THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF ANTIFASCISM BY THE POPULIST RIGHT AND THE FAR LEFT (and others)

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We are all ‘antifascist’ (except for fascists!), but which fascism are we ‘anti’?

Since 1945 fascism is such a tabooized and demonized word that most citizens living in democracies are instinctively ‘anti-fascist’ and most movements reject the description of themselves as fascist.

It has also become an easy insult for any form of authoritarian behaviour, creating terms such as ‘health fascism’, ‘fashion fascism’, ‘climate fascism’

However, when it comes to opposing fascism effectively in an organized way it is essential to be clear what we are opposing.

For some, all authoritarian, racist, conservative, and nationalist politics are fascist: but are all these people protesting against the same thing?
In England
In the US
In Poland
In Serbia
In Slovenia
THE FAR LEFT’S MOBILIZATION OF ANTIFASCISM
In Marxist theory, in all its many variants, fascism is the product of capitalism and is endemic to capitalist society.

More precisely it is the manifestation of the latent violence, oppression and inhumanity which is generally hidden or invisible behind society’s liberal facade as long as it running smoothly for the bourgeoisie and the rich.

In times of crisis the repressive, violent reactions of the state to attempts to protest against inhuman living conditions and extreme injustice, as well as any organized attempts to protect the rights of the oppressed, exploited and mistreated, are manifestations of liberal capitalism’s latent fascism.
Examples of the Marxist concept

1935: Georgi Dimitrov 1935 in an official report to the 7th World Congress of the Comintern:

fascism is "the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, and most imperialist elements of finance capital”

1935 J. T. Murphy, The Socialist League:

“FASCISM is not an alternative to Capitalism. It is Capitalism in its most desperate, violent form. It is a product of the crisis of Capitalism, aiming not at replacing Capitalism by a new social order but by the organisation of a Party and the State seeking to save Capitalism by crushing and destroying every element within society which resists the slavery of Capitalism and every movement within it which seeks to carry society forward to Socialism and Communism. It uses the most modern weapons of violence and repression in its attempt to reverse social evolution. It is the black defender of private property, of rent, interest and profit, in the age when private property and the system of human exploitation based upon it are incompatible with the progressive development of society.”
In 1941 the Marxist playwright Bertolt Brecht, who chose to live in East Berlin after the war, in a poem written during the Second World War refers to the Nazi Luftwaffe as the ‘bombing squadrons of capitalism’

2020 Encyclopedia of Marxism (online)
“Fascism is right-wing, fiercely nationalist, subjectivist in philosophy, and totalitarian in practice. It is an extreme reactionary form of capitalist government.”

In liberal democracies the Marxist concept of fascism often leads to the instrumentalization of antifascism by the revolutionary left to mobilize and unite the disparate forces of anti-capitalism. e.g.:
An antifascist and pro-communist photomontage by John Heartfield
Antifascism was a major rallying cause for the international left during the Spanish Civil War

“A Brief History of Anti-Fascism: As long as the ideology has threatened marginalized communities, groups on the left have pushed back with force”

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/brief-history-anti-fascism-180975152/
More recently: the UK SWP (Socialist Workers’ Party) mobilized the left by protesting against Tommy Robinson (UK fascist rabble-rouser for EDL and Pegida).
In the US sections of the far left used the anti-Trump campaign to call for a Marxist revolution.
In February 2020 Refuse Fascism disrupted the Oscar Awards ceremony
In the build up to the elections the movement got ever more strident.

Ep.22 The Revolution-Nothing Less Show!

As Fascism Accelerates,

Protest Sept 5:
Meanwhile gravitational pull of left-wing anti-Trumpism/antifascism also impacted on some supporters of liberal democracy in the US...
...and abroad
Memories of antifascism still crucial to far left

*International Socialism* 3 January 2021
How We Smashed the Golden Dawn
http://isj.org.uk/how-we-smashed-golden-dawn/

*Socialist Worker*  September 2016
The battle that beat the Blackshirts—80 years since Cable Street
The march of Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists was halted on 4 October 1936 by a working class revolt in east London. Alistair Farrow looks at what we can learn from anti-fascists who recall the mobilisation
Memories of Civil War in Catalonia and Oxford
Sympathetic accounts of left-wing antifascism
These seem particularly empathetic accounts of the mind set of contemporary US antifascism

**WE ARE ANTI-FASCISM**

**ANTIFA: THE ANTI-FASCIST HANDBOOK**

EXPRESSIONS AGAINST FASCISM, RACISM AND POLICE VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES AND BEYOND
Bray argues in his book that militant anti-fascism is a reasonable and legitimate political tradition, and describes his book as "an unabashedly partisan call to arms that aims to equip a new generation of anti-fascists with the history and theory necessary to defeat the resurgent far-right".

Antifa: “can variously be described as a kind of ideology, an identity, a tendency or milieu, or an activity of self-defense.” It’s a leaderless, horizontal movement whose roots lie in various leftist causes—Communism, anarchism, Socialism, anti-racism.

The New Yorker 2017
In “Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook,” published last week by Melville House, the historian Mark Bray presents the Battle of Cable Street as a potent symbol of how to stop Fascism: a strong, unified coalition outnumbered and humiliated Fascists to such an extent that their movement fizzled. For many members of contemporary anti-Fascist groups, the incident remains central to their mythology, a kind of North Star in the fight against Fascism and white supremacy across Europe and, increasingly, the United States.

At the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, a number of Antifa activists, carrying sticks, blocked entrances to Emancipation Park, where white supremacists planned to gather. Fights broke out; some Antifa activists reportedly sprayed chemicals and threw paint-filled balloons. Multiple clergy members credited activists with saving their lives. Fox News reported that a White House petition urging that Antifa be labelled a terrorist organization had received more than a hundred thousand signatures.
THE RIGHT’S MOBILIZATION OF ANTIFASCISM
In the interwar period fascist and authoritarian right-wing movements/regimes exploited the threat of communist ‘antifascism’ and the imminence of a socialist revolution, e.g.

- In Nazi Germany
- In Fascist Italy
- In Vichy France
- In Franco’s Spain
- In Horthy’s Hungary
- In First Slovak Republic (Hlinka Guard)
Under Trump, when left-wing antifascism took to the streets...
a symbiotic relationship developed between far left and far right attempts to mobilize extremist support
For the populist right antifascism is identified at gut level with revolutionary communism, subversion and anarchy. Hence Trump repeatedly alluded to Antifa as the cause of civil unrest during BLM campaign and Capitol attack:

Some US newspaper headlines:

‘Trump loyalists push evidence-free claims that antifa activists fuelled mob’

The claims are typical of many that arise during major news events and particularly violent acts; fringe communities often label them ‘false flag’ attacks.’

‘George Floyd protests: Trump says US will designate Antifa a terrorist organisation.

Trump reportedly suggested that ‘Antifa people’ were behind the effort to storm the Capitol on Jan. 6, during a private call with Republican House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy on Monday morning.’
LOYAL REPUBLICANS EAGERLY FOLLOWED SUITE

‘Trump loyalists push evidence-free claims that antifa activists fuelled mob

The claims are typical of many that arise during major news events and particularly violent acts; fringe communities often label them ‘false flag’ attacks.’

‘Yes, Republicans really did try to blame Trump’s behavior on BLM during impeachment hearings’

SEE VIDEO AT: https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/trump-impeachment-republicans-riots-black-lives-matter-b1786961.html
Certainly left-wing anti-fascists were involved in the BLM protests
However the liberal press refuted Trump’s claims that (the highly uncoordinated US Antifa led the anti-Trump protests or provoked attack on the Capitol

“Arrest records disprove Trump’s claims that Antifa caused disruption during Black Lives Matter protests”

“Capitol Attack Was Culmination of Generations of Far-Right Extremism”
Closer home: there is also an Antifa in Hungary
Predictably, Viktor Orbán has tried to capitalize on Trump’s campaign against the US Antifa

“From what followed in the pro-Fidesz media, it was obvious that Orbán was trying to shift blame for the siege on the U.S. Capitol to Antifa and participants in the Black Lives Matter movement. At the same time, he invoked a trivial incident that occurred on December 13, 2018 during a Budapest demonstration as evidence of a violent opposition at home. In brief, he falsified what happened both in Washington and in Budapest.”

“According to the journalists of the Hungarian gutter press, there is more and more proof that Antifa and BLM provocateurs incited and led the crowd against the Capitol. The paper also adds, following Orbán’s directives, that “left-liberal incitement and the resulting destruction are not unknown in Hungary either.”

https://hungarianspectrum.org/tag/antifa/
Hostile (anti-Marxist) accounts of antifascist radicalism reflecting continued right-wing populist mindset
ANTIFASCISM AS A “FOUNDATION MYTH”
A communist antifascist foundation myth was crucial to the cohesion of new post-war Soviet Empire and its satellites.

In the USSR the victory of the Red Army over ‘fascism’ (Nazism) in the Great Patriotic War was a crucial myth for the rationalization of Stalinism after WWII and the creation of national solidarity and pride.

In the satellites of the Soviet Empire, Antifascism crucial part of the foundation myth of the new communist regimes, Especially in GDR


https://books.openedition.org/ceup/1589?lang=en
E.g. in Poland: Joanna Wawrzyniak
Veterans, Victims, and Memory: The Politics of the Second World War in Communist Poland, ch. 3
‘The myth of victory over fascism (1949-55)’
But also in non-Soviet dominated states e.g. in the foundation of Yugoslavia

See Wikipedia article: ‘Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia’

And even today antifascism an important element of continuity in some social groups Balkan Insight ‘Defending Tito's Legacy is an Anti-Fascist Duty’ https://balkaninsight.com/2017/08/24/defending-tito-s-legacy-is-an-anti-fascist-duty-08-23-2017/

(NB: not all partisan movements left-wing/pro-The communist: Slovak resistance movement was fiercely nationalistic not communist. In the Slovak National Uprising in 1944 Slovak partisans aided by the Slovak Army was crushed by the Germans and their Hungarian and Ukrainian collaborators and after the war the Communist Regime persecuted its members as traitors.)
The role of Slovene antifascism in integrating Slovenia into Communist Yugoslavia


- 1941-1953 Liberation Front of Slovene People (Osvobodilna fronta, OF) > Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia or SSRNJ

- 1943 Plenum changes name to SNOS Slovene National Liberation Committee (Slovenski narodnoosvobodilni) and proclaim itself as the temporary Slovenian Parliament.

- One of the most important decisions of Slovene antifascism was that after the end of the war Slovenia would become a state within the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia

- Just before the end of the war, on May 5, 1945, the SNOS met for the last time in the town of Ajdovščina in the Julian March (then formally still part of the Kingdom of Italy) and established the Slovene government with the Communist leader Boris Kidrič as its president
Semiotics of Slovene antifascism
Anti-fascism was also a key foundation myth for some liberal democracies.
The Allied war against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan based on a shared democratic/capitalist and communist/anti-capitalist antifascism
After 1945 several liberal democracies exploited antifascism as a national foundation myth after the war: e.g.

- France ('résistancialisme') Henry Rousso *The Vichy Syndrome* (1987)
- Portugal: transition to liberal democracy
- NB alliance/blurring of distinction between democratic Catholicism and far left in these myths
Anglophone books on antifascism as democratic foundation myth in Italy, France and post-Salazar Portugal
(M. Consonni: The Eclipse of Anti-Fascism. Resistance, the Jewish Question and Political Culture in Italy from 1943 to 1989)
The importance of immediate postwar Greece to comparative antifascist studies: clash of democratic and communist antifascism in Greece comparatively neglected in English texts but not in cinema history

NB Costa Grigori Gavras (1969) and Theo Angelopoulos (1975)
Since 1990s antifascism is becoming an increasingly rich international subdiscipline.
In overviews...
and in specialist areas....
in critical articles

e.g. Liz Fekete ‘Anti-fascism or anti-extremism?’
Race and Class, 55/4 (2014)

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0306396813519933?icid=int.sj-abstract.similar-articles.1

https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Transnational-History%3A-A-New-Paradigm-for-Studies-Garc%C3%ADa/e811f47ff543b27dcd2d5759029ba294444285ca
AND FINALLY (if I may be so bold)
There is an increasingly productive and mainstream international subdiscipline of comparative fascism associated with the journal *Fascism* and the organization COMFAS based on the working definition of fascism as a *revolutionary form of nationalism*: or to be more precise:

‘A revolutionary form of nationalism, one that sets out to be a political, social and ethical revolution, welding the 'people' into a dynamic national community under new elites infused with heroic values. The core myth that inspires this project is that only a populist, trans-class movement of purifying, cathartic national rebirth (palingenesis) can stem the tide of decadence.'

*Griffin, The Nature of Fascism, p. xvi.*
From liberal perspective, fascism not a face of or child of capitalism. In its own way it is revolutionary and hence ultimately anti-conservative, anti-reactionary, and anti-bourgeois, despite tactical alliances.

The regimes of Salazar, Franco, Horthy, Antonescu, Piłsudski, Vargas, Peròn, and other military ‘generals’, as well as Japanese imperialism were thus not fascist, though they belonged to the ‘fascist era’. They were fought against and defeated by an alliance of liberal democracies with communist Russia in a stand against, not capitalism but systemic inhumanity, of which fascism is only one variant.
Right-wing populism not revolutionary and hence not fascist, but seeks to drive a wedge between ‘liberal’ and ‘democracy’ and de-liberalize democracy.

Arguably, in an anti-fascist age where fascism is deeply marginalized and taboo, right-wing populism is MORE of a threat to liberal democracy than fascism.

Cas Mudde: “I define populism as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people.”
RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN EUROPE
Politics and Discourse

THE POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT
A reader
Edited by Cas Mudde

Catherine Fieschi

RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN AMERICA
Too Close for Comfort

RUTH WODAK

THE POLITICS OF FEAR
What Right-wing Populist Discourses Mean

Hans-Georg Betz
Hence, for example, Trump not fascist but right-wing populist, but still an enemy of liberal democracy:

Dylan Matthews Vox Dec 2020 I asked 5 fascism experts whether Donald Trump is a fascist. Here’s what they said.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/10/21/how-fascist-is-donald-trump-theres-actually-a-formula-for-that/


David Bell Washington Post August 2020 Trump is a racist demagogue but not a fascist

An illiberal democracy is a governing system in which, although elections take place, citizens are cut off from knowledge about the activities of those who exercise real power because of the lack of civil liberties; thus it is not an open society. There are many countries "that are categorized as neither 'free' nor 'not free', but as 'probably free', falling somewhere between democratic and nondemocratic regimes".

The rulers of an illiberal democracy may ignore or bypass constitutional limits on their power. They also tend to ignore the will of the minority which is what makes the democracy illiberal. Elections in an illiberal democracy are often manipulated or rigged, being used to legitimize and consolidate the incumbent rather than to choose the country's leaders and policies.

Some theorists argue that illiberal democracy is fundamentally undemocratic and therefore prefer terms such as electoral authoritarianism, competitive authoritarianism, or soft authoritarianism.
Several leaders commonly called fascists ‘actually’ right-wing populists /illiberal democrats

- Trump
- Orbán
- Putin
- Erdogan
- Netanyahu
- Al-Assad
- Bolsonaro
- Modi

Hence antifascism TOO NARROW a concept on which to base a cause dedicated to opposing a movement or regime based on inhumanity
“Anti-fascism” should not be the main focus of the struggle for social justice and a better world, but an integral part of the struggle to defend and maximize the liberalism of liberal democracies, whether secular or religious.
The multi-faceted struggle for social justice in every sphere of human rights, not just under ‘fascism’: e.g. for

- Gender equality
- Worker’s rights
- Women’s rights
- Children’s rights
- Minority rights
- Sexual and third gender rights
- Freedom of speech and thought
- Ethnic equality
- Refugees
- Fair trade
- Education
- Housing
- Equality of opportunity
- Corruption and the abuse of power
- Sexual abuse of power
- The violation of human rights at home and abroad through many types of discrimination and racism
- The rights of the planet
This humanist struggle does not just demand this: an image from an article on the “11th Week of Anti-Govt, Anti-Fascist & Anti-Anti-Fascist Protests in Ljubljana”
BUT ALSO THIS:
Slovenian Protesters Rally Against ‘Degradation of Democracy’
“Despite coronavirus restrictions, protesters rallied in the Slovenian capital Ljubljana to call for the resignation of Prime Minister Janez Jansa, who they accuse of undermining democratic values”