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Fascism

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Throughout history, more or less every state had to intrinsically rely on force and violence for coming into existence. Within the context of capitalism, Antonio Gramsci has formulated this insight as the claim that the capitalist state is made up of two different domains: a 'political society' – which operates through force – and a 'civil society' – which operates through consent (Gramsci 2011). Put very simply, Gramsci defined hegemony as the sum total of this latter force and consensus. Against this background, it is worth remembering Georgi Dimitrov's definition of fascism as a reactionary, super-oppressive form of state that denies political freedoms, including fundamental rights such as freedom of thought, assembly, and association (Dimitrov 1983, 179-87). In other words, fascism is the most reactionary, terrorist, and bloody form bourgeois sovereignty can take when it is monopolized. In such a situation, political society (force) has gained an overwhelming power over civil society (consensus). In addition, according to Dimitrov, fascism is not a product of any time, but a product of the era of imperialism, the last stage of capitalism – a Marxist-Leninist standpoint (Dimitrov 1983). Defining fascism with reference to the power of capital,¹ Dimitrov emphasizes the relationship between the level of capitalist development and fascism. The most savage fascist experience in history shows that Dimitrov was correct in a remarkable way. Why was German fascism so much more powerful and brutal than Italian fascism? In reply to this

question, one should not, as some have done, point to the Weberian charismatic leadership (of Adolf Hitler). Such an approach clearly ignores the structural dynamics of fascism. Rather, building on Dimitrov's analysis of the prerequisites of fascism, I would argue that there is a decisive structural reason, namely that Germany had the most advanced industrial production capability at that time in Europe (Pascal 2011, 109-17), and along with other historical conditions this enabled the most dramatic fascist experience in history.²

Although the experience of Nazi Germany is highly compatible with Dimitrov's examination of fascism, a considerable number of scholars are currently arguing that contemporary capitalism, and its mechanisms of exploitation and oppression, cannot be read anymore through theories which depend on Marx's understanding of capitalism. Even if for some it seems right at first glance, this proposition is very narrow-minded from the perspective of a structural approach. Of course, there is no doubt that contemporary capitalism is not the same in every aspect when compared with the capitalism that existed at the time of Marx – particularly if we think of 'finance capital'. The term 'finance capital' was first defined by Rudolf Hilferding, the Austro-German Marxist theoretician, in response to the then growing strength and centralization of capital in large firms, cartels, and banks. For Hilferding, the earlier competitive 'liberal capitalism', which formed in response to the interventions by mercantilist states, was transforming, at the turn of the epoch, into a monopolistic finance capital that was integrated into a centralized and privilege-dispensing state (Hilferding 1983). For Hilferding, the flows of financial capital were aiming at imperialist integration into the nascent global economy. However, this imperialist expansion was not caused by the inadequacy of the internal market but by the pursuit of higher profit rates by capitalists controlling the means of production. Very importantly, Hilferding stresses that financial capitalism is not a different phenomenon from industrial capitalism when it comes to capital accumulation and its profit-making orientation. Some leading theoreticians within Marxism at that time, such as Otto Bauer or Karl Kautsky, considered Hilferding's book (namely, *Finance Capital*) as the fourth volume of Marx's *Das Kapital*. In fact, as David Harvey clearly indicated, there is a strong relationship between industrial and finance capital – "finance and money capitalists also demand their cut of the

surplus value produced" (Harvey 2011, 89) – as shown by naming just a few examples in which special circumstances led to a developed financial capitalism without a developed industrial capitalism, e.g. Switzerland, Hong Kong, or the Cayman Islands.

Regarding the context given above, Marx's theory of capital accumulation and over-accumulation (the crisis of capitalism) still have a strong claim to validity in today's capitalism. As Marx claims:

Capitalism establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole. (Marx 2007, 708-9)

Capitalism as an industrial and financial economic system is characteristically crisis-prone. It is determined by forces that cause it to be unstable, chaotic and self-destructive. In *The Communist Manifesto*, written over 170 years ago, Marx and Engels described capitalism as:

a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, [that it] is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells. (Marx and Engels 2012, 25)

However, this sorcerer has succeeded in pulling a rabbit from the hat during each time of crisis, and that rabbit is called fascism. In times of crisis, the capitalist state has succeeded in securing the hegemony of capitalism by using intense ideological and repressive powers via what Gramsci called political society. The capitalist state is essentially primed for the consolidation of bourgeois hegemony. As identified in Marxist theory, power in such a class-divided nation-state consists largely in class power. Class power is established on the objective position of different classes occupying different positions in the social division of labor; "it designates the capacity of each class to realize its specific interests" (Poulantzas 2000, 36) in relation to the

power of other classes. Hence, class power is materialized with regard to definite apparatuses and performs. Louis Althusser expresses the historical role of the state in capitalism in the following way:

The state is a repressive ‘machine’ that enables the dominant classes (in the nineteenth century, the bourgeois class and the ‘class’ of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class in order to subject it to the process of extorting surplus value (that is, to capitalist exploitation). (Althusser 2014, 70)

This role of the state in capitalist formation is not merely an argument raised by the Marxists. In the opposing camp, Friedrich Hayek also says that the state must be a strong legislator and enforcer to ensure the development of individual entrepreneurial freedoms and the market (Hayek 2005). That is to say, the state has to forcefully create new markets for capital accumulation and increased profitability by making and implementing related laws and investments (Bonefeld 2010, 15-24). The problem now becomes how to minimize oppression by the state itself; the response of Hayek is the creation of a private sphere totally independent of communal interference. For Hayek, such a private sphere is only able to come into existence if there are definite actions and rights that are insured and not violated by the state. It necessitates not only individuals but also that the state be obliged by the rule of law. Such a theorization of liberty obviously conflicts with the idea of popular sovereignty as it means that there are various laws which should be beyond the domain of a government to change; however, the idea of popular sovereignty presupposes that a government voted by the citizens has the right to overturn and/or modify all laws. In brief, two fundamental points stand out in Hayek’s theory of ‘minimal’ state concept: (1) the reproduction of capitalism requires permanent state regulations, and (2) popular sovereignty can be sacrificed for a given rule of law which aims to support market interests.

In a nutshell, fascism is an integral part of capitalism and is visibly put into force when capitalism enters a crisis, due to its own contradictions or when faced with a counter-threat from an opposite or alternative ideology. Various predominant

methods in this process include (at the local level) the restriction of rights and wages of non-capitalist classes, the monopolization of political decision-making mechanisms, the use of violence against dissident groups, and, (at the international level), regulatory wars against determined enemy states or groups. Here, someone may raise the question: why are the countries where capitalism is most developed the freest countries on the world? My reply is that you cannot fully comprehend how free a regime is without attempting to test the limits of the system. Especially in the western countries where capitalism is highly developed, capitalism’s ideological and cultural hegemony over civil society and its relatively high level of prosperity – mostly based on the exploitation of underdeveloped countries – means that capitalist reproduction is provided with a consensus within civil society, and thus there is no need for the use of force by political society in general. One of the best examples of this is the fact of communist parties being fully integrated into the neoliberal system. Therefore, Marx’s critique of capitalism (regardless of his teleological propositions) is still vivid today and provides us with a basis for a further deconstruction of capitalism. Adding all this to the account, there is no need to wait for concentration camps or mass genocidal practices to designate a regime as fascist in the 21st century. “The mistake of the 21st century human is to think that fascism will return in a Nazi uniform.”

Notes

1] If we think of fascism as an ideology based solely upon transcendent/holistic ultra-nationalism, we have a one-dimensional approach. Even if the germane historiography presents incommensurate pictures of fascism, the theories of fascism can be separated into materialistic and ideological sets. In this respect, fascism is not only identical with a totalitarian regime that discards parliamentary democracy. In a capitalist state, fascism can be an economic and political response to the challenges with which the administration of society may be threatened by specific conditions (Amin 2014).

2] World War I was essentially a result of an economic struggle among the ‘Great Powers’ in Europe. After the Treaty of Versailles, the imperialist expansion of Germany was halted and German capital was restricted to the internal market only. In this context, keeping in mind the failure of leftist politics in Germany, the Nazi Party was able to achieve a robust political mobilization based upon German nationalism and anti-Semitism within the social and political conjunction that developed after World War I. Besides, the Nazi Party had also given important economic promises to the people,

mainly, more production and more employment. With a powerful war economy, they indeed succeeded in providing these two. With simple historical research, it can be easily seen that capital in Germany at that time integrated itself with the Nazi regime in order to complete its imperialist expansion. The case of Germany in this respect is also an explicit example of ‘uneven development’ as a contradiction of capitalism that is very well analyzed within Marxist theory.

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General Intellect

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In his *Grundrisse* Marx employs a powerful image to indicate the kind of knowledge which constitutes the heart of social production: *general intellect* is the name he gives to the abstract knowledge on which the production of wealth and the reproduction of life rest. Marx writes: “The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process.” (Marx 1973: 706). This passage of the *Grundrisse* includes the last pages of notebook VI and the first ones of notebook VII, (ibid. 690-712) and has been referred to as “The Fragment on Machines” since the early 1960s when discussions concerning the concept of the general intellect began. As is generally known, *Grundrisse* is a lengthy, unfinished manuscript, composed by Marx in the years 1857-58. A limited edition of the manuscript was published in Moscow in two volumes, in 1939 and 1941 respectively. But since only three of four copies of this edition ever reached the “Western world” one can say that discussion prompted by the *Grundrisse* began only in the second half of the 20th century. In fact, the manuscript was first effectively published in the German original only in 1953 by