The Ugly Character of the Far Right of a Special Type.

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A range of political platforms have emerged in the past two decades that have been characterised as fascist, neo-fascist, authoritarian, far right, and extreme right. These forms of political intervention in society have largely grown in Europe and in North America, with a few examples in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The reason why these forms are largely seen in the North Atlantic is that they have been birthed in a situation where the neoliberal technocratic political parties have suffered a serious legitimacy crisis as their political platform of austerity and war has become less and less attractive to a population exhausted by these policies (the emergence of form of the right in the Global South have a different trajectory, which will require a separate assessment). The most crucial finding from our research is that these forms of the right have not abandoned the framework of austerity and war, but are merely new political *brands* that will pursue the same policies as the neoliberal technocratic parties but with a more muscular and acerbic form of nationalism to attract mass support that might have otherwise drifted leftward. These forms of the right share more with the neoliberal technocratic parties than with the classical fascists of the 1930s and 1940s. That is why we call them *far right of a special type*.

Part 1.

Intimate Embrace

One of the curiosities of our time is that the far right of a special type is quite comfortable with the established institutions of liberal democracy. There are instances here and there of disgruntled political leaders who refuse to accept their defeat at the ballot box (such as Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro) and then call upon their supporters to take extra-parliamentary action (as on 6 January 2021 in the United States and, in a farcical repetition, on 8 January 2023 in Brazil). But, by and large, the far right of a special type knows that it can attain what it wants through the institutions of liberal democracy, which are not hostile to its programmes. The *fatal, intimate embrace* between the political projects of liberalism and those of the far right of a special type can be understood in two ways.

First, this embrace is seen in the ease with which the forces of the far right use their countries' liberal constitutions and institutions to their benefit. They do not need to

supplant them dramatically. There is no need to burn the Reichstag (1933) or March on Rome (1920). Far-right governments have a liberal constitution before them that seems to be no obstacle to their rule. Laws against terrorism in the previous neoliberal technocracies make authoritarianism possible without any further legal or extra-legal action. The bureaucrats of the constitutional structure are already schooled in tough talk against terrorists and immigrants. They do not need to be turned around. They are already turned toward a permanent state of exception. There is no need for a coup against the liberal structure. It can be hollowed from within. This is precisely what the second Trump administration is doing in the United States. It has stretched the limits of legality to get its way.

Second, this intimate, but fatal, embrace takes place within the 'cultures of cruelty' (as Aijaz Ahmad called it). A culture of cruelty is not something unique to fascism but is the normal situation in the social world of savage capitalism (which has its roots, as Aimé Césaire argued, in savage colonialism). Forced to work for capital – in increasingly precarious and atomised jobs – to survive, workers discover, as Karl Marx astutely observed in 1857/58, that it is money that is the 'real community' (*Gemeinwesen*) and it is the person who is the instrument, and the slave, of money. Wrenched from the care of genuine community, workers are forced into lives that oscillate between the hell of long and difficult workdays and the purgatory of long and difficult unemployment. The absence of state-provided social welfare and the collapse of worker-led community institutions produce 'cultures of cruelty', a normal kind of violence that runs from within the home to out on the streets – in other words from violence against women in the home to gang violence on the streets. This violence often takes place without fanfare and reinforces traditional structures of power (along axes of patriarchy and of nativism, for instance). The far right's source of power lies in these 'cultures of cruelty', which occasionally lead to spectacular acts of violence against social minorities. Bolsonaro went one step further. He built a Gabinete do Odio (an office of hate), from which his followers received an injection of social media horror against this or that figure to ridicule. But the far right did not need to build a new culture but simply utilised the forms already available in our current capitalist culture of cruelty.

Savage Capitalism

Savage capitalism has globalised production and liberated property owners from adhering to even the norms of liberal democracy, such as paying their fair share of taxes. This political economic structure of savage capitalism generates a neoliberal social order that is rooted in imposing austerity on the working class and the peasantry and in atomising working people by increasing their working time; this increase of work and commute time erodes the social institutions that workers run, and, therefore, diminishes their leisure time. Liberal democracies around the world conduct time-use surveys of their populations to see how people spend their time, but almost none of these surveys pay attention to whether workers and peasants have any time for leisure, how they might spend this leisure time, and whether the reduction of their leisure time is a concern for general social development in their country. We are very far away from the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation's 1945 Constitution that urged the 'free flow of ideas by word and image' and the need to

‘give fresh impulse to popular education and to the spread of culture’. Social discussions about the dilemmas of humanity are silenced while old forms of hatred are sanctioned. Rather than the ‘spread of culture’ we are seeing the erosion of cultural lives.

National cultures in North America and Europe have become so toxic. It is the hatred of the migrant, the terrorist, and the drug dealer – all portrayed as sociopaths – that evokes an *acerbic form of nationalism*, one that is not rooted in love of one’s fellow human beings but in hatred of the outsider. Hatred masquerades as patriotism while the size of the national flag grows and the enthusiasm for the national anthem increases by decibels. This form of nationalism, central to the far right of a special type, has now become available to political forces in the Global South, who have taken them on (such as in Argentina) without emerging from the soil of their own countries.

Human beings across the world ache to be decent, but that ache is smothered by desperation and resentment, by the intimate, diabolical embrace of liberalism and the far right. The North Atlantic support for the Israeli genocide of the Palestinians and for the increase of military expenditure to 5% of their Gross Domestic Product will only increase the horror of austerity and war, and – for now – drive more and more people into the parties of the far right of the special type which provides *at least the rhetoric of opposition* even if it is a Trojan Horse for more austerity and more war.

Testosterone-laden Parties

There is certainly every indication that the normal rule by the bourgeoisie has faded. Neoliberal technocrats with their desire for permanent austerity are no longer a reliable political force for stability. Their eagerness to squeeze society and pursue increased militarism has created social distress and political turmoil. The neoliberal technocrat is now unreliable, and in many countries cannot win elections although might still find themselves placed into the prime minister’s office (as in France) or might become the Chancellor by the creation of coalitions that violate the election mandates of the votes (as in Germany). How, therefore, to continue neoliberal capitalism without the neoliberal technocrat?

In place of these neoliberal technocrats, we now have *testosterone-laden parties* led by men and women who speak bluntly about the problems before us but provide divisive policies as an antidote. They do not want to alter the neoliberal structures of government policy or to burden capitalists with taxes and regulations. What they want is to use their toughness to discipline society, particularly in the West, and to increase the exploitation of the workforce to compete with the growing Asian economies. In the name of the people, these parties seek policies that would increase the social disciplinary pressures on the population. Cuts in social welfare and reductions of worker rights drive the people to seek uberised jobs that – it is hoped – will increase the productivity of labour and the rate of exploitation to better compete with vastly more productive companies based in the new centre of the global economy, namely Asia.

The political economy of the far right of a special type is rooted not just in the cannibalisation of the Western economies by the neoliberal consensus but in the emergence of a vibrant Asian pole of economic growth. The fastest growing economies are now in Asia, where countries have used the surplus generated by high rates of exploitation to increase gross investment and to therefore build up infrastructure and industry. Given that Western governments do not have the political will to seize the vast financial reserves of the oligarchy, and since the states do not have large surpluses to utilise, they are not able to increase their own net fixed capital. On the table before the bourgeoisie in the West, therefore, is the question of how to reinvigorate their economies, the only answer being to increase militarism and threaten China, in particular, so as to get it and other Asian countries to slow down their own development to favour the Atlantic world. The New Cold War imposed by the West on China, in particular, is a key element in the emergence of the far right of a special type. Their parties understand clearly that other conflicts (such as the pressure campaign on Russia) are not the central frontline for the maintenance of Western power – that frontline is in Asia.

Part II.

Classical fascism

Classical fascism was counterrevolutionary, emerging in a period of revolutionary dynamism that produced the 1917 October Revolution and the working-class and peasant movements from the Ruhr Valley in Germany of workers to the Po Valley in Italy of peasants. As the revolutionary developments in Berlin and Turin fell apart, the dangerous fascist menace rose. As Clara Zetkin wrote in August 1923, 'Fascism is the punishment of the proletariat for failing to carry on the revolution begun in Russia'. There are some key points about classical fascism to help us better distinguish that political force from the far right of a special type of our time:

1. Classical fascism emerged as a counter-revolutionary force against the rise of the working-class and peasant movements in Europe after the October Revolution.
2. Classical fascism was not – as Clara Zetkin wrote - 'military-terrorist movement' but decidedly 'a mass movement with deep social roots'.
3. Classical fascism's core mass base was formed by section of the working-class and peasantry that had been disillusioned by the failed communist uprising and sought their future in the arms of fascism, as well as sections of the petit bourgeoisie who had been demoralised by the capitalist crises but who had been saturated by those who preached an eternal national glory. Behind this mass base lingered the big bourgeoisie who nourished the fascist movement and guided it against any programme of revolutionary transformation.
4. Classical fascism did not have support from the totality of the bourgeoisie (Togliatti wrote in May 1926 that there was a 'habit of employing the term fascist in such broad terms that encompassed the most diverse forms of reactionary movements of the bourgeoisie'). There were sections that stood against the

fascists but were committed to other forms of reaction against the working-class and peasantry.

5. Classical fascism could be combatted by the formation of a popular front, by bringing together a coalition from below of working-class groups in alliance with other forces in society that believed in decency and reasons against the fascist forces.
6. Classical fascism was late imperialist, a latecomer to the colonial land grab that allowed it to export its surplus rural population and build – in those settler colonial bastions – external markets for the industrial goods through imperial preference systems. Japanese militarism and the Nazi policy for the creation of a *Lebensraum* (living space) as well as Italy's wars of conquest from Libya to Ethiopia are examples of the necessity for classical fascism to be late imperialist processes.

The Far Right of a Special Type

The far right of a special type in our time emerges when there is no process led by the working-class and peasantry to supplant capitalism. Instead, it emerges to discipline the Western working-class and urban poor to work harder in uberised jobs so that they can compete against the buoyancy of Asian economic growth. The far right hopes that it is the engine for the salvation of Western capitalism. It builds a mass movement around ugly ideas of race and patriarchy. On race, it suggests that unemployment is caused by immigration by the wrong kind of people. On patriarchy, it suggests that the right kind of women need to have more babies to counter the diminished population of the right kind of people (namely whites and not immigrants). This anti-immigrant, neo-natalist politics can build a political constituency for the far right of a special type that is much greater than a narrow appeal to fascist hooliganism. This far right threatens to grab the economy by the throat and make it cough out jobs, but it cannot really force this to happen. The fact that the parties of the far right of a special type mention the crisis and do not deny it – as the parties of the neoliberal consensus do – is sufficient to garner support among enough people who at least see their pain being mirrored in the speeches of far-right politicians. That these parties do not act to change the actual conditions of everyday life will eventually be a burden for this political tendency, but not yet.

The experience of fascist violence since the last century has undone its appeal. The growth of middle-class culture, with its predisposition to convenience, has made fascist violence a political liability. Inconvenience of traffic jams and riots are to be avoided. That is the reason why the far right of a special type incites a homeopathic dose of violence in society by the more fascistic elements within its political coalition to create fear, but not enough fear to turn people against it. On occasion, an arms-length assassination of a labour leader or an arms-length threat made to a journalist, is not blamed on the far right of a special type, which often hastily denies any direct association with the fringe fascistic groups (which are nonetheless linked organically to the far right).

Here are some key points on the Far Right of a Special Type of our time:

1. The far right of a special type develops a mass base through rigorous demonization of migrants and racial and sexual minorities as well as through demonization of countries that are far more economically productive (for instance, China).
2. The far right of a special type is backed fully by a bourgeoisie terrified by its loss of economic buoyancy to China.
3. The far right of a special type has not ruptured its link to neoliberalism but wishes to deepen neoliberalism to intensify the exploitation of workers so as to better compete with Asian workers.
4. The far right of a special type offers an agenda that is profoundly anti-state when it comes to social care but very much pro-state when it comes to the strong arm of the law – which makes them resemble the neoliberal technocrats but with an even stiffer attitude to austerity and violence. There is no decisive break by them from the agenda of neoliberalism.
5. The far right of a special type makes a partial break from the *language* of globalisation and the Atlantic consensus. They are far more interested in national interests. But this does not mean that they are unaware of the structure of the world economy, which is now substantially reliant upon world trade. Even when it comes to the Atlantic Consensus, the language of disregard is not matched with a departure from NATO, etc.
6. The far right of a special type is fully committed to the hyper-imperialist project of using every type of military and diplomatic pressure on China and other Asian countries to get them to surrender their development agenda and become – once again – the workforce of Western firms and not the producers of high value commodities.

Rescue the Collective Life

Classical fascist culture was a dead culture. It was a culture of fake glory and genuine violence. It made a genuine break from the liberal culture that preceded it, and a break from the culture of the working-class and the peasantry that had grown stronger through decades of struggle and institution building.

The culture of the far right of a special type, on the other hand, is a refraction of neoliberal culture. It has no culture of its own, but it is a replica, a broken mirror of neoliberal fantasies and desires, an inflation of desire. Trump is not Hitler, but the host of *The Celebrity Apprentice*, the tag line being *you're fired*. The Global North, the epicentre of the far right of a special type, is marinated in decadence and danger. There is no new philosophy emanating from it. It has no intellectuals who lead it, not even of the type of Nazi intellectuals such as Ernst Kriek or Martin Heidegger or Carl Schmitt. It is dangerous because it commands a military that has the capacity to destroy the world: close to 80% of world military spending is done by the Global North and its close NATO+ allies, with the United States in possession of over 900 foreign military bases (including many on European soil).

Part of our fight against this cultural collapse is to rescue the collective life and to bring vitality back to culture. This is a deeper struggle than a political struggle. It comes back to building the confidence to reject the search for national glory and to search instead for the tremendous histories of ordinary people to build emancipated societies. The world needs less hierarchy and more equality, more of a search for a shared future for humanity. It is not about which is the greatest country in the world, but whether the world has been able to overcome the dilemmas of humanity – hunger, illiteracy, demoralisation……

Do we have a programme, a new theory for the world that we need? You cannot build a programme against the far right of a special type through fear, which encourages a return to old neoliberalism – a neoliberalism of technocracy and pseudo-politeness but nonetheless of austerity and war. No politics of fear can build a proper socialist bloc. We need to build a politics of hope and of optimism. Not through George Orwell and Sinclair Lewis, no doom and gloom. But belief in the future. That is the only way.