

Participants from fourteen countries (Spanish State, Austria, Argentina, Poland, Mexico, Ireland, Russia, Czechia, South Africa, Malawi, Croatia, Portugal, United States, Myanmar) took part in an on-line discussion on “Right-wing populism and Authoritarianism” on 14 April.

Paul

The initial focus of the discussion on the historical and theoretical aspects of the inter-world-war bonapartist and fascist regimes was aimed not simply at defining these terms or giving a checklist of characteristics of these phenomena but at providing the tools needed to analyse the right-wing populist and authoritarian regimes that are seen today. The discussion was then enriched by the contributions from different parts of the world analysing today’s right-wing regimes.

Without such an approach, it is not possible to understand the real nature of such regimes, how they arise, what social forces they rest on and what role they play. Without such an analysis of class dynamics and processes, many lefts simply resort to schematism, relying on quotes from the bourgeois media supplemented by out-of-context Marxist terminology and the repetition of a few truisms in place of a programme.

The way in which our Marxist predecessors applied their understanding of such phenomena as ‘populism’, ‘Bonapartism’ and ‘fascism’ underlines the fact that they should not be treated as rigid models. As Trotsky warned, Bonapartism and fascism develop under specific conditions and can combine elements in different ways. Such complexity was seen in the regime of Józef Pilsutsky in Poland after his 1926 coup. Although combining elements often associated with both Bonapartism and fascism, the regime lacked a strong fascist mass movement, relying instead primarily on the army, the bureaucracy and the police. Despite growing repression, much of the workers’ movement was left formally intact, and parliament remained in place but with sharply reduced powers.

This example demonstrates that these categories do not appear in pure form but as uneven and shifting combinations shaped by concrete class relations. And this matters when we turn to developments today. In the current crisis of capitalism, emerging regimes and movements do not correspond neatly to the classical inter-war forms. And understanding them requires analyzing the concrete balance of class forces and the direction of these processes.

Bonapartism and fascism arise in periods of deep capitalist crisis. In normal conditions, the ruling class prefers parliamentary rule if possible. History has shown it is even prepared to tolerate governments of social democracy which adapted to and became tamed by bourgeois parliamentary democracy. But if parliamentary rule fails, the ruling class may look for authoritarian solutions in an attempt to stabilize the situation.

In post-WWI Italy, the revolutionary crisis was derailed by the reformist leaders, opening the door to counter-revolution. Fascist violence then spread across the countryside, targeting trade unionists and left-wing peasants. Italy's capitalists turned to Benito Mussolini, who was appointed Prime Minister by the king, Victor Emmanuel III. Initially he headed a coalition government and the traditional state institutions remained in place. The bourgeoisie first hoped he would restore order without destroying the existing state system. And it was only over the next few years that the regime transformed itself into a full dictatorship.

In Germany too, fascism was not the first option chosen by the bourgeoisie. In 1918 the revolutionary movement overthrew the monarchy and placed workers' and soldiers' councils at the centre of political life, but was betrayed by the Social Democratic leadership. The government used the proto-fascist Freikorps to crush the uprising and murder leaders such as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. For a time the ruling class was still able to govern through parliamentary democracy.

However, the crisis of German capitalism deepened during the 1920s. And as the forces of revolution and counter-revolution began to gain strength, a series of authoritarian - Bonapartist - governments emerged. The German bourgeoisie turned to open fascism as a last result when the other solutions proved insufficient to stabilize the situation.

For Marx, Bonapartism was an instrument of class rule that arises from a specific relationship between the classes, based on historical examples.

The first was Napoleon Bonaparte who leaned on his peasant army for support and carried out a partial counter-revolution at the end of the French bourgeois revolution. Even so, he still defended the economic and legal foundations of capitalism.

The second was Louis Bonaparte, Napoleon's nephew, who carried out a coup three years after the revolutions of 1848 when France was experiencing political paralysis and class conflict.

A further example was Otto von Bismarck who was appointed by the King and balanced between the property classes and the rising proletariat while raising a powerful military

bureaucratic state apparatus above society. Each of these were examples of Bonapartism during the ascending phase of capitalism.

Bonapartism in the period between the first and second world war was different. In the aftermath of WWI and the Russian Revolution, revolutionary waves swept across Europe. The forces of revolution and counter revolution were locked in mortal combat. In many countries, faced with revolutionary crises, the ruling class could no longer govern using parliamentary democracy and turned to extraordinary and often repressive forms of rule, some taking the form of Bonapartism, and others developing into fully fledged fascism.

Bonapartism arose when the main classes were locked in struggle or in mortal combat, with neither able to decisively impose its rule. The state acquired a certain relative independence and appeared to rise above society, relying primarily on the army, bureaucracy and the police although, in the last analysis, continuing to defend the interests of the ruling class.

Unlike fascism, Bonapartism does not mobilize a mass movement relying instead on the state apparatus. And this limits its capacity to completely destroy the workers' organizations. It leans on different classes at different moments, depending on the shifting balance of forces, but it doesn't actively mobilize them in the same way as fascism. For this reason, Trotsky saw such regimes as relatively weak and transitional arising in exceptional periods of crisis.

By contrast, fascism mobilizes a mass movement, drawn mainly from the petty bourgeoisie and de-classed layers, which it uses to physically destroy the working class organizations. This is the main difference between Bonapartism and fascism. Fascism is the most extreme method of preserving capitalism when all other forms of rule have failed.

There are also key differences between the inter-world-war Bonapartism, and the Bonapartism that developed after WWII. New and more stable forms of Bonapartism emerged alongside the dominance of the parliamentary democracies in the advanced capitalist economies.

One example of bourgeois Bonapartism in the former colonial world was Peronism in Argentina. Juan Peron came to power based on the mobilisation of the working class, and although he granted significant concessions, including strong trade union rights and wage increases, ultimately he defended Argentinian capitalism and the interests of

the bourgeoisie and landowners. His ability to balance between the classes, relying on favourable post-war economic conditions, meant that his rule had a certain stability.

A different form of Bonapartism was found in the Stalinist regime in the USSR. Proletarian Bonapartism existed when a bureaucratic state apparatus rose above the working class, balancing between different social forces, while ultimately preserving the foundations of a nationalised socialist or post-capitalist economy.

After 1945, similar Stalinist type regimes were established in Eastern Europe and later in China, Yugoslavia and Cuba, often through war, revolution or guerrilla movements. These, from the outset, were deformed workers' states, where capitalism was abolished, but political power was monopolised by a bureaucratic elite rather than workers' democracy.

The existence of these regimes was made possible by the specific post-war international equilibrium, including the division of the world between capitalism and the Soviet block during the Cold War. This global balance allowed different forms of Bonapartist rule, both bourgeois and proletarian to persist for decades under relatively stable conditions.

Today the term populism is used very broadly, often to describe movements, parties and regimes, all at once, without much precision. In classical Marxist literature, the term is not central, although Lenin defined populism (narodism) as the "very old ideology of Russia's peasant democrats". Today, the term right-wing populism can be useful when referring to movements or parties, but when it comes to analysing any regime, it is necessary to be as precise as possible, in the context of the balance of forces and the social base of the regime.

It is useful to compare the Hungarian regime with the Polish "Law and Justice" government, which fell two years ago, from the point of view of Bonapartism. Kaczynski's "Law and Justice" regime in Poland and Orbán's "Fidesz" regime in Hungary have similar origins, but they developed in different ways and they were leaning on slightly different social layers.

Val

A dialectical approach to analysing these phenomena needs not only an examination of their historical roots, but also the forces that are in opposition and how they could possibly develop. This aspect will be developed in a deeper way in the second part of

this discussion. But it is already clear that what is happening today is not a one-way process, there are many political processes, including electoral conflict, popular protests, and even geopolitical contradictions that can still be played out. The final outcome will depend on the balance of class forces as they develop.

All three of the above elements lie at the heart of the defeat of Orban in Hungary. The eventual outcome will depend very much on how events develop. If the opposition that has been built up in the past years, because of the terrible situation of the economy, of corruption, of the attacks on women and the LGBT plus community, can develop a real working-class socialist alternative, that will lead to one outcome. But if this doesn't happen, and Magyar continues unheeded as a former member of Orban's party, then we will see a different outcome.

The outcome still has to be decided. But the very fact that Magyar has already appointed an education minister, who is a leading advocate of Catholic evangelism and criticised the woke left in Europe is not a good sign of how Magyar intends to act. This could well provoke new waves of protests against the regime.

It is not possible to analyse today's far right forces by simply cut-and-pasting the characteristics of Bonapartism and fascism as they existed in the 1920s and 30s into the current time. Not least the balance of class forces is completely different. The existence of the Soviet Union, the revolutionary uprising in Spain, the opposition to fascism in Italy and Germany, alongside the burning anger of billions fighting for liberation from imperialism in the colonial world meant that the threat to the capitalist system was much greater than is currently the case today.

At the same time, it is completely wrong to dismiss the dangers that do exist today. There is a very worrying, a very dangerous situation developing in the world which needs to be carefully analysed, if the correct answers are to be developed. While parliamentary democracy is the best, the easiest and the cheapest form of rule that the capitalist class can use, it is far from the established norm across the world. 75% of the world's population live under one form of authoritarianism or another. Elsewhere democratic rights are under serious attack.

In each country though it is necessary to accurately assess which stage has been reached, what turning points have been passed and how far the situation has moved along the spectrum from bourgeois democracy, through Bonapartism towards a fascist

dictatorship. This analysis is needed to develop the correct programme and tactics, in its absence the working class will remain confused and disorientated.

For example the question can be asked of when the new capitalist Russia became a Bonapartist regime. There is no one moment, but a process of change over time. Following the moves to restore capitalism and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, an unstable bourgeois democracy was established. It was chaotic and anarchistic - anything was allowed, in particular so that gangland struggle between the different oligarchs to grab hold of the privatised state property could continue. Elections, barely democratic, took place.

The first blow was when Yeltsin's plans were opposed by the then Parliament, still called the "Supreme Soviet" in 1993. The democratic facade was dropped as Yeltsin ordered tanks to attack the parliament's building. After that elections continued, although with increasing fraud. In 1997 it is widely believed that the Communist Party won the election, but the vote was fraudulently changed.

By this time the newly enriched oligarchs needed the chaos to end, and the consolidation of the new Russian capitalist state. They turned to a new unknown figure, Vladimir Putin, as their preferred presidential candidate. His strong-arm credentials were established by launching the brutal war on Chechnya. The oligarchs backed his election in 2000, only to find him turning against them - some forced into exile, others met stickier ends.

Formally, democratic rights continued to exist - in 2007 20 parties were allowed to take part in the election. But in 2011, the result was so obviously falsified, significant protests took place in Moscow and elsewhere. Most were legal, but the last was brutally attacked by the riot police. This coincided with Euromaidan in Ukraine, the Kremlin's annexation of Crimea, and the start of the military conflict in East Ukraine.

The wave of patriotism that followed allowed the regime to really tighten the screws of repression. Legal protests became impossible, only single-person pickets were tolerated with a high risk of arrest. Covid was then used for a further escalation - not least because video surveillance became the norm. The start of the war was accompanied by the rapid crushing of the very youthful anti-war protests, mass arrests and a very widespread clamp-down on any free speech. Elections are completely stage-managed, power is in the hands of a very small clique around the President, and anyone who steps out of line ends up swallowing unpleasant substances, falling from high buildings or incarcerated in prison.

There are echoes of these events occurring in many countries. In Turkey the main opposition candidate to Erdogan has been arrested. Yeltsin's attack on Parliament in 1993 of course succeeded while Trump's attempted coup on Capitol Hill did not. But for Bonapartism to become firmly consolidated, a number of qualitative changes would be needed, including for example, the abolition of democratic elections, the end of free speech, major changes in the state structure, unrestricted actions by the police or the military, and the concentration of power in the hands of one person or a junta (council) of military leaders.

Bonapartism obviously consolidated in a number of countries - China, Iran, Russia. Others, such as Turkey are moving in that direction. There is an increasing number of countries in which the masses are desperate for change, but the absence of a working-class alternative capable of challenging the regime, while the bourgeois are not capable of maintaining stability, means that the military is stepping in to take power. In Myanmar (despite the reclothing of the military in civilian dress), or in Egypt and more recently in Madagascar, where a section of the military has stepped after the GenZ uprising, supposedly in support, but which will become a more serious Bonapartist force at a certain stage.

At the other end of the spectrum, although moving rapidly are the Americas, countries of Europe and Japan, in which there is the growth and strengthening of very dangerous, right-wing populist forces, which present themselves as representing the ordinary people against a corrupt elite. Trotsky spoke of the difference between left populists - the narodniks - and revolutionaries as being that the former lacked any understanding of class struggle and the role of the working class.

Today's right populists may even have a better understanding of class struggle in the sense that they actually represent the interests of what is usually a very rich section of the bourgeoisie. They disguise their aims, brush over the class realities of society, at least in public. They appeal to those who have lost out in today's world of polycrises, and turn their anger against outsiders.

Yet when they gain power, they clearly and increasingly rapidly move in a Bonapartist direction. Trump's use of ICE, his sacking of military heads, threats to take control of elections and his use of war are clear examples of a move towards a more consolidated Bonapartism. It is not likely he can cancel elections at this stage, it would meet too much resistance, but he would clearly like to.

Today's wave of right populism and authoritarianism has not simply fallen from the sky. It is a consequence of the deep crisis of bourgeois society that has developed during

the decades of neoliberalism, during which many, many people have lost out. In Iran, for example, 90% of workers have contracts lasting just one year or less. To call that a precariat is an understatement. This in turn has led to a historic collapse of confidence in the traditional bourgeois institutions, including the former workers' parties. Britain is not exceptional, but at the last election the combined vote for the Tory and Labour parties was a historical low.

The first wave of left-populist forces - Chavez and Morales in Latin America, Syriza in Greece, the anti-globalisation movement and so on - failed to offer an alternative that could break the stranglehold of capital. At a later stage, a second wave - Kirchner, Obrador, Sanders, Corbin, Melachon, Yamamoto - has been a new feature in this picture. They talk of the 99%, propose economic democracy, social justice, anti-capitalism, but they have no coherent alternative to capitalism. As importantly, they have no strategy to build an organisation capable of overthrowing it.

And that is the critical weakness of left populism. The multi crises caused by capitalism cannot be resolved without getting rid of capitalism, but without aiming to overthrow it the left-populists have to accept capital's rules. Right populists do not have that problem - their task is to protect their capitalist friends, they do so using demagoguery and by building hatred and division to hide their real aims.

It also needs to be underlined that right-populism has a clear material base. The global bourgeoisie after the 2008 crisis has accelerated its retreat from neoliberal ideology, or more specifically from globalisation, the "rule of law" and deregulation in favour of economic protectionism. The strengthening of protectionism needs nationalism and militarisation. When the right-populists attack the corrupt elite, what they are really doing is attacking that section of the ruling elite that benefitted from the neo-liberal era. This explains why, rather than being driven by simple personal hatred of the Democrats, Trump is taking action against a small layer of the US ruling elite.

The material basis of right populism is backed up by increasingly reactionary ideology. Nativism is one element that unites the right-populist leaders. Trump believes only those born in the US with European settler roots are genuine Americans, and anyone else are outsiders, who can be subjected to increasingly brutal anti-migrant attacks. The elevation of the rights of ethnic Russians by Putin's regime is accompanied by new laws restricting minority rights to learn their own languages. But Putin's imperialist patronage extends the role of ethnic Russians to be the core element of the Slavic culture.

Modi, finding it more difficult to maintain the significant economic growth seen in the first period of his rule, is increasingly driven by Hindutva - elevating the rights of Hindus

above all others. Xi Jinping sees the future of China as being increasingly Han-centric, while Japan's Sanae Takaichi has shifted the LDP significantly to the nationalist right under pressure from the more nativist parties of the far-right.

The Islamic world is of course not immune from nativism. As Turkey's Erdogan has moved increasingly in an authoritarian tradition, he has leant more on the principle that the true inheritors of Turkiye are the supporters of political Islam - mainly members of the AKP - while opponents are presented as representing alien and foreign interests.

Despite such examples though, the reverse side of the nativist coin is the strengthening of Islamophobia globally. This is seen not only in the anti-migrant campaigns in Europe and the US, but also in India with Modi's attacks on the Muslim population, in China's anti-Uighur policies, in Myanmar with the attacks on the Rohingya populations. The reaction to this is the radicalisation of Muslim's seen in part by the scope of the Palestinian solidarity actions.

The conclusion from this is that just as there is no 'pure Bonapartism', nor is there a 'pure right-populism' and any analysis should see the transit from one to the other, the dynamic, and understand the process of ebb and flow. Nor should we ignore that there are fascistic people and fascistic tendencies that can appear throughout the process. Often fascist groups can be utilised by bonapartist regimes to do their dirty work, whipping them up to attack migrants, LGBTQ+ groups and so on.

At the same time currently organisations with a fascist past such as Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia* or Le Pen's *Rassemblement national* have had to brush over their past in order to win a wider electorate.

Just as it is impossible to deny the strengthening of support for right-populism globally, it is also impossible to deny that it has won support from a layer of the working class, even if that support may be unstable and is potentially unsustainable if a viable alternative was to be presented.

The fundamental nature of these groups has not changed despite this. Primarily, they have the support of, and represent the ruling elite, or more specifically the most cynical and brutal sections of the ruling elite. Modi's BJP, for example, has traditionally been the party of the rich and urban middle class. Trump's MAGA is financed overwhelmingly by billionaire 'megadonors' particularly from the crypto, AI, energy and finance sectors. Australia's One Nation Party is openly backed by multi-millionaires and billionaires.

The same applies in today's consolidated Bonapartist regimes. As the Mullahs took power after the revolutionary overthrow of the Shah in 1979, they were forced for a

period to accept some of the gains of the revolution. The oil-fields were nationalised, there were elements of workers' control, and significant social reforms. But this period did not last for long as the Mullah's counter revolution was consolidated. It turned on the workers' movement and the left with the brutal clamp down and daily executions of key leaders. This allowed the Mullahs and Revolutionary Guards to seize hold of large parts of the economy, which they managed with brutal capitalist efficiency.

Putin too, who was originally the candidate of choice of the new oligarchs came to power precisely to further their interests. But he quickly moved against a section of the oligarchs and has now fully consolidated power based on a form of state supported oligarch managed corporate capitalism. In China the leading CCP figures are tightly entwined with the interests of corporate capitalism.

It has to be said though, that in a whole number of countries there is a significant section of the working class for a number of different reasons that is supporting the right populist parties.

This does not mean that such parties do not have a stable right-wing electoral base. In Milei's case, his party has a stable core supporting his calls for "strength and freedom" consisting of 20-30% of the electorate. The remainder of those who vote are expressing their anger and deep rejection of the traditional forces. Similarly, about 25% of those who vote for Farage's Reform Party in Britain are traditional right-wing Tory voters. In general such voters are older, non-immigrant, pro-capitalist with a larger percentage of men than women.

While in general this reflects the situation in other countries, there are contradictions. In the US, the two demographics that voted in favour of Harris (51-53%) were those with an income less than \$30,000 and those over \$100,000. In Farage's case, at the last election a third of his voters had a household income of less than £25,000 (\$18,500). Those working class layers that vote for the right populists will tend to be in areas that have suffered deindustrialisation, those who have completely lost out during the era of neoliberalisation, and see no hope for the future. In Australia, working people who vote for One Nation say that they don't trust any of the politicians, including One Nation, but say they have no means of control in this situation, so they use their vote as a protest.

There are other cross-currents, in particular among younger voters. Only a small proportion of Reform voters (>10%) were young and over half of those had high incomes over £70,000. Modi, at least in his first years of rule had the support of a layer of youth who had benefitted from the relative economic growth and were, in particular, taken in by Modi's promise to boost the crypto-economy. In Argentina too, Milei won the

support of a layer of petty-bourgeois youth attracted by the get-rich schemes associated with cryptocurrencies.

This is a volatile section of the population. Indeed in the US a turn away from support for Trump can be seen amongst young voters. 70% of young people now do not approve of Trump's activities, which is a turn-around from the previous period.

There is also a very clear polarisation between male and female voters, particularly, but not only, amongst the youth. In many countries the influence of the manosphere around people like Andrew Tate has been strong. The victory of Trump has been a major factor. Corporations and the mainstream media, which had presented themselves as promoting 'wokism' in the aftermath of the #metoo movement saw his victory as a green light to retreat, and the process quickly spread globally.

The stratification was perhaps first seen in Eastern Europe, for example in Poland in the aftermath of the abortion campaign. In 2016-7 in Russia the anti-corruption protests initiated by Alexey Navalny saw significant numbers of young people take to the streets. In the political vacuum, a section of young men were drawn to the ideas of libertarianism, which promoted the possibility of an 'honest capitalism', based on property rights and the freedom to act without restriction within that property. This led to a reaction from a number of the young women who objected to their bodies and their rights being treated in that way.

The more radical approach of young women is increasingly being noted by bourgeois analysts. One recent academic report concluded that there is a growing consensus among young women that a capitalist feminism is fundamentally contradictory, and that a systematic change is needed to truly empower women.

An article in Jacobin reported that in 2017, a majority of blue collar workers voted for the far right in the election. The same article went on to say though that 30% of workers organised in trade unions supported the Freedom Party. This is a warning. A number of left or left-moving trade union leaders who on some issues have a good position are opening the door to work with the right-populists. Shaun Fain of the US Autoworkers' Union has spoken out openly in support of Trump's tariffs. The report that a delegation from Britain's "Unite the Union" met with representatives of Reform to discuss the Birmingham Bin Strike are worrying particularly when the union's leader Sharon Graham welcomes increased arms expenditure and the environmentally harmful oil and nuclear industries

John - Spain

There are many contradictions in the narrative of the far right, which are exposed when they are actually tested. In the Spanish region of Castilla y Leon there was an election for the Provincial Parliament in March. Even though there was an increase in turn-out of a few percent compared to that in 2022, at 65% it still means 35% have no party they see as their own. The right-wing Popular Party won two more seats to reach 33. PSOE also got two more to reach 30. The far-right Vox gained one more to reach 14. This is very worrying not just for the left, but for the bourgeois of the Spanish State. At the next general election polls show the Popular Party could win, but probably not by themselves, so they will have to rely on Vox. During March's election, the leader of Vox visited some of the villages. Typically what would happen is that he would turn up by the village church in a beautiful car, in beautiful suits ready for the photo-op. Further down the street the young people would all turn out with the occasional older person to shout 'fascist' There was a real polarisation - the young, particularly young women would oppose Vox. While those that supported Vox were older, with very few local people.

It should not be forgotten that for every process, there is a counter process. There are villages in Castilla y Leon close to the border with the Basque Country, and they mostly use services such as healthcare from there. So now there are petitions circulating in the bars and shops to leave Spain and join the Basque country. Examples such as this, although small, demonstrate the limitations of the far-right. There is not a high level of popular support for them but people are desperate because of the economy, low pay and so on.

There is the issue of the armed groups that the fascists use. Last summer in the UK there were the racist mobs who were whipped up by the far-right to attack and try to burn down the hostels housing migrants. The British bourgeois at this stage did not want this to spread, so clamped down quickly, leaving groups like those around Tommy Robinson relatively isolated.

In the Spanish State the far-right has also tried to move against immigrants. But they find it hard. So they are using companies to evict squatters who occupy flats, when they have nowhere else to live. But the people who work for the companies are far-right activists, they are kicking people out from their homes particularly in Madrid and Barcelona.

The contradiction is that Sanchez and the PSOE have won the vote to legalize half a million "illegals". Illegal is a misnomer. Sanchez is widely attacked across Europe by the right who claim he has opened the doors to hundreds of thousands of criminals from Latin America and North Africa in. But to gain citizenship in the Spanish State, a person has to have a certificate from the country of origin's police confirming that they have no

criminal record. So not only is it impossible for criminals to immigrate, many Spanish understand that many migrants work in the health and welfare services, particularly with the growing demographic crisis.

And here is another contradiction. The British ex-minister George Robertson who served in the Blair government and then became General Secretary of NATO. He is now demanding that the Labour government cut everything, welfare, the health service, education in order to step up arms expenditure. This is in contrast to Sanchez, who despite other criticisms, has stood up to Trump, and is resisting any involvement in his wars. After Spain's experience of its involvement in the Afghanistan war, any proposal to leave NATO or be kicked out would be quite popular. But in most countries, Generals and politicians are all demanding more money for the military, and no-one is opposing them.

Vox is increasing its presence in the municipalities. There they deny that domestic violence exists, calling it inter-family violence. It says there is no especial oppression of women. As a consequence, they are recalling expenditure to help refugees, to provide for women's refuges, and so on. They are obviously homophobic. If they are to gain power nationally, they want to control education, and limit the teaching of Catalan and Basque languages. At a certain stage massive movements in opposition to these measures are likely, which is a key factor holding the bourgeois from giving Vox a free hand at this stage.

Philip.

Support for the far-right in Europe has grown strongly in recent years, accelerated by Covid and the Ukraine war. In the final analysis, this is due to objective developments with the deepening crisis of capitalism. But the subjective factor with the failure of progressive reformism and the weakness of the organized left is also important. In general, the left's failure to treat struggles against oppression seriously allowed the reactionary offensive to go further and reach into the working class.

As a consequence, far-right parties have been able to position themselves as the main anti-system and anti-elite forces. In general, the ruling class has encouraged this even if, at this stage, it is not prepared to move too far in the direction of fascism. In doing so, the traditional ruling parties have shifted to the right and increased their use of

authoritarian measures and oppression as they push austerity and pour billions into historic rearmament. Germany is at the forefront of this warfare, not welfare process.

This is accompanied by an ideological offensive to build anti-migrant hatred and specifically anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism. These are the battering rams of the far-right. They use and abuse feminism and consciousness around gender-based violence by opposing feminism itself, then using instances of gender-based violence supposedly committed by people of color to whip up racism. Femonationalist groups which spread far-right ideas claiming they defend women or children and push anti-queer and racist policies, are appearing across Europe. .

Different economic policies can be found in right-wing populist and far-right organisations, depending on the country, and sometimes within the same organisation. Some combine far-right nationalism with ultra-liberal economic policies. This can be seen in sections of the AfD, or around the Bardella wing of *Rassemblement national* in France. In other places there can be what can be termed welfare chauvinism, such as that practised by PiS in Poland. Geert Wilders in Netherlands, and the Le Pen wing of RN appear to be moving in that direction.

Thanks to the help of the ruling class, the far-right has managed to achieve a normalisation in recent years, a key pillar of which has been the varnishing over of its anti-semitism. After October 7th, far-right forces have joined demonstrations against anti-semitism, and several far-right organisations participated in a conference in Israel on anti-semitism. They have turned their vile prejudices instead against other ethnic groups and the left.

The same is happening as far as gender based violence is concerned. In Germany recently the case of Collien Fernades, a well-known actress discovered that her ex-partner had been widely distributing AI-driven online abuse about her. When this was revealed #MeToo protests hit Hamburg, but Federal Chancellor Friedrich Merz used the case of this rich white man who had committed sexual violence against his former partner, turning it into an attack on immigrants. When there is no left opposing this normalisation people increasingly vote for the far-right parties, not despite, but because of their politics, and that includes a layer of working-class people.

This has been a general trend in many countries. First it was more affluent voters who supported the right-wing populist parties, only then did they make inroads into the

working class. This happened with Trump 1.0, then Trump 2.0, during Brexit and now with parties such as Reform, AfD and Vox. .

The leading German labour sociologist, [Klaus Dörre](#), pointed to the emergence of a far-right poll in the factory councils of the automobile industry. This implies that there is a layer of men who have lost out through neoliberalism, and who fear for their future. In this way support is stronger amongst heterosexual men, particularly from younger, less educated and rural demographics.

It is not so easy to say that the youth is turning to the far-right. The process is more polarised. What was seen in recent EU, regional and national elections is that far-right parties have scored strongly among young people. In the Spanish State, support for the far-right has exploded among people under 35, from 4% in 2019 to 30% last September. There is though an extreme gender gap while 40% of young men vote far right, only 20% of young women do.

In Italy though, the youth is not strongly behind Meloni. The proportion of youth who vote for her is lower than that of the overall electorate. And in the recent referendum, 70% of young people voted no. against her.

Nevertheless the “bro vote”, the youth gender gap is important. Young men, particularly white heterosexual men, are the prime target for further far-right growth among the working class, and this youth gender gap is strongly driven by the anti-feminist backlash, and the resulting rising misogyny in sexism among young men. In Spain, this goes hand in hand with at least a certain layer of Francoist nostalgia among young men. This has been prepared by the effects of neoliberalism, where lower class consciousness and levels of organization on the one hand and stronger individualization and competition on the other have contributed to a mindset of the entrepreneur of the self, which has made it easier for reactionaries to push ideas around a zero sum mindset and present aggression violence and hate as legitimate answers against anything and anyone that they present as threatening the status of young men.

In countries like Italy and Austria, the question of right-wing and far-right alliances has become more prominent. They have already existed since the 1990s. But now in the Spanish State there is the prospect of such an alliance for 2027. Elsewhere though in Belgium, France and Germany, there is still an official firewall against the far-right, a *cordonne-sanitaire*, but which is more rhetoric than anything else. While for now, the traditional right-wing parties still present themselves as the main protection against the far-right, they are already adopting their policies and are more open to far-right forces on

the international level. As part of the trend in which support for the traditional parties of the centre is shrinking, the right wing is losing voters to far-right opponents, pointing towards an increased likelihood for far-right/right-wing coalition governments in the future.

There are already signs of movements in that direction. While the ruling class may still not be ready to put the far-right in government, a section is preparing the ground. The Bardella camp of RN is pulling together other forces together with some billionaire support. In Germany, *Die Familienunternehmer* (Association of Family Entrepreneurs) have opened the door for contact with the AfD, while the CDU leadership have doubled financial support for a think tank that advocates for cooperation with the AfD.

For now if the current level of oppression, repression and authoritarian measures is deemed adequate, the ruling elite may hold back from further alliances, or the use of street violence with racist mobs and auxiliary fascist groups to secure the rule of profit and of the ruling class in power. There are signs that the far-right is reaching its limits in some countries. The AfD has complained about slower growth over the last year and Trump's increasingly erratic approach has played a negative role in Italy, Spain and Hungary.

Ndumiso

In discussing the situation across the Africa continent there is a real danger of generalizing too much and painting all the countries with the same brush, not analyzing each country based on its own merits. There are important processes occurring across different countries.

A number of regimes use extremely authoritarian measures to stay in power. The recent elections in Tanzania, Mozambique and Zimbabwe where clearly the majority of people felt they were rigged. Even before the elections different actions were taken that amounted to voter suppression.

At the same time military juntas have taken power through coups in many other countries particularly in West Africa.

One way of categorising these regimes would be to divide them according to whether or not they came to power as a result of former Liberation Movements. Zanu PF came to power in Zimbabwe 46 years ago. It has managed to stay in power since then by sidelining the voters, attacking its opponents, and simply pressurising voters. On the

other hand there is DR Congo where almost immediately after gaining independence from Belgium, the government was toppled.

But when a deeper look is taken, whichever category a country falls into, it is clear that whatever has happened is a response to their colonial history and today's imperialist interventions. In the three decades 1960-90 there were 120 coup attempts across Africa, just over half of which succeeded. Now the number exceeds 200. In many cases these coups took place under the direct influence of the CIA and other imperialist bodies, who have an active interest in maintaining control over the natural resources and the labor within these countries.

Another important aspect is how the liberation struggles were conducted. In many cases a small educated elite played a large role, and they would usually rise to lead the movements. They played an important role in championing independence from colonialism. But the contradiction was that once in power this layer, essentially a petty-bourgeois layer, was very susceptible to the trappings of the capitalist system. So instead of following through on the radical calls for democracy and a complete change in the economic structures, or even for redrawing the borders, they continued to use the same borders with the same military structures that had been imposed by the colonialists. They insisted on maintaining nationalist policies after independence as an attempt to consolidate their power

sual layer and immediately upon coming into power in most countries were instead of for example continuing the you know the radical calls not just for democracy but then also for you know a complete change in the economic economic structures of their countries or redrawing the borders of those countries instead they kept on going on the same using the same borders using the similar sort of military structures that had been imposed by the colonialists and by insisting on nationalism after independence this basically was an attempt to consolidate their power. They hoped they would strengthen their positions, develop and become the new rulers of the entire country.

This dealt a serious blow to the radical nature of the liberation movements of the 1950-60s. The nationalist outlooks of the petty-bourgeois layers cut across the potential for the anti-imperialist pan-Africa movement. By the 1970-80s the rhetoric of these leaders had changed from anti-imperialism to narrow nationalism, reflecting their own interests. .

While there are important differences between countries, one of the issues that comes up time and again is this attempt by the former liberation leaders and the new elites that

arose in the 60s and 70s and so forth to double down on their role as the leaders of the country.

One of the methods they use is the carrying out of coup d'états to maintain their hold on power. The repeated influence of the military, which in most cases plays a very destructive role is obvious. They may say they do, but they are not acting in the interests of the masses, even though they often use mass uprisings and upheavals as an excuse for a section to take over political power as they did recently in Madagascar.

In 2017 in Zimbabwe the huge wave of mass uprisings was hijacked by the military elites who are still in power today. They are currently carrying out another coup this time a constitutional coup in which they are amending the constitution to remove direct presidential elections, in effect allowing the current president to stay in power for much longer.

In Mali, since 2022 when the military launched a coup with the support of Russian mercenaries essentially ending the influence of French imperialism in the country it is difficult to estimate what is actually happening as political activity has been essentially banned. The vacuum it seems has been fueled by various jihadis and separatists, who it seems are on the verge of taking the country over.

In Tanzania too, shortly before the elections opposition leaders were arrested so the masses are left without political options. In such situations, people can go out to protest and fight for something better but in many instances they have no vehicle to pursue their interests.

Polls in South Africa suggest that up to 40% of the eligible voters don't actually have any political parties that they feel they can trust, so they won't vote for any party. This is also seen with the drop in trade union membership. This is despite an increase in the number of workers going on strike, but they don't wait for the trade unions as they've been betrayed and let down so many times before.

Something similar is taking place in Nigeria, where the leaders of the trade movement are often pushed by the masses to go for a general strike and then end up postponing or canceling that strike at the last minute after making a deal with government forces.

Evan

Fascism is in many ways defined by the presence of paramilitary fascist forces based on mass movements that are used to destroy the left, the trade union movement. This is

clearly not present right now but I think the logic of the situation points to it becoming a possibility. It is important to be clear on how to fight this threat, how to fight the rise of fascism. There are two failed strategies.

One is popular frontism, that is broad unity with liberals and sections of the bourgeoisie to fight the rise of fascism. This has been a complete failure, as it does not develop a strong alternative to the conditions that fuel the far-right right. The other is to rely on the bourgeois state to act against the far right, to disempower it, or prosecute leaders of the far right. The limitations of that approach are seen in the US in real time. For years, Trump and his entire movement were prosecuted by the bourgeois state, by the courts, including the January 6th putchists. Not only did these actions not stop the Trumpists, they may even have given the far-right legitimacy with the ability to show they really were against the establishment. And of course, when Trump came to power he pardoned everyone.

What is needed is a completely independent working class response able to present revolutionary socialist alternatives to the current system. There has been a failure of the left to offer solutions to the problems facing the working class, including all aspects of oppression. This is one side of the problem. The other is that, not just in the US, but globally the working class does not have real strong independent institutions, with left organisations either hanging on the coat-tails of the bourgeois parties, or simply acting as sectarians, recruiting and doing activism without focusing on the building up and strengthening of the elementary organizations and institutions of the working class.

These are the building blocks upon which any resistance to fascism will take place. What is needed is for an organization, mass organizations that put forward a real class-based perspective for unity around a programme that can actually show how all elements of the working class have a shared interest in uniting together for socialism against capitalism to defeat these far-right forces.

Eli

If fascism today has not developed to the stage of mass violence, it is impossible to ignore that the increase in far-right and fascist ideology is accompanied by a rise in fascist terror not just in the US, but globally. It is usually dismissed by the establishment and its media as some form of a nihilist breakdown of society, or as meaningless attacks.

The far-right has a long history of such actions such as the 1980 Bologna massacre, the 1995 Oklahoma city bombing, the 2019 El Paso and Columbine shootings. There is an increase in the frequency of mass shootings, with a common thread that most of those carrying out the attacks are not simply inspired by nihilist fascism, but they often have direct links with the police and intelligence apparatuses. Those guilty of the Bologna massacre had links to fascist groups within Italian intelligence. This is also true in the US, where many of the far-right online forums which inspire these incidents have either been run by, or infiltrated by federal agents. In this way they are able to conduct what they call the 'strategy of tension'.

These actions serve to heighten the sense of chaos in society that worries the petty-bourgeois, and a section of the working class. It drives them to seek some sort of stability, and in the absence of an alternative turn to the right-populists and far-right. Although these horrific events are a factor, they so far are just part of the far-right threat and should be part of any analysis. In particular, they have the potential in the longer term to directly feed into a mass terror and paramilitary wing of the far-right.

These actions are not restricted to the US. In recent months there have been bombing and mass shootings in Turkey, Russia, Sweden, Brazil and elsewhere.

Mauro

In Latin America, with Milei in Argentina and the election in Chile which saw the victory of José Antonio Kast, the ruling class as well as reformists and 'progressive governments' are talking about the rise of the far-right and fascism as if they already control the situation. It is important that there is a correct analysis of the situation though, because if it is true that the fascists have won, the conclusion will need to be made that there it is not possible to do anything to change the situation in the next period.

This is not the real situation. Before the first round of the Peruvian Presidential election the ruling class and its media were all predicting that it was a race between two far-right candidates. But the working class and poor intervened, pushing support for the left candidate Roberto Sanchez, with the real possibility he could win in the second round. This demonstrates that the situation, particularly after the arrest of Pedro Castillo who won the 2022 election is more complex.

There is a political crisis developing in all the countries of Latin America, but the attempts by the ruling elite to use Milei as an example of a super-powerful figure does

not match reality. A survey conducted in Argentina in March showed that Milei now had the support of 36% - more than a ten percent fall from 48% last year. This appears to be an accurate reflection of the reality in Argentina, and the declining capacity that Milei still has to implement his policies. The main problem for Argentina, as for other countries in Latin America is the weakness of the left.

On 19 February, the trade union federation Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) organised a general strike against the proposed reform of the Labour law. This had widespread support managing to mobilise almost 95% of union members. But the union is led by Peronists. Even though the Labour law went through the Congress, the CGT leadership failed to develop the movement against it. This is the reality of the left in Argentina, but elsewhere the leadership of the movement is not interested in the development of class struggle.

In Chile after the big demonstrations in 2019 against the right-wing government and its neoliberal reforms, the leftist Gabriel Boric won the 2021 election, defeating Kast. Although Kast has taken power, it is still too early to see how his regime will develop. What is interesting is that in 2021, Kast fought a hard right campaign focusing very strongly on the need to attack women's rights. In the 2025 election, Kast played down the gender issue in his campaigning in an attempt to gain more female votes, and in part relying on the propaganda of femo-nationalist groups.

These examples of how the far-right is developing in Latin America. Whether in Chile where Kast does not have solid support, and Argentina under Milei, it is not accurate to speak of consolidated bonapartist regimes, even though elements of fascism and bonapartism are present. There is no complete brake preventing class struggle.

The situation in El Salvador though is worse. The regime there under Nayib Bukele can be described as Bonapartist with its 'megaprisons' and the campaign against the gangs. As the gangs are closely linked with drug-trafficking, the jailing of all gang-members has enabled the Bukele regime to build support. As a consequence, there is now the proposal in Congress to approve the indefinite election of Bukele.

The far-right is attempting to organise internationally - to establish a 'reactionary international'. The convening of the "Shield of America" summit involving twelve Latin American and Caribbean countries which met at Trump's Florida base is an example at state level. Russia has been at the centre of other attempts. **In 2025 in St Petersburg's Mariinsky Palace the oligarch financed "Paladins International Sovereigntist League"**

was formed by fascist parties from more than twenty countries, who were welcomed by the head of the Russian Church and leading figures from Putin's party. They included Spanish Falanges, Mexico's UNR, the AfD, BNP and fascists from Hungary, France, as well of course ideologies from the Kremlin including the fascist Dugan. Not hedging its bets, in early 2026 the pro-Kremlin "Just Russia" party established a "Sovintern", united they claim 100 various pro-Kremlin parties - neo-Stalinists, former liberation movements such as the Sandinistas and red-brown groups such as Galloway's 'Workers' Party'.

A significant development in response to this was the convening in Barcelona of the "Global Progressive Mobilisation" by Pedro Sanchez involving the Presidents of Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and key US democrats. At best, though, this can be seen as an attempt to coordinate between governments, as the reformist left are not genuinely interested in developing a movement against the far-right, hoping instead that it will be defeated in the next election. It is though important in drawing attention to the dangers of the far-right and fascism, and although they themselves are not capable of developing a viable alternative, it turns attention to the need for developing the independence of the working class and to the use of tactics like Argentina's general strike and the call by Chilean feminists to oppose Kast's attacks on women's rights.

Katriona (Catriona)

The two-week long protests and blockades in Ireland were extremely disruptive and provoked by the 28% increase in the price of petrol and diesel. Consisting mainly of an alliance of truck drivers, farmers and business owners who work in transport organized a really effective blockade of infrastructure all over the south of Ireland, with attempts to spread it to the North too. Not only were heavy tractors used to block Dublin's city centre, but also the country's main oil refinery. Hundreds of thousands participated in demonstrations. These demands exposed Ireland's dependence on fossil fuels.

Although the blockades were led by people driving big trucks and tractors, mainly farmers and hauliers, they very quickly snowballed and were joined by thousands of people. A large proportion of petrol stations were basically empty, so people couldn't get fuel for their cars. Yet the response of the state was extremely repressive, especially for a country which doesn't have a, until now, a very repressive state.

Yet pepper spray was used on protesters and the army called in at the oil refinery. Although it wasn't used, the very threat enraged protesters. On top of that stories were spread in the media trying to undermine the protests about people missing hospital appointments because they were stuck in the blockade. There was a rural element to

the people engaging in the protests, people who are let down by the healthcare system on a daily basis because they must always travel for their hospital appointments. This further enraged the protesters.

In the end the government was under intense pressure to give into these demands and announced a package worth just over half a billion euro to help small businesses, with a very small concession for ordinary people with a small reduction in the fuel cost.

Although initially the protest was led by the drivers and small business owners, very soon other leaders emerged. Some of the more high-profile ones were connected to the organized far-right. One of the main protesters speaking to media had in the past made rape jokes about Greta Thunberg. Another spoke of the role of women to breed. They were accompanied by established far-right politicians.

Some left groups did attempt to intervene based on the fact that many of the people involved were there because they just hate the government and the existence of an intense cost of living crisis. For many it wasn't just about the truckers or price of fuel. It was about the price of everything. But when some of the more high profile left activists tried to make an appearance, they were abused. There was a very right-populist element with lots of Irish tricolor flags.

The response used was to make a public statement supporting the right to protest, defending these protests and calling out the police and government repression, but also calling out the fact that some of the leaders were part of the far right and pointing to their record. But a more developed intervention might be more suitable in the future, as it is very likely that the kind of protests that will happen in the future will be similar, petty bourgeois in nature but attracting a lot of ordinary workers who are just frustrated and fed up with things.

Karlo

In a protest in Croatia, the main trade unions organised a protest to raise the average wage from about 1400 euros to the EU average of 2200 euros. In reality it demonstrated the weakness of workers' organisation in the country, as although they can organise a public demonstration, they had no intention of taking it further by organising in the workplaces for a strike, or even general strike. They try to stay within the rules but in doing so they end up disorganising the movement. This adds to the crisis of the left in Croatia, where even the more radical left seem incapable of relating to the actual problems faced by the masses.

This appears to be a general problem globally. As capitalism has developed, particularly over the past 60-70 years, it has developed a modern society that is much more bureaucratized. In comparison to the trade union and left organisations of the inter-war period, despite the problems, they were more active, prepared to enter militant struggle as protagonists. When the nature of trade unions today is examined, it is seen that they too are affected by this, they accept the restrictions that the capitalist state places on them which are intended to limit any radical actions. The whole of today's left is further affected by this as, while it is necessary to work in the trade unions, the need to break out of these top-down imposed limitations is often forgotten.

In this sense the left needs to change its whole approach. It is not enough to measure success by membership numbers or election results as has become the norm. Success needs to be measured by how successful the left is in building the struggle and mobilizing workers' organisations to lead the struggle of all oppressed.

Marcos

What is being seen at the moment is an international offensive by capital, they are on the warpath against the working class and the masses in general of the whole world. That is the general framework at this stage, it is not fascism as such as that requires the destruction or annihilation of the whole working class. But the window may be small to oppose this, but how far they are prepared to go is seen by the genocide in Gaza, which is why it is critical to support the struggle of the Palestinian masses.

The global offensive manifests itself in three ways. Firstly, there is the development of imperialist war with the US/Israeli attack on Iran, the threats against and blockade of Cuba, and the kidnapping of President Maduro. Secondly, there is the endless economic crisis that is sinking millions into poverty across the global south, and increasingly in Europe, the US and other western countries. This is worsened by the continued attacks on worker rights. Thirdly, and not least, is the very grave environmental catastrophe and climate crisis.

All of these elements are clearly visible in those governments we describe as right-populist/far-right, and it is as working people realize their real intentions that they will begin to impose limitations on how far they can go.

This is already being seen to some degree in the struggles against ICE in the US, in the protest to commemorate the end of the Argentinian Junta, the largest for some years. The 8 March demonstration in Argentina was also the biggest in the last few years. In a

distorted way it is also seen in the results of the Peruvian election, where under the threat of a second round between two far-right wingers, a figure who is seen as from the left jumped from sixth place to end up in the second round.

It has to be recognised that the right-wing advances are being made because of the failure of the reformist parties in the past, such as Peronism in Argentina and Chavismo in Venezuela. Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece also collapsed, because it is impossible to have a capitalism in which everyone wins. For the capitalists to boost or even maintain their profits, it is necessary to attack the working class and sometimes even smash it.

In this situation the left needs to overcome its sectarianism and to work as revolutionaries closely with all the oppressed to progress and push forward the feminist, anti-racist, climate struggles, even though at this stage they do not have the final aim of creating a socialist society they are usually anti-imperialists, fighting for human rights and democracy. The left needs to learn how to engage with other struggles or in other spaces so that genuine working class organisations to unite men, women and youth in common struggle can be built around a socialist, feminist political strategy capable of challenging capitalism.

Petr

A new government was elected in Czechia in the autumn of 2025, comprising two far-right parties, with another larger far-right party in opposition. The liberal parties and the left wing have been totally wiped out having themselves adopted nationalism.

In the former Soviet bloc states of eastern and central Europe, a strong sentiment developed after the restoration of capitalism that they had simply become colonies of Western capital. This mood against the status quo has been exploited by politicians in Poland, by Andrej Babis' party ANO in Czechia, and Orban in Hungary, with barely any opposition from the left and trade unions. As a consequence a layer of working class and poor have been taken in by the rhetoric. .

Now the far-right government simply pushes through the legislation it wants with barely any discussion, in much the same way as Trump pushes decisions through. They are, so far too scared to launch an all out attack on working people, so they use the "salami tactic", - a slice of attack here, a slice of attack there.

Even this provoked a mass demonstration of a quarter of a million people, but as it was organised by the liberal opposition, it presented no real alternative or programme. This allows the government to carry on unencumbered. On his first day in office, the far-right environment minister declared that measures to stop climate change have been stopped. They are stopping finance for sex-education in schools, for vaccination programmes.

What is important despite the hopeless liberal opposition, there have been youth protests, often with many different political views, But out of that there is a new trend developing. This year there was an important intervention on 8 March, one of the biggest in Prague in recent history when 500 participated in an “anti pro-life” demo, outnumbering the pro-life side. This is another example of how reaction provokes counter-reaction, but it also demonstrates the need for an intersectional approach. Increasing participants in anti-fascist and climate protests are seeing the need to follow the example of the IWD protests. Discussions are starting about how to spread the protests, and how to engage with the wider working class.

The class is still very disorientated. The polarisation in society is not between left and right, between the working class and the bourgeoisie, but is a polarisation between different elements of the ruling elite. So the working class is not yet recognising the need to act independently in defence of its own interests. There is though a layer of youth that is radicalizing, beginning to reject the perspective of joining one or other of the ruling camps, and this may start the process of changing the balance of forces.

Paul

It is certainly true that in countries like Hungary, Poland, Czechia and Slovakia as capitalism was restored they orientated more towards western capital than happened in Russia. After the shock therapy of the 1990s, neoliberalism was the only policy. When the social-democrats, usually former Stalinists, came to power they continued this approach. Key sectors of the economy in these countries were integrated into the value chains of West European capitalism. Bourgeois democracy depending on the rule of law created the stable framework for foreign investors to operate.

After 2008's global financial crisis discontent against neoliberalism and austerity grew, generally reflected as movements against corruption as a reaction against the effects of capitalist restoration. In the absence of independent working class parties and very often when the left, the social democrats were in power and had become completely compromised, the right populist forces were able to redirect the social discontent away

from confrontation with capitalism and focus on targets such as foreign capital, European Union institutions and the domestic liberal elites.

They were not questioning capitalism as such and when in power they started restructuring the state, bringing key institutions including the judiciary and the media under strict political party control. In Poland and Hungary the regime aimed to reduce the dominance of foreign capital in the economy, supposedly to defend so-called national sovereignty. Political patronage developed by placing loyalists within state linked firms and financial institutions and state resources were channeled into their own pockets. The distinction between state party and capital became blurred.

The banking sector which was previously dominated by foreign capital was restructured. In Poland this repolonization of banks was a voluntary nationalization intended to consolidate support in society through what, for want of a better word, targeted redistribution policies to lean on a strata of society.

In Poland, the "Law and Justice" party (PiS) came to power on the basis of a mass movement of the organised working class. The trade union leaders failed to take the movement forward into the general strike which was definitely on the cards. This allowed the right-wing populists to channel this to win the election, but only after having to make concessions to the working class. It lowered the retirement age, introduced child benefit and a 13th and later a 14th pension payment. In this way the regime built a base of support among the rural and working class poor.

In Hungary, Viktor Orban's Fidesz party came to power after more general protests against corruption. Although the protests were against neoliberalism and there was a lot of discontent, there was no comparable mass working class mobilisation of trade unions similar to that in Poland. This meant that the targeted redistribution policies in Hungary, often called "perverse redistribution" moved money from the bottom to the top. Unemployment benefits were cut to last only three months, the shortest duration in Europe and the poor were forced onto a kind of public work scheme at very low pay.

So if in Poland there was a Robin Hood taking a small bit from the rich to give to the poor, in Hungary, the Sheriff of Nottingham robbed the poor to give to the rich. In Poland there was a sort of social populism with elements of neo-Keynesist economic policies, while in Hungary there was a national neoliberalism leaning more on the middle class.

In Poland a relatively new party is *Konfederacja* - essentially a merger of several smaller neo-fascist parties, that has been gaining support and now threatens to replace PiS in

the polls. A smaller split is more openly fascist - between the two they currently poll at 20%. The danger is that in Poland, as in several other countries of this region, there is a large rural petty bourgeoisie and semi-proletariat in the countryside, while a large part of the economy is dominated by small companies, self-employed people, family firms or sole proprietors. Support for *Konfederacja* is particularly strong among this layer, attracted in part by its libertarian economic policies similar to those of Milei. Young men are also attracted by its misogynist approach.

The other important factor driving support for *Konfederacja* is the growing disillusionment with the liberal coalition that took power after defeating PiS in 2023. It hasn't been able to turn back the structural changes implemented by PiS, punish those responsible for corruption, or overcome the veto of the President who is still from PiS to limit the role of the Catholic church. Many young people voted against PiS in 2023 wanting changes to the law on abortion rights, but that too has not happened.

This means that *Konfederacja's* appeal is to different layers - there's a socially conservative, reactionary layer, there are those attracted to libertarianism but who are maybe more progressive on social questions like abortion and the church. The latter ignore that reactionary side of *Konfederacja* because of its economic program

This is where the danger lies in Hungary. There are expectations of a break with Orbánism now and the real danger is that if this doesn't happen there will be the growth of the far-right. Support for Peter Magyar isn't uniform. There are former Fidesz supporters who are angry about corruption, conservative youth who are angry with the lack of economic prospects, but also more left wing or left leaning voters who voted for Magyar pragmatically.

Valery

In discussing the ideology of the right populism and the far right, it is clear that the reactionary social position in terms of women's rights, LGBTQ+ and trans rights could well be the breaking point for many youth who are initially attracted to them. The fact that Kast in Chile and Magyar in Hungary both played down these questions in their election campaigns is significant. The expectations that after Magyar's victory there will be no more bans on Budapest's Pride march will be high.

Another important aspect of right-populism and the far-right is their push for militarisation and war. The explosion of military brutality, and the waste of expenditure on arms - whether driven by the Russian imperialist invasion of Ukraine, Netanyahu's

genocide in Gaza and expansionist drive in the West Bank, Lebanon and so on, Trump's war on Iran or the continuing war in Sudan may initially cause shock are issues that will result in a deepening radicalisation of the working class and youth.

As the old saying goes "Violence begets violence". Even in the aftermath of war, the violence continues. One of the reasons why the Kremlin resists ending the war is because it fears what will happen when the 3-400, 000 troops return home having been brutalised by war. By mid-2025 even before many had returned, over 300 people had been killed. Most of these were women and children. Against the background of the huge increase in misogynist legislation this decade there is the real potential for resistance by women and youth as the violence escalates.

Decades of neoliberal austerity, privatisation and the hollowing out of public services such as forestry management, fire control, flood protection compounded by the increasingly rapid escalation of climate change will be another huge challenge for the far right. Their blanket refusal to recognise climate change and in many cases promote policies extremely damaging to the climate and environment is another issue that can provoke resistance.

Even in those countries in which Bonapartism has been consolidated these are issues that still cause serious outbreaks of opposition. Most advanced has been the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in Iran. Siberia in March was shaken by mass unrest after the authorities decided to cull cattle they claimed were ill. Dozens of police and riot troops were needed to quell the protests.

The nature of political work when Bonapartism is strongly consolidated such as in China, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia has a different character than that in which elements of bourgeois democracy still exist. Due to the repression of organisation, now with internet shutdowns every effort has to be made to maintain political discussion and organisation in highly conspiratorial conditions. As discontent spills out in practically spontaneous outbursts, workers' organisations need to be prepared to intervene.

But today, even when Bonapartism is developing, class struggle is still a determining factor. Bonapartist trends can be checked as has happened recently in Hungary and Peru.

There will be an understandable reaction from many activists that unity is needed to oppose right-populists and the far-right. This can take different forms - from 'tactical voting' in England where Labour and the Greens compete with each other to see who is

better placed to beat Reform, or where left forces agree in advance to line up in support of opposition bourgeois candidates - this 'lesser evil' tactic has been used in Hungary, Turkey, Russia and elsewhere. Faced with a second round choice between the socialist Seguro and the far-right Chaga Ventura in Portugal's Presidential election voters from other parties rallied around Seguro.

The truth is though, whichever of these electoral tactics succeeds, it only delays the day of reckoning, as the new government still works within the constraints of capitalism and will therefore be unable to resolve the underlying causes for the growth of the far-right.

As the far-right strengthens and Bonapartism tendencies become more widespread the use of violence increases dramatically. Even aside from the question of wars, state violence will be an increasing feature of life as is already seen in the actions of the French riot police and ICE in the US. Regime violence was brutal when faced with the GenZ uprisings in Bangladesh, Nepal, Kenya and elsewhere. When official state organs are not involved, the far-right can whip up violent gangs to attack immigrants, strikes, protests by women and the LGBTQ+.

Violence is after all a means of existence for capitalism. In many countries different wings of the bourgeois use gangster methods against opponents. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, over 100 leading business and political figures have been poisoned, hung or fallen from tall buildings as 'suicide' has occurred. They have frequently used, and will continue to do so, such methods against workers when they move into action.

Discussions will be needed about how the working class can defend itself and its activities from such violent attacks depending on concrete conditions in each country.

In many countries, the existence of Bonapartist regimes is not just a legacy of former colonial rule, but a means by which the current imperialist powers maintain their control over the nominally independent states. This in no way ensures stability. Bangladesh gained independence in the early 1970s, initially under the influence of the general anti-imperialist movement of that time. Elements of bourgeois democracy, and partial nationalisation were implemented, but the country quickly returned to one-party rule.

Over the next three decades there were at least 29 attempted coup d'états, some successful before an unstable democracy was established. The level of corruption was so great it resulted in the GenZ uprising in 2024. During the uprising the youth declared they had no confidence in any of the political forces, and wanted to change the system. When the new election arrived, the party set up by the students abandoned its

independence and joined a block with the right-wing Islamists They won six places in Parliament but at the cost of the support of a significant layer of women.

This raises questions of how the left should act in such situations, and how it presents its programme in the fight for democracy. One part of the left succumbs to illusions in bourgeois democracy. Another dismisses such struggles as conflicts between different wings of the bourgeois. It is, they say, enough to argue for a socialist transformation.

Parts that relate to next discussion.

we have to have it's not enough to go there and say we need a social society which of course we do we have to have a set of demands a set of ideas that can relate to the everyday experience that the people involved give them agency in the form of organization and to establish a genuine alternative a

Paul said comrades in eastern Europe were often dismissed the former CWI leadership never understood what a colored revolution was about they always saw it as a geopolitical conflict rather than a genuine uprising of people fed up with the way that things had run on wanting a change in the direction of genuine democracy and so we never had any discussion about how you pose democratic demands in these situations for what example we've used in this part of the world the idea of a constituent assembly but the bourgeois use that as well the party replica in this country which is a liberal bourgeois party in 1990 and the Gorbachev's regime the leader of the party demanded a 500 day program of mass privatization everything should be privatized within 500 days it presents itself now as a liberal social democratic type of party half recognized half not by the regime and so on but they argue for a constituent assembly but they argue for one which is a meeting of representatives of each of the current liberal bourgeois parties to divide up the role between them now obviously that's not what we're talking about we when we've raised it we've said it should be a genuine elected representatives of the of work is through their enterprises of workers through their residents places and so if the bourgeois can elect a few will let them elect a few representatives but the vast majority will be ordering working people who would decide what sort of society they would want to live in now that's not a socialist demand it's a democratic demand it's a

transitional democratic demand but it's one that concentrates the attention of people who are fighting for a genuine change well this is something that we can fight for this is something we can do and I do think we need to discuss in much more that such issues and so on and it comes onto the question that

Paul is just commenting on as well as he united from now united from idea has been completely distorting in my opinion in the old CWI when the British section formed an alliance for electoral purposes with the SWP now I'm not saying that the tactic was wrong although I have big doubts about it but then Peter Taf called it well this is united front of a special sort trying to lean back on sort of the proper Leninist tradition of whether united front really was but no united front is how you relate to the mass organizations of the working class and as a number of comrades have commented Paul has just said again

Carlo has spoken about the situation in Croatia and a number of the other each European countries and so on the situation is the same in a whole number of countries in Asia and to a degree in Africa where the working class if it is organized the organizations are very weak and they are quite often NGO-ized in other words the best activist to be they're living on grants from the western bodies are basically at best social democratic and they argue for reforms and not for a genuine revolutionary approach to the change of society and I do understand as well that the NGO-ization of the labour movement is affected a number of countries in what we call the west as well so in those situations where the working class doesn't have is not an independent organized force I do agree with there is a need as an artist organization to build or to rebuild genuine working class organizations I would return actually to what Lenin said and what is to be done when he criticised the what he called the economist

at the time but basically the reformists who worked in the trade unions and they only ever spoke about debt reforms and demands related to the trade union itself and we see that today very much so in a whole number of countries where under the influence of the international bodies trade unions are we can only fight for wages for workers rights and so on it's not our job to fight for women's rights for the LGBT to fight for war to fight for climate to fight climate change not for climate change and so on but Lenin said if you're a genuine revolutionary working in a trade union you should be fighting for all the oppressed that's the only way you could be a revolutionary in a trade union and that's what we have to do is to do that now in that sense what I agree that we need to rebuild and I agree also that if possible we should be working with other left I have to say the condition is the other left understand that that is necessary because if they do not understand that if they do not understand that we need to build this intersectional

approach we will remain in the old if you like ditch with walls on two sides that we can't get out of and we can't mobilise the wider layer of the genuine working class it answered the moment organised in a way and in order to do that you then have to have the political demands as well we have to have an ideological battle to explain what socialism really is and what it should be and what we what we would like to see and at the same time we have to link what people are fighting for today with that that approach to what we see as a future in society so I do think the question is a little bit more complicated than just rebuilding the working class and I do agree that that is a key task but it has to be done on a genuine political revolutionary basis and if we limit ourselves because we tried to work with other lefts who do not understand that question then that is going to block our way here forward so again I suspect I'm over time as well I'm sorry everybody but I do hope comrades have got something out of this discussion we'll try and document it in some way in the next in the next period maybe not this week but in the next week or so and hopefully we can carry on with some deeply discussions on other aspects of this question

w the movement in opposition is developing, normally that would be a real gap in an introduction, we need to discuss that a lot more, because there is big movements in the Gen Z movements, for example, that are taken place, the trade union struggles that are beginning to open up in some countries and so on, the very important, what has happened in southern Europe, in Spain and in Italy, and so on, in particular I'm thinking about the situation, even in Greece, there's signs of something that develop in there, that's very important, we do discuss those issues, that's one question, the second is, and how do we, what program do we put, it's not enough to go and say you're a fascist, we're fighting fashion, we have to put a positive program on democratic rights, and it's very, very clear, however much people mock us, given the situation with young men and so on, any of our demands have to be viewed from a very, I don't like the word, but it's a word that actually describes what we need to do, we have to do things in an intersectional way, we have to combine everything that's prepared to fight, even if there's a section of the older working class, particularly male, who are resistant to this, we cannot let them hold us back, we have to, we have to mobilize those that are prepared to fight, you know what it takes forward, I spoke a little longer, I'm sorry, Andy, but I hope it's been useful and raised some points for the discussion and comments to think about.

the point is, you know, the lessons of what's happened with your party in Corbin, Podemos here as well, one of the things that we're, it struck me when Valerie and Paul were speaking, is that we have to raise the banner of socialism, because people say all the problems, people are angry about all the problems, but no, you know, major parties are putting forward a clear left socialist alternative, and where we've got, you know, obviously we're doing it in Ireland, where we've got points of support in the parliament and councils, we have to continue doing that, but I think it's a popularized idea of socialism is vital, you know, to our movement.

so I think that you know it's there's still a lot of room in order for us to discuss some of these processes that have led to where we are now but then also I think the discussion is still necessary to take us forward in terms of what then our responses should be

I didn't mention in my lead off but we I could have spent a lot of time looking at this question historically several comrades have mentioned it I think the problem of the United Front today is who do we propose the United Front with because several comrades have correctly pointed out what is missing is left wing or is left wing or working class parties but definitely we should adopt to the method and the approach of the United Front so that means we have to have a non-sectarian approach to activists and other groups and remember that the United Front is not a deal done at the top between leaders it's practically united action from below and I agree with the point that Val made it should be an intersectional approach although I don't particularly like that word and I think the United Front should always have been an intersectional approach other comrades stressed importance of building independent working class parties with socialist with socialist program and that's absolutely correct I would say that that socialist program it should be based on on the approach of a transitional program with transitional demands leading up to drawing the conclusion for a break on capitalism and the social transformation of society also I agree with John that we also have that answer or we need party that answers the right wing narrative which glorifies the mythical past of greatness that never existed for example in Britain why in earth Britain was called Great Britain in the first place I will never know because it was never great John also mentioned gains of the far right in Durham which was a former mining and strong a wealth now Farage and reform are now in power there and I think this shows the danger that it's not only people who would traditionally in the past vote for the conservatives that are supporting Farage now but also people who in the past would traditionally support labour but their their dissolution they they feel isolated they feel ignored by the mainstream parties and it's been fertile ground in the absence of at least independent independent working class party with a socialist program and it was struggle for real change it's been fertile ground then for the far right and the right wing

populists yeah I think I'm maybe finished there perhaps and I don't know if I've covered all the points I wanted to make but I'll finish there and I'll let Val kind of mop up and deal with all the rest okay thank you Paul thank you thank you are you yeah thank you so much Paul I start in the same way as

April 26, 2026

General

- Discussion focused on the rise of right-wing populism and authoritarianism, particularly in the context of Bonapartism and Fascism.
- Participants shared insights on the political landscape in various countries, including Hungary, Poland, and the US.
- Concerns were raised about the impact of neoliberal policies and the failure of leftist movements to effectively counter the rise of the far-right.
- Emphasis on the need for a united front against fascism and the importance of building independent working-class organizations.

Decisions

- Continue discussions on the implications of right-wing populism and authoritarianism in various regions.
- Document the key points from the discussion for future reference and analysis.
- Explore the possibility of forming alliances with other leftist groups while maintaining a clear revolutionary agenda.

Tasks

- Comrades to gather and share resources on the historical context of Bonapartism and Fascism.
- Develop a strategy for engaging with grassroots movements and building a united front against the far-right.
- Prepare a summary of the discussion to be shared with participants and the wider organization.

Next Steps

- Schedule follow-up discussions to delve deeper into specific regional issues and strategies.
- Encourage comrades to share their experiences and insights from local movements to inform the broader discussion.
- Plan for a future meeting to assess progress on the tasks outlined and refine strategies as needed.

