

IS DONALD TRUMP REALLY A FASCIST? And Why Does It Matter?

by Bill Weinberg

I've been asked to speak on whether Trump is really a fascist, and, more broadly, what this means for us as activists who are attempting to build resistance to Trump.

Given that so much has been focused on this question of "neoliberalism," I'm just going to say a few words about that very briefly. Since this is the Left Forum, I'm assuming we all know what neoliberalism actually *is*; there's much confusion about what the word actually means. There's also much confusion about what the word "fascism" actually means—I'll be speaking more about that point.

So I want to say from the start that I think it's extremely important that we make clear that we are against capitalism *without adjectives*. That is to say, not against "neoliberal capitalism" or "corporate capitalism" or "savage capitalism" or "crony capitalism" or "finance capitalism," but against *capitalism*. Because ultimately those adjectives represent an equivocation on anti-capitalism.

And this has led to some really unfortunate tendencies, such as the slogan we saw during Occupy Wall Street—now, there were some elements of Occupy Wall Street that were more sophisticated, but we did see this slogan of "We're not against capitalism, we're against corporate greed." Well, we should be against *capitalism*—corporate greed is a mere symptom of capitalism. So we are against capitalism—or we *should* be.

That said, in terms of the kind of society that I actually have to live in... Just as I would prefer my own theoretical anarcho-socialist utopia to the New Deal and social democracy, I would also prefer the New Deal and social democracy to neoliberalism. And in *exactly* the same sense, I would prefer neoliberalism to *fascism*.

And when there's a lot of the so-called "left" that has apparently decided the opposite—that fascism is preferable to neoliberalism—then we have a very, very serious problem on our hands.

This can be seen in various manifestations. Jill Stein, the presidential candidate of the Green Party, who was a speaker here at the Left Forum I understand, was one of the most egregious purveyors of this kind of equalism that we spoke of

[between Clinton and Trump], and actually said during the campaign that Trump was the *lesser* evil, because Hillary would get us into a war with Russia.

It can also be seen in the denialism on the left about the Trump-Putin collaboration, with figures like Glenn Greenwald happily appearing on Fox News to diss the supposed “deep state” conspiracy against Trump in precisely the same terms as Newt Gingrich and so on.

This ties into the related pathology of enthusiasm for dictators which can be seen on much of the left. And a lot of the dictators that the contemporary left in the United States is enthusiastic for are in bed with Trump and Trumpism on the global stage. Jill Stein’s own running mate, Ajamu Baraka is an *open* enthusiast for the certainly fascistic if not outright fascist dictator of Syria, Bashar Assad. After Assad’s thoroughly controlled pseudo-election that took place in the middle of the civil war in 2014, Ajamu Baraka actually hailed this as a victory for the people of Syria! [Slaps forehead.]

And this is happening at the same time, mind you, that Putin is massively backing Bashar Assad, at the same time that he’s putting money into Le Pen in France, into Jobbik in Hungary, into the Golden Dawn in Greece, into Attack in Bulgaria, into all these neo-fascist formations that are coming to the fore in European politics again. It has been documented that Putin has been putting money into these formations—at the same time that I think it’s quite clear he’s been *collaborating with Trump* from the very beginning, throughout the campaign.

Unfortunately, it’s become sort of taboo to say this on the left, even though to me it’s a pretty self-evident reality. Now, I haven’t had access to the digital forensics that the CIA and the FBI say that they have about the hacking of the Democratic Party. So I don’t have an opinion on that. But you don’t have to have an opinion on that to have an opinion on the fact that from Paul Manafort to Jared Kushner to Jeff Sessions—all these key figures in the Trump campaign have had very close ties to Russia. I mean, Paul Manafort, who *ran* the Trump campaign, formerly ran the campaigns of Viktor Yanukovich, the pro-Kremlin ex-despot of Ukraine.

So there’s a kind of global fascism that is coming together—a fascist international, you could say, which is congealing on the world stage. And unfortunately, there are large segments of the left—which you would think would be the foremost bulwark of anti-fascism—that are being *co-opted by it*.

I'll point out, getting back to the Syria question, that just as there are jihadist volunteers that have been flocking to the ranks of ISIS, and (much, much, much more hearteningly!) there have been anarchist and left-wing volunteers from throughout Europe that have been flocking to the Rojava Kurdish resistance against ISIS in northern Syria—similarly, there have been neo-fascist volunteers from throughout Europe, from Greece and France and Britain, who have been forming battalions to fight for Bashar Assad!

And I'll also point out that the Assad dictatorship had *real* Nazi advisors, much as the military dictatorships of Argentina and Bolivia did. Alois Brunner, one of the last surviving fugitive officers of the Nazi SS, took refuge in Damascus; he died there about 10 years ago, and he had been serving as an advisor to the security forces under the Assad dictatorship.

So when you have elements of the left that are cheering on this nexus—or closing their eyes to its actual nature—we have very, very serious problems.

So, is Trump a fascist? Well, I'm not sure it's an entirely critical question whether he's an actual Fascist with a capital F. Certainly, he isn't as ideological as the fascists who were on the world stage from the 1920s through the 1940s. But he is, at the very minimum a *white nationalist authoritarian*. I think all that much is quite clear. And there are certainly *actual* fascists, by I think any definition, who are on board in his political apparatus, Stephen Bannon being the most obvious figure.

And in his outer orbit you've got figures like Richard Spencer—who by the way is married to a woman by the name of Nina Kouprianova, who seems to be a freelance social-media activist who is aggressively pushing the Kremlin line on issues such as Crimea and Ukraine and Syria and so on. So once again, you've got another exponent of this fascist convergence, both East and West.

As to the question that is posed in the description of this panel, of whether this seemingly paradoxical leftist collaboration (sometimes witting, sometimes not) with Trumpism and with this neo-fascist convergence—whether it is because of *ignorance* about white nationalist authoritarianism, or whether it is because there are elements of the left that actually consciously prefer it to neoliberalism...

Well, there is a lot of ignorance out there, without a doubt. One of the most maddening things I've seen—maybe some of you people were spared actually hearing this line, but I heard it a lot from my Facebook friends and so on during the election... that *Hillary was actually the fascist* because “Fascism is Corporatism,”

quote-unquote! Which is based on a quote from Mussolini, which happens to be completely apocryphal, no actual historian has been able to document this quote. And in any event, the “corporatism” that Mussolini was talking about was not what we understand the word “corporatism” to mean today—he wasn’t talking about the power of private multinational business corporations. That’s not what he was talking about. He was actually talking about the populist element of his program, which called for trade unions and other mass organizations to be “incorporated” into the apparatus of the ruling party and the state. It had *nothing* to do with the “corporatism” that the Green Party and Ralph Nader and so on oppose today.

But in any event—even apart from what you could say is this rather narrow and pedantic point—to completely dismiss the reactionary authoritarianism and ultra-nationalism and racism that is at the *core* of fascism, and to engage in these completely ignorant statements about how Hillary was actually the fascist... that would definitely seem to imply a great deal of ignorance.

But I’m afraid that there are also elements in the *ideological leadership* of the left which are *not* ignorant, and are merely *exploiting the ignorance of others*—exploiting the ignorance of their cannon fodder—who actually do prefer fascism to neoliberalism, and want to get back to what is called in Europe “Red-Brown Politics”: an alliance between fascism and the left against capitalism and the West.

And I’ll just end by saying that, you know folks, we’ve seen this movie before. And it did not end well. It especially did not end well for the left. OK? Mussolini started out on the left. He started out as a socialist, he was allied with anarchists, he led a failed general strike in Italy in 1914. And then in 1922, he assumed power, in the guise of what would be called “right-wing populism” today, and left-wing revolutionaries quickly filled his torture chambers. And this strategy was sort of replicated with Hitler, with his Brown Shirts, who were the pseudo-left populist element of his apparatus, which was unceremoniously crushed and its leaders killed in the Night of the Long Knives once Hitler had consolidated power.

So the actual leadership of the left today which is advocating this kind of soft-on--Trump line and viewing the neoliberals or bourgeois democracy or whatever as the *greater enemy* to fascism needs to be rigorously opposed. And I submit that we can oppose it *without giving in an inch* to the Democratic Party, *without giving in an inch* to neoliberalism, and while maintaining a very strong critique of bourgeois democracy which is *central* to our politics, and advancing or at least *aspiring* to some kind radical or popular democracy. (Not “populist”!) Which is opening up a whole other conversation...

The last thing I want to say, and then I'll shut up, is that there's been this whole to-do here at the Left Forum about the so-called "banned panels." People may have picked up this leaflet, where they are squawking about these panels that were "banned" because they've got Holocaust revisionists and anti-Semites on board. Well, this is the Left Forum. So one would think that the voices here should, you know, sort of be confined to the *left*. And you know what I call the "banning" of these panels? I call it a *good start*. And I think there are other panels here that should have been similarly axed, in adherence to what I consider to be basic left-wing principles. So, that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Bill Weinberg blogs world news at CounterVortex.org