

The crisis of capitalism and the rise of neo-fascism

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Fascism today may espouse nationalism as a core value, but its movement is international. Fighting back against this new Fascist international, as Ugo Palheta calls it, demands a strong international socialist movement led by those who are most egregiously exploited under the current capitalist system.

The rise of the far right is a global wave, rooted in the crises and contradictions of capitalism in our time. This is at least the argument of Ugo Palheta in his latest book, *La Nouvelle Internationale fasciste*, in which he insists that far-right movements – no matter how nationalistic they may be – not only inspire each other, but organise themselves on an international scale, building a common understanding across borders that is essentially based on the hatred of equality. The present historical moment is thus marked by the emergence and rise of a ‘new fascist international’, which can only be stopped by the construction of an International of the oppressed, rooted in the struggles already present. We offer here an excerpt from Palheta’s book, which investigates the conditions in which neo-fascisms, these nationalisms of purification, are able to prosper.

Neo-fascism is already a global force. A ‘magnetic field’ of neo-fascisms has formed, allowing them to attract both large sections of the population and entire sectors of the political and media elites seeking a new hegemony. This force of attraction varies in intensity from one country to another, depending on their history, the resistance that neo-fascism meets, the susceptibility of the dominant classes to radical nationalism, the penetration of racist and authoritarian ideas in the population, etc. But the neo-fascist dynamic is global because it stems from a phenomenon that developed in parallel with the advent of neoliberal capitalism and its subsequent crisis. A multifaceted crisis: social, economic, environmental, and of course political.

The political crisis is not a function of the personality of this or that national leader, of corruption scandals here or there, of bad choices made by some people, or of other situational and contingent aspects of the prevailing policy. It refers to the long-term effects of the policies of privatisation, precarisation and dispossession imposed for decades by the ruling classes everywhere in the world (at different rates depending on the resistance they have encountered). Such a political crisis has the breadth, or the depth, of a crisis of hegemony: a crisis of political representation, in the sense that most of the political parties that engaged in the great neoliberal destruction have lost a considerable part of their legitimacy and their social base, or have even completely collapsed; a crisis of belief in political institutions, marked by increasing rates of abstention everywhere; a crisis of all the mediations between the dominant classes and the rest of the population (not least the crisis of the press and the dominant media); as well as a crisis of the project carried by these classes since the end of the 1970s, namely the neoliberal project.

This project promised to free individuals from all the constraints that prevented them from realising their full potential, from being ‘creative’ and ‘innovative’, from proving their talent or merit, in short, from becoming self-made entrepreneurs capable of making their capital (small or large, material or

human) bear fruit. Taxing both companies and rich individuals less was supposed to stimulate the production of wealth, which would then 'trickle down' from the top to the bottom of the social ladder; everyone would thus benefit from renewed growth. Instead of these phantasmagorias, which shaped a whole individualist, productivist and commercial imaginary, what we had was a new phase of capital accumulation, privatisation (or degradation) of public services, destruction of the environment and further enrichment of the wealthiest. In particular, it meant subjecting workers to the most ruthless competition and placing the state at the fullest service of the logic of maximum short-term profit, to the detriment of the majority, of nature and also of productive investments (especially in infrastructures useful to the whole population).

The neoliberal project was intended to be hegemonic, to shape consent to the social order by creating a new common sense and by arousing new affects, after the historical period that economists had described as 'Fordist', based on a social compromise between classes, strong unions, an increase in social rights, a sharing of wealth that was less unfavourable to employees, etc. If the neoliberal project has undeniably been successful (from its own point of view) in undermining everything that was collective and public, it is now in tatters because its double promise of generalised abundance and liberation has never been kept. On the contrary, populations are massively confronted with precariousness and alienation, especially the young, women and racial minorities. This has led to a crisis of hegemony that has deepened as neoliberal policies have taken effect, as inequality has increased, as the signs of indecent wealth for a small minority have become more and more stark, as whole sections of the population have been unable to make ends meet, and as governments have become ever more obviously the proxies of the possessing class.

It is at this point that neo-fascism enters the scene, as a political force called on to take over from neoliberalism in terms of hegemony. What is not understood when fascism is reduced to armed gangs, or the militarisation of politics is that it is not simply a set of repressive techniques or methods of intimidation but a political project with a hegemonic vocation. Fascism doesn't just bludgeon, it seduces. And, from this point of view, its power lies in the fact that it can appeal to all classes:

- to a section of the elites, who understand that neoliberalism has run its course (not as an economic doctrine but as a political project);
- to the middle and lower-middle classes, who are afraid of being downgraded and hate diversity (for themselves or their children);
- and to fringes of the working classes, subjected to increasingly intense competition and seeing no credible political alternative.

The ideological strength of fascism and neo-fascism is thus to be able to intervene on a double level: as a defence of the established social order, potentially for all those who have - or believe they have - something to defend; but, also, as the promise of a new order for those who are - or consider themselves - dispossessed or threatened with dispossession. Taking this hegemonic dimension seriously allows us to understand why historical fascism, when it came to power, managed to endure much longer than its opponents expected. The advent of fascism is not the transition from an order based on consent to an order based on violence, in other words, the birth of a power based entirely on repression, but the transition to a new mode of manufacturing consent. As such, fascism allows for the maintenance or solidification of the social order, ensuring a renewal of capitalist hegemony at a historical moment when its traditional political representatives see their social base shrinking.

In addition to an intensified use of force (though no form of power rests solely on consent), fascist hegemony implies new forms of ideological discipline and the emergence of a politico-cultural axis

that is no longer that of political pluralism and the rule of law, of 'living together' and 'social dialogue', of freedom and growth. Everywhere, this new axis has the following characteristics: the safeguarding by all means of a 'national community' conceived in more or less explicit and narrow ethno-racial terms (according to time and country), but always turned against enemies who are to be punished because they form a 'foreigners' party' ('anti-France', 'un-American', 'antinational', etc.). Who are these enemies? Minorities, whose mere visible presence supposedly prevents the nation from being faithful to its 'identity'; social movements, because they aspire to dissolve all 'natural' hierarchies; immigration, said to jeopardise the security of 'honest people', occupy the jobs of 'true nationals' and threaten national finances; and finally, those elites that would open up the nation to all the winds of 'globalism'.

Ugo Palheta

P.S.

- Verso. Blog. 13 February 2023:
<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/5556-the-crisis-of-capitalism-and-the-rise-of-neo-fascism>

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