

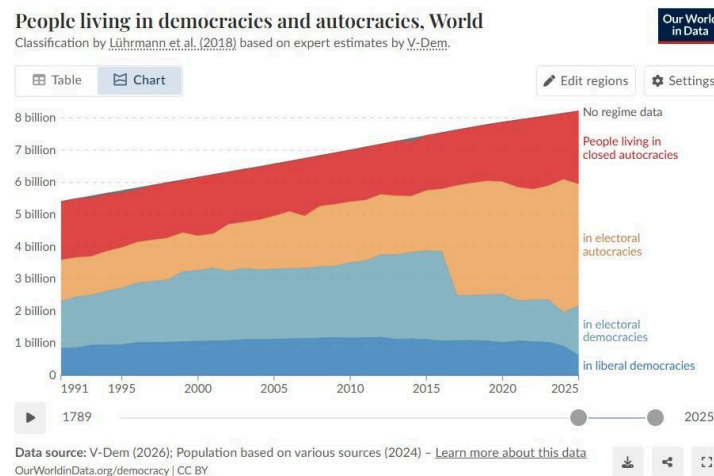
Notes on right-wing populism and authoritarianism (Part 1)

18 April 2026 a discussion on Right-wing populism and authoritarianism is planned. These are some notes that have been compiled by the work-group to prepare for the discussion.

1. Introduction:

We are living through a period of unprecedented crisis of capitalism. There is the growth of far-right and right-wing populist movements, and increasingly authoritarian governments across the world.

It is also important to recognise that the vast majority of people in the world today live under authoritarian regimes, and the proportion is increasing.



In this context, the term *fascism* is often used very loosely, sometimes to describe almost any right-wing or authoritarian regime. Marxists, however, have developed much more precise concepts to analyse these phenomena, particularly the concepts of Bonapartism and fascism, **based on the historical experience of class struggle**.

Understanding the difference between them is important if we want to correctly analyse the political processes unfolding today.

Of course, in reality these categories are not always clear-cut. These are living phenomena that do not arise in identical, perfect, “laboratory” conditions. Fascism and Bonapartism should not be treated as rigid, abstract models. Real regimes develop under specific historical conditions and often combine elements of both.

2. Bonapartism and fascism as responses to crisis

Both Bonapartism and fascism arise in periods of deep capitalist crisis. In normal conditions, the ruling class prefers parliamentary rule, if possible. They are even prepared to tolerate governments of social democracy, which adapted to and became tamed by bourgeois parliamentary democracy. If parliamentary rule fails, the ruling class may look for Bonapartist or other authoritarian solutions in an attempt to stabilise the situation.

It is important to remember that Fascism was not the first option for the bourgeoisie in Italy or Germany. In Germany, various Bonapartist or authoritarian solutions were tried first. Fascism emerged as a last resort when those proved insufficient to stabilise the situation.

Even in Italy, fascism did not immediately establish a total dictatorship. When Mussolini first came to power in 1922, he headed a coalition government and the traditional state institutions remained in place. The Bourgeoisie at first hoped he would restore order without destroying the existing state system. Only over the next few years did the regime transform itself into a full fascist dictatorship.

What do we mean when we use the term Bonapartism or Bonapartist?

Bonapartism is an instrument of class rule based on special relations between the classes. The term Bonapartism originates from the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte, who carried out a partial counter-revolution in France after the French Revolution. But earlier, before Bonaparte, a type of Bonapartism existed in the form of the absolute monarchies that arose throughout Europe. These monarchies raised themselves above society and gained a certain independence from the classes. They rested sometimes on the rising bourgeoisie and sometimes on the feudal landlords in order to attack one or the other.

However, during this period, the seeds of a future capitalist society were developing with the growth of the cities, manufacturing, and the development of both the capitalist and working classes. This was a development which was ultimately to clash with the existing order and which in France led to the French Revolution in 1789. In the French

revolution, the bourgeoisie combined with the urban masses and the nascent/rising working class to overthrow the absolute monarchy and abolish feudalism.

However, the revolution unleashed forces – both revolutionary in the form of the Jacobins and the Sansculottes and counter-revolutionary in the form of the royalists and reactionary European powers – that the bourgeoisie was unable to control.

Into this vacuum stepped Napoleon Bonaparte, a young military officer who enjoyed enormous popularity on the basis of his numerous military victories. Resting on the peasant masses and above all his peasant army, he was able to deal blows at the counter-revolution, but also to extinguish the last flames of revolutionary Jacobinism. Many of the gains of the revolution were undermined as Bonaparte established his dictatorial rule.

Nevertheless, he ultimately defended the economic and legal basis of capitalism and created the conditions for its further development, freed from the fetters of feudalism which were holding it back. To cut a long story short, Bonaparte was finally overthrown and the monarchy was restored, but many of the gains of the revolution remained. The restored monarchy wasn't able to drag France back to the starting point before the French Revolution, and French capitalism continued to develop.

In 1848, revolutionary movements broke out throughout Europe, including in France again. The tasks of these revolutions belonged to the bourgeois democratic revolution, but the main driving force in these revolutions, their most revolutionary wing, was the proletariat. In France, the monarchy was once again overthrown, and once again, after some time, there was a balancing out of the forces of revolution and counter-revolution. This time round, the bourgeoisie revealed its cowardice, manifested in its fear of the strengthened revolutionary proletariat.

Once again, in the vacuum that existed, a new Bonaparte stepped in – this time the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte – Louis Bonaparte. He took advantage of the political deadlock that existed and came to power through a coup d'etat in 1851. He ruled as dictator until 1870, when the next revolution broke out following France's defeat in the war with Prussia.

3. Marx on Bonapartism

Bonapartism is an instrument of class rule that arises from a specific relationship between the classes. Marx and Engels developed their analysis of Bonapartism based on several historical examples.

One was Napoleon Bonaparte, who leaned on his peasant army for support and carried out a partial counter-revolution at the end of the French Revolution, while still defending the economic and legal foundations of capitalism.

Another was Louis Bonaparte, Napoleon's nephew, who carried out a coup three years after the Revolutions of 1848 in France, at a moment of political paralysis and class conflict.

A further example was Otto von Bismarck, who, appointed by the king, balanced between the propertied classes and the rising proletariat while raising a powerful military-bureaucratic state apparatus above society.

These were examples of Bonapartism during the ascending phase of capitalism.

Analyzing the phenomenon of Bonapartism in The 18th Brumiere of Louis Bonaparte, Marx observed that the state had returned to "simple rule by sword":

"...it seems that the state has only returned to its oldest form, to a shamelessly simple rule by the sword and the monk's cowl."

Engels, in a letter to Marx, remarks that the Bonapartist dictatorship is forced to:

"unwillingly adopt the material interests of the bourgeoisie".

In The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Engels outlined the essence of Bonapartism as follows:

"an exceptional period in which the warring classes almost equal each other out, the state power temporarily acquires a certain independence in relation to both classes and as a result the state appears to act as a mediator."

Engels gives as examples the absolute monarchy of the 17th and 18th centuries, the Bonapartism of Napoleon Bonaparte and Louis Bonaparte, as well as the Bonapartism of Bismarck. It's also worth mentioning the point that Engels makes about Bonapartism playing off one class against the other – this is another feature we can often observe, where Bonapartism rests or leans on different classes depending on the equilibrium of the class forces.

“Exceptional periods, however, occur when the warring classes are so nearly equal in forces that the state power, as apparent mediator, acquires for the moment a certain independence in relation to both. This applies to the absolute monarchy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which balances the nobility and the bourgeoisie against one another; and to the Bonapartism of the First and particularly of the Second French Empire, which played off the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. The latest achievement in this line, in which ruler and ruled look equally comic, is the new German Empire of the Bismarckian nation; here the capitalists and the workers are balanced against one another and both of them fleeced for the benefit of the decayed Prussian cabbage Junkers.”

In “[Bonapartism in Germany](#)”, Trotsky pointed out that Marx and Engels also considered that various other regimes had features of Bonapartism. Trotsky observed that Bismarck was not a pseudo-radical demagogue like Louis Bonaparte – that this is not an essential feature of Bonapartism – and that the way he came to power was also different. Bismarck did not come to power as a result of a coup d'état legitimized by a plebiscite, like Louis Bonaparte, but rather was appointed by the king. The key feature was that:

“Bismarck made use in a Bonapartist fashion of the antagonism between the propertied classes, and the rising proletariat... and raised a military-police apparatus over the nation... The fact is that Marx and Engels wrote not only of Bonapartism of the two Bonapartes but also of other species thereof. Beginning, it seems, with the year 1864, they have likened not once the “national” regime of Bismarck to French Bonapartism. And this in spite of the fact that Bismarck was not a pseudo-radical demagogue and so far as we know, was not supported by the peasantry. The Iron Chancellor was not raised to power as a result of a plebiscite, but was duly appointed by his legitimate and hereditary king. And nevertheless Marx and Engels are right. Bismarck made use in a Bonapartist fashion of the antagonism between the propertied classes, and the rising proletariat, overcoming in this way the antagonism within the two propertied classes, between the Junkerdom and the bourgeoisie, and raised a military-police apparatus over the nation.”

4. Interwar period – Bonapartism and fascism

In the aftermath of World War I and the Russian Revolution, a revolutionary wave swept across Europe. The forces of revolution and counter-revolution were locked in mortal

combat. In many countries, the ruling class could no longer govern in the old way, through parliamentary democracy.

During this period of revolutionary crisis, it was forced to turn to extraordinary and often repressive forms of rule, some taking the form of Bonapartism, others developing into full-fledged fascism.

For Trotsky, Bonapartism arises from a balance of class forces – a situation where the main classes are locked in struggle but neither is able to decisively impose its rule.

In such circumstances, the state acquires a certain relative independence and appears to rise above society, relying primarily on the army, bureaucracy, and police, although in the last analysis it continues to defend the interests of the ruling class.

Unlike fascism, Bonapartism does not rest on a mass social base and so cannot completely smash the working class organisations. It leans on different classes at different moments depending on the shifting balance of forces. Because of this, Trotsky saw such regimes as relatively weak and transitional, arising in exceptional periods of crisis.

Fascism differs from Bonapartism because it mobilises a mass movement drawn mainly from the petty bourgeoisie and declassed layers, which it uses to smash the working class organisations.

Trotsky used the concept of [Bonapartism](#) to analyze these authoritarian regimes particularly in Germany. He stressed the difference between those forms of Bonapartism that arose out of necessity during the decline of capitalism to those Bonapartist regimes that were formed during its ascent. Above all, Trotsky saw them to be temporary and relatively weak regimes, lacking the mass support of the petty bourgeoisie, and formed as a result of the cancelling out of the forces of the proletarian revolution on the one hand and fascist reaction on the other:

“Bonapartism of the era of the decline of capitalism differs widely from Bonapartism of the era of ascension of bourgeois society. German Bonapartism is not supported directly by the petty bourgeoisie of the country and village, and this is not accidental. Precisely therefore we wrote at one time of the weakness of the government of Papen which holds on only by the neutralization of two camps: the proletariat and the fascists.”

In Germany, Trotsky analysed the pre-Nazi regimes of Brüning and Hindenburg-Papen-Schleicher. He argued that this type of Bonapartism was not supported directly by the petty bourgeoisie of the country and village, which was why it

was relatively weak and temporary. It was formed as a result of the cancelling-out of the forces of the proletarian revolution on the one hand and fascist reaction on the other.

In contrast, fascism mobilized the frenzied petty bourgeois masses in order to liquidate all forms of working class organization and atomize the proletariat.

However, Trotsky argued that fascism soon exhausted its social support and after some time transformed itself into a Bonapartist regime, using military police methods.

This can be seen particularly in the case of the regime formed in Poland following Piłsudski's coup d'etat in 1926, which was a particularly weak fascism from the beginning, and also in Franco's post-war Spain.

5: inter-war Italy

After the First World War, Italy was swept by a powerful revolutionary movement. Between 1919–1920, workers occupied factories and the possibility of socialist revolution appeared very real. However, lacking a revolutionary leadership prepared to take power, the movement stalled. The reformist leaders retreated and sought compromise with the bourgeoisie instead of mobilising the working class to carry the revolution through. This retreat opened the door to the counter-revolution.

Fascist squads began organising violent attacks on workers' organisations. One early example was the massacre of socialist workers in Bologna at the Palazzo d'Accursio massacre in November 1920. Fascist violence then spread across the countryside, targeting trade unionists and left-wing peasants. As the reformist leaders held back the workers, the bourgeoisie and the monarchy increasingly turned to fascism as a weapon against the labour movement.

In 1922 the king, Victor Emmanuel III, appointed Benito Mussolini prime minister following the March on Rome. Initially this was a coalition government, and the full fascist dictatorship emerged only gradually over the following two years.

What distinguished the fascist regime, once Mussolini had consolidated power, from Bonapartist regimes was that fascism rested on the mobilisation of a mass movement – drawn primarily from the petty bourgeoisie and other declassed layers of society.

Its aim was to physically destroy the organisations of the working class.

6: Inter-war Germany

A similar but more prolonged process unfolded in Germany.

The revolutionary movement that ended the war and overthrew the monarchy in 1918 placed workers' and soldiers' councils at the centre of political life. However, the leadership of the Social Democratic Party handed power back to the bourgeoisie.

When revolutionary workers attempted to resist, 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, thanks to the Social democratic leaders, and the fascists remained a small force without a mass base.

However, the crisis of German capitalism deepened during the 1920s. The workers' movement recovered and the Communist Party of Germany became a mass force, while at the same time support grew for the Nazi movement led by Adolf Hitler.

In this situation, as the forces of revolution and counter-revolution began to gain strength, a series of authoritarian governments emerged – regimes analysed by Leon Trotsky as Bonapartist. They attempted to stabilise the situation by balancing between the classes and relying on the state apparatus rather than a mass movement. But these regimes proved weak and temporary.

As the crisis deepened, increasing sections of the ruling class concluded that only fascism could deal the workers' movement a decisive blow. In this sense fascism represented the last resort of the bourgeoisie – its most extreme method of preserving capitalism when all other forms of rule had failed.

The experiences of Italy and Germany therefore illustrate the relationship between Bonapartism and fascism: the ruling class may first experiment with authoritarian or Bonapartist solutions, but when these fail to stabilise the situation it may ultimately turn to fascism to smash the workers' movement.

8: Inter-war Poland

But history does not always present us with such clear-cut cases. What happens when a regime shows elements of both Bonapartism and fascism, but does not fully develop

into either? One important example is the regime established by Józef Piłsudski in Poland after his coup in 1926.

This regime never succeeded in establishing a fully developed fascist state. Polish fascism remained relatively weak because it was unable to build a sufficiently large social base. From the outset the regime therefore had a hybrid character, sitting somewhere between Bonapartism and fascism.

Lacking a powerful fascist mass movement, it relied primarily on the army, bureaucracy, and police rather than on a mass party. At the same time, it did not destroy the workers' movement in the way fascist regimes did elsewhere. Trade unions and other organisations continued to exist, although under increasing repression. Parliament also formally remained in place, though its powers were greatly reduced and elections were increasingly manipulated.

The Polish example shows that Bonapartism and fascism are not rigid categories.

What we encounter in reality are processes – regimes in transition, reflecting the changing balance of class forces.

Our task is therefore not to mechanically apply labels, but to analyse concretely how these regimes develop.

9. Post-war WW2 Bourgeois Bonapartism

In the Western world after World War II parliamentary democracy was the dominant form of bourgeois rule. However, there were also peculiar bourgeois variants of bonapartist regimes, particularly in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

For example, we classed Peronism as bourgeois Bonapartism. [A pamphlet](#) published by the Militant in the 1980s, explained that Peron came to power by leaning on the Argentinian working class and granting them big concessions. Despite this and the balancing between the classes, in the final analysis Peron represented the capitalists and the big landowners:

"In the modern era we have witnessed all kinds of peculiar variants of bonapartist regimes, particularly in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. Take for instance the bonapartist regime of Peron which was in power in Argentina from 1945 to 1955. Peron was a capitalist Bonaparte: in the final analysis he represented the capitalists and the big landowners. Nevertheless, he came to power by leaning on the powerful Argentinean

working class and granting them big concessions such as the formation of powerful trade unions, wage increases, and other reforms. Peron was able to do this because of the favourable market in Europe for Argentinean beef with the beginning of the post-war boom. Resting on the working class he also struck against the class upon which his regime ultimately rested, the big ranchers and capitalists. Despite the balancing between the classes—a feature of all bonapartist states—and the support enjoyed by Peron amongst the working class right up to his return from exile— his regime defended Argentinean capitalism.”

10. Proletarian Bonapartism

After the Russian revolution , under Lenin and Trotsky, the new Russian state was based on, for that period (and even today) radically progressive democratic and social norms, measures to end the oppression of minorities. As the revolution spread internationally, the perspective was that the state as a repressive apparatus would wither away. But as the international revolution receded, counter-revolutionary forces within Russia restored their strength and degeneration set in, eventually leading to a political counter-revolution in which the Stalinist clique took control.

Trotsky characterised this as Proletarian bonapartism - the state apparatus with its all-encompassing bureaucracy and police - rose above and became independent of its economic/social base [the working class] and maneuvering between different class forces to maintain its existence.

As a Bonapartist, Stalin played off different classes and strata against each other, but ultimately defended the economic base of the workers' state. This concept of proletarian Bonapartism proved to be a useful tool for Trotsky to not only understand, but also to foresee the twists and turns in Stalinist policy and to develop his perspectives for the Soviet Union.

In the post WW2 period new proletarian Bonapartist, or in other words Stalinist regimes, were formed, first in Eastern Europe. Landlordism and capitalism were liquidated and regimes were established in the image of Stalinist Russia.

These were deformed workers' states – grotesque distortions of socialism from the beginning. Instead of a workers' government based on democratic workers' councils or soviets, a Stalinist bureaucracy ruled with the iron fist of dictatorship.

Some proletarian Bonapartist regimes were formed as a result of partisan or guerrilla fighters coming to power – in China, Yugoslavia and later in Cuba – and abolishing capitalism. In some cases, particularly in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, proletarian Bonapartist regimes were formed as a result of a military coup by a section of the officer caste.

This was possible at that time due to the special conditions that existed after World War II and later during the Cold War, where the Soviet Union could act as a pole of attraction and an alternative to capitalism.

When pro-bourgeois forces developed the state leant on the working class to suppress them [adoption of first five year plans, Khrushchev's thaw, Perestroika, cultural revolution in China] but the state was also brutal in putting down working class revolts - GDR 1953, Hungary 1956, Poland, Czechoslovakia etc.] - but as history shows Perestroika released forces that the bureaucracy could not control. Discontent with economic stagnation, the bureaucratic stifling of all aspects of life, the suppression of national rights led to an explosion of mass discontent and the victory of pro-bourgeois forces.

11. Former Proletarian Bonapartist states today - Russia

The first decade of the new capitalism in Russia [all former Soviet bloc states] saw the conscious break up of the former state apparatus [a process driven by the KGB!] and the enforced introduction of capitalist economic relations - forced mass privatisation, gangster relations and libertarianisation [ie whoever had the force could do whatever they liked].

The results - horrific economic collapse and hyperinflation. In that context, Putin's role [who came to power in 2000] was to establish a new, capitalist state incorporating many of the elements of Soviet bonapartism - ie the reformed KGB.

The rise of the gangsterised oligarchs in the 1990s left little room for the growth of a more traditional bourgeois - the economy relied almost exclusively on oil and gas revenues, and to keep the economy viable, the use of state corporations - highly monopolised conglomerates controlled by the regime but privately owned. A combination of the oligarchy, state corporations and new state bureaucracy were not satisfied with remaining within Russian borders - this is the driving force of aggressive Russian imperialism. A bonapartist state, imperialist appetite and reactionary [monarchial fascist] ideology

12. Former Proletarian Bonapartist states today - China

The Chinese revolution under the leadership of Mao Zedong did not, unlike the Russian revolution, establish a worker's state. It was deformed from the very start.

Unlike the Russian revolution, the urban working class played a largely passive role in the Chinese revolution - when it did raise its head, the Maoists quickly moved against it.

So although the revolution defeated imperialism and redistributed the land, power rested on the state structures created by Mao - based on the peasant based Red army. The state structure was from the outset a bonapartist state - proletarian as it rested on a partly nationalised economy with elements of planning but in which the working class had no independent role. Only when the regime felt itself under threat [start of cultural revolution] did it make any appeals to the proletariat.

From the outset Mao made clear that his aim was to "unite with the national bourgeoisie in common struggle. Our present policy is to regulate capitalism, not to destroy it."

Pro-market reforms started in China well before those in Russia with Deng's attempts to reduce the influence of central planning by allowing private relations in agriculture and establishing Special Economic Zones. For the next thirty years the annual average growth rate was 10%. (up from 7% for the first 30 years). [to compare India 4.6% and 6.3% for same periods]. China however differed dramatically from Russia - it did not move to destroy the former Stalinist state and avoided "shock therapy".

In 2007/8 a debate took place in the CWI over the nature of China. VK argued capitalism had been fully restored and that China had the "most radical neo-liberal policies in the world" and a rapidly shrinking state, and shrinking state ownership of the economy. Opponents of this position warned that he underestimated the "autonomous role that can be played by a strong bonapartist state" and that "faced with a deep economic crisis and a mass upsurge that threatens its survival, the regime will revert to much greater intervention in the economy, including taking over failing companies, in an attempt to defuse a potentially revolutionary situation". The second position has stood the test of time far more than VK's.

In both Russia and China, since 2008 there has been the turn to an economy based on “State corporations” (In China maybe some regional corporations] - massive conglomerates with integration of a layer of workers through corporate unions - these have some analogy with the corporations introduced in Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany. There is a very vertical management of the economy. In China there is still the use of “Five year plans”.

Although the process is far more advanced in the sclerotic state apparatus of Russia, there is an increasing personalisation of leadership into the hands of one person. The latest purge of Chinese army leaders is a further move in this direction.

Whilst there is little possibility of the Russian economy really developing, there is still the potential for China to develop. It has and is still facing severe domestic crises in the housing, banking, regional finance sectors which it is attempting to manage using a combination of various bail-outs and stimuli. However it still has the potential for internal migration - approx a quarter of the work force is in restricted rural areas - their continued migration to the cities boosts productivity and demand. This combined with the still growing expansion of China’s global trade - assisted by Trump’s alienation of the Global south and former allies - leaves China some room for manoeuvre.

This is a useful article [China’s ‘two sessions’ 2026: everything you need to know | South China Morning Post](#)

[Iran war gives Chinese exporters chance to grab global market share](#)

13. Applying this method today

This is important when we try to analyse developments today.

The regimes and political movements we see emerging in the current crisis of capitalism do not necessarily correspond neatly to the classical forms of the interwar period. To understand them, we have to analyse the concrete balance of class forces and the direction in which these processes are developing.

This also raises the question of the social base of such movements. The CWI argue that there is no mass social base for fascism today because the petty bourgeoisie is smaller

and the working class larger and more powerful than in the past. This reflects their somewhat idealised image of the working class and a rather mechanical interpretation of Trotsky's analysis.

While fascism historically drew its main driving force from the ruined petty bourgeoisie, its support was never limited to this layer alone. Trotsky stressed that fascist movements can also draw support from the lumpenproletariat and from sections of the working class that have become demoralised or alienated from their own organisations.

This raises several important questions for us today.

- Can sizeable sections of the working class be mobilised by far-right, reactionary, or even proto-fascist movements against their own class interests?
- Could such movements be used to weaken or atomise workers' organisations, even if those organisations are already relatively weak?
- In this context, if working class organisations are so weak, does finance capital need full-blown fascism to achieve its goals, or might it sometimes deploy these movements in a more limited, auxiliary role?

14: Fascism and the Right in the United States today

The reactionary policies of the second Trump government, occurring in the context of a global turn towards the far-right, have led to an increased public debate about the political character of both Trump himself, of his political movement, and of the United States generally.

Among liberals, a loose consensus has emerged that Trump is a fascist, although this designation exists solely as an accusation, rather than a clear political label. It is undeniable that within Trump's administration there exist true ideological fascists. The most prominent example of course being Stephen Miller, Trump's Deputy Chief-of-Staff, widely viewed as one of the most influential figures in the White House. Miller's ties to openly fascist figures and organizations are well documented including VDARE, Sailer and American Renaissance.

The second Trump administration has also escalated its white nationalist and fascist rhetoric. Dept of Homeland Security recruitment ads openly appeal to white nationalists with thinly veiled codewords and Nazi inspired imagery.

Trump has backed this rhetoric with action. Launching massive 'immigration' sweeps in Chicago, Minneapolis, and elsewhere. The total number of deportations remains comparable to, and possibly lower than, those under Biden and Obama, but the arrests are carried out by an increasingly paramilitarized ICE. ICE itself has been documented as having loosened recruiting standards, and recruited members of the fascist militia the Proud Boys who were involved in Trump's 2021 coup attempt.

The presence alone of fascist ideologues and rhetoric does not make a government fascist. Trump was elected with a clear popular mandate, and not only that, but the views of the most radical members of his administration are not truly out of line with the existing conservative bourgeoisie.

Unlike the classic cases of fascism in Italy and Germany, or even Austria or Poland, Trump's victories in 2016 and 2024 did not come through a defeat of labor or the organized left. Not only did such a defeat not bring Trump to power, but it is difficult to single out any such occurrence in the United States, as at no point has there been a unified enough working class movement to require a classic fascist movement.

Another complication emerges when comparing the current conditions in the United States to those of the past. In the collected work, "Fascism: What it is and How To Fight It" Trotsky correctly identifies that fascism is in part a mass movement of the petty bourgeoisie, acting as "the gendarmes of capital". This phenomenon is also seen in the United States. In the South, Black workers were terrorized and murdered by the thousands by the proto-fascist Ku Klux Klan. In addition to enforcing racial terror, the KKK also served as a tool of the capitalists against organized labor, notably in Tampa Florida, where they were unleashed to crush a general strike in 1932. In Detroit Michigan, the Black Legion were closely integrated into the private security apparatus of the fascist industrialist Henry Ford as well as the local government.

These forces played a dual role, suppressing labor on behalf of both the landlords in the south and the bourgeois industrialists in the North. Unlike fascist or bonapartist regimes however, the collusion between the bourgeois state and the terrorist formations of the petite bourgeoisie in the United States was fairly stable. In the southern US, the authoritarian rule of the white bourgeoisie, enforced by both state forces and a mobilized petite bourgeoisie, endured for over 75 years, collapsing only in the late 1960s when the state conceded to reforms demanded by the Civil Rights movement.

In this way, the *methods* of classical fascism have historically been not a final resort of the bourgeoisie in the United States, but the status quo. In his book "Blood in

my Eye” the Black Marxist and revolutionary prison activist George Jackson describes this in detail, arguing that the United States, by these common measures, has always been fascist. While this is an understandable argument, particularly given the conditions under which Jackson made it, it is also lacking. A classical fascist regime, such as that in Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary or Poland would never have conceded to the reforms of the Civil Rights movement without the threat of civil war. Nor would a fascist regime allow the open organization of labor unions, which while weak, not only persist but continue to organize.

In this context, the United States under the second Trump government cannot be accurately described as fascist, even if Trump himself might be. Still, Trump has broken from the status quo of the bourgeois right in important ways, and the conditions of the Trump government can accurately be described as *pre-fascist*.

Transphobia is a ubiquitous feature of the far-right, but under Trump, the US has seen a dramatic escalation in attacks on trans people. The federal government’s endorsement of transphobia serves as *carte blanche* for reactionaries on a local level. In Kansas, the drivers licenses of hundreds of trans people have been unilaterally revoked, on the grounds that the gender identification on the licenses is false. In many states, gender affirming care has been effectively banned.

While as previously noted, total deportation numbers steady, the use of Immigration and Customs Agents as a paramilitary is deeply concerning. It is not a coincidence that the primary city targeted was Minneapolis. The deployment of ICE to Minneapolis was clearly meant as retaliation for the uprising that began there after the murder of George Floyd in 2020.

As of March 24th, Trump has deployed ICE to airports across the US, ordering them to fill in for airport security workers who have quit or taken sick leave rather than work without pay due to shortages in federal funding. Not only is this yet another example of Trump using ICE as a personal militia, but it is perhaps the first case of Trump using ICE to address a labor dispute. We must not downplay the primary function of ICE as an instrument of oppression against immigrants. However it is the deviations from this function where Trump most clearly moves in a fascist direction.

Trump’s use of ICE as a personal militia is most concerning when considered in the context of the events of Jan 6th 2021. Electoral interference is hardly uncommon in US elections, but not since the end of Reconstruction in the Corrupt Bargain of 1877 had the threat of open violence been used in an attempt to overturn a federal election.

Trump's coup attempt on Jan 6th collapsed within hours, having not even come close to achieving its goal. This is in no small part due to the incompetence of the putschists, who represent simply the most gullible section of Trump's base.

The move towards ICE as a personal militia, and the precedent set by Trump of using them as scab labor illustrates the break between Trumpism and the prior status quo of the American bourgeoisie.

15: Nature of Iranian regime

The regime in Iran is a consequence of the wrong leadership by the left (Tudeh, Mojahedin) during the 1979 revolution.[as opposed to the situation in which a left was absent, the left was relatively strong in 1979]

The inspiring movement of workers and youth – with women at the forefront, in opposition to the reactionary policies of the brutal monarchist dictatorship would have been unstoppable if the left had had a policy based not on Stalin's theory of stages, but Trotsky's permanent revolution. But the Tudeh (Communist Party) were seeking a "progressive bourgeoisie" and saw the mullahs as allies in their struggle against imperialism.

Khomeini came to power resting on what was potentially a successful workers' revolution, and in the first stages had to accept social reforms, even nationalisation of key companies. But he set about implementing a counter revolution, first treading carefully - acting against women and the national minorities.

Fearful of the danger of revolution spreading Saddam Hussian pushed by the US launched the Iran-Iraq war [which lasted 8 years and cost 500,000 lives] in 1980. This allowed Khomeini to militarise the country, and in 1981 he launched his own counter-revolutionary offensive against the left - all resistance was brutally suppressed, newspapers banned, and hundreds executed daily.

Still presenting itself as an anti-imperialist [anti US/Israel] force the regime strengthened its social base with the clerics, army and increasingly strengthening "Revolutionary guards" - the IRGC in effect took over key sectors of the economy providing it with a

stable economic basis. Despite sanctions, the economy operates very much on a capitalist basis - in effect despite its theocratic covering,

Iran is a classic bonapartist regime, which as recent waves of protest have demonstrated lacks any real social basis. [Not difficult to imagine today such a bonapartist regime based on christian fundamentalism - - Gilead].

16: GenZ and Bangladesh

Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan in 1971 after a short struggle in which India intervened in the war effectively defeating Pakistan and acting to recognise Bangladeshi independence.

Initially the post independence [NBP] governments were leftish - with nationalisation and talk of social justice. But to cut a long story short the government moved in an authoritarian direction, and since the country oscillated between short periods of very weak parliamentary democracy and different forms of military rule - between 1971 and 2009 there were 29 attempted coups. Early nationalisations were quickly reversed.

After a two year "State of Emergency" [2008-10] new elections resulted in the victory of Hasina's Awami League, which proclaimed secularism. She remained in power until overthrown in 2024 with increasing complaints about undemocratic elections. The spark for the protests was the Supreme Court decision to continue the practice under which one third of places in Parliament were reserved for relatives of the 1971 "freedom fighters". A massive police attack which left 300 dead provoked a new wave and the overthrow of Hasina.

In the February 2026 election the BNP won an overwhelming majority - the students formed a party the NCP - which linked with the right wing islamists - the NCP won 6 seats but alienated many women.

17: Authoritarianism and bonapartism in Africa

The roots of authoritarianism in Africa arose in the colonial period. Only the faces and centres of power changed since the 1800s while there has been a continuation of their disconnection from the masses. For decades, there has been growth in the wealth of

the ruling class in Africa vis a vis the continued decline of living conditions among the majority.

The wealth gained by the elites allows them to secure further dominance of political life. The elites have over different eras used their money to buy protection from armed forces against the masses when dissent arises. Ultimately, since 1960 the “Year of Africa” democracy on the continent has been marked by clientism and oppression thereby undermining any pretences of free and fair elections.

Vote buying ensures that financial might can be translated easily into political might and vice versa. Ultimately, this means that the elites are able to rise above not just the peasants, the working class, and the petty bourgeoisie classes but are also able to play off the different classes against one another. A potential example of this relation can be seen by how the Oppenheimer family, or the Rhodes before them, were able to use their financial muscle to not only influence the economies in Southern Africa but were also able to influence political actors in order to secure their profits. The system of Apartheid is therefore a useful example of how the question of race was used to divide the working class.

Although even up until 1936 certain black people were allowed to vote in the Cape Colony, between 1876 and 1936 race relations among black and white mine workers were marked by tensions that were actively encouraged by the ruling class. The ruling class relied on keeping the majority black population disenfranchised and imposed laws that ensured that positions in the mines would specifically be allocated based on race. The prevailing idea was that white workers were superior to black workers despite the fact that both groups were effectively forced into the mines. This status quo was challenged by global events such as WW1 and WW2, which politicians then fed upon in order to stoke up racial tensions among mine workers. Political leaders attempted to enhance these tensions when the Rand Rebellion took place in the 1920s in order for them to break up the strike action by workers in the mines of Witwatersrand. When this failed, they resorted to outright violence and there were several incidents of racially motivated violence that took place among the workers. Workers in the mines at the time were facing incredibly dangerous conditions underground and deaths were common. However, the policies at the time ensured that white workers were expected to supervise the work of non-whites and could even violently “discipline” workers under their control who were either working too slowly or were not willing to follow orders.

Mine owners benefited from the racial divisions and actively sought to keep the workers divided. One way they did this was by reserving the highest positions underground to white workers, and the lowest positions to the black miners. The racial group with the

smallest population would then occupy the supervisory roles, while the majority would be forced to occupy the lowest posts, while the Asian and Coloured workers would be somewhere in between.

In other words, the existing capitalist class attempted to allocate the posts in the mines based on the ratio of how these groups were represented in the wider society to their own benefit. This approach was eventually adopted as the national policy of South Africa following the 1948 elections. During the formal apartheid years between 1948 and 1994 racial identification was synonymous with class position as the black majority occupied the position of peasants and workers, managerial and skilled posts were reserved for white people. This arrangement of society was arranged and managed by the elites who owed the means of production and benefitted from structuring the labour force in such a manner. This structure survived into post-apartheid South Africa. The minority white population still controls and owns the majority of the land and subsequently the wealth produced in the country. Unfortunately, racial language still shapes the political landscape, and is used to divide workers - to the detriment of the workers and to the enrichment of the capitalist class that still has influence on the leading political figures.

18: Authoritarianism and bonapartism in India

India claims to be 'the world's largest democracy' and the 2024 general election, held over seven weeks, in which nearly two thirds of a billion people voted, was a set-piece propaganda exercise to demonstrate this.

However the increasing Hindu communalist tenor of Indian politics, during 12 years of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rule, the repression of ethnic and religious minorities, and the increasing use of force, intimidation and legal exclusion against women, 'lower' castes and other minorities as well as the workers' movement give the lie to this claim.

The most recent example of this is the passing of a law restricting trans rights. This replaces self-identification with medical certificates, and introduces legal penalties designed to force the trans community into either traditional religious and caste categories such as the Hijra and Kinner communities or a highly medicalised definition of being 'intersex', effectively erasing the identities and rights of most trans women and

men and the non-binary community. Barely 32,000 of the 487,000 trans people recorded in India's last census qualify under this law.

The significant resistance to these measures, such as protests nationwide against this latest attack, the 2024 strike by a million doctors and health workers protesting the rape and murder of a trainee doctor by a volunteer policeman in her workplace, and, above all, the 2020-21 nationwide uprising by farmers and the wider rural community which forced the repeal of the 'Farm Laws', designed to commercialise agriculture by removing tenants' and workers' rights point to the relative weakness of authoritarianism in the face of the power of the workers and other oppressed masses when this is mobilised.

It is also important to stress that authoritarianism, communalism and gender and ethnic discrimination are by no means novel inventions by the fascistic BJP and its leader Narendra Modi. Modi has simply accelerated the use of elements of Bonapartism hard-wired into Indian capitalism and its state since independence in 1947. Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code introduced by British colonialism to punish 'Whoever by words... by signs, or by visible representation attempts... to excite disaffection towards, the Government established by law in India' with up to life imprisonment, under which Mohandas Gandhi and other participants in the defiance campaign for independence were detained, remained in place until it was overturned by the Supreme Court in 2022 and was used by governments of all political stripes against their opponents.

The main opposition party, Gandhi and Jawahar Nehru's Congress Party, purports to resist Modi's repression and oppose communalism. But the rule of Nehru's successor and daughter Indira Gandhi (no relation to Mohandas) revealed the limits of capitalist democracy in post-war neo-colonialism when she introduced a 21 month state of emergency in June 1975, during which more than 100,000 were detained without trial. Four years previously Gandhi had also invaded (then) East Pakistan to determine the outcome of the Bangladeshi national uprising, preventing the workers' and peasants' movement threatening the stability of class rule in the region. In this way she elevated the role of the army in domestic politics, which she subsequently used to enforce the emergency, and established India as a regional imperialist power.

Gandhi's drift to authoritarianism, and the mass resistance it provoked, led to the end of Congress's unchallenged rule in the March 1977 elections, called by her son Sanjay after her assassination. These were won by a coalition led by the Hindu communalist Janata Party, led by Moraji Desai. One component in this coalition was the BJP's fore-runner the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, itself the political wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, an openly fascist Hindu paramilitary organisation founded in the 1920s.

The failure of India's, then far more powerful, trade unions and working class (particularly Communist) parties to mount an independent class defence of political and civil liberties prepared the way for the further development of Bonapartism as world and Indian capitalism's cruises unfolded.

In the 1970s, two states, Kerala and West Bengal, had 'Communist' Ministers with significant electoral mandates, but leaders of both wings of the communist movement the Communist Party of India (CPI), aligned with the Moscow Bureaucracy, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) who tended towards the 'Maoism' of the the Beijing regime, both sought, following the Stalinist 'theory of stages', to align themselves with parties of the 'National Bourgeoisie' whose task, they argued, it was defend national independence and democracy, until capitalism was 'mature' enough to be overthrown.

In 1977, however, they reached entirely different conclusions as to which political forces represented this mythical political creature. The CPI, drawing on an exaggerated portrayal of the historical role of Congress in the movement for independence, refused to break from their practice of restricting the demands of the workers movement in order to enter into alliances with Congress and backed the Gandhis despite their repressive legacy.

Meanwhile, the CPI (M) dominated 'Left Front' entered into an alliance with Janata, which they portrayed as leading the resistance to repression. This led to the quip that their acronyms in reality stood for the 'CP(Indira)' and 'CP(Muraji)'. The less funny side to the joke is that both parties' common abandonment of class politics has led to the

decline of the workers' movement and in the case of West Bengal the near-total electoral eclipse of the Left Front, which ruled the state for for 34 years from 1977, by the political representatives of neo-liberal austerity and religious communalism.

Bonapartism and authoritarianism can only be overthrown in India by building an independent class party of the workers at the head of a mass movement of all the oppressed. This party must be built on the basis of an intersectional struggle against class society and the many-headed hydra of gender, religious, national and ethnic repression which it breeds and on which it rests. Modi and the BJP's politics of fascistic rhetoric and almost daily local and generalised pogroms are, perhaps, even more than Trump and the MAGA millionaire tech-bros, the type specimen of this hydra. Their politics is riddled with the vilest prejudices and actual violence against Muslims, Sikhs, members of 'lower' castes, national minorities, women, queers and all other easily scapegoated minorities. The heads of this hydra cannot be cut off one by one; it must be strangled at the neck and only a movement of the whole working class to transform society will be powerful enough to achieve that.

19: The far-right in Latin America

Kast's victory in the Chilean elections, which adds to the far-right governments led by Javier Milei in Argentina, has raised new concerns in Latin America. This has led some sectors of the regional left, especially reformists, to agitate about the "rise of fascism in the region."

Of course, Milei and Kast represent a danger to the working class and its living conditions, as well as to the rights won in recent decades, such as the right to abortion and to diversity, achieved by the feminist and LGBTQ+ movements in the last decade. But neither Milei nor Kast truly represent an expression of fascism, understood as an extreme form of reaction as Trotsky characterized it. Therefore, it is not only inaccurate to speak of fascism, but also dangerous, since an incorrect assessment leads to incorrect policies.

Fascism in Latin America? The Usefulness of the Term 'Right-Wing Populism'

For Marxists, fascism is, as Trotsky stated, a form of reaction or response by the bourgeoisie in times of crisis, especially by imperialist sectors, to the struggle of the working class and the oppressed. More precisely, it is a response to the revolutionary threat of the proletariat, as exemplified by Italian fascism after the Biennio Rosso (Red Two) or the regime of Miklós Horthy in Hungary after the defeat of the Hungarian Soviet Republic led by Béla Kun.

Furthermore, Italian and German fascism, to return to the aforementioned example, arose at a very particular moment in history when the 'red menace' had a concrete embodiment: the Soviet Union and the Communist International. In other words, fascism in the 1920s and 30s was largely a response to the threat posed by the Soviet Union, even in its degenerated state, as an example for the working class worldwide. This does not mean they are "twins," as some social-democratic and liberal historians have tried to explain in order to justify the crises of liberal democracies in the interwar period. On the contrary, it represents a counter-revolutionary response to the Russian Revolution. Today, neither the Comintern nor the USSR exists, which is charting a different course in the current era of crisis.

In this sense, in Latin America, despite events such as the mobilizations in Argentina in 2001, those in Venezuela in 2003, or more recently the mobilizations in Chile and Colombia in 2019, we have not exactly witnessed a revolution in the region. Even in Venezuela, where the process has gone further in terms of the measures implemented by Chavismo. Therefore, based on what has been said above, it is difficult to characterize the current reaction as "fascist."

Furthermore, despite the reactionary nature of Milei and Kast, they do not lead paramilitary groups like the fascist Brownshirts. Despite their defense of their countries' dictatorships, neither can rely entirely on the military (a form of Bonapartism) due to the enormous disrepute the military still suffers as a consequence of the disappearances during those dictatorships.

Therefore, in Latin America, it is inaccurate to speak of fascism or Bonapartism to characterize right-wing regimes. Furthermore, unlike what Trotsky very succinctly characterized as 'sui generis Bonapartism' to refer to reformist military governments (Cárdenas in Mexico, Vargas in Brazil, and years later used by Trotskyists to characterize Perón in Argentina), far-right governments are far from championing any

popular demands. On the contrary, they openly speak in favor of capitalists and imperialism, which, while it has permeated some segments of the working class, has also quickly entered into crisis.

And while it is not a 'Marxist' term, we must be wary of this type of assessment. Marxism is, above all, a method for analyzing and transforming reality, which is constantly changing. In that sense, it is about accounting for changing reality, not about pigeonholing it into categories or concepts that fail to capture it. Marx never used the term fascist because fascism did not exist in his time, and this does not mean we reject Trotsky's contributions on fascism.

Today, as we have already pointed out, unlike in the 1920s and 30s when Italian and German fascism emerged, for example, the Soviet Union does not exist as a latent 'threat' to global capitalism. Although Trump or Milei speak of 'communists' as a threat, this is currently more of a 'straw man' than a real threat.

Argentina

The bourgeoisie and the media are using the case of Argentina as an example to show the failure of progressivism. And while it is true that Alberto Fernández's government was a disaster, leaving the country in a deep economic crisis that partly explains Milei's victory, it is not true that Milei is as strong as the media portrays him.

In January 2025, Milei reached a 43.7% approval rating compared to a 40% disapproval rating. In January 2026, this was reversed, with a 48.7% disapproval rating compared to a 38% approval rating. In more recent days, a Bloomberg poll places Milei's approval rating at 36%, the lowest of his administration. This gives a fairly clear picture of the situation.

A relevant aspect for characterizing Milei's social base is that it comprises a segment, especially young people, who, amidst the crisis, are seeking alternatives in cryptocurrencies and financial investments as a means of livelihood. This is not a phenomenon exclusive to Argentina, as the same is happening in Mexico, the United States, and Europe. The so-called "manosphere," a virtual space where far-right, sexist ideas and "how to invest" are promoted by influencers like Andrew Tate or Temach in Mexico, is also relevant.

On the other hand, struggles such as those of pensioners, strikes like the one at the Fate tire factory, or the general strike against the labor reform on February 19th called by the

Peronist CGT, which is estimated to have had 90% participation, demonstrate that the Argentine working class is not defeated. Another example of this is the recent mobilizations for the 50th anniversary of the coup that gave rise to the last military dictatorship, which some consider to have been the largest in history.

The underlying problem is, as Trotsky said, 'the crisis of leadership.' In practice, the Peronists are acting as Milei's crutch, allowing him to 'do the dirty work' so that he wears himself out, hoping to later return. A clear example of this is the lack of continuity in the mobilizations against the labor reform, which was approved, after the powerful and decisive general strike of February 19th, which we have already mentioned.

Although powerful organizations exist in Argentina that claim Trotsky's legacy, their sectarianism prevents them, on the one hand, from attracting the disaffected sectors of Peronism who still harbor some illusions. On the other hand, it also prevents them from forging a true united front, since the Left and Workers' Front is merely an electoral front. In the union arena, each organization promotes its policy separately and in confrontation with that of other organizations that are part of the FIT.

Chile

It is still too early to have an accurate picture of the Kast government, which took office just last March 11.

However, one relevant aspect that reveals weakness is that in the last elections, Kast made no mention of his positions on the gender agenda and the rights of the LGBTQ+ community in an attempt to attract segments of that electoral support. This contrasts with the 2021 election, in which Kast himself emphasized these issues during his campaign.

The above, of course, does not mean that Kast will promote a feminist and LGBTQ+ agenda. On the contrary, it is clear that he will take measures to reverse the progress achieved by the women's and LGBTQ+ movements. But he will undoubtedly face a movement that will defend what has been gained.

As in the case of Argentina, the triumph of the far right in Chile is explained above all by the failure of progressive reformism. Boric came to power in Chile in 2020 after the powerful mobilizations of 2019, and with the prestige of having been part of the leadership of the 2011 student movement alongside Camila Vallejo. But his government left much to be desired from the start; the defeat of the constitutional plebiscite in 2023

already demonstrated this. Added to this were the disappointments of Boric's extreme moderation.

El Salvador

El Salvador is undoubtedly the most advanced case of the far right in Latin America. Nayib Bukele has become a figurehead for the way he has dealt with the serious problem of gangs, with whom he initially tried to establish a pact to diminish their power. The construction of a large high-security prison (CECOT) and the incarceration of approximately 90,000 people accused of gang activity, of whom an estimated 30% are innocent (30,000), have strengthened Bukele's position in a country where, as we have mentioned, the gang problem was very serious.

This is reflected not only in the consolidation of a state of exception for several years, but also in the establishment of a one-man government, since a few months ago Bukele managed to secure approval for his indefinite reelection. The near disappearance of the leftist FMLN, in which Bukele built his career, as well as the persecution of union and social leaders, human rights defenders, and journalists, allow us to characterize Bukele's El Salvador as being in a situation of Bonapartism.

Ecuador

A similar case to that of El Salvador is Ecuador, where Daniel Noboa came to power after the government of banker Guillermo Lasso. The latter defeated Rafael Correa's Citizen Revolution after the disastrous government of Lenin Moreno, Correa's successor. Noboa has promoted a state of emergency under the pretext of combating crime, but which is essentially a mechanism for resolving political crises.

Therefore, despite being a somewhat imprecise term, it is still useful to speak of far-right populism. It allows us to account for a phenomenon that is neither fascism nor Bonapartism in the strictest sense, but which is, in a way, a broad phenomenon that is not limited to the petty bourgeoisie but also includes sectors of the working class demoralized and burdened by the moderation of progressive reformism. We insist that it may be inaccurate, but for now it is more useful than other terms.

However, since El Salvador and Ecuador are smaller countries with less political weight than Argentina and Chile, and generally less well-known, the bourgeoisie and their media don't usually use them as examples. It's more profitable for them to create a false image of Milei as someone who can implement all his reforms than to explain where El

Salvador is or who Daniel Noboa is, the son of the Ecuadorian banana-growing oligarchy that competed with the United Fruit Company.

19: The rise of the far-right in Western Europe

The contradictions of capitalism – oppression; climate and environmental crisis; imperialism and war; tendency of the rate of profit to fall, which in turn has led to low productive investment, low productivity growth, stagflation, austerity – and their consequences, have been sharpening strongly in the recent period, leading to permanent and multicrisis.

In response to this, a general yet often vague anti-system mood has grown in many places in Europe (not only there of course, but the text will focus on this region), expressed also through increased levels of (perceived insecurity), decreasing trust in bourgeois parliamentary rule, and rising levels of violence in society.

During the 2010s, the reformist left, particularly in southern Europe, was able to grow and achieve some impressive electoral victories. However, the attempt to make society more social, ecological, equal and progressive, while staying within the systemic limits of capitalism and adapting largely to the rules of bourgeois parliamentarism and the political establishment, meant that – especially in a context of extremely marginal to non-existent space of maneuver for reformist politics – it was by and large not able to deliver on its promises or overtly betrayed them. Syriza became the epitome of that.

Since then, reaction has gained the initiative and momentum on balance. Far-right parties of different colors have been able to position themselves as the main anti-system and anti-elite forces. In several places they have been able to keep this image despite coming to power (e.g. Meloni in Italy or the FPÖ in different regional coalition governments in Austria), underlining the point that the far-right will not defeat itself.

At the same time, the ruling classes and their political representatives in Europe have shifted significantly to the (far-) right, in turn contributing to the strengthening of far-right politics generally. They have increased oppression and use more authoritarian

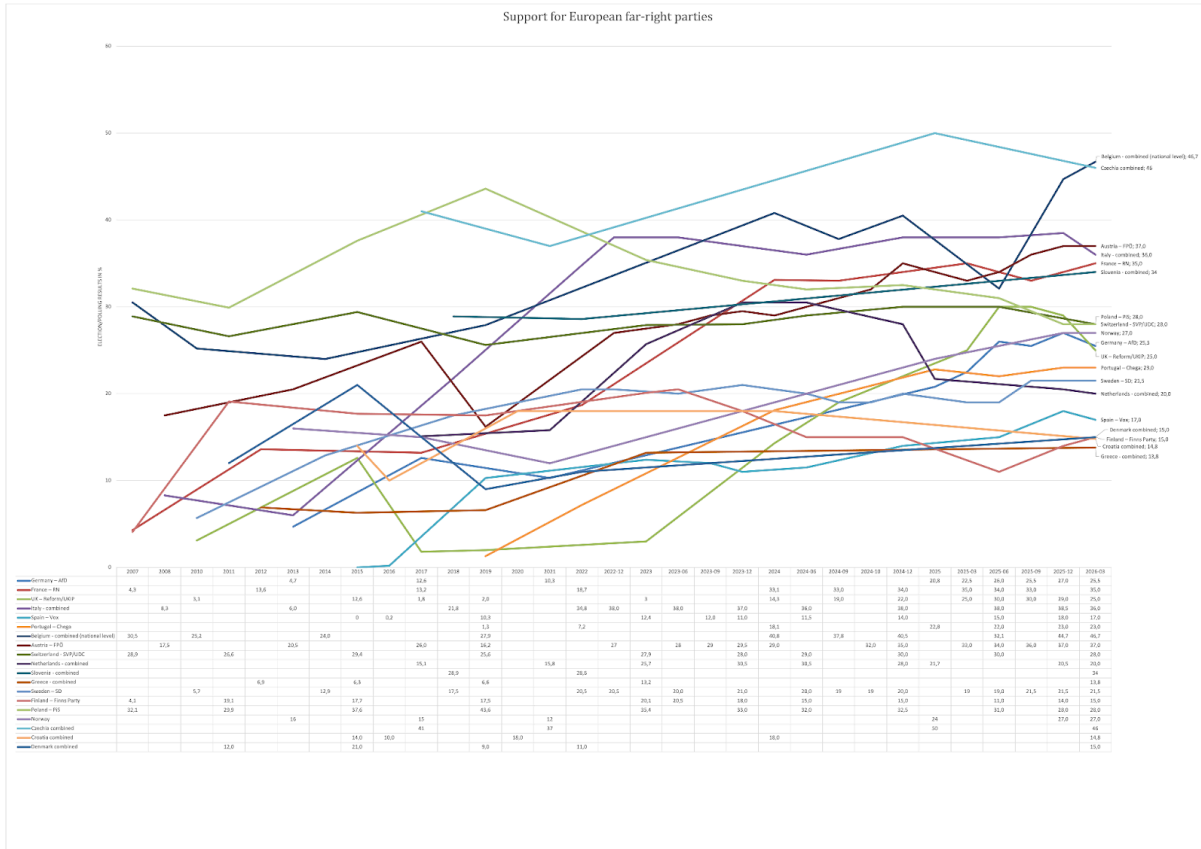
measures to push through cuts in the social, education and health care as well as cultural sectors, while pouring billions into the historic rearmament.

The German government is at the forefront of European “warfare not welfare” and military keynesianism politics, aimed at building up their own military might to enforce their imperialist goals and at overcoming the stagflation crisis of European economies, which will be reinforced by the imperialist war on Iran, Iran’s reactions and the consequences from that.

European industry, particularly in western Europe, is at a competitive disadvantage vis à vis their US and Chinese counterparts (higher wages and energy costs). We can see a parallel process of mass layoffs and companies/factories shifting from industrial to military production. These developments are of course interlinked with the strengthening of reaction, oppression, repression and authoritarian measures.

Despite recent complications for the far-right in some regions (e.g. Spain regional elections, France municipal elections, Reform UK), the trend of the rise of the far-right seems to continue and increase during the next period.

Support for European far-right parties



	2007-2013	2014-2019	2020-2023	2024-2026	2026
Germany – AfD	4,7	12,6	10,3	24,6	25,5
France – RN	9,0	13,2	18,7	33,9	35,0
UK – Reform/UKIP	3,1	5,5	3,0	24,3	25,0
Italy - combined	7,2	21,8	37,0	37,3	36,0
Spain – Vox		3,5	11,8	15,1	17,0
Portugal – Chega		1,3	7,2	21,8	23,0
Belgium - combined	27,9	26,0		40,4	46,7
Austria – FPÖ	19,0	21,1	28,4	34,1	37,0
Netherlands - combined		15,1	24,0	24,1	20,0
Switzerland - SVP/UDC	27,8	27,5	28,0	29,3	28,0
Slovenia - combined	27,8	28,9	28,6	34,0	34,0
Greece - combined	6,9	6,5	13,2	13,8	13,8
Sweden – SD	5,7	15,2	20,5	20,1	21,5
Finland – Finns Party	11,6	17,6	19,5	14,0	15,0
Poland – PiS	31,0	40,6	34,2	30,3	28,0
Norway	16,0	15,0	12,0	26,0	27,0
Czechia combined		41,0	37,0	48,0	46,0
Croatia combined		12,0	18,0	16,4	14,8
Denmark combined	12,0	15,0	11,0	15,0	15,0
AVERAGE	15,2	18,0	20,7	27,1	27,4

Graph and table: Support for European far-right parties during general elections and in surveys between those

The far-right's ideological offensive

The combination of deepening multicrisis of the capitalist system, low levels of working class organization and a consciousness among large layers that is determined by what Mark Fisher called “capitalist realism” – meaning one can more easily imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism – as well as the neoliberal fake progressive politics of the center/center-left, has been fertile soil for the rise of the far-right.

“In such situations, what [\[Naomie\] Klein calls the ‘mirror world’ of the right-wing conspiracy theorists](#) can become attractive to working-class people, because it seems to take them seriously and to provide apparently compelling, if false, answers to their problems”.

The far-right presents itself as an anti-system and anti-elite force, claiming to stand up for “regular people” and their concerns and problems. However, they “explain” those by scapegoating minorities, feminism, climate protection etc. and present their hateful agenda as the “defensive” antidote.

The far-right create the image that “our normal way of living and culture” is threatened by the “Others” and position themselves as the last defensive bulwark, since “corrupt globalist elite politicians of the deep state” either don’t stand up against the threat firmly enough or are part of it.

They try to frame misogyny and sexism as an “imported” problem, by peddling the “myth of the black rapist” and abusing cases of gender based violence when it is committed by migrants and men of color, claiming to “defend our women”. In France, the femo-nationalist collective Némésis is pushing this approach and has been able to mobilize crowds in the hundreds and sometimes low thousands onto the streets.

The far-right claim to “defend our kids” against sexualization by and indoctrination with “queer ideology”, particularly sowing hate against trans people. In several places, reactionary parent initiatives have formed around that issue, such as “Parents vigilants”

in France, which is connected to Eric Zemmour (Reconquête, even further right than RN).

The crises and problems in the social, care, education and housing sectors, a result of austerity, are blamed on migrants. The far-right's response is "defending our people's interests". They have also portrayed themselves as defending "our freedom" against "woke language policing", against Covid measures, or against climate protection measures.

The central ideological battering rams of the far-right, has been wiping up anti migrant hatred and interlinked anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism.

In the book "White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Danger of Fossil Fascism", Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective put forward and explain the "myth of palindefence" as a central ideological tool for the far-right in Europe. The core of the myth can be summarized as: we [white, Christian people in European countries] successfully defended ourselves and our cultures against Islam and Muslim invasion in the past and today we have to do it again. Below, some excerpts from the book:

"The myth of palindefence became immensely popular in the early twenty-first century European far right and the body of ideas that nourished it, such as Eurabia and the Great Replacement. [...]

In the years of the War on Terror, so crucial for the Islamophobia that subsequently seized swathes of Europe as an organised political force, this myth was enunciated by outlets in the Western mainstream. It was then sucked up by the fighters on the streets.

There arose the English Defence League, with offshoots across Europe, wielding symbols from the Crusades. The EDL vowed to 'defend our land from 1,400 years of jihad' and, addressing its Muslim enemies, to 'contest your kind, as our forefathers did, relentlessly pursuing you in our quest to see all shari'a banished from our great democratic country'. [...]

In France, Génération Identitaire emerged as the main direct-action group practising the ideas of the Great Replacement and made headlines in 2018 when it

sent a hundred activists to patrol the border in the mountains between France and Italy, marching in blue windbreakers with 'DEFEND EUROPE' written on the back. [Far-right parties in Austria, Italy, Spain, Hungary and Poland have used the same approach, only adapting the "historical" part of it to the regional context (not necessarily accurately of course)].

The myth of palindefence [...] effectively separates two kinds of people: one bound by ancestry to the victims and heroes of the homeland, the other to the interlopers and usurpers from distant lands [...]. It constructs races, [...]speaks to the anxieties over borders, [and] lives on the feeling that possessions built up over many years must now be safeguarded against various threats of diminishment. **It binds a history of victimhood to a sense of entitlement** [my emphasis].

[...] Elements of palindefensive myth-making were present already in classical fascism. [...] In his remarkable study *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism*, Paul Hanebrink dredges up a forgotten far-right discourse from the interwar period, which likened the advances of Judeo-Bolshevism from the east to the Muslim penetration centuries earlier. [...] The myth of a racial adversary once again coming to erase borders and debase the nation has returned: Judeo-Bolshevism now goes under the name of Islamisation [in France: Islamogauchisme].

[...] Palindefence has been the principal myth for actual fascists resolving their problems with machine guns and pistols in the recent European past. Breivik called his monster manifesto 2083 [because] 2083 will be the four hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Vienna. [...] The slaughtering of one hundred thousand Muslims in Bosnia [...] was a genocide committed under the sign of palindefence. [...] On his long way to the social-democratic camp at Utøya, Anders Breivik stopped to sit at the feet of Serbian nationalist war criminals. When Brenton Tarrant drove his car to the Al Noor mosque in Christchurch, he listened to an anthem from the war called 'Remove Kebab'. Lauding the hero Radovan Karadžić, the song was composed to heighten the morale of the Serbian nationalist forces; the original music video has paramilitaries singing in the hills and pictures of Muslim interns in concentration camps. In his manifesto, Tarrant called himself a

‘kebab removalist’, a term he also had inscribed on one of his guns. On another, he had written ‘Charles Martel’. Indeed, the propaganda material he posted was covered in palindefensive references, to the Crusades, Vienna 1683 and the rest of the interminable story.”

Project Normalization

Over the past years, the far-right have been immensely successful in normalizing their hateful politics and organizations, which has been facilitated and accelerated by the shift to the right of the ruling class overall and especially its right and conservative wing.

Ruling class shifts

Particularly regarding migration politics and anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism, the center-right and sometimes also center-left parties in many European countries have adopted policies and laws that seem to have been copied straight from the far-right’s playbook, sometimes even forming majorities with far-right forces.

Only two weeks after the begin of the genocide against the Palestinians, using the “opportune moment” of the 7 October 2023 shock, back-then-chancellor of Germany Scholz (SPD) declared “we have to finally deport on a large scale”, which clearly echoes the far-right demand for “remigration”. In January 2025 then, current chancellor Merz formed a majority with the AfD to adopt anti-migration plans. This has been repeated at the end of March 2026 on the EU-level, when EPP (European People’s Party) teamed up with far-right MP’s to push through a very extreme anti-migration bill that they had even drafted together in a secret Whatsapp chat. The legislation includes among other things legalizing deportation centres outside the EU and deportations to 3rd-countries, measures which had been attempted by Meloni before, but which were blocked by an EU court.

The brutalization, repression and criminalization of Palestine solidarity activists and protests across Europe, has been intricately connected to dehumanizing and Othering people with Palestinian background as well as Muslim and Arab people generally.

This has gone hand in hand with insinuations and open accusations of (imported) antisemitism and support for terrorism against those communities as well as against

the left – in France this is expressed in the term “Islamogauchisme” – which in turn have been used to justify racist and authoritarian measures and the undermining of democratic rights.

Primarily in Germany, and to a lesser degree in Austria, this conflict is a central fault line between the more center and rightwing layers – oriented towards government participation – and an anti-colonial and more clearly anti-capitalist left wing.

Whitewashing themselves from antisemitism

A key goal on the far-right’s road to normalization is their attempt to deceive people regarding their antisemitism by down-toning or hiding it, by supporting Israel and its genocide against Palestinians and by trying to shift the label of anti-Semitism onto migrants, Muslims, BPoC and the (radical) left. The establishment political parties and media as well as the Israeli regime have greatly helped them in that endeavour.

The RN in France for example, participated in November 2023 in a march against antisemitism and in March 2025, Jordan Bardella (likely RN presidency candidate for 2027) and far-right representatives from Hungary, Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden, the US and Brazil were [invited to a conference on antisemitism in Jerusalem](#).

Points to add and develop:

- **away from protest party:** people increasingly vote for far-right parties not despite but because of their politics -> who is social base, potential for further inroads among working class?

Social base of far-right: main pillars, tendencies and potential

Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective – who analyzed the politics and development of the far-right in thirteen European countries (Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) as well as the US and Brazil – make the point that while initially, more affluent voters supported the far-right (Trump 2016, Brexit, AfD in its early stages in Germany, Eric Zemmour in French presidential elections in 2022), the long rise of the

“contemporary far right in Europe began with it winning over layers of the working class from the left” (p.323).

Malm et al state that this dynamic first appeared in France and later also in “northern Europe [Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden following in 2018] – the region where the allegiance of the class to its social-democratic parties had long been the most absolute and abiding” (p.323) – and Germany.

While the AfD voter profile in 2017 was wealthier than the average, the party soon:

“stood tallest in the east, in provinces with manufacturing industries and low incomes. It also made inroads into the unionised core of the class. The leading German labour sociologist, Klaus Dörre, pointed to the emergence of a far-right pole in the factory councils of the automobile industry and offered the following statement from one union activist, who had just led a strike to victory:

Refugees should – at least that’s my opinion – they should have to leave ... I wouldn’t have a problem if they re-opened Buchenwald, put a barbed-wire fence around it, and then it’s them in there and us out here. And no one has to deal with the other one. And leave them in there for as long – I mean, with normal humane treatment and all – but to put it bluntly, until they are deported.

This was, in Dörre’s judgement, an extreme expression of a common mood. Indeed, he reported ‘an astonishing affinity for violence’ among his informants, the lines between so-called populism and plain old Nazism difficult to detect.” (Malm et al, p.323).

This trend, has been confirmed in the recent regional elections in Germany in which the AfD reached 18.8% in Baden-Württemberg (9.1% 2021) and 19.5% in Rhineland-Palatinate (8.3% in 2021), their best result in a region in western Germany.

In both elections, they had very high vote shares among workers. In Baden-Württemberg, where the AfD won over many voters from the social democrats (SPD), a [survey](#) found that 37% of workers voted for the AfD, 11% more than in 2021. In [Rhineland-Palatinate](#), even 39% of workers voted for the AfD and 40% of people who

perceived their financial situation as “bad”. Among people under 44, the AfD had the highest vote share (18-24yo 21%, 25-34yo 20%, 35-44yo 26%) of all parties.

The strong performance among young voters is a more general trend in Germany. In several recent elections, including the 2025 federal election, the AfD has performed better among younger voters than among the population as a whole.

20: Fascist Terror

Appendix I - Trotsky's theory of fascism is a unity of six elements

Summary-type intro by Mandel (p.9-50)

Trotsky's theory of fascism is a unity of six elements (p.20++)

1. The rise of fascism is the expression of a severe social crisis of late capitalism, a crisis in the very conditions of the production and realization of surplus value. It is the impossibility of continuing a “natural” accumulation of capital under the given competitive conditions on the world market (i.e. with a given level of real wages, labor productivity, and access to raw materials and markets). Fascism's historical function is to change those to the advantage of the decisive groups of monopoly capitalism.
2. Looked at historically, fascism is both the realization and negation of monopoly capital's tendency to “organize” in a totalitarian fashion the whole of social life in its interests.
3. Such a violent centralization of power cannot be achieved by a military dictatorship or a police state, they cannot atomize and demoralize for very long a

conscious social class with millions of members. For that, the big bourgeoisie needs a movement that can set masses in motion on its side:

- a. destruction of the proletarian mass organizations through systematic mass terror and street warfare -> conscious proletarian elements atomized, demoralized, resigned
 - b. constant supervision of the class-conscious masses through block wardens, street monitors and factory cells
4. Such a mass movement can only arise on the basis of [primarily] the petty bourgeoisie. Inflation, bankruptcy of small firms, mass unemployment of university graduates, technicians and higher salaried employees can create levels of despair that such a movement can arise. It combined extreme nationalism and verbal anti-capitalist demagoguery with the most intense hatred for the organized workers' movement. When such a *movement* begins physical attacks on workers' movement (groups, actions, meetings, buildings), a fascist movement is born -> period of autonomous development to win mass influence -> then it needs financial and political support of important sections of monopoly capital to seize power.
5. Workers' movement must be ground down and beaten back before seizure of power (or disarmed as in Germany in 1930s through wrong politics of KPD), otherwise the attempt can trigger a revolutionary situation that can threaten capitalism itself as in Spain 1936. -> hesitancy of big bourgeoisie in light of such an all-or-nothing game; passivity and weakness of labor movement reduced hesitancy in Germany.

At the beginning, fascist bands were composed of the most resolute and desperate parts of the petty bourgeoisie. The p.b. masses and unconscious and unorganized parts of the wage workers—especially young workers and white collar youth—will normally waver back and forth between the camps (they want to be on the winning side). Historically, the victory of fascism expresses the inability of the workers' movement to resolve the structural crisis in its own interest and to its own ends.

6. If fascism succeeds "like a battering ram in smashing the workers' movement", then its main task is done and the mass movement will be bureaucratized and to a large extent assimilated into the bourgeois state apparatus (-> fascism turns

into bonapartism). Once the workers' movement is smashed and conditions of production altered decisively in favor of the big bourgeoisie, then efforts will be concentrated to achieve similar changes on the world market -> military "adventures" and war. But the war economy deteriorates the economic situation and political position of the p.b; a pronounced acceleration in the concentration of capital and the proletarianization of the middle classes takes place. The fascist dictatorship has the tendency to undermine and disintegrate its own mass base. In the phase of its decline, fascism is transformed back into a particular kind of Bonapartism.

Appendix II - Fascism's characteristics by Zetkin

Clara Zetkin: Fighting Fascism - How to Struggle and How to Win *edited and introduced by Mike Taber and John Riddel*

Notes on and quotes from the book

Fascism's characteristics

General conditions for the emergence of fascism:

- structural crisis of capitalism and decline of its institutions; escalating attacks on the working class, the middle layers (petit- and middle bourgeois) are increasingly squeezed and proletarianized
- the failure of the working class to resolve the social crisis by taking power and reorganizing society. Demoralization among the working class and those layers that looked to their leadership and socialism for a way out.

Characteristics of fascism as a movement:

- fascism possessed a mass character with a special appeal to petty-bourgeois layers threatened by the decline of the capitalist order
- historically: "anticapitalist" demagogy to win support; today, at least so far, far-right forces put more focus on "defending the normal way of life", "anti-system", "anti-elite"

- use of organized violence by anti-working-class shock troops, aiming to crush all independent proletarian activity

Fascist ideology:

- elevates nation and state above all class contradictions and class interests
- national chauvinism is used as a cover to incite militarism and imperialist war
- racism and racist scapegoating is central

Support from (finance) capital: at a certain point, important sections of the capital class support the fascist movement to counter the threat of socialist revolution

Fascism's spiritual appeal

"We must understand that, incontestably, growing masses here are seeking an escape route from the dreadful suffering of our time. This involves much more than filling one's stomach. No, the best of them are seeking an escape from deep anguish of the soul. They are longing for new and unshakable ideals and a world outlook that enables them to understand nature, society, and their own life" (Zetkin, p. 60).