

The last decade has starkly revealed the limits of the capitalist class's power to rule. Trump's 2017-2021 presidency and the 'decoupling' of the world economy alongside the 'new cold war' shattered the 'consensus strategy' of global stability through 'open markets' and capitalist cooperation which had been pursued following the market collapse and depression of 2008. This was further undermined by the global impact of coronavirus pandemic forcing working class people into a deeper struggle to survive.

In reality, when governments bailed out the banks after the 2008 market crash they were already sacrificing ordinary people's lives and living standards at the altar of profit, revealing where their interests truly lie. Furthermore, the pandemic revealed the inadequacies of health care systems run under a capitalist system which prioritises making money even while millions of people are dying.

Hard on the heels of this crisis, the 'cold war' turned hot with the Ukraine conflict, the Gaza genocide and other geo-political crises spurring a drift to militarisation, and shattering the commodity supply chain, driving up the cost of living worldwide. These crises, along with the impending climate catastrophe, increasing rates of gendered violence and revelations about corruption by political elites have had a radicalising effect on the masses, most especially young people, across the world, from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to Kenya and Serbia. However, the lack of strong socialist organisations armed with the revolutionary programme needed to champion the struggles of the oppressed has opened up a space for far right ideas to spread.

In many countries where working class people struggle to access health care, decent jobs or housing, reactionary groups have attempted to point the finger at migrants and have made use of racist, often islamophobic, rhetoric as a rallying point. Migrants are an easy target for opportunistic politicians who do not have viable plans to rescue ailing economies or to address challenges faced by working class people because migrants are often marginalised and cannot vote, so can be targeted without fear of losing votes.

War and climate change across the Sahara, Sahel and the Middle East, from Mauretania to Afghanistan, for example has displaced millions of people forced to seek refuge in other countries. As a result, the AfD in Germany and a host of similar far-right parties across Europe portray refugees as the biggest threat facing their countries. These parties paint refugees and migrants as the cause for a shortage of employment and housing opportunities or as terrorists, dangerous and undesirable people.

This phenomenon is not limited to Europe. For example politicians in South Africa have repeatedly targeted migrants from other African countries in their political campaigns to divert attention from issues such as corruption by government officials or the economic structure that alienates the majority. Inevitably such approaches rooted in nationalist, racist or xenophobic ideas often lead to violent outbursts but do nothing to improve living conditions for the working class.

This rhetoric of hate is no longer the exclusive political 'stock in trade' of far right political outsiders. It increasingly drives the policy agenda of established capitalist parties in response to their growing lack of authority and political legitimacy. The 'centre left' UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer unapologetically uses racist tropes about migrants turning Britain into an 'Island of Strangers' which made Enoch Powell a political pariah in the Conservative Party five decades ago.

Donald Trump's election as US president and his 'anti-woke' agenda has shifted the global center of gravity on race, migration, gender rights and especially the bodies, and even right to exist, of trans-folk dramatically to the right. This is reflected in capitalist politics, corporations, institutions and culture, exemplified by Mark Zuckerberg's Meta internet giant's abandonment of any pretence of objective moderation, making facebook almost indistinguishable from Elon Musk's 'X'.

Even those sections of the bourgeois who see it as damaging to capitalism and the norms of 'liberal democratic' civil society for the most part mount only token resistance to this drift to reaction and authoritarianism. In the US there is only shrill and confused 'opposition' by the Democrats and the not insignificant minority the Republican congressional caucus opposed to Trump. They are unable to mount any effective opposition because they can find no coherent alternative programme of policies to advance within the constraints imposed by the crisis, and because they are terrified of encouraging mass resistance which they cannot control. Where opposition appears it is almost always limited and in response to popular pressure, for instance West European, and Canadian (totally meaningless) threats to 'recognise' Palestinian statehood and Starmer's, humiliating retreats on welfare reform and the winter fuel allowances.

Since the rise of the internet, some groups have tried to make use of online platforms to spread far right talking points presenting hate filled lies as accurate information. For example, there has been a growth in the manosphere, mainly targeting young men to instill misogynistic ideas in them. Often, movements against gender based violence and femicide such as #MeToo are caricatured and feminists are intentionally misrepresented so as to sow fear within boys and young men. This is dangerous because it shifts the focus from the necessity of uniting in the fight against abuse and creates conditions for the continuation of abuse. In a country like Kenya where young people have used online platforms to organise progressive demonstrations, the manosphere has been blamed for sustaining high rates of violence against women and girls. Some politicians have taken advantage of this, openly dismissing the struggle for bodily autonomy and blocking trans healthcare in some instances.

Authoritarianism grows stronger on an almost daily basis, not just in the majority of states like Putin's Russia, where it has long been the normal form of capitalist rule, and where repression has now reached unprecedented level. Even in 'Liberal democracies' such as Germany and Britain, where increasingly draconian laws ostensibly aimed against terrorism or Nazism are deployed against the solidarity movement with Gaza. If the capitalist class can get away with this today these laws will undoubtedly be used against trade unions in struggle tomorrow.

The response of reformist trade union leaders and the remaining workers parties, however, has been at best weak and frequently supine. Union bureaucracies have become even more deeply entwined with the structures of the state and capitalist management and often actually support increased arms spending and the imposition of tariff barriers, as preferable means of 'protecting members' jobs' to organising industrial struggle. Nationalist rhetoric is increasingly common in the politics of many left politicians, especially from a Stalinist tradition. This is particularly blatant in the anti-migrant rhetoric of Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht in Germany, but even Jean-Luc Melenchon's France Insoumise is not untainted. Building effective resistance to the far-right offensive will require a struggle from below for workers to reclaim their unions and build mass democratic parties and organs of struggle.

The absence of any clear class alternative means that the far-right can appeal to significant layers of workers by offering 'easier answers'. Whilst right-populist politicians remain firmly part of the ruling class and their social base is overwhelmingly middle class they can and do attract the support of workers (such as the many, especially male, 'rust belt' workers who voted for Trump in 2024) and the growth of their ideas undoubtedly has a negative impact on class consciousness. The presence, and growth of reactionary and oppressive ideas, prejudices, and practices within our workplaces and communities means that rebuilding the workers' movement requires a conscious struggle against these divisive barriers.

Far right movements are encouraged by the rise to power of figures such as, Modi, Orban, Netanyahu, Meloni, and Bolsonaro among others. However, their time in power has not been marked by economic growth or the eradication of poverty. Rather, they have insisted on ideas such as purity of the nation, religious intolerance and attempts to silence or to eliminate minorities and opposition which have caused significant harm to the populations living under them. Thus it is unsurprising that there has been strong opposition to their rule and they will face more resistance in future as their regimes reveal their inability to bring the change that people need over time.

This process does not yet represent a decisive victory for far-right politics or a fundamental defeat for the working class on the scale of the inter-war rise to power of Mussolini, Hitler and Franco, or even the Kuomintang's crushing of the Chinese revolution. This is confirmed by Bolsonaro's defeat in the 2023 Brazilian elections, the mass demonstrations against Milei in Argentina and magnificent youth-led uprisings as far apart as Kenya, Korea and Serbia. Bonapartist rule is inherently unstable and crisis ridden and will inevitably give rise to spontaneous and often powerful resistance from the oppressed, especially the rising generation of the youth in the global south. However, this reaction arises directly from capitalism's organic crisis and can only be decisively defeated by building democratically from below a strong intersectional revolutionary movement of workers and all the oppressed layers of society