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Introduction

Fascism is an important political category, but a confusing one. People use the word fascism in many different ways, and often without a clear sense of what it means.

Political events since the September 11, 2001, attacks have raised the issue of fascism in new ways. People on both the right and the left have described Islamic rightist forces such as al Qaeda and the Taliban as fascist – but for very different reasons. Neoconservatives and Bush administration officials have denounced “Islamofascists” to help justify the so-called war on terrorism and the military occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. By contrast, some leftists describe some of these same groups as fascist – not to rationalize US expansion, but to highlight the fact that there are major political forces today that are deadly enemies of both the left and US imperialism.

At the same time, a number of liberals and leftists have warned that the United States itself is headed in a fascist direction. As I’ve argued elsewhere, the Bush administration’s authoritarian and militaristic policies are a serious threat, but they’re a world apart from fascism’s volatile mix of oppression and anti-elitism, order and insurgency. Fascism doesn’t just terrorize and repress; it uses twisted versions of radical politics in a bid to “take the game away from the left,” as neo-Nazi leader Tom Metzger urged his followers in the 1980s. We need different strategies to fight these different forms of right-wing authoritarianism, and we need a political vocabulary that lets us tell them apart.¹

Claims of impending fascism tend to reflect two underlying problems. The first is the idea that fascism is essentially a tool or strategy of big business to defend capitalist rule, and the second is vagueness about what delineates fascism from other forms of capitalist repression. We can see both of these problems in pronouncements from

1. Matthew N. Lyons, “Is the Bush Administration Fascist?” *New Politics* 11 (2), Winter 2007, www.wpunj.edu/newpol/issue42/Lyons42.htm

several different US leftist organizations (such as the Communist Party, Socialist Workers Party, Revolutionary Communist Party, and Socialist Labor Party), in leftist and left-liberal media organs such as *CounterPunch* and *Common Dreams*, and in numerous websites and online discussions among US activists.²

A recent sophisticated example of both problems comes from Marxist academicians Gregory Meyerson and Michael Joseph Roberto. In an October 2006 *Monthly Review* article, "It Could Happen Here," they argue that "fascism is a plausible response by the US bourgeoisie to the general crisis of Pax Americana" and, although the outcome of the crisis remains unclear, "evidence is mounting for what we are calling a fascist trajectory." Meyerson and Roberto see fascism as an intrinsic structural tendency of capitalism in crisis, a form of rule that is promoted strictly from the top down. "Only the ruling class can institute fascist processes," they argue. Although they acknowledge the existence of fascist movements, "the Marxist view," they claim, "does not focus primarily on fascist mass movements because they are not primary engines of fascism."³

Even if we accept this concept of fascism (and of Marxism), Meyerson and Roberto never explain concretely what they mean by fascist rule. They emphasize that fascism needs to be understood in functional terms, as a form of capitalist rule in crisis, and they criticize descriptive definitions of fascism on the grounds that these obscure its changing historical character. A US fascist trajectory "will look quite different from past fascist trajectories," and will "unfold in a bipartisan context, liberals and conservatives acting in concert – the whole ruling class." But since Meyerson and Roberto don't tell us what fascism will

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2. See for example, Gus Hall, "The hidden GOP agenda: Right-wing control of Republican Party stands as a wake-up call to the nation," *People's Weekly World*, August 24, 1996, www.pww.org/archives96/96-08-24-1.html; Jack Barnes, "Fascism: not a form of capitalism but a way to maintain capitalist rule," *The Militant*, September 4, 2006, www.themilitant.com/2006/7033/703356.html; Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, "The Battle For the Future Will Be Fought From Here Forward!" December 2004, <http://rwor.org/future/web.htm>; Eric Hass, *The Reactionary Right: Incipient Fascism* (New York Labor News: 1963; online edited edition 2007), www.socialistlaborparty.org/pdf/others/reactionary_right.pdf; Anis Shivani, "Is America Becoming Fascist?" *CounterPunch*, October 26, 2002, <http://www.counterpunch.org/shivani1026.html>; Alan Nasser, "The Threat of US Fascism: An Historical Precedent," *Common Dreams*, August 2, 2007, www.commondreams.org/archive/2007/08/02/2933/; and the numerous progressive websites that invoke Laurence Britt's "Fourteen Identifying Characteristics of Fascism" or Bertram Gross's 1980 book *Friendly Fascism*.
 3. Gregory Meyerson and Michael Joseph Roberto, "It Could Happen Here," October 2006, www.monthlyreview.org/1006meyerson.htm

look like, how will we know it's happening? The substance of their argument seems to be that the growing crisis may persuade most representatives of capital that they need to establish a much more repressive and authoritarian state. This is a serious and wholly justified concern, but it's a simple point that doesn't require elaborate arguments about functionalism and structural tendencies. And we gain nothing, but lose much, by calling the result fascism.

The concept of fascism is indeed highly relevant for analyzing current political threats, but not in the way that Meyerson and Roberto maintain. Fascism can help us understand a range of political phenomena that the US ruling class didn't initiate and does not control. These phenomena are part of a crisis that goes far beyond the decline of US global hegemony and the American welfare state, to include the following:

- across eastern Europe and northern Asia, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, followed in many countries by a drastic decline of living standards and the rise of large-scale criminality and a host of right-wing nationalist movements;
- in many parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the co-optation or defeat of revolutionary leftist insurgencies and governments and the growth of diverse populist or religious-based oppositional forces;
- in much of the world, the acceleration of capitalist globalization dynamics such as capital flight, international mass migration, commodification of women's labor, the growth of international mass culture, and the erosion of traditional local institutions – and the upsurge of ambivalent or hostile responses to all of these from various points on the political spectrum.

In this volatile mix, fascism is an important reference point – not just as a developed political force but also as a tendency or potential within broader movements. It is both distinct from and at odds with top-down capitalist authoritarianism. In addition, while fascism takes shape in a capitalist context, it isn't a functional consequence of capitalist development, analogous (as Meyerson and Roberto suggest) to imperialism. Rather, it is a political current, which – like socialism, liberalism, or conservatism – embodies its own set of ideas, policies, organizational forms, and bases of support. Like all major political currents, fascism exists in multiple variations and evolves dynamically to address new historical conditions. This means that no definition of fascism is the one true, final answer. But defining – or at least describing – fascism can help us to grasp fascism's key features, delineate its relationship with other forces, and explore how it develops and how it can be fought.

Unlike many discussions among left activists in the United States today, this essay offers a concept of fascism that speaks to its double-edged reality – bolstering oppression and tyranny but also tapping into real popular grievances and overturning old conventions and forms of rule. To do this, I bring together two distinct but complementary approaches. First, I draw on a current within Marxist thought that emphasizes fascism’s contradictory relationship with the capitalist class. As a movement or a regime, fascism attacks the left and defends class exploitation but also pursues an agenda that clashes with capitalist interests in important ways. Since the 1920s, several independent Marxists have analyzed fascism along these lines; I will look specifically at the work of August Thalheimer, Tim Mason, Mihaly Vajda, Don Hamerquist, and J. Sakai.

These writers are strong in analyzing fascism’s class politics – its relationship with capital and other class forces, its roots in capitalist crisis, and its impact on the socioeconomic order. They are weaker in discussing fascist ideology, which is important for positioning fascism within the political right and for understanding why people – sometimes millions of people – are attracted to fascist movements. To address these issues, I draw on the work of Roger Griffin, a non-leftist scholar who has done pathbreaking work on fascist ideology over the past two decades. Griffin treats fascism as a form of revolutionary nationalism that attacks both the left and liberal capitalist values, an approach that resonates strongly with some of the most promising leftist discussions of fascism. Griffin’s focus on ideology neglects fascism’s structural dimensions but offers a helpful complement to a class-centered analysis.

The body of this essay is divided into three parts. First, I discuss the work of several independent Marxists who have grappled with fascism’s relationship with capitalism, from Thalheimer’s “Bonapartism” theory to Hamerquist and Sakai’s treatments of fascism as a right-wing revolutionary movement. Next I explore Griffin’s ideology-centered approach, particularly his argument that fascism represents a blend of populist ultra-nationalism and a myth of collective rebirth. Lastly, I offer a new draft definition of fascism that incorporates aspects of both approaches, and discuss how this stereoscopic vision can help us understand fascist movements and tendencies today.

From Bonapartism to right-wing revolution

Many Marxists have treated fascism as a tool of big business to defend capitalism in times of crisis. There have been several different

versions of this approach. During the Communist movement's so-called Third Period, roughly 1928–1935, leaders of the Communist International (Comintern) argued that fascism wasn't really a distinct political movement, but rather a counterrevolutionary trend within all bourgeois parties. This meant that the rising Nazi movement in Germany posed no specific danger. In fact, it was more important for Communists to fight against the Social Democratic Party ("social fascists") to win workers to revolutionary politics. This conception blocked German Communists from seeking an alliance with Social Democrats against their common Nazi enemy – the one thing that could have saved Germany from Nazi rule at that point.

After Hitler's rise to power, the Comintern shifted course. In December 1933, the Comintern executive committee declared that "Fascism is the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital."⁴ By identifying fascism with a specific wing of the capitalist class, this approach soon contributed to a new Popular Front strategy of broad antifascist alliances with Social Democrats and liberal capitalists. In practice, this meant abandoning revolutionary politics for liberal reformism. Over the following decades, the Comintern's 1933 definition was embraced by radicals of various persuasions and become the most well-known and influential leftist definition of fascism.

Leon Trotsky, in opposition to the Comintern, emphasized that fascism developed as an autonomous mass movement, based primarily in the petty bourgeoisie, whose plebian and violent character frightened big capitalists. Nevertheless, he argued, fascism's main purpose was to smash the workers' organizations in the service of capitalism. Once in power, fascism lost its mass support and became "a most ruthless dictatorship of monopolist capital."⁵ Some other leftists have echoed Trotsky's distinction between fascism as a movement and fascism as a regime. For example, Canadian Marxist David Lethbridge endorses the Comintern definition but acknowledges that fascists initially criticize big business and sometimes disrupt political stability in ways that the ruling class does not want. But, he argues,

4. Extract from 13th Enlarged Executive of the Communist International (ECCI) Plenum (held in December 1933) on "Fascism, the War Danger, and the Tasks of the Communist Parties," reprinted in *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*, ed. Roger Griffin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 59.

5. Leon Trotsky, "What is National Socialism?" 1933, published 1943; reprinted in *The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology*, ed. Isaac Deutscher (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1964), 181.

fascism falls into line and gives up its radicalism "as soon as it becomes financed by substantial circles within the ruling class."⁶

All of these approaches oversimplify fascism's complex relationship with capitalism. Certainly, both Italian and German fascists received crucial support in winning state power from sections of the business community, the military, and the state apparatus. Once established, the fascist regimes aided capitalism and boosted profits by suppressing the left, smashing the labor movement, and – at first – stabilizing the economy and society. Both Mussolini's and Hitler's governments initially included some traditional conservatives as junior members, and old elites kept control of some sectors, such as the army. The "radical" wings of the fascist movement that wanted to challenge old elites more directly were either frustrated, as in Italy, or suppressed, as in Germany.

But as the fascist regimes consolidated themselves, the capitalist class increasingly lost political control: it lost the power to determine the main direction of state policy. Fascism installed a new political elite that advanced its own ideological agenda. While capitalists remained an important constituent in the overall system of rule, they were progressively reduced to a reactive role at the level of national policy, adapting themselves to the fascists' agenda, not the reverse.

An important statement of this view came from British Marxist historian Timothy Mason, who was a specialist on the working class under Nazism. In his 1966 essay, "The Primacy of Politics," Mason argued that "both the domestic and the foreign policy of the National Socialist government became, from 1936 onwards, increasingly independent of the economic ruling classes, and even in some essential respects ran contrary to their interests."⁷

In Mason's view, the representatives of capital handed state power to Hitler in the mistaken belief that they would be able to retake it once the Nazis had crushed the left and restabilized civil society. During the first few years of Nazi rule, business elites played little role in shaping foreign or military policy but continued to control economic policy through Hjalmar Schacht, minister of economics and Reichsbank president. But starting in 1936, the Nazis intensified rearmament and demanded economic self-sufficiency for Germany. Leaders of heavy

6. David Lethbridge, "The Marxist-Leninist Theory of Fascism," The Bethune Institute for Anti-Fascist Studies, 1999, <http://bethuneinstitute.org/documents/mltheory.html>

7. T.W. Mason, "The Primacy of Politics – Politics and Economics in National Socialist Germany," in *The Nature of Fascism: Proceedings of a conference held by the Reading University Graduate School of Contemporary European Studies* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), 165–95.

industry, who had previously dominated the business community and had been among Nazism's staunchest allies, opposed this shift toward economic isolation because they relied on international trade. The IG Farben chemical trust gained influence in their place by promising to provide synthetic replacements for strategic imports (notably petroleum and rubber), thereby furthering the Nazis' self-sufficiency goal. The shift not only "broke the economic and political supremacy of heavy industry," it also "meant an end to the formation of any general and unified political will or representation of interests on the part of German capital . . . all that was left were the special interests of individual firms, at most of certain branches of the economy."⁸ Each big firm cultivated its own ties with state agencies in order to win contracts, but big business lost its collective voice as a player in shaping overall policy.

Mason acknowledged that capitalists took advantage of the rearmament drive and the German military victories to expand, increase profits, and smash foreign competitors. But the overall direction of the Nazi war policy was based on political aims, not economic ones. The war helped alleviate certain economic shortages, but those shortages were the direct result of the forced rearmament drive itself.

In this context, Mason emphasized, the Nazi state pursued ideologically driven goals – the genocide and mass enslavement of Jews and other peoples – that were "in flat contradiction to the interests of the war economy":

Among the first Polish Jews who were gassed in the extermination camps were thousands of skilled metal workers from Polish armament factories. . . . The army emphasized the irrational nature of this action in view of the great shortage of skilled labour, but was unable to save the Jewish armament workers for industry. . . . The same internal power relationship lay behind the use of scarce railway installations for the deportation of persecuted Jews towards the end of the war, instead of for the provisioning of the forces on the Eastern Front.⁹

Similarly, the Nazi leadership decided to import millions of enslaved eastern European workers for the war economy – rather than draft German women for industrial work – even though the official in charge of labor deployments warned that slave labor was unproductive, unreliable, and a "racial danger" to the German people.

Mason's essay has held up well, with some qualifications. Ian Kershaw, after weighing two decades of later scholarship on the topic, endorsed the main line of Mason's argument but cautioned

8. Mason, "The Primacy of Politics", 179.

9. Mason, "The Primacy of Politics", 191f.

that Mason separated politics and economics too sharply and exaggerated industrialists' loss of political influence under Nazi rule. Jane Caplan suggested that the concept "autonomy" was preferable to "the primacy of politics," so as not to imply a hierarchy of politics over economics.¹⁰

Mason claimed that the Nazi state's relationship with capitalists was "unique." But the dynamic under Italian Fascism was in fact strikingly similar. Non-leftist historian Franklin Hugh Adler, in one of the few detailed English-language studies of Italian Fascism's relationship with big business, describes how Mussolini's regime helped industrialists to intensify workplace exploitation and control – both by destroying working-class organizations and by overruling the Fascist movement's own syndicalist wing. At the same time, the Fascist state pursued a long series of policies that industrialists did not initiate and did not want, from overvaluing the lira's exchange rate to imposing a corporatist bureaucracy on the economy, from encouraging Italians to move to the countryside and have lots of babies to allying with Hitler against Britain and France. Adler summarizes this dynamic as follows:

Although absolute managerial authority was preserved at the factory level, and Confindustria [the confederation of Italian industrialists] came to assume significant authority in administering economic policy, it is nevertheless the case that the context of economic policy became increasingly political and irrational from a strictly economic point of view. . . . At the level of public policy, both foreign and domestic, Confindustria exercised little or no initiative. Here the association, at best, could negotiate subsequent trade-offs to the relative advantage of industry once fundamental decisions had already been made; it reacted rather than acted [italics in original].¹¹

Adler's discussion suggests that capitalists held onto more political power under Italian Fascism than they did under German Nazism. But in both cases they increasingly lost control of core government policy.

Although Mason did not offer any theoretical framework to explain "the primacy of politics" under Nazism, his analysis meshes closely with

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10. Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), 44–60; Jane Caplan, "Theories of Fascism: Nicos Poulantzas as Historian," in *Radical Perspectives on the Rise of Fascism in Germany, 1919–1945*, ed. Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Walliman (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989), 149 n.29.
 11. Franklin Hugh Adler, *Italian Industrialists from Liberalism to Fascism: The political development of the industrial bourgeoisie, 1906–1934* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 347.

the Bonapartism theory of fascism first proposed by August Thalheimer in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Thalheimer was a leading theoretician of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), who was expelled in 1928 for opposing the Third Period line and helped form the Communist Party – Opposition (KPO). Thalheimer rejected the Comintern’s campaign against “social fascism” and called instead for broad-based working-class defense against the Nazis through extraparliamentary action.

Thalheimer argued that Marx’s analysis of the Louis Bonaparte dictatorship in mid 19th-century France offered the best starting point for understanding fascism. The fascist dictatorship, like that of Louis Bonaparte, represented “the autonomisation of the executive power,” in which the capitalist class gave up control of the state in order to protect its socioeconomic status. Thalheimer quoted a passage from Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that described this move:

the bourgeoisie confesses that its own interests dictate that it should be delivered from the danger of its own rule . . . that in order to preserve its social power intact, its political power must be broken; that the individual bourgeois can continue to exploit the other classes and to enjoy undisturbed property, family, religion and order, only on condition that their class be condemned along with the other classes to like political nullity . . . and the sword that is to safeguard it must at the same time be hung over its own head as a sword of Damocles.¹²

Like Bonapartism, Thalheimer argued, fascism came to power after “an unsuccessful proletarian onslaught ended with the demoralization of the working class, while the bourgeoisie, exhausted, distraught and dispirited, cast around for a saviour to protect its social power.”¹³ This interpretation had far more accuracy than the Comintern’s Third Period line that fascism was capitalism’s last-ditch defense against the *rising* threat of proletarian revolution. And while the Comintern claimed that fascist rule was a natural outgrowth of bourgeois parliamentarianism, Thalheimer argued that it marked a “sudden leap.” Parliamentary governments helped lay the groundwork for fascism with their own anti-labor repression, but fascism itself “only begins at the point when and where the bayonet becomes independent and turns its point against bourgeois parliamentarians as well.”¹⁴

12. August Thalheimer, “On Fascism,” 1928; reprinted in *Marxists in the Face of Fascism: Writings by Marxists on Fascism from the Interwar Period*, ed. David Beetham (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1984), 188.

13. Thalheimer, “On Fascism,” 191.

14. Thalheimer, “So-called Social-fascism,” 1929; reprinted in *Marxists in the Face of Fascism*, ed. Beetham, 196.

Thalheimer saw the fascist party, like Louis Bonaparte's Society of December 10, as consisting of "socially uprooted elements from every class, from the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, the urban petty bourgeoisie, the peasantry, the workers," while the fascist militia paralleled the Bonapartist army, "and like it provides a source of livelihood for the socially uprooted." Fascist ideology echoed Bonapartism in its nationalism, rhetorical denunciations of economic and political elites, and glorification of the heroic leader. But while Bonaparte's organization mirrored French working-class secret societies, the fascist party mirrored the Soviet Communist Party. As a mass formation, the fascist party was in some ways stronger than Bonaparte's organization, but this also intensified its internal contradictions "between the social interests of this mass following and the interests of the dominant classes which it has to serve."¹⁵

Thalheimer regarded fascism as inherently unstable, a regime pulled simultaneously in opposite directions. "Fascism, like Bonapartism, seeks to be the benefactor of all classes; hence it continually plays one class off against another, and engages in contradictory maneuvers internally." He predicted that the conflicting policy demands of fascism's various constituencies, "combined with the nationalist imperialist ideology, push the dictator to external violations of the peace, and finally to war" – a process that would bring about fascism's ruin.¹⁶

Thalheimer's discussion amounts to just a skeletal analysis of fascism. He offered only brief, general comments on fascism's ideology, organization, and social base; the dynamics of capitalist-fascist relations; and the historical context that promoted fascism's rise. Some have criticized him for applying the concept of Bonapartism mechanically. But given that Thalheimer wrote early – only a few years after Mussolini consolidated his dictatorship and before the Nazi seizure of power – his outline matches the fascist regimes' later trajectories strikingly well.

Thalheimer's work has influenced a number of later scholars. Jane Caplan, for example, echoed and reformulated his point about fascism's inherent instability:

Fascism is the most extreme form yet observed of the exceptional capitalist state, and the essential contradiction of exceptional states is that they represent a type of coercive structure in which the control of the extraction of surplus value is displaced from the labor process to the political process, in a vast enhancement of the state's role. The fascist regime is the extreme form of the

15. Thalheimer, "On Fascism," 191, 194.

16. Thalheimer, "On Fascism," 190, 192f.

autonomization of politics under capitalism. It is the product of an immense dislocation of the capitalist mode of production and ... is unlikely to persist in the long term, for it manifestly bristles with contradictions ... Under National Socialism, for example, one term of the fundamental contradiction in the role of the state is expressed in the tendency toward the ultimate autonomization of the political police, with its disruptive implications for the process of production.¹⁷

Hungarian Marxist philosopher Mihaly Vajda incorporated a Bonapartist approach into a general theory of fascism in his book *Fascism as a Mass Movement*, which was written in 1969–70 and first published in 1976. Vajda was a member of the “Budapest School” of intellectuals around Georg Lukács, whose members became increasingly critical of orthodox Soviet-style Marxism, particularly after the Warsaw Pact’s military suppression of the Czechoslovak Spring in 1968. In 1973, Vajda and several other members of the Budapest School were fired from their academic posts and expelled from the Hungarian Workers Party (Communist Party) for their political views.

Vajda drew on both Thalheimer and Mason in arguing that fascism is “a capitalist form of rule” in which “the bourgeoisie does not itself exercise political power, and ... lacks a voice in the decisions of those who are ruling politically.”¹⁸ As a general rule, Vajda asserted that “fascism in no way restricted the bourgeoisie’s economic power within the factory. It did not thwart their economic interests and even helped them obtain increased satisfaction.” On the other hand, fascism “creates extraordinary political conditions and replaces normal bourgeois everyday life with a situation of constant tension, and the bourgeoisie finds this at least ‘uncomfortable.’” Beyond that, fascism “openly contradicts the interests of the ruling class in some cases,” specifically in the conduct of World War II. Vajda’s account of the dynamics of German Nazi rearmament and war closely followed Mason’s. On Italy, Vajda wrote, “if Mussolini had not bound his fate to Hitler’s absolutely, none of his political objectives would have endangered the bourgeoisie’s particular interests in any way whatsoever.” But Mussolini’s alliance with Hitler, like the Nazi war drive itself, reflected fascism’s inherent tendency toward aggressive expansionism.¹⁹

Vajda went beyond a Bonapartist argument to address several other aspects of fascism, such as its social psychology and the

17. Caplan, “Theories of Fascism” (note 10), 143f.

18. Mihaly Vajda, *Fascism as a Mass Movement* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976), 13, 93.

19. Vajda, *Fascism as a Mass Movement*, 93, 75, 8, 105.

contrasting historical functions it served in Italy and Germany. As his book's title suggests, Vajda emphasized that a fascist regime comes to power as a mass movement, which gives it both organized popular support and a recruiting pool for the new political elite. The fascist movement centers on combat organizations such as the stormtroopers, whose paramilitary activism is the driving force in fascism's bid for state power. Although helpful for understanding the Italian and German examples, this focus on paramilitary formations arguably does not apply to all fascist movements.

Vajda also argued that fascism has a distinctive ideology: a form of aggressive, totalistic nationalism. Within the nation-state, this doctrine subordinates "every kind of particularity to the 'total,' 'natural-organic' whole, 'the nation'"; externally, it promotes national uplift "even at the expense of the very existence of other nations." Fascist ideology negates bourgeois democracy and liberalism (which involve the promotion of particular group interests over the national totality) and rejects the principle of human equality in favor of national chauvinism or racism. But fascist ideology does not challenge the principle of private property; therefore its vision of national unity "is not a negation of the basis and framework of the existing class society" and "represents an illusory transcendence of particularity."²⁰

Vajda argued that "the 'uplifting' of the 'nation' ... is the only constant element in [fascism's] very varied programmes, which in other respects are always subject to radical change." This nationalism and racism "enabled fascism to avoid conflict between, on the one hand, the particular interests of the masses who joined it and were represented by it, and on the other hand, the basic principles of the existing social system."²¹

Vajda's discussion sheds a useful light on fascist ideology and prefigures several points in Roger Griffin's more developed treatment. Vajda's formulation is not precise enough to distinguish fascist ideology from other forms of right-wing nationalism and overlooks the fact that some fascist movements, such as Romania's Iron Guard, were not expansionist. In addition, as I will argue later, some fascist ideologies don't center on nationalism at all.

Thalheimer, Mason, and Vajda wrote about fascism of the 1920s-1940s. The 2002 book *Confronting Fascism: Discussion Documents for a Militant Movement* is concerned with fascism today as much as "classical" fascism - its points of reference are not just Hitler and

20. Vajda, *Fascism as a Mass Movement*, 17, 24, 19f.

21. Vajda, *Fascism as a Mass Movement*, 24f.

Mussolini but also the World Church of the Creator and Alexander Dugin, Israeli West Bank settlers and the Taliban. As outlined in the Introduction by Xtn (then of Chicago Anti-Racist Action), the book grew out of discussions among antifascist and revolutionary leftists (both anarchist and Marxist) about the relationship between fighting fascism and fighting the capitalist state. It was published in the wake of the September 11 attacks, which sparked a new wave of state repression and racist attacks while highlighting the fact that some of the US power structure's most militant opponents were on the far right.²²

Confronting Fascism centers on an essay by Don Hamerquist, formerly of the Sojourner Truth Organization, and an extended reply by J. Sakai, a Maoist best known for his book *Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat*. Hamerquist and Sakai are both independent Marxists who have worked with anarchist antifascists and been influenced by anti-authoritarian critiques of dogmatic Marxism. Like Thalheimer, Mason, and Vajda, they emphasize that fascism is an independent political force, not a capitalist puppet or policy. But Hamerquist and Sakai go much further than this, presenting fascism as a right-wing revolutionary force. In Sakai's words, "Fascism is a revolutionary movement of the right against both the bourgeoisie and the left, of middle class and declassed men, that arises in zones of protracted crisis." It is not revolutionary in the socialist or anarchist sense: "Fascism is revolutionary in a simpler use of the word. It intends to seize State power for itself . . . in order to violently reorder society in a new class rule."²³

Hamerquist and Sakai argue that most leftists seriously underestimate fascism's potential to attract mass support within the United States and worldwide. Capitalism's developing contradictions, they argue, create growing opportunities for a resurgence of fascist movements. Far from being a frozen relic of the past, fascism is a dynamic political force that includes a range of factions and tendencies and is evolving in response to changing conditions. Fascist groups feed on popular hostility to big business and the capitalist state, and some of them present an oppositional militance that looks more serious and committed than that of most leftist groups today. (Hamerquist particularly cites "third position" fascists, who claim to reject both the left and the right, but the argument is not limited to these groups.) The main danger of fascism today, Hamerquist argues, is not that it will seize

22. Xtn, "Introduction," in *Confronting Fascism: Discussion Documents for a Militant Movement* (Montreal, Quebec: Kersplebedeb; Chicago: Chicago Anti-Racist Action and Arsenal Magazine, 2002), 1-13.

23. J. Sakai, "The Shock of Recognition" in *Confronting Fascism*, 88f, 95.

power, but that it “might gain a mass following among potentially insurgent workers and declassed strata through a historic default of the left” causing “massive damage to the potential for a liberatory anti-capitalist insurgency.”²⁴

A related danger that Hamerquist raises is a convergence between fascists and sections of the radical left. He points to leftward overtures from sections of the far right, and tendencies within much of the left that mesh dangerously with fascism, such as male supremacy, glorification of violence, leader cultism, hostility to open debate and discussion, and elitism. Hamerquist notes that German Communists in the early 1930s sometimes made tactical alliances with the Nazis against the Social Democrats because they considered Social Democrats the bigger threat.

Hamerquist warns that US fascist groups are actively organizing around a number of issues that leftists often consider to be “ours,” such as labor struggles, environmentalism, opposition to police repression, US imperialism, and corporate globalization. This kind of fascist popular appeal is nothing new. As Sakai points out, both Mussolini and Hitler galvanized people largely by attacking established elites and promoting an anti-bourgeois militance that seemed much more exciting and dynamic than conventional left politics. “Many youth in 1930s Germany viewed the Nazis as liberatory. As opposed to the German social-democrats, for example, who preached the dutiful authority of parents over children, the Hitler Youth gave rebellious children the power to keep their own hours, have an active sex and political life, smoke, drink and have groups of their own.”²⁵

In different ways, both Hamerquist and Sakai argue that fascism’s radical approach shapes its relationship with capitalism. Of the two writers, Sakai’s position is closer to a Bonapartist model. He describes fascism as “*anti-bourgeois* but not anti-capitalist.” Under fascist regimes, “capitalism is restabilized but the bourgeoisie pays the price of temporarily no longer ruling the capitalist State.” But for Sakai this conflict is much starker than it is for Bonapartist theorists. Today’s fascism “is opposed to the big imperialist bourgeoisie . . . to the transnational corporations and banks, and their world-spanning ‘multicultural’ bourgeois culture. Fascism really wants to bring down the World Bank, WTO and NATO, and even America the Superpower. As in destroy.”²⁶

24. Don Hamerquist, “Fascism & Anti-Fascism,” in *Confronting Fascism*, 16.

25. Hamerquist, “Fascism & Anti-Fascism,” 38; Sakai, “Shock of Recognition,” 104.

26. Sakai, “Shock of Recognition,” 94, 89, 93f.

Sakai argues that fascism radically reshapes the capitalist social order to create an economy of "heightened parasitism": "a lumpen-capitalist economy more focused on criminality, war, looting and enslavement." He describes how Hitler's regime elevated millions of German workers into a new parasitic class of soldiers, policemen, and bureaucrats and replaced them with a new proletariat of foreign and slave laborers, retirees, and women. This process "created an Aryan society that had never existed before" – giving Nazi racial categories a concrete, social reality that was qualitatively new (but which paralleled the color-line divisions of US society).²⁷

Sakai's discussion belies claims that Hitler's regime had little or no impact on the socioeconomic order. We should remember, however, that this discussion does not apply to Italian Fascism, which lacked Nazism's overarching racialist imperative and never consolidated the same degree of control over the state. Its effect on the socioeconomic order was far more limited.

Hamerquist takes fascist anti-capitalism more seriously than Sakai does. He notes that current-day fascist movements encompass various positions on how to relate to the capitalist class, from opportunists who want to cut a deal, to pro-capitalist revolutionaries who want to pressure big business into accepting fascist rule, to some third positionists who want to overthrow the economic ruling class entirely. It is unclear how serious a challenge to capitalist economic power any fascists would mount in practice. Where it has been tested, fascist anti-capitalism has meant opposition to "bourgeois values," specific policies, or a "parasitic" wing of capital (such as Jewish bankers) – not the capitalist system. On the other hand, as Hamerquist warns, it would be dangerous for leftists to dismiss the prospect of a militantly anti-capitalist fascism simply because it doesn't fit our preconceptions.

Hamerquist's concept of fascist anti-capitalism rests partly on his analysis (following German left communist Alfred Sohn-Rethel) that German Nazism foreshadowed "a new 'transcapitalist' exploitative social order." In particular, Hamerquist argues, German fascism's genocidal labor policy broke with capitalist principles. Not just labor power, but workers themselves were "consumed in the process of production just like raw materials and fixed capital," thus obliterating "the distinctively capitalist difference between labor and other factors of production." True, "normal" capitalist development involves genocide "against pre-capitalist populations and against the social formations that obstruct the creation of a modern working class." But by contrast,

27. Sakai, "Shock of Recognition," 91, 121.

“the German policy was the genocidal obliteration of already developed sections of the European working classes” – i.e., the importation of colonial-style mass killing into Europe’s industrial heartland.²⁸

This doesn’t necessarily mean that Nazism was in the process of overthrowing the capitalist system. The labor policies Hamerquist describes did not call into question the economic power of big business, and arguably could not be sustained for more than a brief period. But the very fact that they were not sustainable may be part of the point. As Hamerquist reminds us, Marx warned that the contradictions of capitalism might end, not in socialist revolution, but in “barbarism,” “the common ruin of the contending classes.” Fascist revolution could be one version of this scenario.²⁹

Here we should remember Thalheimer’s and Caplan’s point that the fascist state’s contradictory relationship with the business class – defending its economic power but pursuing policies that eventually conflict with capitalist economic rationality – is inherently unstable. In theory, this conflict could be resolved in various ways: (1) the collapse or overthrow of the fascist regime (as happened in Italy and Germany), (2) the conversion of fascist rule into a more conventional pro-capitalist regime, or (3) some kind of fascist overthrow of capitalist economic power. The last of these alternatives is the hardest to imagine, but cannot simply be dismissed as impossible or nonsensical. It would not abolish economic exploitation but would reshape it in fundamental ways, as Hamerquist suggests in his discussion of Nazi labor policy.

Sakai and Hamerquist also differ on the question of fascism’s class base. Like many others before him, Sakai links fascism to middle-class and declassed strata threatened or uprooted by rapid social and economic change – historical losers who hate the big capitalists and want to get back the privilege they used to have. Sakai sees this dynamic in the Germans who rallied to Hitler during the Depression, the Timothy McVeigh figures who turn to neo-Nazism as the old US system of white privilege crumbles, and the Muslim world’s shopkeepers and unemployed college graduates hit by globalization, who are at the core of the pan-Islamic right. “To the increasing mass of rootless men fallen or ripped out of productive classes – whether it be the peasantry or the salariat – [fascism] offers not mere working class jobs but the vision of payback. Of a land for real men, where they and not the bourgeois will be the one’s [*sic*] giving orders at gunpoint and living off of others.”³⁰

28. Hamerquist, “Fascism & Anti-Fascism,” 27.

29. Hamerquist, “Fascism & Anti-Fascism,” 24.

30. Sakai, “Shock of Recognition,” 94.

This discussion is helpful but oversimplified. The dynamics Sakai describes represent part of fascism's appeal, and there is evidence that the middle classes and sections of the unemployed disproportionately supported fascism in the interwar period. But it would be a serious distortion to pigeonhole fascism as a movement of historical losers. Pre-World War II fascism didn't just attract declining and uprooted middle classes such as small merchants, but also groups at the core of the new corporate economy, such as white-collar workers and professionals. The fascist vision criticizes modern decadence but also embraces many aspects of modernity. For example, as David Roberts argues, Italian Fascism appealed to petty-bourgeois activists as a vehicle for national integration, political reform, and large-scale industrial development.³¹

Furthermore, as Geoff Eley has pointed out about German Nazism, the movement's dependence on a particular social class is less striking than its ability "to broaden its social base in several different directions" – to construct "a broadly based coalition of the subordinate classes," "without precedent in the German political system." In contrast to the Social Democrats and Communists, who remained focused on the industrial working class, the Nazis (and to a lesser extent Italian Fascists) unified "an otherwise disjointed ensemble of discontents within a totalizing populist framework."³²

Hamerquist does not directly expand on his warning that militant fascism could build a mass base among insurgent workers (a possibility that Sakai questions). Although definitions of "working class" are subject to debate, several fascist movements in the 1930s seem to have attracted substantial numbers of workers, such as the Arrow Cross in Hungary and Father Coughlin's Social Justice movement in the United States. In 1930–33, workers made up about 30% of German Nazi Party members and a majority within the SA (Stormtroopers), the Nazis' paramilitary wing.³³

While they disagree about fascism's class base, Hamerquist and Sakai agree that we need to rethink old leftist assumptions about fascism's racial politics. As Hamerquist puts it, "there is no reason to view fascism as necessarily white just because there are white supremacist fascists. To the contrary there is every reason to believe that fascist

31. David D. Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Geoff Eley, "What Produces Fascism: Preindustrial Traditions or a Crisis of the Capitalist State?" in *Radical Perspectives on the Rise of Fascism in Germany*, ed. Dobkowski and Walliman, 78f.

32. Eley, "What Produces Fascism," 85.

33. Eley, "What Produces Fascism," 83; Conan Fischer, *Stormtroopers: A Social, Economic and Ideological Analysis, 1929–35* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1983).

potentials exist throughout the global capitalist system. African, Asian, and Latin American fascist organizations can develop that are independent of, and to some extent competitive with Euro-American 'white' fascism."³⁴ Coupled with this, some white fascists support Third World anti-imperialism or even disavow racial supremacy, and some have started to build links with socially conservative Black organizations such as the Nation of Islam.

Sakai notes that the mass displacement of Black workers over the past generation, coupled with the defeat of 1960s' left Black nationalism, has fueled an unprecedented growth of authoritarian rightist organizations in the Black community. Sakai also argues that fascism's key growth area now is in the Third World, where "pan-Islamic fascism" and related movements have largely replaced the left as the major anti-imperialist opposition force.

Unfortunately, Sakai and Hamerquist have little to say about what fascism means for women, as Xtn notes in the Introduction to *Confronting Fascism*. Sakai asserts that fascism is basically a male movement both in composition and outlook. In reality, as Xtn points out, fascist movements intensify patriarchy but often rely on mass support from both women and men. As I have argued elsewhere, all fascist movements are male supremacist, but they have embodied a range of doctrines on women and gender issues, both traditionalist and anti-traditionalist, and even including twisted versions of feminism. Fascism has sometimes recruited large numbers of women as active participants, largely by offering them specific benefits and opportunities – in education, youth groups, athletics, volunteer work, and certain paid jobs – even as it sharpened and centralized male dominance.³⁵

Hamerquist and Sakai offer a fuller, livelier picture of fascism than the earlier writers we have considered. In my view, their discussion of current-day movements highlights the immediacy of the issue, and their emphasis on fascist radicalism helps to explain fascism's appeal much more than Bonapartism theory does. At the same time, they are not always clear about which movements they consider fascist (and why) or about fascism's relationship to other right-wing forces. Their discussions of fascist ideology are fragmentary and sometimes vague. For a fuller and more systematic look at these areas, I turn now to someone outside the Marxist tradition.

34. Hamerquist, "Fascism & Anti-Fascism," 41.

35. Xtn, "Introduction," 11-13; Matthew Lyons, "Notes on Women and Right-Wing Movements." *Three Way Fight* blog, September 2005; revised text, www.scils.rutgers.edu/~lyonsm/WomenAndRight.html

The myth of national rebirth

British historian Roger Griffin has been a leading figure in the academic field of fascist studies since publishing *The Nature of Fascism* in 1991. In this and later works, Griffin draws on a wide body of historical material to develop an innovative theory of fascism. He is a self-described liberal whose premises, focus, and method contrast sharply with the Marxist writers I discussed above. This makes the complementarity of their analyses all the more striking.

Griffin's approach builds on the work of historian George Mosse, whom he credits with "establishing several points which herald a new phase in fascist studies":

First, though Nazism is to be conceived as unquestionably a manifestation of generic fascism, it is no longer to be seen as paradigmatic or its quintessential manifestation. Second, at bottom fascism is neither a regime, nor a movement, but first and foremost an ideology, a critique of the present state of society and a vision of what is to replace it. Third, when this vision is dissected it reveals fascism to be a revolutionary form of nationalism . . . Fourth, its ideology expresses itself primarily not through theory and doctrines, but through a bizarre synthesis of ideas whose precise content will vary significantly from nation to nation but whose appeal will always be essentially mythic rather than rational. Equally importantly, it is an ideology which expresses itself through a liturgical, ritualized form of mass political spectacle.³⁶

Like Mosse (but unlike many leftists), Griffin takes seriously fascists' own statements of belief. He argues that an analysis of fascist ideology – like socialist, liberal, or conservative ideology – should be based on how its proponents themselves articulate a social critique and vision, an approach he calls "methodological empathy."³⁷ Although some critics wrongly interpret this as lack of critical distance or even political sympathy for fascism, methodological empathy is in fact crucial for understanding what draws people to support fascist movements.

Another basic premise of Griffin's work is that "generic" fascism (as opposed to the specific Fascism headed by Mussolini) represents an "ideal type," a term coined by Max Weber. This means it is a theoretical construct that can only approximate historical phenomena. Definitions of fascism, Griffin argues, are not objectively "true" in the descriptive sense – rather, they are more or less useful as conceptual

36. Roger Griffin, "Section II: The Search for the Fascist Minimum: Presentation," in *International Fascism* (note 4), 52f.

37. Griffin, "Notes towards the definition of fascist culture: the prospects of synergy between Marxist and liberal heuristics," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 42 (Autumn) 2001, 12.

frameworks for interpreting and classifying events and mapping relationships. For some reason, historian Robert Paxton claims that this approach “condemn[s] us to a static view, and to a perspective that encourages looking at fascism in isolation.” As I will show, Griffin’s own work belies both of these criticisms.³⁸

Griffin’s definition of fascism can be boiled down to three words: “palingenetic populist ultra-nationalism.”³⁹ Each of these terms needs explanation:

Palingenetic: From the Greek *palin* (again or anew) + *genesis* (creation or birth). It refers to a myth or vision of collective rebirth after a period of crisis or decline.

Populist: A form of politics that draws its claims of legitimacy from “the people” (as opposed, for example, to a monarchical dynasty or divine appointment) and uses mass mobilization to win power and transform society.

Ultra-nationalism: It treats the nation as a higher, organic unity to which all other loyalties must be subordinated. Ultra-nationalism rejects “anything compatible with liberal institutions or with the tradition of Enlightenment humanism which underpins them.”⁴⁰

As a form of populist ultra-nationalism, fascism fundamentally rejects the liberal principles of pluralism and individual rights, as well as the socialist principles of class-based solidarity and internationalism, all of which threaten the nation’s organic unity. At the same time, fascism rejects traditional bases for authority, such as the monarchy or nobility, in favor of charismatic politics and a new, self-appointed political elite that claims to embody the people’s will. Fascism seeks to build a mass movement of everyone considered part of the national community, actively engaged but controlled from above, to seize political power and remake the social order. This movement is driven by a vision “of the national community rising phoenix-like after a period of encroaching decadence which all but destroyed it.”⁴¹ Such rebirth involves systematic, top-down transformation of all social spheres by an authoritarian state, and suppression or purging of all forces, ideologies, and social groups the fascists define as alien.

38. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991; New York: Routledge, 1996), 11; Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 21.

39. Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 32–39.

40. Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 37.

41. Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 38.

By demanding a sweeping cultural and political transformation and break with the established order, the vision of renewal sets fascism apart from conservative forms of ultra-nationalism as a revolutionary ideology. The fascist revolution, Griffin argues, is above all a cultural one. "The dominant world-view . . . was for the fascist mindset the primary reality, the principal locus of the nation's rebirth, and the foremost object of its regeneration and metamorphosis. Indeed, the Marxist stress on socioeconomics as the motor of historical change was for fascists a symptom of its essential materialism, its 'atheism,' and hence of its decadence." "In the new order 'culture' would cease to be an individualized, privatized, marginalized sphere of modern life . . . Instead it would once more be what Lewis Mumford calls the 'megamachine,' the matrix for all the mythopoeia, rituals, institutions, values, and artistic creativity of an entire society . . ."⁴²

Despite this emphasis on the subjective, Griffin argues, fascism also pursues major objective structural changes. "While neither the Fascist nor Nazi state wanted to abolish capitalist economics and private property, they had no scruples about involving themselves with the economy on a scale unprecedented in any liberal state except in wartime," including vast public works programs, a drive for economic self-sufficiency (autarky), and, in the Nazi case, creating a vast empire and enslaving millions of workers. "Both regimes also indulged in a massive programme of social engineering which involved creating mass organizations for every social grouping, retooling the educational system, symbolically appropriating all aspects of leisure, sport, culture, and technology . . ."⁴³

In emphasizing fascism's revolutionary side, Griffin obscures the extent to which fascism has acted as a bulwark of capitalism and established social hierarchy. He notes in passing that "fascism in practice colluded with traditional ruling elites in order to gain and retain power and left capitalist structures substantially intact." But for him the crucial point is that "at the level of ideological intent both Fascism and Nazism aimed to coordinate all the energies of the nation, including conservative and capitalist ones, in a radically new type of society . . . and went some way towards doing this."⁴⁴ Griffin offers no indication that the tension between these two statements

42. Griffin, "Notes towards the definition of fascist culture," 12, 13.

43. Griffin, "Revolution from the Right: Fascism," in *Revolutions and Revolutionary Tradition in the West 1560–1989*, ed. David Parker (New York: Routledge, 1999).

44. Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 48.

needs to be addressed at a basic theoretical level – for him, ideology is simply more important.

Nevertheless, Griffin's focus on fascism's myth of collective rebirth represents a conceptual breakthrough, which has widely influenced the field of fascism studies. The palingenetic element gives Griffin's model of fascism more precision than some earlier ones (such as Mihaly Vajda's), which identify fascist ideology simply with ultra- or "organic" nationalism. The focus on palingenetic myth also clarifies fascism's apparent contradiction between forward- and backward-looking tendencies. As Griffin notes, although some forms of fascism invoke the glories of an earlier age, they do so as inspiration for creating a "new order," not restoring an old one. Fascism "thus represents an alternative modernism rather than a rejection of it."⁴⁵

The concept of palingenetic myth sheds light not only on fascism, but also on a number of related political currents. For example, the Ku Klux Klan was formed in the late 1860s around a vision of restoring the white supremacist South after its near destruction in the Civil War and Reconstruction. Since the 1860s, white supremacists have repeatedly invoked this vision of rebirth to help them interpret and address other crises in the US racial order. That helps to explain why the Klan, unlike many other racist institutions, has been revived again and again – and how the Klan helped to prepare the ground for fascist ideas imported from Europe.

Griffin's definition of fascism has other advantages. It is flexible enough to encompass many different versions of fascist politics. As Griffin notes, fascism may or may not involve paramilitary organization, a cult of the supreme leader, corporatist economic policies, or a drive for imperialist expansion. (Some fascist movements, such as Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, have preached neutralism or even a community of regenerated nations.) And while all forms of fascism are racist, Griffin argues, in the sense that they promote ethnic chauvinism and monocultural societies, this racial ideology may or may not be defined in biological terms and can range from relatively mild ethnocentrism all the way to systematic programs for genocide.

Unlike many definitions of fascism, Griffin's model is also specific enough to map fine-grained distinctions and relationships between fascism and other branches of the right. Griffin distinguishes fascism from formations that share a related ideology but make no effort to build a mass base or to overthrow a liberal political system. He

45. Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 47.

recognizes that there can be borderline cases. He argues, notably, that Italy's National Alliance, successor to the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement, represents a contradictory but genuine hybrid between fascist ideology and an acceptance of the liberal democratic rules of the game. Griffin's name for this hybrid, "democratic fascism," is unfortunate, but the basic point holds true that some formations straddle the line between revolutionary and reformist branches of the right.⁴⁶

Griffin's definition of fascism also excludes most of the dictatorships that have often been labeled fascist. He has suggested the term *para-fascist* to describe many of these.⁴⁷ A para-fascist regime is imposed from above (often by the military) and represents traditional elites trying to preserve the old order, but surrounds its conservative core with fascist trappings. These trappings may include an official state party, paramilitary organizations, a leader cult, mass political ritual, corporatism, and the rhetoric of ultra-nationalist regeneration. Para-fascist regimes may be just as ruthless as genuine fascist ones in their use of state terrorism. Unlike true fascism, para-fascism does not represent a genuine populist mobilization and does not substantively challenge established institutions. During the 1920s and 1930s, Griffin argues, para-fascist regimes arose in several European countries, such as Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Romania, and Austria, joined by the Vichy government after France surrendered to Germany in 1940. Para-fascist regimes regarded genuine fascist movements as a threat and used various strategies to contain, co-opt, or crush them. In Spain during the Civil War, for example, General Franco "imposed a shot-gun marriage between Falangists and the traditional (that is non-fascist) radical right" as part of his strategy to establish a para-fascist dictatorship.⁴⁸

Contrary to claims that an "ideal type" definition freezes our image of fascism in the past, Griffin is also alert to ways that fascism has changed. He writes in some detail about *neo-fascism*, by which he means post-1945 forms of fascism that have substantially modified or replaced interwar versions of fascist ideology.⁴⁹ Many fascists have concealed their politics behind a democratic façade through the use

46. Griffin, "The 'Post-Fascism' of the Alleanza nazionale: A case-study in Ideological Morphology," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1 (2), 1996, 123–46.

47. Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 121.

48. Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 123.

49. Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 166–74; Griffin, "Europe for the Europeans: Fascist Myths of the European New Order 1922–92," *Humanities Research Centre Occasional Paper*, no. 1, 1994.

of coded rhetoric, helping to blur the line between hard-line conservatism and the far right. Some have advanced new philosophical systems for rationalizing fascist politics, such as the Nouvelle Droite (New Right) of Alain Benoist's GRECE think-tank in France or the Traditionalism of Julius Evola in Italy. Third Position groups have embraced the "leftist" anti-capitalist current on the margins of traditional fascism, rather than the mainstream of Hitler or Mussolini.

Among a range of neo-fascist innovations, Griffin highlights one trend in particular: a shift toward increased internationalism. From the 1960s on, international networking increased substantially, both through informal contacts and through organizations such as CEDADE (Spanish Circle of Friends of Europe), the NSDAP-AO (National Socialist German Workers Party-Overseas Organization), and WUNS (World Union of National Socialists). Such networking has fostered the sense of belonging to an international movement, and a belief that fascist principles can regenerate many nations, not just one's own.

Despite the many advantages of Griffin's approach, several assumptions sharply limit its usefulness for understanding current politics. This is evident, for example, when Griffin addresses the social and political factors that promote fascism's rise. He argues that the growth of a strong fascist movement is only possible under a special combination of circumstances: a liberal democracy (where there is political space for fascist organizing) experiencing a major crisis (which gives visions of radical rebirth broad appeal) and without strong non-fascist right-wing forces (which block fascism's ability to build mass support). For a fascist seizure of political power, the window of opportunity is even narrower: the liberal democracy must be "mature enough institutionally to preclude the threat of a direct military or monarchical coup, yet too immature to be able to rely on a substantial consensus in the general population" around liberal values. Griffin argues that fascist movements have reached such an opportunity in only four countries: Italy (1918–22), Germany (1918–23, 1929–33), Finland (1929–32), and South Africa (1939–43).⁵⁰

Unlike his definition of fascism, this part of Griffin's discussion is too static, trapped in a description of classical fascism's rise between the world wars. As the history of the left shows, oppositional forces can organize on a mass scale (and even take power) under many different political systems, not just liberal democracies. Even weaker is Griffin's claim that fascists will never again be able to break out of

50. Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 208–11.

their marginal status to bid for state power, because “the structural factors that turned Fascism and Nazism into successful revolutions have simply disappeared.”⁵¹ As support for this, Griffin argues that since 1945 liberal nation-states have raised living standards, strengthened popular commitment to democratic principles, and improved the handling of structural crises. The naiveté and shortsightedness of these assertions is jarring, given Griffin’s level of insight on other points. Here Griffin seems particularly limited by his liberalism and lack of radical analysis.

Another weak spot in Griffin’s discussion concerns fascism’s relationship with religion. He argues that fascism is a secular ideology that is fundamentally incompatible with “genuine” religion. To Griffin, fascism’s “earthly aspirations” contrast with religion’s focus on an infinite, metaphysical reality above all human activity, and fascism’s brutality and ethnocentrism are irreconcilable with “authentic” religion’s recognition of the interconnectedness and beauty of all life. It’s true, Griffin admits, that many ostensibly religious people have embraced fascism, but this represents a “confusion” of their faith. Yes, many fascist ideologies have incorporated religious themes, but in doing so fascism has “corrupted,” “desecrated,” even “mongrelized” religion.⁵²

Given the history of religion worldwide, it’s hard to understand how Griffin could argue that violent or oppressive versions of religious belief are simply not authentic. Who is he to say that his concept of religion is the only true one? In doing so, Griffin is throwing his own commitment to methodological empathy out the window. If analysis of fascist ideology is supposed to “penetrate fascist self-understanding . . . in order to grasp how people saw the movement,”⁵³ then we need to try to understand what religion has meant to fascists – not dismiss their beliefs as phony or corrupt because they don’t match an external yardstick. Griffin is clear about this when it comes to fascist conceptions of revolution, but for him religion is a blind spot.

More defensible, but still flawed, is Griffin’s insistence that there is a basic conceptual difference between fascism and religious “fundamentalism.” Although both promote a vision of collective rebirth out of a corrupt and disintegrated modern society, he argues, fascism calls for

51. Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 220.

52. See Griffin’s essays entitled “Fascism” written for *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda Brasher (Massachusetts: Berkshire Reference Works, 2001); *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor and Jeffrey Kaplan (Continuum International Publishers, 2003); and *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Politics*, draft February 11, 2000.

53. George Mosse, quoted in Griffin, “Notes towards the definition of fascist culture.”

the rebirth of a particular nation and claims “the people” – defined by a specific cultural or genetic heritage – as its source of authority. By contrast, “fundamentalists conceive ‘the people’ as a community of believers created by a divine force for a metaphysical mission” and define God – not the nation or race – as the ultimate reality and source of legitimacy. Furthermore, fundamentalism “attempts to reestablish what it conceives to be traditional or orthodox religious values based on divine revelation,” which means that its response to the modern world is “not revolutionary but reactionary and conservative.”⁵⁴

Griffin concedes that, in practice, “hybrids” between fascism and fundamentalism can occur, and even that “the boundaries between the religious right and neo-fascism have become increasingly fuzzy over the last two decades.”⁵⁵ His discussion of this point is somewhat confused, because he uses the term fundamentalism in different ways, not all of which match his description of fundamentalism quoted above. In general, the examples he gives of fascist–fundamentalist hybrids (Kahanism in Israel, the Bharatiya Janata Party in India, Christian Identity in the United States) are movements that are not particularly concerned with religious orthodoxy but rather use religion as a marker for national or ethnic identity and persecution. As Nikki Keddie has argued, such movements are better described as *religious nationalist*, and the term *fundamentalist* is better reserved for movements (such as the Christian Right) that try to impose a specific set of religious beliefs or practices on society.⁵⁶ Fundamentalist movements in Keddie’s narrower sense have relatively little overlap with fascism as Griffin defines it.

Contrary to Griffin, there are good reasons to extend the concept of fascism to include some religious fundamentalist movements (in the narrower sense). This means rethinking the idea that fascism is always a form of nationalism. In the era of globalization, fascism is less closely tied to nationhood than it was 75 years ago. Griffin himself notes a trend toward internationalism among neo-fascists, and some neo-fascists have also worked to break up nation-states into smaller, ethnically pure units (such as the neo-Nazi call for an independent white homeland in the Pacific Northwest). A British Third Positionist magazine declares, “Highly centralized states are

54. Griffin, “Fascism,” *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*.

55. Griffin, “Fascism.”

56. Nikki Keddie, “The New Religious Politics and Women Worldwide: A Comparative Study,” *Journal of Women’s History* 10 (4), Winter 1999, 11–34, <http://iupjournals.org/jwh/jwh10-4.html>

likely to lead to extreme conflict in these times. The practical alternative of decentralized states based on homogeneous groupings co-operating through Confederacies and allowing bi-lateral agreements between Regions is the only long-term answer."⁵⁷ (Such decentralist visions remain totalitarian in that they seek to impose rigid ideological conformity on all spheres of society, but would enforce this through local, regional, or nongovernmental institutions, not nation-states.)

In the context of these shifts away from traditional fascist nationalism, the difference between rebirth of a nation and rebirth of a community of believers remains important, but it isn't more important than the difference between Mussolini's cultural chauvinism and Hitler's biological racism.

Coupled with this, I disagree with Griffin's claim that the drive to impose religious orthodoxy is never revolutionary. The most radical branches of both the Christian Right and the Islamic Right demand a "return" to supposedly ancient scriptural laws. But adapted to modern conditions and combined with modern technology and organizational strategies, this means a coordinated, elite-controlled project to reshape all social spheres, which closely resembles the fascist cultural revolution Griffin describes. It also means that some religious fundamentalists pursue ideological goals that may clash with capitalist policies (such as promoting consumerism or exploiting women's labor power) in ways that parallel secular fascism's contradictory relationship with business elites.

Combining two approaches

In their analyses of fascism, Griffin and the independent Marxists I discussed above share several important points. In broad terms, both regard fascism as an autonomous political force, a distinct form of right-wing politics that opposes the left but also challenges the established order, including conventional capitalist politics and culture. Two of the Marxists (Hamerquist and Sakai) join with Griffin in labeling fascism as revolutionary. Within both approaches there is also a recognition that fascism is not a static entity, but one that evolves to address new historical conditions and opportunities. Along with these points of commonality, each side also brings something to the table that the other lacks. Griffin brings an incisive and detailed portrait of fascist ideology, while the Marxists bring a careful assessment of fascism's contradictory relationship with capitalism.

57. "Nation State - Out of Date?" *Third Way*, no. 8, July 25, 1991, 3.

All of this offers a lot of room for useful interchange, but little work has been done in this area. Griffin himself often treats Marxist discussions of fascism as an intellectual dead end, trapped by a supposed dismissal of fascism's revolutionary claims and what he calls "the axiomatic assumption that fascism is primarily to be understood in relation to the crisis of the capitalist state."⁵⁸ However, Griffin does recognize significant variation among Marxist analyses and in one 2001 essay hails "the prospects for synergy between Marxist and liberal" approaches to fascist aesthetics.⁵⁹

On the other side, few Marxists have even addressed Griffin's work. Trotskyist Dave Renton offers a mean-spirited polemic that falsifies many of Griffin's views. Renton claims, for example, that Griffin wants to "rescue fascist Italy from stigma" and that he believes "fascism cannot be blamed for the Holocaust." In contrast, Mark Neocleous makes a serious effort to synthesize class analysis with an exploration of fascist ideology that is partly influenced by Griffin. But Neocleous underplays fascism's insurgent dimension – precisely the area that should be central to such an interchange – and instead portrays fascism one-sidedly as "a counter-revolutionary phenomenon in defense of capitalism."⁶⁰

As a step toward bringing the two approaches together, I offer the following draft definition: *Fascism is a revolutionary form of right-wing populism, inspired by a totalitarian vision of collective rebirth, that challenges capitalist political and cultural power while promoting economic and social hierarchy.*⁶¹

In this definition, *revolutionary* implies an effort to bring about a fundamental, structural transformation of the political, cultural, economic, or social order. Fascism seeks, first of all, to overthrow established political elites and abolish established forms of political rule, whether liberal-pluralist or authoritarian. Second, fascists also attack "bourgeois" cultural patterns such as individualism and consumerism and aim to systematically reshape all cultural spheres – encompassing

58. Griffin, "Introduction," in *International Fascism*, 4.

59. Griffin, "Notes towards the definition of fascist culture."

60. Dave Renton, *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 24; Mark Neocleous, *Fascism, Concepts in Social Thought Series* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 38.

61. In a previous draft of this essay, I offered a version of this definition that had a different final clause, stating that fascism "challenges capitalist control of the state while defending class exploitation." Thanks to Don Hamerquist for pointing out that this violated methodological empathy, since many neo-fascists either ignore or disavow class exploitation, although they glorify hierarchy, authority, and discipline.

education, family life, religion, the media, arts, sports and leisure, as well as the culture of business and the workplace – to reflect one unified ideology. Third, some (not all) forms of fascism promote a socioeconomic revolution that transforms but does not abolish class society – as when German Nazism restructured the industrial heart of Europe with a system of exploitation based largely on plunder, slave labor, and genocidally working people to death.

By *right-wing* I mean a political orientation that reinforces or intensifies social oppression as part of a backlash against movements for greater equality, freedom, or inclusiveness. *Populism* means a form of politics that uses mass mobilization to rally “the people” around some form of anti-elitism. (This definition, borrowed from Margaret Canovan, differs slightly from Griffin’s use of the term populism.) Combining these two concepts, *right-wing populism* mobilizes a mass movement around a twisted anti-elitism (often based on conspiracy theories) at the same time that it intensifies oppression. In place of leftist conceptions of class struggle, fascists often draw a phony distinction between “producers” (including “productive” capitalists, workers, and middle classes) and “parasites” (defined variously as financiers, bureaucrats, foreign corporations, Jews, immigrants, welfare mothers, etc.). Right-wing populism appeals largely to middle groups in the social hierarchy, who have historically formed an important part of fascism’s mass base.⁶²

The phrase *totalitarian vision of collective rebirth* draws on Griffin’s work but broadens his category of ultra-nationalism to encompass certain religious-based and other non-nationalist movements. The fascist vision is *totalitarian* in that it (a) celebrates one group – national, ethnic, religious, or racial – as an organic community to which all other loyalties must be subordinated, (b) uses mass organizations and rituals to create a sense of participation and direct identification with that community, (c) advocates coordinated top-down control over all institutions, and (d) rejects in principle the concepts of individual rights, pluralism, equality, and democratic decision-making. The *collective rebirth* aspect of the vision declares that the community must be rescued from a profound inner crisis, largely by purging “alien” ideologies and groups of people that are considered threats to the community’s unity and vitality. This vision often draws on romanticized

62. Chip Berlet and Matthew N. Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America* (New York: Guilford, 2000); Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981).

images of the past but points toward a radically new cultural and political order.

Fascist regimes *challenge capitalist political and cultural power* by taking dominance of the state away from the representatives of big business and subordinating capitalist interests to their own ideological agenda. At the same time, fascism *promotes economic and social hierarchy*, either within or (potentially) outside a capitalist framework. Historically, fascists have colluded with capitalists and bolstered the economic power of big business. Although fascists have often targeted specific capitalist features and even specific sectors of the business class, no fascist movement has substantively attacked core capitalist structures such as private property and the market economy. A fascist revolution of the future might radically reshape economic exploitation but would not abolish it.

By combining insights from the two approaches I have explored, the proposed definition – with its twin focus on ideology and class rule – offers a fuller, more rounded model of fascism. In the process, it gives us a more powerful tool to map divisions, relationships, and changes in right-wing politics, and to understand how these dynamics relate to changes in capitalism.

The past 30 years have seen an upsurge of right-wing movements in many parts of the world. Many of these movements promote some form of authoritarian populism – either nationalist or religious in focus – that incorporates themes of anti-elitism and collective regeneration out of crisis. In this context, some commentators treat explicit racism or anti-Semitism as the decisive markers of fascism, but racism and anti-Semitism can be found among non-fascists as well, and not all fascists today fit the classic profile for ethnic bigotry. A more critical dividing line is between “reformists” who are content to work within existing channels and “revolutionaries” (including but not limited to fascists) who advocate a radical break with the established order. This division often cuts across movements rather than between them. The United States has seen two major examples of this in recent years: the Patriot movement and the Christian right.⁶³

The Patriot movement, which included armed “citizens militias” and peaked in the mid/late 1990s, represented the United States’ first large-scale coalition of committed Nazis and non-fascist activists since World War II. The Patriot movement promoted the apocalyptic specter of an elite conspiracy to destroy US sovereignty and impose a

63. The following sketches of the Patriot movement and the Christian right are based on Berlet and Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America*, chapters 11, 12, and 14.

tyrannical collectivist system run by the United Nations. The movement's program centered on forming armed "militias" to defend against the expected crackdown, but more extreme proposals circulated widely, such as bogus "constitutional" theories that would re-legalize slavery, abolish women's right to vote, and give people of color an inferior citizenship status. A loose-knit and unstable network mainly based among rural, working-class whites, the Patriot movement attracted millions of supporters at its height. It fed not only on fears of government repression but also on reactions to economic hardship connected with globalization (such as the farm crisis of the 1980s), the erosion of traditional white male privilege, the decline of US global dominance, and disillusionment with mainstream political options. (Many of the same impulses fueled grassroots support for Pat Buchanan's 1992 and 1996 Republican presidential campaigns. Buchanan blended attacks on immigrants, homosexuals, and feminists with a critique of corporate globalization and an anti-interventionist foreign policy, but did not challenge the established political framework.)

The Christian Right has promoted a program of cultural traditionalism in response to perceived social breakdown and a supposed elite secular humanist conspiracy to destroy American freedom. The movement's agenda centers on reasserting traditional gender roles and heterosexual male dominance, but also includes strong subthemes of cultural racism. The Christian right is based mainly among middle-class Sunbelt suburbanites and has fostered a dense network of local, regional, and national organizations that actively engage millions of people. The movement includes a small fascist wing, spearheaded by advocates of Christian Reconstructionism. Reconstructionists, who have played a key role in the most terroristic branch of the anti-abortion movement, reject pluralist institutions in favor of a full-scale theocracy based on their interpretation of biblical law. However, the bulk of the Christian Right has (so far) advocated more limited forms of Christian control and has worked to gain power within the existing political system, not overthrow it.

In many other parts of the world, too, fascism operates as a tendency or a distinct faction within a larger movement. In western and central Europe, many right-wing nationalist movements encompass small hardcore neo-fascist groups alongside mass parties such as the National Front (France), the Freedom Party of Austria (FPO), and the National Alliance (Italy).⁶⁴ All three of these parties were built

64. See Martin A. Lee, *The Beast Reawakens* (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1997); Jérôme Jamin, "The Extreme Right in Europe: Fascist or Mainstream?" *The Public*

largely by (ex?)-fascists and promote political themes (especially anti-immigrant racism) that are widely identified as the opening wedge for a fascist agenda. Both the FPO and the National Alliance have participated in coalition governments at the national level. This may be part of a long-term strategy to “fasciticize” the political climate and institutions from within, but it also suggests the possibility that fascists – like socialists – can be co-opted into a liberal capitalist political system.

The Islamic right encompasses a great diversity of organizations, political philosophies, strategies, and constituencies across the Muslim world.⁶⁵ Although some branches (notably Saudi Arabia’s religious power structure) are conservative or reactionary, others represent a kind of right-wing populism that aims not to reject modernity but reshape it. These branches use modern forms of political mobilization to rally Muslims against Western imperialism, Zionism, global capitalist culture, and/or local elites. They envision a collective religious and national (or international) rebirth through re-Islamicizing society or throwing off foreign domination.

Within this framework, Afghanistan’s Taliban and Lebanon’s Hezbollah represent opposite poles. The Taliban have promoted a totalitarian form of Islamic rule that combines virulent misogyny, Pashtun ethnic chauvinism, and warlord capitalism – politics that fully deserve the fascist label. Hezbollah, in contrast, offsets its call for a theocracy modeled on Iran with an everyday practice that respects religious, ethnic, and political diversity, does not impose special strictures on women, and focuses its populist critique mainly on the realities of Israeli aggression and the hardships faced

Eye 19 (1), Spring 2005, www.publiceye.org/magazine/v19n1/jamin_extreme.html; Luciano Cheles, Ronnie Ferguson, and Michalina Vaughan (eds), *Neo-Fascism in Europe* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1991).

65. See Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (eds), *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Said Amir Arjomand, “Iran’s Islamic Revolution in Comparative Perspective,” *World Politics* 38 (3), April 1986, 383–414; Abdel Azim Ramadan, “Fundamentalist Influence in Egypt: The Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Takfir Groups,” in *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militance*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, The Fundamentalism Project, Volume 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 152–83; Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu’llah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); Nikki R. Keddie and Farah Monian, “Militancy and Religion in Contemporary Iran,” in *Fundamentalisms and the State*, ed. Marty and Appleby, 511–38.

by Lebanon's Shi'ite majority.⁶⁶ (Iran's Islamic Republic falls somewhere between these two poles. Although authoritarian, it preserves too much openness and pluralism to be labeled fascist, which highlights the fact that right-wing revolutionary anti-imperialism does not necessarily equal fascism.)

India's massive Hindu nationalist movement advocates Hindu unity and supremacy as the key to revitalizing India as a nation. The movement promotes hatred of – and mass violence against – Muslims and claims that India's political leaders have long pursued anti-Hindu policies and favoritism toward Muslims and other minorities. Hindu nationalism, or "Hindutva," has disproportionately appealed to upper-caste, middle-class Hindus from northern and west-central India. The movement centers on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (Association of National Volunteers, or RSS), an all-male cadre organization that promotes a paramilitary ethos and a radical vision to reshape Indian culture along authoritarian corporatist lines. The RSS's political spin-off, the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, or BJP), has often favored a more pragmatic electoral strategy that blends a toned-down version of Hindu chauvinism with populist economic appeals. (The BJP headed India's coalition government from 1998 to 2004 and now leads the parliamentary opposition.) There are also tensions within the movement between advocates of free trade and economic nationalists who warn of the dangers posed by foreign investment. In contrast to many fascists and other right-wing nationalists, Hindutva forces have sought close strategic ties with both the United States and Israel, especially since George W. Bush proclaimed the War on Terror.⁶⁷

This array of movements looks different from classical fascism, in large part, because the capitalist world has changed. Classical fascism took shape in an era of European industrialization and nation building, competing colonial empires, and an international

66. See Matthew Lyons, "Defending my enemy's enemy," *Three Way Fight* blog, August 3, 2006, <http://threewayfight.blogspot.com/2006/08/defending-my-enemys-enemy.html>; and Lyons, "Further thoughts on Hezbollah," *Three Way Fight*, August 26, 2006, <http://threewayfight.blogspot.com/2006/08/further-thoughts-on-hezbollah.html>

67. See Arun R. Swamy, "Hindu Nationalism – What's Religion Got to Do With It?," Occasional Papers Series, Asian-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2003); Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1999); Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Vijay Prashad, *Namaste Sharon: Hindutva and Sharonism Under US Hegemony*, Signpost Series (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2003).

Communist movement inspired by the recent Bolshevik Revolution. Now both old-style colonialism and state socialism have almost vanished, while corporate globalization is shifting industries across the world and reshaping nation-states. Far-right movements are responding to these changes in various ways. They promote nostalgia for old empires but also right-wing anti-imperialism, old-style nationalisms but also internationalist and decentralized versions of authoritarian politics. They tap into a backlash against the left but also grow where the left's weakness has opened space for other kinds of insurgent movements. And they promote different versions of anti-elitism, often targeting US or multinational capital but sometimes focusing more on local elites.

Many commentators have argued that fascist movements today represent a right-wing backlash against capitalist globalization. Martin A. Lee argues, for example, that in Europe "the waning power of the nation-state has triggered a harsh ultranationalist reaction." Here far rightists have exploited a range of popular issues associated with international economic restructuring – not only scapegoating immigrants but also criticizing the European Union, the introduction of a single European currency, and the rise of a globalized culture. "Global commerce acts as the great homogenizer, blurring indigenous differences and smothering contrasting ethnic traits. Consequently, many Europeans are fearful of losing not only their jobs, but their cultural and national identities."⁶⁸

In Europe and elsewhere, far-right politics is indeed largely a response to capitalist globalization, but this response is more complex than a simple backlash. For example, the Patriot/militia movement in the United States denounced "global elites," the "new world order," the United Nations, international bankers, etc. But their attack on government regulation, as People Against Racist Terror has pointed out, dovetailed with "the actual globalist strategy of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to end all environmental and labor codes that restrict untrammelled exploitation."⁶⁹ In India, Hindu nationalists have denounced multinational capital and globalized culture, but the movement's dominant approach has been to seek a stronger role for India within the context of global capitalism. The

68. Martin A. Lee, "The Fascist Response to Globalization," *Los Angeles Times*, November 28, 1999. For a parallel argument, see Roberto Lovato, "Far From Fringe: Minutemen Mobilizes Whites Left Behind by Globalization," *The Public Eye* 19 (3), Winter 2005, www.publiceye.org/magazine/v19n3/lovato_fringe.html

69. "PART's Perspective on the Militias," *Turning The Tide* 8 (2), Summer 1995.

BJP-led coalition government of 1998–2004 promoted privatization, deregulation, foreign investment, consumer credit growth, and expansion of the information technology sector. These policies are tailored to India's rising upper and middle classes, eager to participate more effectively in the global economy – not historical “losers” trying to gain back their old status by attacking the forces of change.⁷⁰

The gender politics of the Christian and Islamic right, too, are sometimes seen as a reaction against capitalist globalization – a drive to force women out of the wage labor force and back into full domestic submission, depriving multinational capital of a crucial source of labor. There is truth to this, but here again the dynamic is more complex than a simple backlash. To begin with, many Christian rightists and Islamic rightists consider it acceptable for women to work outside the home, as long as they do it in a way that is “modest” and doesn't challenge male authority. As Maria Mies argues in *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, however, defining homemaking as women's natural role trivializes women's paid work as a source of “supplementary” income (which justifies paying women much less than men) and isolates women workers from each other and from male workers (which hinders collective labor activism).⁷¹ This means that there is potential for both conflict and accommodation on gender politics between religious rightists and global (or local) capital.

Concluding note

This essay is intended to challenge the prevailing view among US leftist organizations that fascism equals a tool of capitalist repression – because that view not only distorts history but also hides major political threats in today's world. Fascism is better understood as an autonomous right-wing force that has a contradictory relationship with capital and that draws mass support largely by advocating a revolution

70. Radhika Desai, “Forward March of Hindutva Halted?” *New Left Review* 30, November–December 2004, 61. On Hindu nationalist ambivalence about globalization, see Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 432, 492f; Hansen, *Saffron Wave*, 171f.

71. Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed, 1986), 118. Regina Cochrane has criticized Mies for “populist and maternal feminist tendencies” that are anti-modernist, essentialize motherhood, and romanticize poverty. However, I believe that Mies's point about homemaking that I cite here remains valid and reflects a useful critique of capitalist globalization's gender dynamics. See Cochrane, “‘They Aren't Really Poor’: Eco-feminism, Global Justice, and ‘Culturally-Perceived Poverty,’” Center for Global Justice, 2006, www.globaljusticecenter.org/papers2006/cochraneENG.htm

against established values and institutions. Several Marxists discussed above have helped to develop this counter-model of fascism, but their work is limited by an unsystematic analysis of fascist ideology. By contrast, Roger Griffin's analysis of fascism centers on a careful treatment of ideology, although his conception neglects class dynamics and does not adequately address fascism's scope and prospects today. Combining the two approaches gives us a stronger model of fascism than either approach can offer on its own.

This essay does not offer a comprehensive theory of fascism. Many important aspects of fascism merit a fuller treatment than I have been able to give here, and the writers I have discussed are only a sampling of those (both Marxist and non-Marxist) who have written insightfully about fascism. I hope that this discussion will encourage further efforts at synthesis.

The concept of fascism as a right-wing revolutionary force has spawned the idea that we are facing a "three-way fight" between fascism, conventional global capitalism, and (at least potentially) leftist revolution. This approach is an improvement over widespread dualistic models that try to divide all political players between the "forces of oppression" and the "forces of liberation." As some radical antifascists have pointed out for years, "my enemy's enemy" is not necessarily my friend. At the same time, like any theoretical model, the three-way fight itself only approximates reality. There are more than three sides in the struggle, and to understand the different forces and their interrelationships, we have a lot of work to do.

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