal whims, independently of the needs and demands of the US bourgeoisie. As we will explain below, Trump’s policies are, no less than those of the other parties we are examining, to be seen as very concrete tendencies born within the bosom of the bourgeoisie of the respective countries.

If we have dwelled to such length on Trump, this is owing to the fact that the country he is ruling over is the one that has the greatest impact on the world’s economy, politics and military affairs. The other two countries that we now turn to are countries with immense weight in their own regions, but lack the clout of the US worldwide. That is why we will touch upon them more briefly.

It should not come as a surprise to anyone if one were to claim that India is amongst the most decisive countries in the politics of Asia. It will soon catch up with and surpass China populationwise, becoming thereby the largest country of the world, is a nuclear power in its own right, and has even proved recently that it ranks fourth in space technology, after the US, Russia and China. It is in this

country, which harbours close to 200 million Muslims in an ocean of Hindus, has gone through the trials and tribulations of the Partition, and has been rocked by strife between the two communities (summed up by the term “communalism” in Indian political literature) since the early 1990s, where the standard-bearer of Hindutva nationalism, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has now been in power for six years. The leader of the party, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is a politician with a political record upon which the long shadow of collaboration with one of the greatest pogroms committed against Muslims is cast.

One particularity of the BJP stands out: the existence of paramilitary forces claiming allegiance to the party has played a powerful effect in the historical development of the party. We are not claiming that India lives now under a fascist regime. Nonetheless, it should not be ignored that the danger is very real and that the most reactionary characteristics of the BJP may take over the Indian political scene.¹³

The family of movements that we are examining has most recently made an inroad in Latin America. Jair Bolsonaro, almost universally acclaimed as a “fascist”, has been elected president of Brazil in the wake of the conviction to eight years and subsequent imprisonment of Lula, the historic leader of the PT (Workers’ Party), for an unproven case of corruption, upon the explicit instruction of the military.¹⁴ A racist and an enemy of women’s and gay people’s rights and an extreme advocate of neoliberal economic policy, Bolsonaro also openly supports the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to the mid-1980s with brutal methods. His vice-president, a retired army general, has had no qualms saying that if need be, Congress should be shut down and the military should take over the country. Bolsonaro’s love affair with the army is by no means platonic: his government is packed with generals. The military dictatorship established in 1964 is now being celebrated every year starting from its 45th anniversary in 2019.

Bolsonaro displays affinity to fascism in his hostility towards the PT and the unions and his zeal in mobilising the Brazilian petty-bourgeoisie, filled with hatred against the PT, which remained in power for 14 years, but tends towards the methods of a traditional military dictatorship in his infatuation with the armed forces.

The US, India and Brazil are three key countries that can be very influential in helping this family of movements to extend to other countries. While the US is the hegemon of the world (albeit more and more questioned in its supremacy), India is a giant in the context of Asia and Brazil in that of Latin America. The fact that Trump turned to a much more aggressive policy with respect to Venezuela as soon as Bolsonaro took office is evidence as to how important Brazil is in the overall context of Latin America. In other words, the future is filled with threats for both Asia and Latin America.

13 For the Indian situation in its entirety the reader can consult with great benefit Burak Gürel’s article on the question in this issue of *Revolutionary Marxism*.

14 Since the writing of this article, Lula has been released from prison. But the damage was done, making it possible for Bolsonaro to win the elections.

Political characteristics and class nature

Are there common traits shared by the movements we are examining? Are these traits specific enough to these movements so as to distinguish them from others? How can the class character of these movements be described? Let us now proceed in our task of understanding the nature of these movements by answering these questions.

The first common trait that hits the eye is a sickly racism, hatred for immigrants and refugees, anti-Semitism and hostility to Muslims. These traits are certainly closely connected to the powerful presence of an unshakeable faith in one's own nation or race (usually the white race), so commonly spread within imperialist countries. As the non-white races or nations continue to swamp (the term is due to Margaret Thatcher) the prosperous and peaceful territories of the white Western civilisation, they debase civilisation. The reaction that takes thus a cultural form in the mind of the bourgeois and the petty-bourgeois turns, among the ranks of the proletariat and of the poor, into grievances of the form "they come and take away our welfare programs and become our rivals, steal our jobs, raise house rents, and make crime a widespread occurrence".

The movements we are discussing exploit the prejudices and concerns that already exist in the imperialist countries to the full and win mass support on the basis of these sentiments that are almost inscribed as an embedded ideology in the ranks of the population. It is very easy to understand what has been said up to this point. However, this is just the background, so to speak. The gist of the matter lies elsewhere. Against this background acting as a facilitator, racism/nationalism, anti-Semitism and hatred for Muslims all serve a very specific purpose for the movements we are discussing. ***This is not any old racism. It is a specific kind of racism that is trying to substitute class contradictions by contradictions between nations and races.***

There is a second aspect that seems identical, but is distinct from and broader than racism in its function, although it also comprehends racism itself. This may be labelled as the "über alles syndrome". As the reader may be familiar, "Deutschland über alles", or, in other words, "Germany above all", is the refrain of the German national anthem, one that was made into a symbol of German racism under the Nazis. Although this was adopted as the national anthem before the Nazis came to power and remained the national anthem after the Nazis' ouster, this verse asserting the absolute primacy of Germany has always been identified with Nazi racism. It is this idea that is adapted by each of these movements to its own country that marks these movements. Trump's idea of "America first" turns into the "*prima gli italiani*" ("the Italians first") in the electoral propaganda of Italian fascists. As we shall see presently, this really lays bare the essence of a solution sections of the bourgeoisie opt for in the environment of the deep economic crisis the world is going through, but even before that it strikes by its sheer egotism. This, then, is what we call the "über alles syndrome" that accompanies racism in these movements. It raises the idea of the advance of nations at each other's cost in opposition to the liberal myth of "win win" and makes the entire world an arena of the conflict of nations version of social Darwinism.

This political orientation, which counterposes the interests of nations and states worldwide, takes the form of an opposition to the European Union (EU) at the level of the European continent. This is a common trait for all these movements. (Interestingly, even Trump, whose country is of course no member of Europe, strives to divide the EU.) There are very concrete reasons why the movements in member states of the EU are anti-EU.

The major reason, as we will have the opportunity to explain in more grounded fashion below, is the fact that the EU is established on the premise of liberalisation within the Union. That is why “Brussels”, i.e. institutions promoting the interests of the EU as an entity, in particular the Commission, refuses to let the bourgeoisies of the single nations resort to measures that seem to each country to be in line with its own interests. In particular, the constraints on fiscal policy, best known as the “Maastricht criteria”, create great pressure on single countries, most of which have, moreover, foregone their control over monetary policy by joining the Eurozone. Hence each national movement within the far right family we are discussing is promising its bourgeoisie (and petty-bourgeoisie) to take control of their country’s economic policy.

A second factor regarding the EU is geared towards rallying mass support. As the EU continues imposing neoliberal policies at the continental level, it becomes easier to throw the blame on “Brussels” for the ravage wrought by these policies. Thus these movements profit from this by creating a “foreign enemy” and drawing closer on imaginary bases the bourgeoisie and the working class of their own country. This may be compared to the part played by the IMF in poorer countries: in the same way as the governments and the ruling classes of those countries that implement a stand-by programme under the tutelage of the IMF play the role of the victim and thereby hide from view the fact that the policies imposed by the IMF are really in their own interest, for the governments and the ruling classes of the member states of the EU, “Brussels” is an excuse that mystifies their own part in the application of neoliberal austerity. For the EU is, as we have not tired from saying for years and as has been repeatedly proven, most recently in the case of the Troika austerity in Greece, another name for the IMF on the European continent.

Still another aspect of the anti-EU stance of the movements in question derives from the fact that the EU is a source of immigration. As is widely known, the “single market” stipulates the free movement not only of capital and goods but also of people. This implies a powerful wave of migration from the poorer regions of the EU (principally from eastern Europe and the Balkans) into the richer regions (principally to western and northern Europe). While there is an adverse reaction to this migration from the latter, the idea of a “more equitable” sharing of the migrants and asylum-seekers coming from the Middle East and northern Africa has created a backlash in the former countries.

Finally, in a series of countries hostility to the EU is based on the blatant political intervention of the central powers of Europe (in particular Germany and France) in the life of the poorer countries or those who happen to be passing through dire straits for a certain time. The arrogance of the German government in taking up the debt crisis in Greece when it broke out in 2010, the fact that Angela Merkel imposed on

Italy a government of technicians headed by central banker Mario Monti in 2011, the humiliating reprimand addressed to the Italian people by Jean-Claude Juncker, the former president of the Commission, saying “they should work more”, at a time when Italy was going through difficult times—all these provoke an instinct of self-defense against the EU and find a serious echo in the masses of people. The movements in question thus benefit from the discontent thereby created.

The most important thing that marks the economic policy of these movements is the defence of national economies. As a reaction to the shaping of each individual national economy by globalism and neoliberalism in the interests of the EU, these movements have posed themselves the task of defending and developing the “national economy” as a priority. Although this approach has not yet reached the stage of defending “autarchy” or self-sufficiency, this is a tendency in progress.

Another distinguishing characteristic of these movements is the fact that each of these movements practices a policy of revanchism/ideological irredentism in its own way. What we mean by this is the following: The rights obtained by such oppressed groups as women, oppressed nations or races, gays etc. against their victimisation have created a backlash among the supporters of these movements and the movements thus engage in a fight in the ideological sphere in order to return to what seems to many a certain “golden age”. The aspiration to go back to the good old days when white supremacism was a normal thing, the desire to go back to those times when the civilisation of the white race had not yet been “sullied” by immigration, the yearning on the part of Vox of reviving that fatherland of the ancestors when privileges had not yet been granted to the autonomous regions and “Catalan separatism” had been subdued characterises these movements constitutionally.

We now come to a most delicate aspect of the matter. The class basis and the class character of these movements will of course play a very important part in determining their nature and potential. The first thing to be said here is that there is almost no doubt that these movements are very popular among the owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the petty-bourgeoisie of city and country alike. Naturally, it is necessary to research more carefully in order to verify to what degree this proposition is valid for each movement. But a lot of evidence exists to show that Trump has received a lot of support from the American farmer and small business person and that Marine Le Pen speaks with the voice of SMEs and others align their policies to the needs of these strata. Hence, it would not be wrong to say that the core of the class basis of these movements is the petty-bourgeoisie and the SMEs, two categories sometimes amalgamated in unwarranted manner.

However, one should not hasten to conclude from this that these movements have not established close ties to certain sections of the big bourgeoisie and that they do not represent the long-term interests of those groups. Trump himself is, also at a personal level, a prominent representative of the American bourgeois class. Powerful sections of the American bourgeoisie, starting with oil companies, arms producers, iron and steel, those industries that produce for the domestic market, and even automotive, support the overall political and economic orientation of Trump. Moreover, almost the entire gamut of large capitalists supports some of the policies

that no president dared to implement until Trump came along.

The tough policies Trump has pursued concerning intellectual property rights, industrial espionage, and the stringent conditionality to which foreign investors are subjected in the domestic market of China receive the backing of all multinationals. Trump has delivered the administration of all supervisory and regulatory agencies in almost all spheres to the representatives of large corporations. To cite two examples, EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency, has been turned over to the hands of companies that pollute the environment and the FAA, the Federal Aviation Agency, regulator of civil aviation, to representatives of companies in that sector. No one had shown the temerity of making the corporate world happy with such cocksure policies. It need not even be emphasized too heavily that the gigantic tax break that Trump has treated capitalists and other magnates was a boon for these plutocrats.

Just like Trump, Nigel Farage is also a successful businessman. He has gathered around him a coterie of big bourgeois that has been financing his ventures all along. At first sight, it may not be clear in this so-called “age of globalisation” why members of the big bourgeoisie might wish to wrest Britain away from the EU. We will come back to the question of why certain sections of the big bourgeoisie support these kinds of protectionist measures. But we did see, when looking above at the support for Trump, that there may be differences between the different industries on such matters.

However, alongside that aspect of the matter, there are other scenarios that come on the agenda within the bosom of the British bourgeoisie as alternatives to EU membership. For one thing, the “special relationship” with the US has always been a strategic orientation for the British ruling class after the first quarter of the 20th century. Brexit creates the possibility of extending this diplomatic-military rapport towards the economic sphere. Readers may remember that at the time when Theresa May was prime minister Trump made clear that he was against what was called “soft Brexit”, a concept that implied that Britain would remain within the so-called single market, and that he was a vociferous defender of “hard Brexit”, making clear that he preferred Boris Johnson over Theresa May for this reason. As a result, he threatened Britain that it might miss the chance of signing a comprehensive free trade agreement with the US. So there need not be an implication that those sections of the British bourgeoisie that pursue the goal of Brexit have necessarily given up on foreign markets, quite the contrary. In other words, elements of the big bourgeoisie that are committed to other types of strategic orientation may become partisans of Brexit.

As may be expected, the degree and the form of the support of the big bourgeoisie or some wings thereof varies from country to country. As one overriding factor, let us mention the degree to which the bourgeoisie of the country in question needs the alternative offered by these movements as a consequence of the intensity of its own peculiar crisis. The support provided for Trump and Farage may not be observed in the short run in Germany, where big capital thrives as a result of exports, which also implies that German capital is more dependent on global, or at least European, markets. An elementary fact is the degree to which class struggles within the country in question challenge the unswayed rule of the bourgeoisie.

The movements in question also stretch out their hands, at the other end of the class spectrum, to the working class of their respective countries. Globalist neoliberal policies have impoverished the working class and the labouring strata around it considerably since the early 1980s. Having become popular through opposition to globalist policies, these movements appear to offer a solution to the problems experienced by the working class.

Examples are legion. Trump won the elections directly because the blue-collar working class families of the so-called “rustbelt” of the US, a series of states ravaged by the decline of US industry, switched their vote from the Democrats to Trump. In France, Marine Le Pen has made her party the strongest force in the North, what was once considered to be a fortress of the French Communist Party. The highest “yes” vote for Brexit in the 2016 referendum came from those regions of Britain in which, in quite a similar way as the US “rustbelt”, the British working class experienced, over several decades, a condition of steady industrial decay. In Germany, the AfD achieved an electoral success way over its natural average both in the impoverished urban areas of the former East Germany and in those regions where powerful metal and motor industry plants are located. We will come back later to the lessons of the clout that these movements have acquired over the working class.

Finally, a common trait of these movements is the special relation that they have been fostering with Russia, a trait that is perhaps not so essential but rather tactical in nature. It is quite evident that Trump has a special relationship with Putin. But even the report by the special attorney Mueller admits that this does not extend to collaboration with the alleged intervention of Russia in the presidential elections of 2016. In France the special relationship of Marine Le Pen to Russia has been the talk of the town for a long time. It is a fact that some of the other members of this family of movements also entertain good relations with Russia. It would probably be more correct to view this as a result of Russia’s desire to divide its foes rather than as a result of some ideological affinity.

Proto-fascism: a transitional stage

The political characteristics and class nature discussed so far imply that these movements may be regarded as fascist movements in their orientation. The distinguishing characteristics that we discovered in the first part of this article by studying Nazism in Germany and fascism in Italy exist unambiguously in these movements as well.

For one thing, we clearly observe one characteristic that is usually neglected in the study of fascism that we brought under the limelight in the previous instalment of this article. Within an international environment that has been characterised by a progressive internationalization of capital (ideologically dubbed “globalization” by liberalism of the right and of the left), these movements have abruptly turned to attributing priority to the national economy and have made considerable moves against the international dimensions of liberalism. They share at least a dose of Euroscepticism because of the liberalism of the EU. In short, by refusing to accept the liberal precept that the economic interests of each country is served best by

marching in tandem with the rest of the world, they view the future in opposition to the EU and see the salvation of their country outside of the it.

Outside the EU, Trump has gone so far as to attack the liberal international order through heavy doses of protectionism. The policies pursued by Trump are only apparently tougher and more virulent than those of the others. Take the British example: if the option defended by the partisans of hard Brexit materializes and Britain abandons the Single Market, that country too will have turned to heavily protectionist policies. In other words, the economic policies of Farage do not differ from those of Trump. So it is no coincidence that there is a love affair between Trump and Farage.

This orientation, which we have so far formulated in terms of economic policy, manifests itself clearly in the “über alles syndrome” as well. As already mentioned there is no difference between Trump’s “America first” and Salvini’s “prima gli italiani” and the “Deutschland über alles” so rampantly popular under the Nazis.

We have already seen, in the first instalment of this article, that in an age in which capitalism has integrated the world economy to an advanced level and in which the productive forces have long outgrown the frontiers of the nation state, this turn towards the nation state, this choice of economic policy was, in the age of classical fascism, a manifestation of the inner contradictions of the capitalist mode of production in decline. This historical tendency towards capitalist decline, we may remember, manifests itself in deep crises periodically, more concretely in what are called “great depressions”, the most ravaging of such crises. At the stage capitalism has reached, the productive forces that have become totally dependent upon each other require a recourse to central planning, but because the fragmented decision-making processes of the market are defended tooth and nail in the name of the interests of private property, capitalism simply cannot find a solution to the contradictions manifested in great depressions. Some national fractions of the international bourgeoisie, sensing the impossibility of an overall solution, turn to the salvation of their own national economy. The tendency to defend the interests of a single country “über alles” is a product of this kind of contradictory dynamics. But precisely because the world economy is deeply integrated, this economic policy will generate contradictory, even irrational consequences. This is the reason why fascism opens the door to world war and barbarism. The situation today is, from this point of view, a repetition precisely of the 1930s. In other words, Trump and the movements in Europe have revived the historic spirit of fascism once again.

The racism and the hostility towards immigrants, Muslim peoples, which have become minority peoples in Europe, or that traditional scapegoat of Europe, the Jew, displayed by this family of movements is a trait that derives from the desire to lead the masses in the service of the same “über alles” policy. We have already underlined the fact that this is a special kind of racism that strives to substitute class contradictions by contradictions between races and nations. But this is precisely the kind of racism that Nazism was! Here, then, we are face to face with a second distinguishing characteristic of fascism.

This invites a policy of revanchism. A considerable backlash has been simmering within the oppressor nation or race, as the case may be, of the more distant past,

confronted with some progress in the rights of the races or nations that had been oppressed for decades, if not centuries, a progress that is the result of long and painful struggles. The power of the civil rights movement that started in the United States in the 1950s and reached its climax in the 1960s had subdued the white supremacist movement into silence. These same groups are usually equally disturbed by the advance in the rights and positions gained by women and gay people. Now that race instead of class is brought to the forefront by the forces in power or at least a very powerful opposition, when the “über alles syndrome” spreads afield, all barriers are eliminated in the way of the revanchist motives within the oppressor nation, race, faith or gender and the return to the “golden age” becomes a more palpable hope for these masses. The same kind of legend concerning the return to a glorious past and the reestablishment of a “golden age” played an important part in the mythology of German Nazism and Italian fascism as well.

During its advance towards these goals, in particular in striving towards the replacement of class conflict as the dominant contradiction by racial ones, fascism will inevitably confront all kinds of independent organisations of the working class, whether these be of the economic kind or political ones. The method of fascism in fulfilling this task is to organise the petty-bourgeoisie and then have it attack the workers’ organisations. We have already seen that the family of movements we are dwelling upon has established close connection to both the urban and rural components of this class. In this sense, too, these movements partake of this distinguishing trait of fascism.

All these show that fascism is mounting on the stage of history once again in this beginning of the 21st century. But these movements lack a very important aspect, key among the fundamental characteristics of fascism. This is street power. It is the absence of paramilitary bands or militia. Only a few of the movements evoked above have already organised such forces. The clearest examples in Europe are the fascist movements in Ukraine, Golden Dawn in Greece, Jobbik in Hungary, and Nordic Resistance. There is also the exceptionally strong RSS of the BJP in India. The others have not turned or could not turn, as yet, to the task of organising street power.

The only meaning of paramilitary organising is not that it will add to the strength of the fascist movement in question or, in other words, add military clout to political influence. As we tried to explain in the first instalment of this article, fascism is no ordinary reactionary movement that emerges in normal times. Fascism is, in a certain sense, a counter-revolution against historical development. The paramilitary force is the practical expression of this ideology of rupture, of radical break. In the same way as revolutionary organisations cannot make do with parliamentary methods, fascism needs the same kind of additional instruments for its counter-revolution.

But that is not all. Fascism’s hostility to working class organisations or, to use Trotsky’s characterization, to workers’ democracy embedded within bourgeois democracy pushes it to have recourse to the forces of the petty-bourgeoisie in order to smash working class organisations. But the petty-bourgeoisie is nothing in its disorganized state of existence. For it is a class that is congenitally atomized,

with no collective traditions. Fascist militia is also the form under which the petty-bourgeoisie is transformed into the battering ram of finance capital, of the big bourgeoisie, against the working class and in particular its organisations.

Finally, the fascist movement *qua* counter-revolution, despite being a movement of bourgeois character itself, needs to wield a force, an instrument outside and beyond the regular bourgeois state apparatus. For its revolt against history may, indeed will, lead it to practice barbarism to a scale that would be difficult at times to stomach even for the regular bourgeois state apparatus. It may have to confront resistance. Under such circumstances, a paramilitary force that is organised outside the remit of the armed forces of the state in question, one that is organised under the authority of the fascist movement itself and accountable only to the leader of the movement, is necessary for fascism, not only during its rise to power, but equally when in power.

That is why today's fascist movements, in their majority, are incomplete in their becoming. They have not matured sufficiently for the counter-revolution. They are prefigurations of fascism. We propose that they be labelled proto-fascist movements.

It is our belief that proto-fascist movements have the capacity and the propensity to add street power to their overall baggage when class struggle and the political conjuncture reach a certain stage, when the need makes itself felt, and/or when the opportunity makes itself felt. When this becomes a reality, we will then have reached the stage of full-fledged fascist movements. This is something that can be accomplished in the wink of an eye. So it is necessary not to content oneself with saying this is not yet fascism in the full sense of the word. On the contrary, it must be emphasized that the overriding character of these movements is of a fascist nature, but that they have not ripened to the level of obtaining victory immediately (using the word in its *dialectical* sense).

To put it differently, these are not movements of a hybrid nature. They are not "populist" movements that bear a certain number of the traits of fascism. We are face to face with fascism. But it is a *coy fascism* that cannot yet forcefully assert its nature. This is a fascism that cannot say its name, a fascism that does not feel itself powerful enough to arm. It is coy and yet it is fascism.

The sources

We have so far examined the general picture that is presented by a family of movements that emerged fully after the 2008 financial crash and also taken up the class nature and the political characteristics of these movements, reaching, in the light of all this, the conclusion that these are proto-fascist movements. Let us now proceed to examine the historical precondition of the rise of this phenomenon, the environment that made its emergence possible and necessary.

The principal factor behind the emergence of proto-fascism is of course the Third Great Depression that set in with the financial crash of 2008. Although this particular depression did not deepen as rapidly as the Second Great Depression of the 1930s, unemployment rates of the 1930s far exceeding those of the present, just to cite a single indicator, the fact that it was preceded by a 30-year crisis meant that the overall impact was graver than the depression alone could have produced.

The reader may remember that the premise for the depression of the present was the long crisis of the world economy that started in the 1970s. The response of the international bourgeoisie to this long crisis was the neoliberal assault on the working class and the labourers that was set off in 1979 (the Thatcher moment). This assault was complemented by globalism after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

So here is the picture: the bourgeoisie was in search of a solution to the long crisis of the world economy for three long decades, but the solution that it had internationally agreed upon ended up leading to a financial crash and a great depression!

Face to this situation, a second tendency arose within the ranks of the diverse national fractions of the international bourgeoisie. This is what has prepared the emergence of fascism, the new “solution” being the tendency to force the ways of overcoming the crisis of national bourgeoisies at the single country level. Fascism is thus, in direct fashion, a product of the deep crisis of capitalism on the world scale and of the decline of the capitalist mode of production that lies behind this crisis.

The neoliberal and globalist policies pursued over the 30-year crisis and the decade-long great depression have generated another result: a painful process of impoverishment with an unprecedented increase in inequality, especially in the imperialist world, i.e. in “rich countries”, accompanying this. The evidence for this is so clear that it is admitted by even some who defend “globalisation” blindly. It was, throughout all that period, very commonplace, both worldwide and in Turkey, to attribute neoliberalism and globalism to the urge of advanced economies to export the crisis to the underdeveloped countries. We, on the contrary, kept stressing that the real target was the relatively organised workers of the imperialist countries who enjoyed rights and gains acquired through struggles over the years. Today, the whole world understands that it was those fractions of the international proletariat that had the most advanced rights and conditions that stood most to lose from so-called “globalisation”. Thus fascism addresses itself to the rage engendered by globalism in those sections of the working class and promises them racist and nationalist methods against immigrant populations, hence *transforming a question that has its roots in the class contradictions of capitalism into a war of races and nations*, progressively creating a political space for itself within the masses. This analysis also demonstrates that the policy of revanchism or ideological irredentism is really not, at bottom, an exclusively cultural and ideological question, but the ideological form taken by the wrath of the working class face to material impoverishment and immiseration, a word almost evicted from the dictionary for decades now.

Here we see that, different from the dynamics of classical fascism, the current proto-fascist movement is able to reach into the ranks of the working class as well and capture sections of it ideologically and politically before smashing it under the assault of the petty-bourgeois hordes. While examining the political characteristics and the class nature of proto-fascism, we had pointed out that certain movements within the family (Trump, Brexiters, Le Pen, AfD) succeeded in gaining strong support from certain sections of the working class. Classical fascism, on the other hand, was only able to draw large masses of the working class to its side only after

it had ascended to power and crushed the independent organisations of the workers. Where does the difference come from?

The difference arises from the contrast between the left-wing movements of the two periods. Both wings of the left in the 1920s and the 1930s (whether social democracy or the communist movement evolving from its departure point in the 1920s of revolutionism towards bureaucratisation and national communism in the 1930s) were fundamentally workers' organisations. Whatever may be their political and organisational defects, their myopia, the wild fluctuations in their political line etc., the interests and needs of the working class lay at the centre of their activities. Partly for this reason and partly because unions had not been integrated into state structures to the extent that they are now, these parties had a lot of influence on trade unions. The working class did not need to search for other forces that would champion its needs in the face of the ravage of the Great Depression. In the wake of first 1968 and later 1989, i.e. after the restoration of capitalism commenced in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, in the Soviet Union, and in China and Vietnam, the international left turned its back on the working class. It first turned towards class collaborationism with the glorification of what has since been dubbed "civil society" and then towards identity politics with postmodernism. Being a worker was seen, in the best of cases, as one more identity among others. Things would go further, with the claim that the working class was undergoing a process of evaporation, all attention being then turned towards identities, democracy, and ecology. On the other hand, the widespread impact of left-wing liberalism on the left led to expectations of democracy and progress from European imperialism and implied a positive view of the EU, which is nothing more than the most powerful centre of imperialist liberal barbarism.

In consequence of all this, the left abandoned the working class to *political solitude*. It declared that class struggle was over just when the class offensive of the bourgeoisie took its most virulent forms. The left became an unalloyed petty-bourgeois movement, a movement of the modern and well-to-do petty-bourgeois. Under these circumstances the masses of workers and, in particular, those layers that were the worst hit by the economic crisis, turned to the only movement that held out its hand to them, the proto-fascist movement. Left-wing liberalism, identity politics, and post-Leninism, the latter being the movement that has been working for the liquidation of working class parties of a vanguard nature, together form *one of the political conditions of the ascendancy of proto-fascism*.

Conversely, wherever there emerged a left-wing leadership that owned the interests of the workers and conducted politics on that basis, the working class distanced itself from the proto-fascist forces and turned to that leadership. Sanders in the US and Corbyn in the UK are striking instances of this proposition.¹⁵ While in Brazil fascism rose as a result of the policies of the PT under Lula and Dilma

¹⁵ Since the writing of this article, Corbyn lost the parliamentary elections of 2019 miserably and had to resign the leadership of Labour. For our analysis of his rise and fall, see Sungur Savran, "The inglorious end of Jeremy Corbyn the prevaricator", <http://redmed.org/article/inglorious-end-jeremy-corbyn-prevaricator>.

Roussef, in neighbouring Argentina the formation of the FIT (the Front of the Left and of Labourers), to which the Partido Obrero (PO) is affiliated, and its success in becoming the third political force in the country is due to the same contrast. ***We must not, then, explain the rise of proto-fascism on the basis of the Third Great Depression only, but also by the abdication of the left in the course of the last half a century.***

Another factor that made the rapid ascendance of proto-fascism possible is that in the epoch of the Third Great Depression, political party systems that had been in place for decades were dealt a great blow and became fragmented. The typical European political system that functioned like a pendulum between the centre right and the centre left, the latter being labelled misleadingly socialist or social democratic as the case may be, is going bankrupt. In many countries (France, Greece, even Germany) it seems to be the end of the road for so-called social democracy. In some countries (e.g. France) the centre right finds itself in a state of coma. In such a state of collapse, proto-fascism finds itself a much more propitious environment to grow.

There are other phenomena that show that the political party systems in Europe are in deep crisis. In some countries new parties can grow by fits and bounds in a short span of time. It is more readily understandable to see *Podemos* (or *Unidos Podemos* and later *Unidas Podemos* under its newer appellation) grow rapidly, for it is a direct product of the mass protest movement of 2011 in Spain. However, the other new party in Spain, the centre right *Ciudadanos*, which rapidly gained in strength to become one of the four major parties in that country, does not even have a social movement behind it. Beyond that, at times, a single celebrity, for instance a comic as in Italy (Beppe Grillo of the Five-Star Movement) or in Ukraine later (Volodymyr Zelensky), can gain political clout and in the end win elections. For a moment, in certain countries the common fantasy of what was called the “Pirate Party” (established as a pan-European party) won some success in several countries of Central and Nordic Europe. Of course such developments are always possible in single countries now and then, but the fact that all this is happening on the scale of a whole continent clearly shows that the entire political system is already in crisis. It is obvious that for brand new starters such moments of upheaval are more fertile ground than usual.

Now we come to an extremely important factor. We can summarise this factor by saying that ***European reaction and Middle Eastern reaction find themselves in a metabolic relationship of symbiosis, nourishing upon the politics of each other.*** As long as Europe, as well as the US, subjects the Middle East to pillage and aggression, as long as the European proto-fascist movements make scapegoats of the Muslim immigrant populations of Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the others in the full sense of the term, this instills great strength in the *takfiri* organisations (first and foremost Al Qaeda and ISIS). The very fact that among the components of the militant force of this kind of organization, Muslim youth who have lived miserable lives in the dilapidated neighbourhoods of metropolitan cities, have remained jobless almost all their lives, have been involved in petty crime and were drug addicts until they chose that other opium of the people occupy an

important part is the most salient symptom of what is being said here. Conversely, as these *takfiri* organisations stage bombings, assassinations, attacks on crowds in vehicles or with knives in hand and sow fear and terror in the ordinary people of these countries, this feeds into racism by provoking a feeling of hatred in them and renders these ordinary people into easy prey for the proto-fascist movements, which advocate aggressive policies against Muslims and immigrant populations at large.

We are face to face with a veritable vicious circle here. Hence, every struggle against the fascism of the 21st century needs to be simultaneously anti-imperialist in nature. On the opposite side, struggle against *takfirism* in the Middle Eastern and North African countries with a majority Muslim population holds great importance for the brotherhood of peoples. Only an internationalist struggle that acts as a barrier to both reactionary movements can stop the blood-letting.

We have already mentioned the special relationship that Russia entertains with these movements, possibly in an effort to sow divisions among and play against each other the powers of NATO. It may be said that this is an additional source of strength for the proto-fascist movement, but it is really not easy to gauge the level of this support extended in surreptitious manner. On the other hand, to present these movements solely as the product of Russian intervention in the politics of the Western countries would not only be an extreme exaggeration, but would amount to falling in the trap of the disinformation disseminated by the globalist wing of the European (and American) bourgeoisies and result in ignoring the profound dynamics of these societies themselves, with every cell secreting fascism on a daily basis.

Finally, as in the age of classical fascism, each of the proto-fascist movements receives extra strength from the protection of certain reactionary circles within the state apparatus and financial and propaganda (media etc.) support from certain wings of the bourgeoisie of the country it works in. In this sense, the Chemnitz and Köthen events are extremely significant: here, an atmosphere of aggression and fear was created through cooperation between fascist and proto-fascist forces and the racist horde saw the state apparatus pave the way for its hysteric mob actions. The so-called security forces almost embraced the mob even as they freely used Nazi symbols and resorted to open violence against immigrants and leftists in a manner impossible to witness if a left-wing rally turned aggressive in the same way. In the wake of these events, it was documented that a very senior level security official was in close contact with these currents and that Horst Seehofer, leader of the Bavarian wing of Christian Democracy and federal interior minister, protected this official. It is a well-documented fact that at least in the cases of Nigel Farage and the AfD, certain wings of the bourgeoisie simply protect and support these parties.

Prospects

From the analysis conducted so far it has transpired that the *substance* of these movements is fascism, but that this fascism has developed and is still developing under a *form* that remains incomplete and inadequate when compared with classical fascism. This tense and contradictory relationship between substance and form,

intertwined with the dynamics of the deep economic and political crisis the world is going through, will probably result in developments that will bear local colours peculiar to each country. Concrete developments so far do offer us clues as to what prospects are in the offing. To go through these briefly might create the possibility of reaching certain prognoses as to what forms proto-fascism may develop in in the near future.

Before all else, it must be stressed that the movement has a certain “internationalism” to it in its own manner. It is obvious that, as opposed to the international proletariat, which has shared long-term interests over and above national frontiers, these chauvinist movements that might at any moment break loose upon each other cannot be consistently internationalist. Each fascist movement, by its very nature, sets its eyes on establishing hegemony or even tyranny over others. However, before reaching this “final” stage, there is a long way in the struggle fascism wages both against the working class and the cosmopolitan, globalist wing of the international bourgeoisie. In the age of classical fascism as well, fascist movements set up alliances and common fronts, although these alliances also bore severe contradictions and tensions. We took up the pact between Hitler and Mussolini, the support given by both to Franco, and the partnership they established with Japanese imperialism, no less aggressive than its Western counterparts, in the first instalment of this article.

Today also, proto-fascist movements are coming together to assess the possibilities of cooperation at the European level and looking into prospects of concrete cooperation. Without going into detail, let us point out that this search for cooperation has been accelerated in the recent period for three different reasons. First, the fact that certain proto-fascist parties became government parties in coalition governments in some European countries has given a momentum to these efforts. For instance, as Marine Le Pen committed certain mistakes during the 2017 presidential elections in France and suffered a degree of setback and even an important scission from her party, in order to overcome the adverse effects of this, she set up a special relationship with two proto-fascist parties in power: one was the Lega of Matteo Salvini, then deputy premier and interior minister in the Italian government, and the other was the FPÖ of Austria. Coming together with these “statesmen”, so to speak, held a message for the French people: she was thereby proving to the French citizen that she was not the “marginal” that some tried to show her as, but a perfectly respectable interlocutor of other European government parties.

Secondly, an institutional change in the make-up of the EU made a rapprochement between the proto-fascist movements of the different countries attractive for them. In the past, the president of the European Commission, the main executive body of the EU, used to be elected on the basis of negotiations between the member states. From now on the European Parliament will have a say on who the president will be. Hence not only will the elections in May 2019 determine the balance of forces within that parliament, up to now of an entirely ceremonious nature, but it will also have an impact on who will be elected president of the Commission, a post that wields extensive powers. As other political families within the EU, the proto-fascist

one now also has an interest in bringing together its forces in the election for the president of the Commission. Salvini's name is often dropped in this context.

The third factor also evokes the relationship between the American movement (Trump) and European proto-fascism. Steve Bannon, who, as we have already seen, was an advisor to Trump during his election campaign and his first few months in office, but later resigned his job at the White House, is doing a lot of work to unite the European proto-fascist movement. Thanks to the objective factors at play we have just touched on, his efforts seem to be bearing fruit.

The cooperation and solidarity between proto-fascist parties in the imperialist countries seem to us to have the potential to help the transition from proto-fascism to fascism until such time when these nationalist movements enter into contradictions between themselves.

One characteristic of proto-fascism is the meteoric rise in some of these movements, with the help of objective circumstances it should be added. On the other hand, some of these movements can fall as fast as they have risen. The most striking example is the rise and fall of the Pegida movement in Germany due to the blunder of its foremost leader, which we have recounted above. The roller coaster nature of some others (the most notable instance being the Dutch movement) are also noteworthy. The PVV under the leadership of Geert Wilders was given first place in the upcoming elections in public opinion polls in early 2017, but after having come in second that spring, lost its place to a newcomer in 2018. The same thing happened in Greece to LAOS in the elections of 2011 when it was replaced by Golden Dawn and to the latter in 2019, when it, in its turn, remained below the electoral threshold of three per cent and lost all of its parliamentary seats.

In our opinion, what lies behind these ups and downs is the fact that these movements have not yet acquired the most adequate form under which fascism, the substance of these parties, can flourish best. These parties are not like the determined, audacious, even intrepid parties of classical fascism. The characterisation of proto-fascism in effect tells us that these parties stand half-way between fascism and the established order. That is why they may very well decline rapidly after initial successes and even be absorbed by the parties of the established order.

In this context, we should return to the theme of the coyness of present-day fascism, one we have already raised. The crux of the matter lies in the historical lived experience of European society. Europe came out of World War II with a painful trauma regarding the Nazi and fascist experience. Hence propagating fascist ideas openly and, in particular, owning the symbols and ideas of the age of classical fascism explicitly, still bears the risk of the self-isolation of these parties. Although there has been some erosion in this aversion to Nazism and fascism, it is nonetheless still valid. It is because of this that many of these parties are trying to project a softer image of themselves than that which corresponds to truth. Some even go further and try to erase the virulent and extreme image created by former practices.

The clearest example of this can be observed in France. After having taken over the party from her father Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founding leader, Marine Le Pen engaged in an intense effort to soften the image of the party in the eyes of the people, probably reckoning that under the circumstances of the earlier period, the

ideological discourse set by her father had gone too far. This even ended up in a brawl between father and daughter, which finally led Marine Le Pen to expel her father from membership, although he was supposed to be the “honorary chairman”. This whole process of making the proto-fascist party in France more likeable to the public at large is called in French “*dédiabolisation*”. Marine Le Pen also changed the name of the party from the original Front National (National Front) to *Rassemblement National* (National Rally).

Yet this whole process raises a question: to what extent is this just a change of image and to what extent is it a real change of the nature of the party that the present leader inherited from her father? This last question need not be confined to questions of ideological order, but does arise even in areas of practical politics, creating real dilemmas for the party. Take the following example: in the presidential elections of 2017, as she was going into the second round, Marine Le Pen brought the question of leaving the Eurozone on the agenda (a timid Frexit). This caused pretty much an earthquake. Even sections of the more loyal electorate of the party made clear that they would not vote for this. The EU still has a kind of untouchable quality to it, an indispensability in the eyes of the majority of the population in countries like France (Germany, Austria, and the Benelux countries can comfortably be classified into this category). The great majority may be critical of, or even against, the “Brussels bureaucracy”, but, for the moment, their aspiration is to “reform” the EU, not abandon it wholesale. At least these are, as yet, the “No Exit” countries, so to speak.

This in fact forms the major distinction between the far right (proto-fascist) parties and the conservative/Christian Democrat/centre right parties in European countries. We can see this in action in Austria. Sebastian Kurz, the present leader of the ÖVP, the traditional centre right party in this country, has a position on immigration that is little different from his coalition partner, the proto-fascist FPÖ. The coalition agreement between these two parties was signed in Kahlenberg near Vienna. This is the hill on which the Ottoman army was defeated during the second siege of Vienna in 1683. The symbolism is transparent: hostility to the Turk or rather to the Muslim and highlighting the Christian identity of Europe. Kurz is no different on such matters from his partner. But his red line is the EU.

However, as we have just said, this is true for only certain countries. The overall political and social atmosphere in Britain has become so hostile to the EU that an important wing of the Conservative Party is competing in its zeal for Brexit with Nigel Farage. This may have inspired in Nigel Farage an “entryist” tactic, but we do not have information whether this is true.

Only time will show to what point the image refreshing operation of Marine Le Pen will carry her party. The same goes for the FPÖ of Austria and the Jobbik of Hungary, which have both set off a process of renewing their image.

What demonstrates most clearly that proto-fascism is cut of the same cloth as fascism in substance, though not in form, i.e. in terms of organization, is the fact that these movements, strubbornly dubbed “populist” by bourgeois commentators and representatives of the post-Leninist left, act as a shield and an advocate of unalloyed fascist actions or mobs when the time comes. What the AfD did during the

Chemnitz and Köthen events was precisely this. In Italy, Matteo Salvini defended fascist elements much more virulent in style than he is while he was minister of the interior. In each country, there are other movements that are more “orthodox”, stricter regarding doctrine, purer in terms of ideology. Italy is surely one of them.

Finally, it is clearly visible that institutions of the established order offer channels that would contribute to the strengthening of the proto-fascist movement. It is not true, at least in those countries that are more prepared ideologically and politically for fascism, that a proto-fascist party that comes to power will necessarily go through a process similar to the early years of social democracy, when, once in power, these parties adapted themselves to the routine of everyday politics. On the contrary, in such countries racist and anti-EU policies bring a lot of support. The increase in the power of Salvini when he was in office, thanks to his vociferous anti-immigration policy, was the best instance of such a situation. Such coalition governments can, under the right circumstances, act as governments transitional to fascism.

Let us finish this discussion on prospects by underlining the most important possibility and stressing the dimensions of the threat this poses. If the world economy undergoes the bursting of a bubble and a consequent financial crash of the dimensions of 2008, proto-fascists of the type of Marine Le Pen or Matteo Salvini, having already prepared the ground, may rise to power on their own in the wink of an eye. The Second Great Depression had confronted the world immediately with a very profound economic crisis, a fall in production, skyrocketing unemployment etc. The Third Great Depression, for reasons we have taken up elsewhere, is developing in a much more protracted way.¹⁶ Classical fascism came to power in an incredibly short span of time (in Italy only two years, in Germany three). When the Third Great Depression also wreaks havoc in the world economy similar in dimensions close to the Second, proto-fascism will see the road paved for its ascent to power. Proto-fascism will then easily find the opportunity to show to the population at large that a worldwide solution is no longer possible and will sound much more convincing in its quest for “national” salvation. And when the movement is finally unleashed, we have no doubt that it will easily and swiftly arm itself, thus becoming a fascist movement not only in substance but in form as well.

Fight against barbarism

The whole argument above has shown that fascism has once again taken a step to mount on the stage of history and is biding time in the antechambre for the day of reckoning. To everyone who wishes to prevent that the future of humanity becomes one of repression, barbarism and world war befalls the task of asking themselves what to do in order to stop the ascendancy of fascism. We had earlier planned to write a third instalment of this article, delving into the debates of the past over how to fight fascism and reach conclusions for the present on the basis of that.

¹⁶ The collapse of the stock exchange in this most recent period, in which the Coronavirus pandemic has acted as a detonator, has changed this completely. See our “2020 Stock Market Crash: a New Phase within the Third Great Depression”, <http://redmed.org/article/2020-stock-market-crash-new-phase-within-third-great-depression>.

However, the danger is so imminent, the tendency toward barbarism so palpable, that it would be unwise to finish this second part of the article without providing some indications on the burning questions of our time. We will be very brief and clear at the expense of a more elaborate exposition.

The first point has to do with the precondition for everything that we will take up later: ***an end must be put to the domination of the liberal and identity politics left within the socialist and left-wing movement.*** The period in which petty-bourgeois leftists did not tire of bringing to the fore their own personal problems and simply ignored the burning questions facing the overwhelming majority made up of workers and labourers must come to an end. Everyone who adopts a hostile attitude towards the working class is an enemy of the future of humanity. This, as we have shown, is why proto-fascism has gained so much ground. Even in the miserable conditions in which the international left finds itself today, after the ravage of Stalinism and later the collapse of the experience of socialist construction of the 20th century, it proves possible to attract the working class towards socialism at the expense of the proto-fascist movement if left-wing policies that are centred on the problems and needs of the working class: the popularity of Bernie Sanders within the blue-collar workers of America is a case in point. The same goes for the FIT in Argentina on a different plane and a totally different scale.

To centre one's politics on the working class implies the revival of Marxism on the left. If that is the case, then while, on the one hand, a robust class policy is pursued in the practical sphere, the whole left must also join, on the other, the fight against left-wing liberalism and post-modernism as this journal has been doing in its Turkish and English versions for close to fifteen years and five years now, respectively. Class war also requires a battle of ideas!

Leftists from a petty-bourgeois background as well as student revolutionaries should give priority to winning positions within the working class, the labouring population and the poor. Cultural activity as well should be centred on class struggle. Works of art that ruminate on the problems experienced by petty-bourgeois intellectuals have imprisoned the imagination and horizon of young artists and literary people far too long. Let young minds open up to the multitudes of the working class!

It is very important to unite the class as a class and create a force with which the working class can once again defend its interests through united front tactics. Only if the working class can be mobilized for its own material and political interests can it also pose its candidacy for becoming a hegemonic force and go beyond the horizon of the petty-bourgeoisie, constricted by a mere struggle for democracy and rights, by showing the way to all oppressed under capitalism.

The revanchist policy of proto-fascism threatens the newly acquired rights and freedoms of many an oppressed group won through hardy struggles. These rights must be defended. But to pursue the "identity politics" of yesterday would be suicidal. Such an attitude implies accepting the terms of the struggle imposed on us and lead us to a self-defeating fight, making things even worse. What must be done is to educate the working class on these questions all the while as we win it over by addressing its deep-seated needs and demands. Inasmuch as women,

oppressed peoples and faiths, immigrants, gays etc. stand by the working class in its struggle for its demands, what the practical struggle teaches in action *and* the ideological education provided for the working class will come together to change the workers' consciousness. It must not be forgotten that, historically, it was during workers' revolutions, and in particular the October revolution of 1917, that the rights and freedoms of the oppressed were most rapidly and completely recognized. The working class is not condemned to remain forever immured in cultural underdevelopment.

This means that we need to organise anti-fascist actions that grow out of the bosom of the working class and not "antifa" actions that are confined to the well-off liberal petty-bourgeoisie, the upper educated crust of the proletariat, students, ecologists etc.

Naturally, in order to materialise all of this, a revolutionary Marxist party that is equipped with the lessons of history, that organizes its ranks in discipline in order to become a leadership for the working class of its own country, starting with the vanguard of the working class, that will reconstitute the nation through a revolution under the hegemony of the proletariat is necessary. In order to fight fascism, embodying a poisonous nationalism, this party and similar ones in other countries must necessarily adopt internationalism as a major plank of their politics. Proletarian internationalism makes a world party indispensable.

A socialist left that can do all this will not only overcome the fascist threat, it will be knocking on the door of world revolution.

Appendix:

The proto-fascist menace in Europe¹⁷

Sungur Savran

A month has gone by since the European elections. In this while, RedMed brought light and insight for its readers on the national results of 11 countries in 8 articles. Of the six largest countries, five were covered: Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Poland. Two more central and eastern European countries were taken up in addition to Poland, Hungary and Romania. The three Nordic countries members of the European Union (EU), i.e. Sweden, Denmark, and Finland were taken up together. And finally, Greece, the *enfant terrible* of the EU, was given special attention, through a party document of our sister organiser of RedMed, the EEK.

Above and beyond the national constellation of forces, the European elections laid bare certain trends with respect to the evolution of the major political forces of the continent. Of these, the most controversial was the result obtained by what we call the proto-fascist movement. The tenor of the debate on that question was again a tendency towards the underestimation of the rising menace of fascism over the

¹⁷ First published on 29th June 2019 on RedMed: <http://redmed.org/article/proto-fascist-menace-europe>.

old continent. There were three main arguments put forward to belittle the outcome obtained by proto-fascism. The first was that the pundits and the cassettes (of which we admit to be one) had predicted a much stronger leap forward for the movement across Europe while the actual results, when considered Europe-wide, were wanting with respect to that kind of expectation. The second was that in many countries (the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Greece etc.) a kind of regression was observed, let alone a triumphant rise. Thirdly, those who tend to underplay the fascist menace pointed out that there was no immediate threat from the movement at this stage of the development of the forces in play.

Beware subjectivism

The first argument is deplorably identical to the reaction displayed by the ecological, postmodern, post-Leninist left as the year 2017 advanced. The first continent-wide display of the rise of proto-fascism was on the occasion of the 2014 European elections. Of course fascist and proto-fascist parties existed and were significant in a number of countries before that. But they were isolated cases. France and Austria, and somewhat later Greece and Hungary were the scene of the early rise of this new trend. But the trend became a universally European phenomenon only in 2014. It will also be remembered that 2016 brought in two alarming results in the advanced capitalist world: Nigel Farage's UKIP emerged as the big winner of the Brexit referendum held in June of that year and in November Donald Trump won the most powerful political office in the world, quite contrary to the expectations of the detractors of the idea that a far right menace was on the horizon of the entire imperialist world. These twin scourges led everyone to cast a wary eye on the national elections to be held in the Netherlands, France and Germany in the course of 2017. In the former country, the results of Geert Wilders' Freedom Party turned out to be much less spectacular than that suggested by opinion polls, which had persistently forecast that the party would come in first, whereas the outcome of the elections placed the party in second place.

France was of course a much bigger test. Incredibly, the general judgment was that Marine Le Pen lost big in those elections. It was not at all important for these people that in the second round Le Pen's extremely retrograde discourse had attracted one in three French people! Nor did they notice that as opposed to her father, the founder of the party, who also passed to the second round in 2002, but did not succeed to raise his share of the vote significantly, the daughter captured an additional 10 per centage points of the popular vote in the second round. Everybody concurred that Marine Le Pen's performance during the television debate between the two rounds with the winner Macron had been awful. But to deduce complacency from this relative failure was a real feat!

What was striking was that the complacency was due not to bad results (after all both in the Netherlands and in France the proto-fascists had come in second, not exactly a disaster for them!), but was predicated upon a relatively smaller success than had been predicted by the "pundits" or the polls. This kind of reasoning is particularly dangerous in politics, for it substitutes subjective evaluations and predictions into a kind of yardstick on the basis of which one decides whether

a political development is significant or not. But as our leftists have been psychologically comforted, the new fascist menace has covered new ground, which goes unnoticed to our post-Leninist, who now lives day to day according to the precepts of postmodernism. So, by mid-2017 the fashion was to think that the new “populist” movement had already peaked.

The German elections in the fall shattered this illusion. For the first time since the Nazi experience, Germany saw a mass exodus towards a racist party: the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland-Alternative for Germany) came in third to win around 14 per cent of the popular vote and 82 seats in parliament. This was a wake-up call for anyone, so the atmosphere of complacency was over by the end of the year.

It is remarkable how the same subjectivist urge has come to dominate the scene once more in the wake of the recent European elections. What is the reason for the new complacency? The fact that things did not turn out as bad as was predicted! But did they turn out bad? They sure did. So what does the complacency serve except the “wellness” and a better “quality of life” for the intellectuals and the leaders of the post-Leninist and Green left?

What do the statistics say?

The second reason why the results of the post-fascists are belittled has more to do with objective developments. This argument relies on certain facts, in particular pointing out that the results for post-fascism are mixed, some defeats as well some real victories. Let us then look at the statistics, but not in unsystematic and haphazard fashion but more dialectically.

First to be mentioned is the fact that the numbers clearly show the leap made by post-fascism. Out of the dozen or so political families at the European level, only three groups raised the strength of their representation in the European Parliament. The big losers were, of course, the centre right (Christian democracy and conservatives etc.) and the centre left (so-called social democratic and socialist parties), as well as the soft, post-Leninist left. The winners were the Greens on the left, the liberal democrats at the centre and the ensemble of two proto-fascist families and a group close to them on the right. It is not enough to say that these were the winners. One should also look at the rate at which each of these families advanced. Here the misnamed Europe of Nations and Freedom (the most hard core proto-fascists led by Marine Le Pen of France and the rising star Luigi Salvini of Italy), now renamed Identity and Democracy (a well-deserved ironic slap in the face to identity politics on the left!), is way ahead of all the other winners. Let us compare the percentage increase in the number of MEPs between the three most publicised winners: the Greens 44 per cent (from 52 MEPs in 2014 to 75 in 2019), the Liberal Democrats (earlier named ALDE, now “Renew Europe”) 56 per cent (from 69 to 108), and the post-fascists of Identity and Democracy by a full 103 per cent (from 36 to 73, more than doubling their number of MEPs)! The mixed family bringing together Italy’s Five-Star Movement with Britain’s Brexit along with some other minor groups only raised its number of MEP’s by 2 (roughly 4 per cent), this despite the undeniable victory received by Brexit, and the European Conservatives and Reformists group, sometimes considered to be a potential ally of

the proto-fascists, somewhat higher, by 33 per cent (from 47 to 62). So the success of the Greens is really highly inflated. Compared to the likes of Salvini and Le Pen, theirs is only a modest gain, while the latter have doubled their presence in the parliament.

There is then the possibility of a future alliance of the three groups, the full-blooded proto-fascists of Identity and Democracy, the hybrid group that brings together the proto-fascist Farage and the charlatans of the Five-Star Movement, and finally the far right European Conservatives and Reformists. The three together add up to 179 MEPs, second only to the biggest group in the European Parliament, the centre-right European People's Party (the EPP, which currently has 180 MEPs). Before the 2019 elections, that ratio was 216 for the EPP and 120 for the prospective proto-fascist-far right alliance! One should also remember the delicate situation that was born in the EPP group immediately before the Euro elections, when Viktor Orbán of Hungary was temporarily suspended from the group for his strongman practices vis-a-vis the opposition in his country.¹⁸ Not only Orbán, but the party in power in Poland, the PiS, may very well become allies of the proto-fascists before the end of the five-year term of the European Parliament.¹⁹

So it is not enough to say this or that political family lost or won in this or that country in a non-systematic manner, but necessary to look at the overall picture.

For a more dialectical approach to the data

But, secondly, even more important than the crude data is the dialectical analysis of the combined but equally uneven development of the proto-fascist movement. When we are talking of the leap forward of a political current, *a fortiori* of a current such as post-fascism, which challenges the status quo and is seen as abhorrent by many political tendencies, a linear and well-balanced development is the last thing to be expected. This would be true even within the frontiers of a single state, let alone a multifarious and heterogeneous totality such as the EU. Each nation state has its own temporality and direction of change and while early risers such as the Netherlands and Denmark may fall behind, latecomers such as Italy may very well leap light years ahead. This is precisely what happened in the 2019 elections. Moreover, the Italian surge forward is incomparably much more dangerous than an even distribution of gains across many nations.

The excellent article by our comrade Burak Sayim on Italy in the RedMed series²⁰ shows clearly that Italy has become the new political centre of Europe. The results in Italy are daunting: La Lega of Salvini (Lega Nord in 2014) received 34 per cent of the popular vote as opposed to 6 per cent in 2014 and won 28 MEPs, 22 more than the 6 it had since 2014! It has become the first party of the country, receiving fully one half more votes than the Democratic Party in second place. And as if

18 On Hungary, see the article by Matyas Benyik: <http://redmed.org/article/european-election-results-hungary-show-restructuring-opposition>.

19 For a very informative article on Poland, see Ewa Groszewska's article: <http://redmed.org/article/european-elections-poland>.

20 <http://redmed.org/article/still-resistible-rise-salvini>.

this were not enough, another proto-fascist party that goes by the name of Fratelli d'Italia (FdI-the Brothers of Italy) raised its share of the vote from 3.5 per cent in 2014 to 6.5 per cent in 2019 and its number of seats in parliament from nil to 5. Only time separates, in all probability, proto-fascism from single-handed power in Italy, one of the most decisive countries in Europe.

What being in power in one of the largest countries of Europe will mean for the further development of proto-fascism may be gauged by looking at the use Salvini has made of his position as minor coalition partner of the Five-Star Movement so far. Domestically, Salvini has exploited his position by addressing the basest tendencies of a part of the Italian petty-bourgeoisie and the less organised and disadvantaged sections of the Italian proletariat through his ignominiously racist policies. Internationally, he has become the driving force (with the full collusion, let it be pointed out, of Marine Le Pen) of European proto-fascism. Now, if he successfully crowns his newly-found strength with victorious early national elections and forms a government of his own, getting hold of the state apparatus of one of the richest countries in the world will give him immense room for manoeuvre for building up the proto-fascist movement across Europe. That this has escaped so many analysts on the left is truly a source of astonishment for us.

In second place, the development in Britain is a true source of fresh resources for the proto-fascist movement. Having formed his new party Brexit only two months to go to the elections, Nigel Farage left behind all the other parties of the political spectrum to win the elections with 31 per cent of the popular vote, in the process raising his share of the vote from the (already immensely successful) vote of 27 per cent of his UKIP in 2014 and his number of MEPs from 24 to 29. Farage was a complete outsider in 2014. Today he is the protégé of a powerful actor on the world stage, none other than Donald Trump. The latter has already suggested to his favourite and look-alike candidate for the prime ministerial race within the Tory party, Boris Johnson, to give a role to Farage in the negotiations for Brexit with the EU! Some within the soft left tend to protect Farage from any comparison to Salvini, Le Pen or Gauland of Germany, but given the sympathy between Trump and Farage, that is rather like saying Trump is no racist like Salvini or the others.

We will come back to the British scene a propos the pitiful sight displayed by the conservatives and the formidable rise of the Liberal Democrats, but let it be said in passing that the victory obtained by Farage and the complementary defeat of Labour after its resounding success in the recent parliamentary elections are a product of Jeremy Corbyn's own making. Having almost erased UKIP from the depressed working class regions of Britain in the parliamentary elections, he refrained from taking a decisive stand on Brexit, giving in to the Europeanist, neoliberal wing of his party. Thus he made it impossible to propose a progressive Brexit to British society, which would carry a part of the pro-remain population along with the traditional working class Brexiters. In the end, stuck between two mosques, as the saying goes in Turkish, he could not win sufficient hearts on either side and had to concede victory (and a part of the working class) to Farage.

Thirdly, the result in France deserves careful, albeit brief, commentary.²¹ The Rassemblement National (RN-National Gathering) that replaced the Front National (FN) saw its share of the vote fall from 2014 to 2019 (from 25 per cent to 23 per cent) and the number of its MEPs as well (from 23 to 22). But this should be interpreted in its concrete context. First of all, as we have already said, the 2017 elections were perceived as a defeat for Marine Le Pen by French society at large. This was coupled with the fact that Le Pen's foremost lieutenant abandoned her to form a rival party (Les Patriotes). Hence Le Pen went through very difficult times. Secondly, despite the drop in her share of the vote, Le Pen saw her new party come in first, before the République en Marche (LREM) of her arch rival President Macron. This was sufficient to restore her confidence and that of her followers. One can safely conclude that the crisis opened by the 2017 elections has been successfully managed and overcome. Next to this, the 2 percentage point drop in the share of the Le Pen vote remains insignificant.

When we look at these three countries together, an obvious fact jumps to the eye. In three out of the four original giants of the EU, proto-fascism has come in first. This is no mean feat. All in all, the statistics show that these elections were an unambiguous victory for the proto-fascist movement.

Uneven development across the board

Some may say that the jump in the number of seats captured by the hard core proto-fascists, the Identity and Democracy family, is really due to the remarkable leap in the number of additional seats won by the two Italian parties, the Lega and FdI. This is true. Of the 37 additional seats taken by the whole family, 28 are won thanks to the Italians. We explained above how this might and probably will prove to be an advantage rather than a drawback. But let us also point out that this is true for almost all groups. Uneven development was a rule for most of the political families in the elections of 2019.

The group only second to the full-blooded proto-fascists in the increase of seats gained is, it will be remembered, the Liberals (Renew Europe). Of their 39 additional MEPs, 15 came from the British Liberal Democrats (who had a single MEP in 2014, but have raised that number to 16 now!) and another 14 were won by the LREM of Macron in France (LREM was inexistent in 2014, so the comparison is with the centrist MODEM and another small formation). This brings the contribution of two countries alone up to 29 out of a total of 39, perfectly comparable as a ratio to that which applies to the proto-fascists. The same goes for the Greens. The great "victory" attributed to the Greens owes to the jump in the vote of the German Grüne (from 10.5 to 21 per cent, providing an extra 10 seats) and the French EELV (which doubled the number of its MEPs from 6 to 12). The two add up to the 16 of the 23 new seats the family of Green parties have in the parliament.

So much for the winning families. There is another kind of uneven development in the losing political families. It is not to be doubted for a moment that the centre

²¹ For a careful analysis on France, involving precious sociological insights as well, see the article by our comrade Guy Hesser: <http://redmed.org/fr/article/europeennes-2019-en-france>.

right and the centre left took a great blow in these elections. Even in Germany, where despite everything Merkel's CDU-CSU came in first, the total of the votes of the centre right and centre left fell from 62 per cent in 2014 to 44 per cent in 2019.²² But there are some other striking examples to be cited. Of these the twin cases of the French right wing Les Républicains (LR) and the British Conservatives is crystal clear. The LR came in fourth with a meagre 8.5 per cent and 8 seats (compared to 21 per cent and 20 seats in the previous elections) while the British Tories came in fifth (this is the government party, mind you!) with only 9 per cent of the vote (as opposed to 23 per cent in 2014) and 4 MEPs (as opposed to 19 seats in the previous elections). As for the centre left, the Parti Socialiste (PS) suffered another humiliating defeat in France, winning only 6 per cent of the popular vote; the German SPD, for its part, fell from 27 per cent in 2019 to 16 per cent this time around.

But uneven development created exceptions here as well. At the centre left, the shining star in the bigger countries was the PSOE of Spain, which came in first, receiving 33 per cent of the popular vote as opposed to 23 per cent in the 2014 elections.²³ And on the centre right the spectacular event was the comeback of New Democracy, topping Syriza with its 33 per cent as opposed to the miserable 24 per cent of that government party.²⁴

Overall, then, statistics should be read with ample space for uneven development and for national particularities.²⁵ It is only out of that kind of sensitive reading that the true message of the 2019 European elections can be correctly deduced.

In the wink of an eye

One last grace period. The elections to the European Parliament have provided one last chance to the organised working class movement of Europe and the left before the storm. The proto-fascist movement, which the whole world persistently and blindly names "populist", attained great success in these elections, but nonetheless this was not the kind of victory that will create havoc immediately tomorrow. Moreover, the movement ran on two different slates for the European Parliament. It is, in other words, divided. Hence, in the short term, in the aftermath of the election,

22 For a fuller analysis of Germany see the article by our comrade Kurtar Tanyılmaz: <http://redmed.org/article/implications-european-parliament-elections-crisis-german-bourgeois-democracy>.

23 For a much more extensive analysis of Spain, with the background of national elections as well, see the article by our comrades of the Grupo de Independencia Obrera: <http://redmed.org/es/article/espana-un-balance-del-largo-proceso-electoral>.

24 The perceptive analysis of our comrades of the EEK on not only Greece but Europe as well is required reading: <http://redmed.org/article/what-syriza-seeded-sprouted-field-right-wing-harvest-however-must-and-can-be-only-red>.

25 For the national peculiarities of other countries we recommend the reader (for Romania) the article by Ana Bazac: <http://redmed.org/article/what-syriza-seeded-sprouted-field-right-wing-harvest-however-must-and-can-be-only-red>. As for the Nordic countries an analysis with a broad sweep is presented on the three countries of Sweden, Denmark, and Finland by an associate of ours in the region, Muzaffer Ege Alper: <http://redmed.org/article/eu-elections-north-victory-anti-immigration-over-anti-austerity>.

it would be incorrect to say that proto-fascism will create an immediate danger for the people on the scale of Europe as a whole. In certain countries taken singly the question may arise. Striking developments may unfold in some of the bigger countries (starting with Italy, France, and Britain, in each of which the proto-fascist parties came first), with the proto-fascist movement becoming an important element in the day to day life of the country (in Italy this had already commenced since the Lega of Salvini joined a power-sharing scheme and became a ruling party). So in the short term the danger is distant for Europe as a whole, but in the medium term this movement is a real danger. This delay in the emergence of the immediate threat is what has given the working class movement and the left a very precious reprieve for preparation before the impending showdown. Should the left once again fall into the kind of complacency that was observed after the relative setbacks suffered by the proto-fascist movement in France and the Netherlands in 2017, for instance, woe to the working class and the poor of Europe and beyond!

These are the introductory lines to our first article on the European elections, written immediately after the event.²⁶ Trying to calibre the true scale of the fascist menace for Europe, we try there to both point to the fact that the danger is not immediate, but also to sound the alarm of warning for the near future. It is this fact that fascism is still not an impending threat. This justifies, through however unconscious modalities, in the ranks of the soft left the belittling of the fascist menace.

But this is entirely deceptive. We also pointed to the following aspect of the matter in the same article:

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

So we again warn as to the possibility of the rapidity of the transformation of these movements and parties into real storm troopers. But not only that. There is a very concrete situation which, if and when it occurs, will give the final impetus to the march to power of the proto-fascists, through the eventual transformation of the

²⁶ See our “European Elections: Iron and Cotton”, <http://redmed.org/article/european-elections-iron-and-cotton>.

Revolutionary Marxism 2020

movement into a fully fledged fascist one.

If and when the world faces a new Lehman Brothers scenario, fascism will almost of necessity be the solution many (but not all) of the national fractions of the imperialist bourgeoisie will turn to. A new 2008 will, in all probability, usher in a new 1933. It will be too late then to start building the movement that really has the ideological and political clarity and the guts to fight fascism effectively. No Wall of China separates us from that moment. So let us start to prepare now.