

# **Pre-Emptive/ Neo-Fascist Capitalism, Marxism and Resistance**

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## **Abstract**

*In this article I examine and analyse: 1. Marxist analysis of Social Class; 2, Late Western Capitalism, it's economic class war from above; 3. Fascism, Pre-Emptive -Fascism/ Neo-Fascism; 4. Repression by and Resistance to Capital(ism); 5, Marxist analysis, program and strategy regarding Capitalism and Resistance. Here, I stress that revolutionary Marxists go beyond reformism and reforms, beyond radical democratic, social democratic (and, certainly, liberal-progressive and conservative) analysis, program and strategy. I conclude with 6, Our Task.*

**Keywords:** *Capitalism, Fascism, Pre-Emptive Fascism, Marxism, Reformism, Class, Trump*

## **Introduction**

In this article, I focus on the Marxist critique of Reformism, and on Marxist critique of liberal/ bourgeois/ parliamentary/ democracy referring, in particular, to the example of the Trump - Musk Presidency in the USA and Starmer - led Labour Party and its victory in the 2024 General Election in the UK.

Marxist critique of `liberal democracy/ bourgeois/ democracy/ parliamentary democracy sees such parliamentary- or presidential- elections as a sham, as giving an illusory choice between `Tweedledum and Tweedledee`, between political parties and programs which operate within strict limits set by national and global capitalism. Actual or symbolic death and defenestration await those

leaders and parties- and sometimes hundreds of thousands of party members and supporters, as in Indonesia in 1965-1966 - who challenge the discourse, and the practice of social class based oligarchic capitalist rule legitimised by bourgeois democracy, and USA capitalist hegemony (Sachs, 2025). Examples of capitalist- and hegemonic- imperialist USA limitation on democracy are the actual deaths of the elected Marxist President Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, of Patrice Lumumba in 1960 and the 'Jakarta Method' of mass murder of Communists and other Leftists and community leaders resisting or in the way of 'American interests'/ foreign policy. Following the US inspired and backed coup in Indonesia in 1965-66, under the US backed dictator, general Suharto, "between five hundred thousand and one million people were slaughtered, and one million more were herded into concentration camps." (Blakely, 2020, citing Bevins, 2020). Bevins documents Washington's virulent anti-communist crusade across several continents. *The next testing ground for the Jakarta method was Latin America, where hundreds of thousands of people would be killed or "disappeared" in the name of anti-communism over the subsequent decades*. He continues,

a loose network of US-backed anti-communist extermination programs . . . carried out mass murder in at least twenty-two countries": Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, East Timor, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, the Philippines, South Korea, Sudan, Taiwan, Thailand, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Vietnam.

Bourgeois parliamentary democracy, the freedom and choice to choose a new government and/ or leader, is enforced variously by the full panoply of state apparatuses- by both ideological state apparatuses such as the media, schools, universities, often the established religious organisations, and by the repressive state apparatuses, such as laws, the police, police batons on the skulls of protesters, and attempt to limit by law what is acceptable to local and national

capitals. For example, there is the widespread delegitimising of current (2023 - 2025) protest against Israeli mass slaughter in Gaza and NATO expansionism in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. It is becoming increasingly apparent that bourgeois, parliamentary democracy is a chimera of freedom and choice. The claims - in this case, that such democracy can effect radical change and implement the will, the policy wishes, of electorates - is make-believe, a bit like believing in Father Christmas.

Having said that, elections and electoral politics, can assist in some mobilization and spreading, popularising, socialist ideas that are not generally disseminated by the media to the broader population, and mobilisation of activists and their wider supporters. I refer here to my own electoral and direct action/extra-parliamentary experience: in fighting thirteen election campaigns as a municipal/ local, as a Parliamentary, and as a Euro-Parliamentary candidate between 1972 and 2023- and to my experience in direct action, extra-parliamentary action- strikes, demonstrations, occupations, marches.

## **1. Marxist Analysis of Social Class**

### ***Class Analysis/ Class Conflict, the Capital-Labour Relation and Intersectionality***

Marxists recognise that there is permanent class conflict, ongoing class war between 'the bourgeoisie and 'the proletariat'. This is basic Marxism, from Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels ([1848] 2010) onwards. The relationship between Capital and Labour is not just based on discrimination and oppression and cultural oppression and what Bourdieu termed 'symbolic violence' important and life destroying though they can be (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Unlike the discrimination and oppression based

on ‘race’, religion, gender, sexuality, age, language, disability— the Capital-Labour Relation is also, importantly, a relationship of *economic exploitation*. This is the exploitation and appropriation of the surplus value created by the labour power of workers. Surplus value is the value produced by workers in addition to their necessary labour time. Surplus value arises because the worker continues to work after s/he has already produced value equal to the cost of her/his own wages. (Profit is different, it is that portion of surplus value retained by the capitalist after capital investment and any rental costs above wages is taken into account).

Workers from the various strata/ levels/layers of the working class (labelled in the USA as ‘blue collar’ workers, and ‘the middle class’) sell their labour power to capitalists, or to institutions (education, health, welfare/ social security apparatuses, police and ‘the law’, the armed forces, etc.), which uphold, maintain, and defend the capitalist state. Apparatuses- such as health, education, social welfare apparatuses, help keep a labour force- workers- educated and fit enough to work. They serve to supply and reproduce workers’ labour power fit for Capital.

Within the tiered, layered, stratified working-class, many women, migrants as well as many (in particular, recently immigrated) minority ethnic and racial groups (Rajaram, 2021) are exploited, and even super-exploited, more than other sections of the working class.

Of course, such ‘maintenance’ and reproduction of the existing economic and social relationships of production is contested and is not automatic. It is contested by counter-hegemonic forces-people, organisations.

### ***Intersectionality, 'Race' and Class***

Racial, gender and other forms of discrimination and oppression have extreme effects on the material, affective, socio-cultural, economic and other forms of agency and life for many people in marginalized groups that suffer social discrimination. As well as macro-aggressions (beatings, rape, murder, state violence, imprisonment), micro-aggressions such as ridicule, 'the cold shoulder', silencing, non-preferment, and the 'symbolic violence' to which Bourdieu and Passeron refer (1977) impact damagingly on those discriminated against.

But, we as individuals are more than our subjective understanding of our social class location. We are more than what we *feel* ourselves to be, more than what we consider are our identities. Politically, emphasis on 'identitarian' politics, social and political movements and demands – Black Lives Matter, Gay Rights, and Women's Equality- can be coped with, can be addressed, within capitalism. Indeed, a quick buck made out of these consumer niches. And there are jobs for embourgeoisified layers of these groups - in the education industry, in the media, in the politics.

It is very useful for capitalists in their ongoing attempts to prevent working class unity, to emphasise and prioritise these aspects of subjectivity - of self - in contradistinction to that of social class. It is common for capitalists, for the ruling class, and to 'incorporate leaders of such groups into the ranks of the handsomely paid (as it is to incorporate- with flattery, status, preferment, many trade union and centrist and Left political leaders, suborned by the rich).

Léger (2023), in his hugely useful book and analysis in '*Identity Trumps Socialism- The Class and Identity Debate after Neoliberalism*' notes that 'much of today's study of culture happily deals with race, sexuality and gender but not

with the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society. Léger quotes from an earlier critique of postmodernism by Terry Eagleton (2016: 188) 'Neoliberal capitalism ... has no difficulty with terms like 'diversity' or inclusiveness' as it does with the language of class struggle: In today's universities, museums and corporations, racists are cancelled but not class exploiters.' (Léger, 2023: 12; also, Léger, 2021). Léger (2023: 12) asserts with great clarity, 'identity and class are not equivalent.'

Class is transformed from an economic and, indeed, social category to an exclusively cultural or discursive one or one in which class merely signifies a 'subject position' (Kelsh and Hill, 2006). The capitalist class, and governments, 'co-opt' the liberatory spirit of anti-oppression and anti-discrimination causes into capitalist-friendly avenues, for both continued surplus value expansion and new 'markets' as well as the blunting of these claims in relation to 'class' content. For example, companies cash in on Pride and the 'pink pound' (Bengry, 2018). Anti-racism, anti-homophobia etc. are grassroots struggles of the oppressed that have often been co-opted by our class enemies, who would drop or diminish the more critical anti-racism/anti-homophobia perspectives if it became a financial or political liability. Intersectionalists, gender and 'race' separatists, derogate from social class materiality - the materiality of economic exploitation—to one 'cultural' aspect of 'self' among many (Kelsh and Hill, 2006). Kelsh and Hill (2006) warn against class being transformed from an economic and, indeed, social category, to an exclusively cultural or discursive one.

As Loren Goldner argues, what the 'discourse' on class, race and gender etc. does is to "strip the idea of class of exactly that element which, for Marx, made it radical: its status as a universal oppression whose emancipation required (and was also the key to) the abolition of all oppression" (Goldner, [1989] 2011).

‘Race’, gender and other forms of oppression point towards *particular* oppressions; class indicates *universal* oppression, based on selling our labour-power to Capital for wages. The *universalism* of class is foundational to solidarity, resistance and emancipation from the rule of Capital. This is not to deny the history of slavery, colonialism, misogyny, and their impacts on the lives and consciousness and fears and hope and deaths of the enslaved and the colonised and of myriad women, and on the development of racism, lynchings, sexism, sexual violence and a thousand macro-and micro-aggressions. Asserting the universality of class oppression based on class exploitation is not to deny the burning anger of the descendants of the colonised and the enslaved and the brutalised- and of their co-fighters against misogyny, and racism of all ethnicities and colours.

Marx himself noted the ‘divide and rule’ strategy of the ruling capitalist class, writing that “division of labour seizes upon, not only the economic, but every other sphere of society and everywhere lays the foundation of that all engrossing system of specializing and sorting men (sic)” (Marx, 1867/1999).

Having noted a litany of those oppressed and discriminated against by Fascists and Nazis, and by Capitalism in its various historical forms, the essence of capitalist economy and society is the economic exploitation of the labour power of workers (of all ethnicities, racial groups, sexualities, genders etc.) by the capitalist Class and associated institutions. To repeat, in addition to oppression and discrimination, notably at interpersonal and institutional levels - as analysed lucidly by Bourdieu - the working class is also subject to economic exploitation. This is the Capital-Labour relation, one not only of denigration and devaluation, but also of economic exploitation. One result, a matter of life and death, is that within the working class the less well-paid layers/strata have shorter lives and poorer health. How long you live, how sick you get is related to social class. In

the UK, for example, there is an 18-year life-expectancy difference in healthy life between the richest and the poorest (Hill, 2022a). This is so globally, in capitalist economies. For example, São Paulo is marked by extreme social inequality. Life expectancy varies between 58 years in the poorest neighbourhoods and 80 years in the richest ones (Socialist Equality Group, Brazil, 2024). The poor die young.

In my own writing (e.g. Hill, 2022a) I focus on the working class: the particular group in capitalist society that is disabled, demeaned and denied by capitalism itself, through processes of economic exploitation, systematic and systemic class exclusion, and discrimination/ prejudice. In doing so I recognise that the working class (defined as all those who sell their/ our labour power) is segmented horizontally into 'layers', or strata (for example, the dispossessed, unemployed, unskilled, though to the supervisory. managerial level/ stratum). The working class is also segmented vertically, for example, by 'race/ ethnicity' and by gender, with particular ethnic groups, and women in general, disabled and oppressed and exploited to a greater degree than their/ our white, male brothers).

## **2. Late Western Capitalism in its economic form**

### ***Intensified class war/ extraction of surplus value***

Donald Trump and Elon Musk are, par excellence, 'class warriors,' representatives of the oligarchy of the capitalist class. They have made a massive attack on the US working class summarily laying-off/ dismissing hundreds of thousands of federal workers, closing down numerous government national and international agencies. They have shredded welfare programmes at home, and aid programmes globally.



The USA federal workforce of over two million are threatened. The welfare and social programs in danger of being slashed - including Medicaid, food stamps and public education - are lifelines for millions.

The government is targeting nurses, scientists, teachers, daycare providers, judges, veterans, air traffic controllers, and nuclear safety inspectors. What welfare programmes are in the firing line? The food stamps program, Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid are next (Corbett, 2025).

What Trump is doing is new but is also *not* new. What is new - the novelty - is the absolute openness, nakedness, of oligarchic, plutocratic control of the USA government with this war on workers and on the social wage - welfare agencies that supplement the incomes of the poor. What is novel is the transparency, the openness of intensified oligarchic capitalist barbarism.

The intensification of capitalist exploitation, the increased levels of exploitation and super-exploitation of the labour power of workers in this current stage of Late Western Capitalism promotes at national levels:

- (1) vastly increasing inequalities of wealth
- (2) reducing incomes of workers, decline in 'real value' of wages and salaries, the repression and suppression of wages, the impoverishment and pauperisation of millions of Americans
- (3) decline in social wage – the gutting of the welfare and social wage, services and jobs
- (4) deregulation of protections such as environmental, health, social, labour, and judicial regulations and workers' and trade union rights

(5) mass dismissals and threats to jobs. Employment contracts are being voided, due process rights trampled, and workers fired the current Musk/ DOGE actions threatening the largest single mass firing in US history.

I repeat, what Trump is doing is *not* new. It is 'shrinking the state', depleting all social spending, letting the poor perish, forcing workers to work harder and more insecurely. It is the cruel and anti-human, anti-empathy, anti-kindness, anti-community, ultra-individualism philosophy of Ayn Rand through the voices of Elon Musk, Donald Trump and their neo-con and neo-Nazi promoters and supporters.

This is 'class war from above' - with a vengeance. Since the economic crisis of the mid-1970s, ('the oil crisis') the capitalist class has been exponentially wresting back from the working class a greater and greater share of public wealth, of the share of national income and wealth, across much of the capitalist world (Picketty, 2014). It is not just Trumpian USA. It was Biden's and Obama's USA and to a greater or lesser degrees, true of Late Western Capitalist economies globally.

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, the China mix of capitalism and state / collective control is different (Hill and Zhao, 2024). None of the five above characteristics are evident in China. In fact, millions of Chinese are pulled out of poverty, not pushed into it. But in Late *Western* Capitalism the assaults on both the social wage (state provided benefits such as unemployment, health, retirement, disability, family and children's support benefits) and on individual wage of workers has been deliberate and longstanding. Assaults on the actual wage for labour provided- the suppression and repression of the worker's wage has been pronounced, stark, and disastrous for millions.

The contrast between 'Wall Street' and 'Main Street' is so extreme that it is now obvious, *contra* the 45-year-old message, 'TINA', that 'There Is No Alternative' to austerity, that 'there is not a magic money tree'. What is now clear is that when capitalism is threatened, there *is* indeed a forest of magic money trees to bail out businesses! In the financial crash period after 2008 and in the years after the Covid crash of 2020, billions of dollars, of pounds, were plucked off the magic money tree in subsidies to the wealthy, to the capitalist class. And, alongside the forest, of magic money trees, there is a graveyard - a graveyard of hopes and lives and scarcely recalled memories of a more civil, a more social democratic, a more equal, kinder, a more socially compassionate society. Those memories stoked by the voices of the old, and stirred by socialist, Marxist and communist organisations and movements and activists, proclaiming, 'it doesn't have to be like this.'

We see the global rule of Capital intensifying: ('raced' and gendered) working class immiseration and impoverishment is visible and intensifying. This intensification is firstly in economic terms and secondly in terms of increased visibility and awareness. The existence side by side of gross plutocracy with widespread immiseration is laid bare in an era of social media, as is the ubiquity of resistance, compared to an era where radio/ televisual and Print Media exerted more influence. Trump surrounding himself with oligarchs at his inauguration (Johnson, 2025) is one indicator that that 'the ruling class have torn off the liberal mask' (Silverman, 2025)

The economic exploitation of workers is grossly intensifying. To use a technical Marxist phrase, we see the intensification of the extraction of 'surplus value' from the labour power of workers. Surplus Value in Marxist analysis is where a workers' wage is only a proportion of the value they create in productive labour. The rest of the value workers create, after taking account of factors such as rent,

capital investment, is taken by the capitalist class as profit. The capitalist mode of production is a system of exploitation of one class (the working class) by another (the capitalist class). It is the Labour - Capital Relation, *the economic relation of production*, of Capital and Capitalists on the one hand, and those who sell their/ our labour on the other. While superficially it appears that the worker receives a ‘fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay’, the extraction of surplus value is the deep reality of class exploitation.

In countries such as the UK there is, now, ‘in-work poverty’ and the need for foodbanks and clothing banks, and there has been an increase in homelessness, exemplifying the desperation by millions over how to ‘get by’. This is not to assume that capitalism before the 1970s was benign. Far from it. I grew up in a single parent in-(factory)-work poverty household in the 1950s. But the extent, the numbers in poverty, were less widespread and the system appeared to less inherently rapacious and cruel. In the UK, for example, for tens of millions in Britain, there is a cost-of-living crisis— prices of energy, food, have increased far more than workers’ incomes. There has been a savage cut in the standard of living of the poorest in Britain. Four million people in the United Kingdom are (2024) living in poverty. There are around one million children experiencing destitution—their families unable to afford to properly feed, clothe, or clean them, or keep them warm (Butler, 2023; Butler, 2024; Hill, 2024). As the Joseph Rowntree Report (2025) on Poverty in the UK states,

Looking at the deepest and most damaging form of poverty – destitution, where people cannot afford to meet their most basic physical needs to stay warm, dry, clean and fed –around 3.8 million people experienced destitution in 2022, including around one million children. These figures have more than doubled since 2017’. Whelan (2024) that ‘Millions of Working-Class UK Households Suffer 18 Percent Cut to Incomes in Space of Five Years’.

### ***Class War: Macroeconomic Inequality, the Suppression of Wages, Jobs and Workers' Rights***

In the USA, the suppression of wages has been at the very centre of widening social inequality. Mishel and Bivens (2021) note that in the USA, the '*great wage deceleration for the vast majority of workers after 1979*' was a deliberate policy. This is in stark contrast to the wages of the bottom 90%. Gould and Kandra (2022) note that '*from 1979 to 2021, Wages for the top 1% and top 0.1% skyrocketed by 206.3% and 465.1%, respectively, while wages for the bottom 90% grew just 28.7%. On an annualized basis, bottom 90% wages grew only 0.6% per year, compared with 2.7% and 4.2% annualized wage growth for the top 1% and top 0.1%, respectively*'. In their report for the Economic Policy Institute, and referring specifically to the USA, Bivens and Kandra (2023) report that '*in 2022, CEOs were paid 344 times as much as a typical worker in contrast to 1965 when they were paid 21 times as much*'.

Mishel and Bivens (2021) then comment on the share of all wages earned, respectively, by the top 1%, and that earned by the bottom 90%:

The share of all wages earned by those in the top 1% nearly doubled from 1979 to 2019, from 7.3% to 13.2%. Correspondingly, the share of wages earned by the bottom 90% eroded throughout this time, from 69.8% in 1979 to 60.9% in 2019.

Citing Taylor and Ömer (2020) in their *Macroeconomic Inequality from Reagan to Trump*, Beams (2020) notes that,

The share of profits in national income began to increase after 1970 at the rate of 0.4 percent per year, eight percentage points over 50 years ... the reduction in the labour share of national income by 8 percentage points means that, with gross domestic product in the US now at over \$20 trillion, workers would be receiving some \$1.12

trillion more in income had the previous distribution between wages and profits applied.

This suppression and repression of wages under Late Western Capitalism is what Fascism typically enforces. Chile, the early test - bed for neoliberalism, with the Fascist dictator Pinochet in power between 1973 and 1988, enforcing a Fascist state, laid bare impacts of what is usually typified as neoliberal capitalism, but which can, in its extremity, also be described as Fascist:

In Augusto Pinochet's Chile, the majority of workers earned less in 1989 than in 1973 (after adjusting for inflation). Labor's share of the national income declined from 52 percent in 1970 to 31 percent in 1989. The minimum wage dropped almost by half during the 1980s, and by the end of that decade, Chile's poverty rate reached 41 percent and the percentage of Chileans without adequate housing was 40 percent, up from 27 percent in 1972. One-third of the country's workforce was unemployed by 1983

Similar results were in Argentina, following the Military coup and government 1976-1983. Dolack (2020) notes,

In Argentina, the main union federation was abolished, strikes outlawed, prices raised, wages tightly controlled and social programs cut. As a result, real wages fell by 50 percent within a year. Tariffs were reduced deeply, leaving the country wide open to imports and foreign speculation, causing considerable local industry to shut. For the period 1978 to 1983, Argentina's foreign debt increased to \$43 billion from \$8 billion, while the share of wages in national income fell to 22 percent from 43 percent.

Most recently in Argentina, the Milei government, in power since December, 2023, has launched an all-out attack on workers; rights, relaxing regulations aimed at limiting informal employment, on social spending, massive cuts to social spending, a drastic currency devaluation- with the consequent

depreciation of wages- the reduction of subsidies on energy and transport, ..price liberalization (Erdosain, 2023) and fired tens of thousands of public servants and closed government departments (BBC, 2025). The results, detailed by ITUC in December 2024) (ITUC 2025a) include a reduction of 22% in the purchasing power of pensions in just one year, a severe decline in the value of real wages, with the minimum wage now covering less than 30% of basic living expenses and 50% of basic food needs. `Milei’s administration has not only marginalised workers but actively suppressed their right to protest. New laws impose severe penalties for organisers of social protests, including potential prison sentences of up to six years’ (ITUC, 2025b).

In the USA, wage suppression was enabled by anti-trade union legislation, by the weakening or shredding of workers’ rights and protection, abolishing trade union negotiating rights. In the USA, Trump signed (27 March) an Executive Order abolishing numerous previously negotiated federal union contracts under the pretext of defending “the national security of the United States.” (Crosse, 2025). This is simply a continuation of anti-trade union legislation and practice in the USA over decades. Gould and Kandra (2022) cite current labor law that does not adequately protect workers’ right to form unions. They state,

With the possible exception of excess unemployment, declining union membership plays the single most significant role in slow and unequal wage growth. This erosion was not driven by workers’ declining interest in unions, but rather by concerted employer opposition, along with state and federal policy that has made it nearly impossible for workers to form unions in the face of unwilling employers.

Organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) details attacks on trade unionists’ rights, safety and lives across the globe (e.g. ITUC, 2024b). Since I wrote a report for the ILO in 2006 (Hill, 2006) the situation for workers and trade

unions has markedly worsened. And globally, as the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICTU, 2024) notes,

as millions of households struggle in a debilitating scenario of squeezed incomes and an entrenched cost-of-living crisis, policymakers and business leaders are actively restricting workers' rights to collectively demand fairer wages or to legally exercise their right to strike.

Unless successfully resisted, this is an indication of what is in store for the working class of the USA and elsewhere. The mass dismissals of federal government employees, workers, are a harbinger. And it is being emulated. In the UK The 'Labour' Prime minister is promising to cull, to cut the Civil Service/ Bureaucracy numbers substantially.

### **3. Fascism, Neo-Fascism and 'Pre-Emptive fascism'**

The term 'Fascist' is used widely and loosely. We can analyse:

1. The actual nature of Fascism, the Fascist state, its dictatorship government, its total control of the judiciary and of the media, its governance, its 'fuhrerprinzip', what it does, its ultranationalism, its 'race superiority', its policies,
2. There is also a debate about the causes of Fascism itself- the social and economic and political conditions necessary for and leading to its growth and taking of power. It is here that I go on to introduce the concept of 'Pre-Emptive Fascism' as an addition to the classic Trotskyist analysis, which can be described as 'Reactive Fascism'
3. The personality/ beliefs, actions and attempted actions of a Leader (such as Trump, Erdogan, Orban, Modi, Milei). There is debate about whether Trump is Fascist or not, his beliefs, his rhetoric, his behaviour.



### *Classical 20<sup>th</sup> century Fascism*

To quote Trotsky, 'German fascism, like Italian fascism, raised itself to power on the backs of the petty bourgeoisie, which it turned into a battering ram against the organizations of the working class and the institutions of democracy. But fascism in power is least of all the rule of the petty bourgeoisie. On the contrary, it is the most ruthless dictatorship of monopoly capital.' (Trotsky, 1933).

For Woods (2025), the principal theorist of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) in the UK, Fascism is a 'totalitarian state in which the bourgeoisie hands state power over to a fascist bureaucracy', its chief characteristic being 'extreme centralisation and absolute state power, in which the banks and big monopolies are protected, but subjected to strong central control by a large and powerful fascist bureaucracy'.

Outside Marxist circles, it is little remembered that it was, and is, working class organisations—parties, trade unions and their leading cadres—, who are often the initial and primary targets of killings and imprisonment under fascist and Nazi regimes. That is, those organisations and local/national leaders of the working class, those who directly threaten Capital, who are the first to be incarcerated, tortured, killed. This was true of Hitler's Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Fascist Italy, Horthy's Hungary, the Iron Guard in Rumania, Salazar's Portugal, Franco's Spain, Pinochet's Chile, the Argentinian and Brazilian and many other fascist/far-right, military dictatorships. When fascists seize power, they routinely vilify and scapegoat various ethnic and religious minorities such as Jews, Muslims, immigrants. This has been obvious with the Far-Right riots and attacks on Asylum Seekers' hotels in England in July 2024, with for example, a Far-Right mob trying to burn down an Asylum Seekers hotel in Rotherham (Socialist Worker, 2024).

But it is the working class and the representatives and organisations of the working class who Fascists and Nazis go for once they are in power. It is the working-class organisations and cadres who they seek to destroy. Fascists and Nazis and their parties had a mass base, and street armies that murdered, brutalised and terrorised working-class activists and attacked their organisations, their trade unions and political parties and Press.

### ***Classical Trotskyist Explanations of The Conditions for the Growth of Fascism***

Regarding the social/ economic/ political conditions for the growth of Fascism, the classic Trotskyist analysis (Trotsky 1944/1993) is, summarised by Silverman (2025): 'Fascism means the voluntary surrender of direct political power by the capitalist class to an agency of brute force in conditions of crisis and deadlock in the class struggle'. He contrasts this with today's right-wing authoritarian rulers. He continues,

because society today has become so grotesquely polarised; wealth so monstrously concentrated; the capitalist class so grossly monopolised, that it feels it can dispense with the need to assign its collective interests to a specialised political agency: it now wants to rule directly in its own name. Naked personal power is to be exercised by the owners of capital themselves. This is almost unprecedented.

Trotsky's classic definition (1944/1993) is very specific, referring to regimes such as those of Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, installed with the support of the national capitalist class following years of open class warfare and working-class strength (unions, strikes, occupations, political parties). Working class strength—numbers, organisation, actions—terrified the capitalist class. Actions such as the clearest, most powerful and most threatening forms of direct action—threatening the ruling class and their profits—and, indeed, their control and ownership— are strike action, occupations. Strikes, manifestly, can be of a

handful of workers or a mass strike such as a national strike by a union, or a general strike of all or most trade unions. Direct action includes direct takeovers of factories (such as the *biennio rosso*, the two red years of factory occupations in Turin, 1919-1921) (Trudell, 2007) and in the farmworkers' takeovers- led by the Communist Party- of the *latifundia*, the landed estates, in the Alentejo southern region of Portugal, during the Portuguese anti-Fascist revolution of 25 April 1974, that I covered as a young post-revolution photo-journalist in the late 1970s (Hill, 1983).

We can call this 'Reactive Fascism', Fascism installed because of, reacting to, a specific balance of class and political forces, one in which profits, the capitalist class, are directly and imminently threatened by the organised working class.

### ***Neo-Fascism***

Díez-Gutiérrez *et al* (2024) define what they term current 'neo-Fascism of the 21st century'. They note :

In recent years, we have witnessed a resurgence of the far right around the world. The term 'neo-fascism' is more appropriate to describe the forces currently occupying the far-right space. Their programme does not so much refer to the classic fascism of the 1930s, but rather to the aim of accelerating and deepening the neoliberal model, with an increasingly 'deconstructed' State... except for the military and police spheres to accelerate the 'freedom' of capital's power to reactivate expanded accumulation.

The neo-fascism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a discourse based on class, ethnic, and gender hatred, appeals to fear and resentment to wage the 'cultural battle' for ideological hegemony. It seeks to set the media and political agenda through strategies of constant provocation. It dominates propaganda, populist messages, and fake news on social networks. They re-appropriate the instruments of action used by social movements seizing public spaces. Also, they redefine the language of the defence of the commons (freedom, democracy, social justice...) in an individualist and libertarian

key to attack everything that implies solidarity, collective rights, and the struggle for the common good. Their way out of the crisis and their political programme as a whole show a clear commitment to neoliberalism ... which distinguishes them from the flirtation with social aspects that the fascisms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century initially had.

Paradoxically, this neo-fascism has been nourished by popular discontent originating in the social effects of the capitalism managed by social democracy, even if it is disguised under different euphemisms - 'with a human face' or 'third way'-. The increase in inequality, pauperisation, individualisation of the working class, has generated a breeding ground that has fueled their messages of rejection of migration and distrust of institutions. Their response to the effects of neoliberalism and capitalism has been more neoliberalism and capitalism.

### ***Pre-Emptive Fascism***

The balance of class and political forces, the relative numerical and organisational and action-oriented/ activism of the two great classes of society, are manifestly different now than that analysed about twentieth century fascism by Trotsky (and, subsequently, as classical Trotskyists such as Silverman and Woods). The working class in Western Late Capitalism is currently weak politically and largely demobilised organisationally. As working-class resistance and class consciousness rise – the levels of repression and immiseration will rise into mass struggle. Mass struggle is happening in Spring 2025 in Greece and in Turkey. Then, when working class power explodes on the streets, in strikes, in occupations, then Trump and his think-alikes and acolytes may well, then, impose, or seek to impose, Fascist rule. They give every rhetorical and some legislative indication of doing so. In other words, at this current juncture, their neo-Fascism, quasi-Fascism, proto-Fascism is Pre-Emptive. To Pre-Empt, to forestall, to nip in the bud, working class resistance. By 'Pre-Emptive Fascism' I do not mean this in the sense of pre-empting, forestalling, interrupting, impeding Fascism. I mean it in the sense of pre-empting, forestalling,

interrupting, impeding the growth of resistance, of working-class organisation and mass activism. That is, in the sense of 'nipping mass working-class action in the bud'. Repressing it before it can immediately threaten Capitalist class interests. This 'nipping in the bud' could take the form of the 197 Insurrection Act in the USA

***Trump/ Musk as neo-Fascist or as 'Reactive Fascist or as Pre-Emptive Fascist or as traditional Right Wing Authoritarian Conservative***

Do we typify, categorise Trump (and Musk, and Milei and Bolsonaro and Orban) as Fascist or Pre-Emptive Fascist, neo-Fascist, quasi-Fascist, proto-Fascist or what? (Bellamy Foster, 2025). Giroux (2025a) describes Trump's USA as a 'neoliberal fascist state'...characterised by 'social, ideological, and racial cleansing.' Giroux writes (2025b) 'Amid State Abductions, Trump's Fascism Is No Longer Creeping — It's Here'. Ryback (2025), drawing parallels between Hitler's destruction of parliamentary democracy in Germany with Trump's current actions in the USA, shows how, Hitler set about destroying a constitutional republic through constitutional means. He gives a step-by-step account of how Hitler systematically disabled and then dismantled his country's democratic structures and processes in less than two months'.

Woods (2025) decries name-calling, analysing, that depict Trump as a Fascist, pointing out that the USA 'remains a bourgeois democracy'. As far as individual characteristics go, the characteristics of individuals such as Trump and Musk and Hegseth can be seen individually as Fascist. But the US state is not Fascist. Trump is remodelled neo-Fascist/ quasi-Fascist/ proto-Fascist. He is not (yet) accompanied by a jackbooted street militia, and has not yet installed dictatorial one-party government (Bellamy Foster, 2025). Though these are in the wings. And much commented upon, with his attempts to control the judiciary, with the 'snatching off the streets' undocumented (and sometime documented)

immigrants by ICE (Immigration, Customs and Enforcement), his financial penalties against universities he deems unpatriotic, or antisemitic or left-wing Trump, and his co-thinkers promise to remove, destroy, 'the unhuman', those who, in the eyes of key Trumpists have lost the right to live. In *Unhumans: The Secret History of Communist Revolutions (and How to Crush Them)* (Posobiec and Lisec, 2024) (a book endorsed by Trump's Vice-President JD Vance and with a Foreword by Steve Bannon) the authors praise murderous Fascists such as Pinochet in Chile and Franco in Spain, and argue that leftists, communists, socialists, and 'woke' liberals, do not deserve the status of human beings.

Socialist journalist Nathan J. Robinson (2024) was sufficiently appalled to write 'It is perhaps the most paranoid, hateful, and terrifying book I have ever picked up'. Anita Walters (2024) describes the book as a 'fascist rewriting of history'. Trump's policies are an ideological complement to the hugely influential far right governmental policy plan set out in Project 2025 (also known as the 2025 Presidential Transition Project) the authoritarian political initiative published by the Heritage Foundation, seeking to impose an ultraconservative social vision. It is 'a playbook for an authoritarian administration' (Ragland and Radosovich, 2024). Its proposals are wide-ranging and would 'eliminate fundamental personal freedoms while cutting the take-home pay of millions of Americans'... its policies would ... 'increase taxes on the middle class, allow corporations to stop paying workers overtime, implement a national abortion ban and raise the retirement age for Social Security.' (Ragland and Radosovich, 2024).

Trump and Musk are not there yet, not yet heading a fascist state, while they do give many rhetorical and policy indications of personally being Fascists. Which is not the same as a Fascist state.

My poem 'Fish and Fascism' (Hill, 2019), referring to, among others, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Milei in Argentina and Trump in USA, suggests (about these leaders, rather than the state they head):

If it looks like a fascist,  
If it sounds like a fascist  
If it acts like a fascist,  
If it smells like a fascist,  
Then it is a fascist.  
Even if the label on the box says democratic

USA has a corporate tyranny in any case, the Republican - Democrat duopoly, where criticism (for example over Israel's genocide in Gaza) is crushed, critics dismissed and hounded, and immigrants vilified and deported- in chains. This was and is true under Obama, Biden, Trump.

Of course, there are some differences between Democrats and Republicans. Trump is more clearly a racist white man's warrior, opposed to people of colour, women, anti-sexism, anti-racism, LGBT. This social ultra-conservatism is identical in nature and vilification classic to Nazi and conservative authoritarian positions, against the relative 'wokeness' and social liberalism and identity politics of the Democrats. But both 'screw the workers', both drive down wages, both enrich the plutocrats, the oligarchs, the new 'Masters of the Universe' with their multi-billions and their social pathologies.

### ***Nakedness of Imperialist Colonialist Capitalism, 'Economic Nazism'***

Marxist criticism of neoliberalism is not just of *neoliberal* capitalism. Neoliberal capitalism is simply one version of capitalism, one of the most extreme versions of capitalism, a version which is currently, in the mid-2020s, in the USA and some other states, veering, plunging and marching into neo-

Fascism. Not only has the exploitation of workers become intensified, with the diminution of the actual wage, and the shredding of the social wage, shredding the previous version of the ‘welfare state,’ the more social democratic ‘welfare capitalism’ of the three decades or so after World War 2, it has become more widely obvious, more naked, more authoritarian, and more openly xenophobic, nationalist and cruel.

Capitalism has never been a warm embrace for the working class as a whole. The texts and novels and art of the nineteenth century from Marx and Engels’ *Das Kapital* (Marx and Engels, 1848/ 2010) to Engels’ *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845/2021) to the novels of Charles Dickens, Jack London, and Emile Zola as well as the texts of the working class socialist and trade union movements are testimony to that. But in the post-Second World War social democratic version of capitalism, very few people, in the richest countries of the world, had to use food banks, and fewer people than today died of hypothermia or of simply not being able to afford to live. It was very different in the colonies and empires, where genocidal and super-exploitative capitalism has ruled for centuries with scant regard to the cries and deaths of millions. As Westmoreland (2024) notes:

The older generation that grew up in the 1950s and 60s remember living under the post-war consensus that a protective, welfare state was necessary to keep the working class onside after the horrors of the 1930s and the war. We shouldn’t exaggerate this. Life was still tough, but for people who remembered the hell of the 1930s of mass unemployment and the Means Test, it was a new dawn.

But what we have seen with extreme neo-liberalism is the establishment of the radical philosophy of Ayn Rand, what I call her ‘economic and moral Nazism’, together with Margaret Thatcher’s ideological hero, Friedrich von Hayek (e.g.



2007) and Ayn Rand (1943//2007), 1957/ 1992) were quite happy to consign people to destitution and death: ‘if they can't look after themselves then they can perish’. For Rand and for von Hayek, humanity becomes truly human only when it is self-sufficient, and not a burden on the state. And empathy is a weakness. For Elon Musk, ‘The fundamental weakness of western civilization is empathy,’ Wong (2025). Wong writes, ‘The rightwing movement against empathy seeks to dismantle and discredit one of the essential tools for any society – our capacity to recognize and respond to suffering.’ Wong details anti-woke and anti-empathy speeches by religious and secular rightists. She continues, ‘we should see the campaign against empathy by Trump supporters for what it is: a flashing red light warning of fascist intent’.

This economic Nazism, of the tiny state shrunken of its welfare responsibilities and funding, has taken hold for, example, in what were the wilder reaches of the Conservative Party in Britain. These ‘swivel-eyed’ small state ideologues have controlled the Conservative governments and party in the UK in recent years, and, in 2025, under the leadership of Kemi Badenoch, still do. The Conservative Party has moved very far on the ideological spectrum, embracing increasingly unequal, corrupt, xenophobic, nationalist policies compared to 50 years ago. The supposed democratic discourse within Conservative Party mainstream politics has now veered to openly racist and fascist National Front slogans of the 1970s. Britain is not alone. In Western Europe, traditional conservatives in Finland, Sweden, Italy and the Netherlands have jumped into governmental bed with far-right parties, whose histories, traditions and demands are rooted in fascism. In the Netherlands, for example: “The far right is not a foreign body in an otherwise healthy organism, but rather an expression and product of the shift to the right of the entire ruling class” (Zora and Schwarz, 2024). Trump, in the USA, embraces ultra-nationalist fascistic groups such as The Proud Boys and

others, who are celebrated at the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC) (Díez-Gutiérrez et al., 2024).

### ***Capitalism, Social Murder and Genocide***

Capitalism accepts that people will have to be sacrificed. Historical examples of genocides from Australia, North and South America and Africa are well-known. If people are not useful for Capital or stand in the way of capitalist imperialism/neo-colonialism and its geo-politics (as is the case with the current genocide in Gaza) then they die. There is one class aware that there is a class war going on. Warren Buffet, the American multi-billionaire, has said ‘[t]here's class warfare all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning’ (Stein, 2006).

This is a war that most representatives of the working-class trade union leaders, social democratic and Labour Party leadership and representatives have given up fighting. They are, indeed, fighting the class war, and they are fighting it on the side of the capitalist class. In the UK, as Westmoreland (2024) notes, ‘At the end of the day, the role of the trade-union leaders is always to negotiate the rate of exploitation and act as the managers of strikes’.

## **4. Authoritarianism, Repression, Resistance**

As the gulf between the billionaire class and workers increases exponentially, and welfare benefits and services deteriorate, worker anger and the delegitimation of mainstream political parties and parliamentary democracy and populisms of Left and Right grow (Leopold, 2024), then worker resistance grows- and will grow. For example, the strike wave in Western Europe on 2022-2023, the *Gilets Jaunes* in France 2018-2020) (Hill, 2021a, 2022a, b), and more recently, in Spring 2025, mass demonstrations in USA, Turkey, Greece,

Argentina, for example. In Greece, for some observers (e.g. Stevens, 2025), the largest ever general strike/ demonstrations. In response, state repression is ratcheted up. Repressive laws such as 'Minimum Services Provision' laws restricting the right to strike, police brutality, the severity of incarceration are all increased, in various countries. One example was the jailing (now judicially reversed on appeal) of Just Stop Oil peaceful protesters in the UK for 4 years or 5 years, imprisoned for blocking a motorway) (Morning Star, 2024).

And at both a demagogic and a state enforcement level, xenophobia flourishes, stimulated by radical right, quasi-/ proto- fascist politicians as various as Donald Trump, with his plans for mass deportation, including to Guantanamo, and his dehumanisation and proposals for ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza. Similarly, outright xenophobic are the AfD in Germany which came second in the German federal election of February 2025, and, in Britain, and many of the UK Conservative Party Cabinet since 2015 such as Priti Patel, Suella Braverman, Robert Jenrick and current (Spring 2025) leader of the Conservative Party, Kemi Badenoch. Marking the shift to xenophobia, the Labour Party under Prime Minister Keir Starmer is now boasting of 'sending back' more immigrants than the Conservatives did (Foster, 2024).

This embrace of ideas, rhetoric, policies from the fascist, authoritarian, communalist, xenophobic and the ultra-nationalist stable is, today, global. We see it with Modi in India, Javier Milei in Argentina, Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Viktor Orban in Hungary, Donald Trump in USA, and we see it, more ominously, in countries such as the UK, France and Germany, whose leaders and governing parties have tried to restrict the right to strike and protest, and have popularised xenophobic, anti-immigrant and anti-minority rhetoric. For many, these have normalised and legitimised for many a range of racist resentment, xenophobia and hate. In the UK, the Far Right, in July 2024, elected

their first-ever MPs, under the Reform Party label, galvanising and being galvanised by posh xenophobes, such as Nigel Farage, lauded by the right-wing Press, and by street-level operatives such as Tommy Robinson and his followers (Chakraborty, 2024; Hyde, 2024; Kimber, 2024).

In terms of pedagogy—public pedagogy as well as formal (institutional) pedagogy—, there have been thousands of articles and books written about the conservative movement clamping down on the curriculum, on teachers' rights, on pedagogy, and on repression and privatisation/ quasi-privatisation of education in different countries. The pages of the journals, the *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* ([www.jceps.com](http://www.jceps.com)), Critical Education (<https://ices.library.ubc.ca/index.php/criticaled>) and *Workplace: a Journal of Academic Labour* (<https://ices.library.ubc.ca/index.php/workplace>) are full of these.

In fact, I was dismissed from one of my jobs when one of the British governments of the 1990s effectively removed most issues of class, race, gender, politics, and sociology from teacher education curricula (Hill, 2003). The Conservative government renamed it. Instead of 'teacher education', in England, the professional formation of teachers is now called 'teacher training.' Teacher training became far more about 'teaching skills' without the theory and without critique. My other dismissals—in common with thousands of socialist and Marxist trade union representatives—were because of my trade union activities and, importantly, management hostility to my Marxist politics and teaching. At my most recent dismissal, termed 'redundancy,' I was accused of setting up a Marxist 'cell' of staff and students. If that's what you can call the weekly Wednesday morning cafeteria meetings of around half a dozen radical left and Marxist comrades, then, indeed, I was.

In response to this intensification of exploitation, to this intensification of pauperization, there is increased resistance to the rule of Capital and an upsurge of resistance in the form of strikes, marches and demonstrations, since 2023, in particular, marches of millions against the genocide in Gaza. This has become so much more evident, exemplifying the revulsion at the hypocrisy of the imperialist-colonialist-capitalist project regarding the support of many Western governments, and parties of both Right and social democratic Left for the Israeli genocidal war on and in Gaza (Cook, 2023, Nineham, 2024). The Biden-Sunak-Macron-European cast-iron support for the Israeli government and armed forces have, for millions, torn away the mask of Western / USA decency, humanity, and, importantly, also the mask of Western bourgeois parliamentary democracy. This form of “democracy” is decidedly centred around pro-capitalist parties of the Right and the social democratic Left scrambling to demonise and penalise Any criticism of the state of Israel is castigated as ‘anti-semitism’. Pro-Palestine student and other groups vilified and penalised as ‘anti-semitic’. This is true of USA, Germany, France, UK, Australia, and regularly exposed by left news media (e.g. governments of various states such as France and Germany, and the Chief Executives of various universities, particularly in the USA, deploy brute force against peaceful protesters (see, e.g. Kimberley, 2024; Martinez, 2024, np) highlights: ‘Young people ... hit by precariousness and ... politicized by movements against the climate crisis, sexism, and racism. They feel that they owe nothing to capitalism, and many are radicalizing in the heat of the new experiences of struggle’.

### ***Strikes, Social Movements, Demonstrations***

The ruling classes referred to above are concerned about social explosion, and about rage on the streets. They are concerned that there will be mass riots and mass rebellion, and organised working-class direct action through strikes and other manifestations. Across Western Europe and beyond, trade union

movements have exploded into widely supported public consciousness (e.g. Martinez, 2023, Smith, 2023). And trade union memberships, while halved or more in the last 50 years, grow when there is militant strike action

People around the world are now seeing more critically and clearly through the pro-capitalist (always contested) hegemonic ideology. The material conditions of people's lives—living and lived conditions—have changed and appear to be changing dramatically for the worse. Stories of secure employment, wages enough to feed and clothe a family, and private or social housing to provide roof over our heads almost seem like fairy tales from the past. As Marx and Engels put it, “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life” (Marx and Engels, [1848] (2010). We can grasp this through Gramsci’s famous quote:

The ruling order is losing its capacity to lead through consent. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear. The old world is dying and the new world struggles to be born. Now is the time of monsters (Gramsci, 1971).

Martinez (2024) is one of many in the Left Press to welcome the working class ‘taking to the streets against a cost-of-living crisis, anti-union attacks, and austerity’. He continues:

From the eruption of the great capitalist crisis of 2008 to today, we have seen a return of the class struggle that has unfolded in various cycles, without surpassing the initial moment of revolt; they have often taken the form of a combination of partial strikes, controlled by the union bureaucracies, and more massive “revolt-like” phenomena, such as the Yellow Vests movement or youth protests.

Prior to October 2023 and continuing today, there has been an upsurge of militancy on the streets and in the workplace. For instance, since the last 20 or so years, we have seen massive growth of social movements like Black Lives Matter, Me Too, and Extinction Rebellion. I have been going on marches in my city (of Brighton and Hove, population of a quarter of a million, in England) for over 60 years, since I was a teenager. Other than the anti-Iraq Invasion marches in 2003, the demonstrations in the last few years have been the biggest in the history of this city, in particular those condemning the Israeli government genocide in Gaza and murderous apartheid in the West Bank.

## **5. Marxist Analysis, Program and Strategy**

How should we, as revolutionary Marxists, relate to these social movements? How should we play a role in their organisation and in developing their program? And how can we build critically engaged democracy through revolutionary Marxist analysis and action?

Where do we want to end up? What do we, as anti-capitalist Marxist activists, spend our political lives doing, working for? Hundreds of thousands, millions of radical socialist, social justice activists, communists, Marxists, Freirean educators, and educators throughout the world have a basic agreement about where we want to get to.

### ***Social Democratic/ Labourist Reformism***

Reformism of the social democratic, Labourist type has billions of adherents around the world, aimed at trying to make things *a bit better*, to reform or regulate capitalism. The view is, 'let's have regulation capitalism', 'let's have a nicer, gentler form of capitalism with a welfare state', 'let's have social democracy with a meritocracy (even if your merit is not meritorious within a

hugely unequal society)’. And let’s develop reforms on social issues, such as sexism, racism, gay rights, prostitution, abortion, etc. as well as on environmental protections, labour and trade union rights.

If we carry on with such reforms, however life enhancing and valuable, then what we are seeing is still the deformation of humanity, the deformation of what it is to be human, of the human essence, which is to be cooperative, kind, supportive to each other. Marxists have written considerably on this, about what capitalism does to the human personality, to the human person in terms of alienation (e.g. Marx and Engels in ‘The Critique of German Ideology, 1846/1932), Chapter Three, in the section, ‘Individuality’, and in Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* Marx, 1844). For Marxists, capitalist economy and society alienates the worker from (1) the product of their own labour, (2) the process of labour, the activity of labouring/ working that is, the work process whereby the worker is made to feel foreign to the products of his/her own labor, (3) others human beings, and (4) from one’s self, from one’s ‘species- being.

### ***Marxism and Reforms/ Reformism: Reform and Revolution***

But, writing as a Marxist, as a revolutionary anti-capitalist Marxist, and as a revolutionary critical pedagogue, then, together with Marx, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and others, we all work for and accept reforms. We support regulations on labour exploitation, on food and hygiene standards, on the environment, on how much filth can be injected into our rivers and seas and the air we breathe, and the food we eat.

I am nearly 80 years old. Born in 1945, I grew up in the welfare state. I had free orange juice, I had free milk, free dental treatment, free medicine, free visits to the doctor or the hospital. In the National Health Service (established in the UK



in 1948), all of these were totally free at the point of demand (until 1951-2), paid for by us all through the tax system. (In Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, prescriptions of medicines are still cost-free to the public today).

I also benefited from free secondary education, and, indeed, because of family poverty, was given vouchers for vests and other clothes. To enable me to stay on at school from 16-18 and then go to university, not only did I have free university education, in addition I had a living grant from the government (payable via the local authority/ municipality). This was a grant, not a loan. I could give my (by then, single-parent factory worker) mother some money while I was an undergraduate (see Hill, 2025a, b, c) for my political and social class autobiography). Like other working-class students, I also worked during vacations, in my case, usually on building sites/construction sites, with my brothers and father, who were carpenters.

So, I, and tens of millions of others, benefitted from these reforms, which were inaugurated in the UK by the post-war Labour government; these were reforms demanded by workers and trade unions before, during and after the 1939-1945 war. These were invaluable reforms. Thus far, I can still dance, run, make speeches, and play guitar, in good health. I am a child of what was a fully functioning Welfare State.

A major difference between Marxist and non-Marxist socialists (that is, left social democrats such as Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn in England, Bernie Sanders and Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez in the USA) is the belief that reforms are *not sustainable* under capitalism. Of course, Marxists fight for reforms. Marx and Engels ([1848] 2010) emphasise, in *The Communist Manifesto*:  
`Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the

movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement’

But they continue, ‘they never cease, for a single instant, to instil into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat’.

Such reforms can be developed a strategy of “anti-capitalist structural reforms” , such as nationalisation and public control, as Mandel (2008) set out in *Marxist Economic Theory*. A programme of left social democratic reforms, such as the 2017 Manifesto of the Corbyn led Labour Party (BBC, 2017) could also be seen as what Trotsky called ‘ a transitional programme’ - one with demands that seem reasonable to a majority of the population (e.g. widespread public control, taxing the rich and corporations more heavily) but which could not be countenanced by Capital. As Trotsky explained,

The strategic task of the next period – pre-revolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organization – consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation, the inexperience of the younger generation. It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demand and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat. (Trotsky, 1938/ 2006. See also Hill, 2012; Joyce, 2024 for explanations of the Transitional Programme).

Reforms can always be snatched back, which is what capitalism does in times of crisis. It is happening now, with a vengeance, currently (Spring 2025) in much

of Europe various governments are re-arming, re-militarising, with policies of 'guns not butter'. Cuts in 'real wages' as well as in welfare provision are enforced, for example during the Great Depression of the 1930s in the past. Marxists understand that reforms are stripped away when there are the (inevitable recurrent and systemic) crises of Capital, such as the 1930s, 1970s, 2008, since Covid, and in relation to the end-stages of war in Ukraine of 2022-25.

For Rosa Luxemburg, ([1900], 1999), reform and revolution had never been opposites: they complement each other. She opens her major pamphlet, *Reform or Revolution* as follows:

Can we counterpose social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reforms? Certainly not. The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, is .... indissolubly tied to its final goal. The struggle for reforms is its means, the social revolution, its goal.

Classical Marxists, like Marx, Lenin and Luxemburg, welcome reforms, *without being reformist*. Rosa Luxemburg explained how “superficial and temporary changes to the economy did not constitute a fundamental break from the past” (Cox, 2019). Socialists cannot, Luxemburg argued, choose between reform and revolution, as if they were choosing different sausages from the buffet of history (Cox, 2019).

That is why people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform *in place and in contradistinction to* the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the *same* goal, but a *different* goal. ... Our program becomes not the realisation of *socialism*, but the reform of *capitalism*; not the suppression of the wage labour system but the

diminution of exploitation, that is, the suppression of the abuses of capitalism instead of suppression of capitalism itself. (Luxemburg, ([1900], 1999)

What left Social Democrats and Revisionist Reformist Marxists do *not* want is Marxist revolution, the replacement of Capitalism by socialism and, ultimately, by communism. Revolutionary Socialists such as Rosa Luxemburg, argued that socialism can only be achieved through the self-emancipation of the working class through an act of revolution.

On the other side in that debate, the Reformist side, within the SPD (Social Democratic Party in Germany, then the largest and best organised of all socialist parties in Europe, indeed, globally) of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, led by Edouard Bernstein, were the reformists, or revisionists. These argued- and still argue, that capitalism had reached a stage in which it was no longer necessary to call for revolution, but that enough reforms could be put into place—more democratic rights, more social welfare programs and so on. Reformists – the Labour and social democratic parties of the world, stop at Reforms, and are horrified by Marxism and communism. An example, of social democratic horror at not only Marxist anti-capitalist revolution, but even left social democracy- major reforms of capitalism such as nationalisation, and notably raising taxes on the rich is the expulsion of not only Marxists from the Labour Party in the UK (groups such as Socialist Appeal, now renamed the RCP- Revolutionary Communist Party) but also mass expulsions of even left social democrats like Jeremy Corbyn, from the Labour Party.

It is not easy to define differences between socialism and communism, the terms are sometime used antithetically, and sometimes coterminously. This is so historically and today. (See Hill, 2021b). Confusingly, the name of the communist party in Russia in the early twentieth century as the RSDLP, the

Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party. But today, in Marxist discourse these terms are usually meant to signify the following- Communists as revolutionary anti-capitalist Marxists, and Socialists as left social democrats. (In some circumstances, such as party conferences of activists, or at selection meetings, any social democrats will call themselves socialist, and even use the word 'comrade').

For most of the history of the Labour Party in the UK, for members and MPs from all wings of the party it has been *de rigueur* to claim to be a socialist. But, under the current leadership (of Keir Starmer) this is no longer the case. Indeed, the current Labour Party is a Reformist Party without (meaningful) reforms. One more confusing element is that many self-proclaimed Communist Parties, both historically and currently, became reformist, gradualist, putting revolution off the agenda. This is true of the current CPB (Communist Party of Britain) and PCF (Parti Communiste Français) in the UK and in France, and in the CPI (Communist Party of India (Marxist) which has usually ruled the Indian states of West Bengal and Kerala) and the CPI (Communist Party of India) in India. Historically it was also true of a period when it did not serve Stalin's USSR to have communist revolutions in Europe.

And there is also the 'stage theory' of communism, adopted by many colonial communist parties in the second half of the twentieth century, and also in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Russia (for example, the Mensheviks), that a proletarian revolution could not take place until there had been a bourgeois democratic revolution (overthrow of feudalism or colonialism and replacement by capitalism). In pre-revolutionary Russia, 'stage theorists' such as the Mensheviks argued that underdeveloped countries such as Tsarist Russia must first pass through a stage of capitalism via a bourgeois revolution before moving to a socialist stage.

## 6. Conclusion: Our Task

Revolutions do not happen by magic. Revolutions are not like apples - they do not fall off trees. Class consciousness—a subjective understanding of class society and of one’s class position—does not follow automatically or inevitably from the objective fact of economic class position. There is ‘false consciousness’. This is a Marxist concept that suggests that the workers do not recognise that they are being exploited by the ruling capitalist class, Bourgeois ideology persuades, primarily through capitalist controlled media and education systems them to think that the interests of the ruling class are in fact the interests of all, that ‘There is No Alternative’ (to the current capitalist set of economic, social and political relationships).

Hence, Marxists see the need for both theoretical/academic intervention and for activism. This takes place in various for a/ venues/ sites, e.g., through policy analysis/critique and policy development, as well as activist intervention in trade unions and formal and informal groups, and in the direct-action venues-marches, occupations, demonstrations. Such intervention also takes place at election times, in electoral work. Election literature and meetings and street events may, indeed, be the only, or the first time, many (have) ever come across Marxist analysis and critique and proposals.

The point is to go beyond neoliberal reforms, to change the system. To use the classic quote from Marx’ *Theses on Feuerbach*, ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it’ (Marx, [1845] 2002) not any change, not just reforms, not just change for ‘the democratic republic’, but socialist change and the proletarian revolution. Class consciousness does not follow automatically or inevitably from the objective

fact of economic class position. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, Marx observes:

In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that divide their mode of life, their interests and their cultural formation from those of the other classes and bring them into conflict with those classes, they form a class. (Marx, [1852] 1974, p. 239)

Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy* [1847a] 2009] distinguishes between a 'class-in-itself' (an objective determination relating to class position) and a 'class-for-itself'. That is, a class aware of itself as a class in the Capital-Labour relation, a subjective appreciation, and understanding, of class position. To refer to a classical Marxist injunction from *The Poverty of Philosophy*, (Marx, [1847b] 1999), the key political task facing communists is "[...] the formation of the proletariat into a class", that is, a "class *for* itself", a class aware of itself as a class in the Capital-Labour relation.

The Communist Manifesto explicitly identifies 'the formation of the proletariat into a class' as the key political task facing communists. The process that links economic and social class is that of *class consciousness*. The class conflict arising from class consciousness and as a constituent of class consciousness is that class struggle, which is fundamental to understanding economic, political and educational change. It is in periods of extreme class differentiation and polarisation that we experience the intensification of the extraction of surplus value-profit from the labour power of workers, that more and more workers perceive, subjectively, the objective nature of their exploitation. Nineham (2010, p. 15) draws on Lukacs concerning periods of capitalist crisis: "in the midst of panic, the role of state institutions is exposed, as politicians vote to bail out the banks, or police forces attack unemployed protestors".

This is Marxists' political pedagogical importance, of party, organization, leaflets, newspapers, booklets, books, media, social media, and all of the ensuing analysis and debate. Here, as well as in the classroom, in conversation and in rhetorical speeches, we carry out the role of socialist analysis, of revolutionary pedagogy, of connecting the here and now of a rent strike, a pro-immigrant rally, an anti-austerity march, a picket line of a zero-hours contract employer, a Black Lives Matter or an Extinction Rebellion march, an occupation of a tax-avoiding multinational company-owned shop. These are valid and extremely valuable reforms, *political* reforms. It is in connecting these with developing subjective socialist class consciousness, demanding and propagandizing the need for an anti-capitalist, socialist revolution, a change in the economic relations of production, a change from capitalism, to a socialist reality, and ultimately, a communist economy and society in which "class" itself is abolished. In Lenin's words, "In the struggle for economic emancipation, for the socialist revolution, the proletariat stands on a basis different in principle and it stands alone." (Lenin, 1902/1961).

We have to be activists as it is not enough doing zooms, doing lectures, making speeches, doing stalls, 'selling the newspaper'. These are all very important but, in addition, we have to get involved in movements in trade unions, political direct action, and other forms of political action and solidarity. And we have to have a clear socialist vision.

As Silverman (2024) analyses: 'the Labour movement' (by which he means the organisations of the Labour movement, such as trade unions, at national and local branches, and unofficial, organised local and national movements of trade unionists and workers, Trades Councils (local co-ordinating bodies of trade unions)), 'will create its own party' (working with socialist groups, just as with



the original foundation of the Labour Party in 1906). Silverman continues: ‘it will formulate its own program; it will appoint its own leaders’. No group of organised Marxists, individually or in sects or in parties will dictate a program (though, clearly, it will be informed by social class and Marxism/ Socialism). By joining forces to present candidates we can take a first step, and help speed up this process, to help launch a mass workers’ party, campaigning for a clear socialist programme’.

Thus, we have to be there, with our experience, working with those who are developing their knowledge, working with their and our experiences and knowledge to join in the battles that are a part of the class war. We do what we can, notwithstanding the tragedies that sometimes necessitate that we take time off, owing to health and family.

The importance of solidarism, solidarity with each other, ideological, political, and emotional solidarity. We need to hold hands; we need to hug and be hugged. You are not the only socialist or revolutionary or Marxist or anti-capitalist in the workplace, or in the rally or in the street. We need courage. And we need solidarity.

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## **Acknowledgement**

This is a greatly extended and an updated version of the chapter by Dave Hill (2025) Neoliberalism, Resistance and Solidarity, in Carr, P.R., Rivas-Sanchez, E. and Thésée, G. (eds.) *Pygmalion Democracy: If you build it, will he/they come?* And of Dave Hill (2025) What Trump is doing is new, but is also not new: the novelty of openness and the barbarism of intensified oligarchic Western capitalism, *Workers International Network*

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Stephen Beresford, Paul Carr, Mike Cole, Jesus Jaime-Diaz, Glenn Rikowski, Leena Helavaara Robertson, Bill Templer and Spyros Themelis for their comments on a Draft version of this. Any errors, of course, remain mine.

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