

The Struggle to Get Back to Zero

The day before the 2016 election

Peter Werbe

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There have been long standing political and theoretical debates about whether a particular political movement or leader is fascist. In the article before this one, as Bill Weinberg attests in the previous pages, it can come down to hairsplitting. Is Trump a fascist? Was the Spanish dictator, Francisco Franco? Or, Argentina's Juan Peron? Or, is the term fascist applied indiscriminately to any oppressive government and politician?

Mussolini certainly was and declared himself as such. The Italian dictator made the fasces, a bundle of sticks featuring an axe indicating the power over life and death, the original symbol of fascism, hence, the origins of the term. The figure, taken from Imperial Rome, also appears on the U.S. \$1 bill.

Pure fascism was rooted in a philosophy of creating social harmony by ending class conflict under the rule of a strong state and leader. Its aim was to resolve social antagonisms by enforcing the vertical integration of classes whereby, in theory, the state both protected capitalism from revolutionary workers, but also supposedly mitigated exploitation of workers by capital.

In reality, the first tenet was much more forcibly adhered to, with the latter given scant adherence. War, nationalism, and racism figured heavily into the equation.

However, with all of the attempts at defining fascism and who fits into that category, when authoritarian rule becomes dominant in a society, do the formal definitions really matter?

No one labels Stalinist Russia as fascist, but when an "enemy of the people" was sent to a Gulag or shot in the basement of a Cheka prison, compared to a similar scenario involving the Nazi SS, would it really matter to the victim, or to the larger society what the political label was?

What we are seeing now in the American political landscape doesn't rise to the level of historic fascism, but its social base certainly comes close to what has been described as the "crazed hordes of the petty bourgeoisie." The vertical integration of classes under a strong warlike state, with a large portion of a population whipped up in racist frenzy, which worships militarism, and encourages personal self-actualization through identification with the leader and the state, sounds much like the U.S.

Perhaps the good news is that the majority of American voters felt they were rejecting this in the last election, although, as it has been since 1968, the majority of whites voted for the Republican presidential candidate mostly on the basis of addressing the question: Do black lives matter? They answered, no.

The same would have been true with any Republican candidate, but because of Trump's extraordinary history of racism, xenophobia, and sexism, there is heightened moral indignation at his election and an outpouring of expressions of condemnation. This was seen in the almost immediate organizing of huge demonstrations not seen since the 1960s.

While the outrage at a personally and politically horrid figure being elevated to the position of the world's most powerful man should not be diminished, it's hard to imagine that such a sizable opposition would have occurred had the winning Republican candidate been one of the other terrible politicians from their party.

If the 2016 election hadn't been stolen from Clinton by the suppression of minority voters, Russian hacking, FBI malfeasance, and the Electoral College, there probably would have been only a handful of the usual suspects (that would be us) protesting the election of a Wall Street warmonger (that would be her).

When so many people are mobilized in opposition to the government, anything is possible, but most of it so far has been a struggle to get back to zero; that is, what life and politics was like on Nov. 7, 2016, the day before the election.

Rather than policy, this election particularly was a referendum on what was to constitute the dominant social narrative. In those terms, the Democrats constitute the continuing expansion of the bourgeois revolution which began as narrowly inclusive, contradicting its motto of "liberty and justice for all," or the even better expressed French version—"liberty, equality, fraternity."

The struggles against slavery, including the Civil War, women's suffrage, the labor, civil rights, feminist and LGBTQ movements fit into the fulfillment of these slogans, but always within capitalism, and never completely bringing the visionary triad into complete fulfillment.

The Democrats represent (the importance of the verb needs to be stressed) tolerance and inclusion, while the Republicans are a 21st century version of (as is written elsewhere in this issue) 1970s Rhodesians hanging onto a fantasy of white supremacy and a world that barely existed even for them.

The new Republican administration has begun a right wing wish-list repealing of reforms to capitalism that go back as far as the Roosevelt New Deal and 1970s protection of the environment and a women's right to choose. At this writing, they have only begun to unravel social safety nets and restrictions on capital accumulation by the wealthiest.

However, these are not fascist moves, nor is defunding Planned Parenthood or the National Endowment for the Arts or ending financing of programs for Great Lakes or Bay Area water restoration. Even Muslim bans and increased border madness isn't. They are just plain awful and it is understandable why the resistance is as great as it is.

But, where is the resistance going? Occupy, the last great moment of opposition, essentially collapsed because it had nowhere to go after claiming public spaces. The right wing Tea Party found a comfortable home in the Republican Party to the point where their policy goals became dominant and they elected a president.

The developing resistance to the far-right conservative presidency is still in its infancy, but most of it is aimed squarely at replicating Tea Party success by capturing the Democratic Party. Much of the resistance advocates what they define as a progressive agenda, that is, defending the social gains of the last 85 years and adding to them with policies such as a national health care plan.

Even employing a term like resistance with its resonance to the World War II partisan fight against the Nazis suggests something may be different than the usual call for reforms. However, when you go to michiganforrevolution.com, one finds a call to join the Democratic Party.

The Republican executive orders and legislation have already hurt a great many people, and more injurious rollbacks of liberal policies that have made capitalism less onerous than it was before the 1930s are planned.

A key component of fascism as well as the American state is its culture of militarism that is the bulwark of war Keynesianism, a huge transfer of wealth from taxes to fuel the U.S. economy through war production. This economic policy brings with it the American empire being perpetually at war, a situation exacerbated by Obama and Clinton's military confrontational policies at Russia's borders, something even the darling of progressives, Bernie Sanders, didn't challenge.

So, what is to be done? Revolution was simple for our radical forebears. Workers produce all wealth; all wealth should go to the workers. Workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains. The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. (Oops, that phrase from the preamble to the constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World has disappeared from their publication where it was featured for over a hundred years.)

When those slogans were devised, the proposed solution to capitalism was to get rid of the owners and rulers and have a democratic and equitable society managed by workers councils.

Now, with industrial/petro/chemical capitalism reaching its tipping point of making the planet unlivable, its continuation under a different mode of administration seems fatuous. Plus, are the majority of workers, now less organized than ever since capitalism's origin, the agency for revolution?

Can the same productive apparatus remain after a revolution, but only substituting a Flatulence Filtering Underwear (actual product) Workers Council for the capitalist boss, and in other industries producing thousands of other useless items manufactured to keep capitalism humming?

The question to address is where is the locus of revolutionary organizing? Anywhere? Everywhere? Maybe that's the best we can do right now for self-guidance. What not to do is obvious.

Back into the arms of the Democratic Party as a bulwark against Trump leaves us where we started, at zero.

Regarding right wing policies and actions? Call them fascists or not, we will fight them.

Peter Werbe is a member of the *Fifth Estate* staff collective.

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See "The War on the Poor: Plenitude and Penury in Detroit" by E.B. Maple and George Bradford, FE #338, Winter, 1992.

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