

Facing the Fascist Danger, Autumn 2024

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In autumn 2024, the largest democratic republics in Europe and North America remain in extreme danger, amid ongoing and deepening fascist threats, especially in the U.S.

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France : Centrists Betray July Vote, Allying with Neofascists.

In France, voters mobilized by the left defeated the neofascist National Rally party in the July parliamentary elections. But by September, the authoritative newspaper Le Monde published a somber editorial noting that by now the neofascists had been placed “in the position of arbiter or censor” of the government, with the left sidelined (“Matignon : Un choix qui ne referme pas la crise politique,” September 7, 2024).

How did this happen ? July saw a surprising and exhilarating defeat for the fascists, one where the left took the lead in creating a “republican front” against them, forcing most of the centrists into line. In the event, the neofascists came in a humiliating third, after the leftist New Popular Front and after President Emmanuel Macron’s “centrist” Together bloc. However, France’s semi-authoritarian constitution, originating in De Gaulle’s 1958 coup, allows the president huge powers. Using these to the fullest, the increasingly rightwing Macron refused to allow the leftist New Popular Front even to attempt to form a government, likely with his Together bloc the minor partner. Instead, he appointed conservative politician Michel Barnier as prime minister, rather than even trying to negotiate with the left. Even though Barnier’s small party combined with Macron’s lacks anything near a parliamentary majority, he has entered into a corrupt informal agreement with the National Rally, which now has veto power over policies and legislation. This bodes ill for migrants and refugees, people of color, the working class, as well as for Ukraine, and most of all for the future of French democracy.

Evidently, French centrists and conservatives have finally moved far enough to the right to do what has been feared over the last several decades. They have decided to side with the fascists against the left, in order to preserve austerity, avoid even the mildest tax increases on high incomes or wealth, and because they are also becoming increasingly anti-immigrant, more openly racist and Islamophobic, and repressive. They have also slid to the right in the face of mounting unrest from the left, from labor, from youth of color in the banlieus, and from a new generation of students determined to defend Gaza in the face of an Israeli genocide in which the French state is complicit.

In response, the left held large protest demonstrations around the country on September 7. Tens of thousands took to the streets, with their white-hot anger expressed by slogans like “Barnier, go

f—yourself, you did not get the votes.” With larger labor demonstrations scheduled for October, it could be a hot autumn. But for now, the left has been defeated and the fascist threat in France is looming larger.

Germany : Fascist Surge in the East

September 1 state elections in the east showed dramatic gains for the neofascist Alternative for Germany (AfD). In Thuringia, AfD garnered a third of the votes and in Saxony, over 30%. Moreover, leftwing parties saw their vote sharply diminished, with the Left Party going down below the level for any representation in the state parliament in Saxony, and dropping to 13% in Thuringia, where it had held power in a coalition. The Social Democrats and the Greens did equally poorly. The new red-brown Sahra Wagenknecht Party (BSW), which recently split off from the Left Party, received 12% in Saxony and 16% in Thuringia. Overall, the BSW represents another type of shift to the right, in this case from parts of the left with Stalinist roots. While still in the Left Party, Wagenknecht opposed the COVID vaccine. Today, BSW attacks some aspects of capitalism and claims to support labor, but is hostile to immigrants and refugees, climate justice, and sexual minorities. Like AfD, it opposes Ukraine.

At a national level, the Thuringia and Saxony elections have already driven the governing coalition government — comprising the Social Democrats, the Greens, and the liberal Free Democrats — to the right, as seen in the September 9 announcement that Germany will require border checks from other European Union countries. This rolls back freedoms of circulation within Europe going back three decades. Germany will also begin to deport Syrian and Afghan refugees to their respective countries, despite the extreme levels of danger facing them under these horrific dictatorships. In addition, the Free Democrats have shifted right in a particular way, against environmental restrictions, now declaring that they cannot support “anti-automobile” policies.

Over the past year, Germany has seen an upsurge in labor actions and a series of large street demonstrations against the fascist threat represented by AfD, implicitly if not actively supported by the ruling coalition. Yet under the same coalition government, pro-Palestine voices have been muzzled to a greater extent than even in the U.S., including the rescinding of invitations to renowned international scholars who have criticized Israel and bans on demonstrations by students and youth. This is another type of rightwing politics, put forward in the name of democracy and largely spurious charges of antisemitism. (And while some progressive intellectuals like Hartmut Rosa have defended pro-Palestinian voices, others like Jürgen Habermas have simply and shamefully echoed Israeli war propaganda.) With this, and their anti-immigrant politics, the centrist democrats are making it increasingly difficult for any kind of united front against fascism with the very popular forces that would be able to confront it in the streets, should it come to that.

In contrast to France, Germany now lacks a substantial electoral or labor voice to the left of the Social Democrats. On the other hand, the neofascists are polling at around 20% of the vote at a national level, half their level of support in France and less than half that in the U.S.



Britain's Race Riots

The British political system has not so far evidenced a neofascist surge in terms of parliamentary or local elections. One reason lies in the fact that the Conservative Party, especially since Brexit and even more so since Boris Johnson, has absorbed many of these tendencies into its own ranks. Another factor is how the electoral system makes it very difficult for minor parties to win political office. Be that as it may, British far right extremism and racism were on full display in the July anti-immigrant riots, when mobs attacked people and property after false rumors on social media attributed a July stabbing attack at a school that killed 3 children to an immigrant of Muslim origin. (In fact, the perpetrator was born in the UK to a Rwandan immigrant family with a Christian religious orientation.)

As the Marxist-Humanist writer Seamus Connolly reported, "In scenes not seen for decades, people of color are being randomly attacked on the street. The 'P-word,' an insult aimed at those of Pakistani heritage has been a common refrain, as have Nazi Flags, Nazi salutes, chants of 'Allah, Allah, Who the Fuck is Allah?'" ("Race Riots in the UK : Fascist Thugs Take to the Street in a Wave of Violent Clashes," International Marxist-Humanist, August 5 2024).

For its part, the new and very "centrist" Labor government of Keir Starmer condemned the violence but failed to single out racism, xenophobia, or Islamophobia. Starmer is also doubling down on austerity policies, hardly a way to lessen the appeal of neofascist politics among sectors of the working and middle classes that have seen their living standards decline. He also praised Italian neofascist Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's immigration policies, saying she has made "remarkable progress." Even before taking office, Starmer purged the Labor left, going to far as to expel the internationally renowned former party leader Jeremy Corbyn, who nonetheless kept his seat in the July elections that brought Starmer to power. Starmer is also keeping his distance from the mass anti-racist demonstrations in August in response to the mayhem in July.

The Trumpist, Neofascist Threat in the U.S.

As dangerous as the above developments are, it has to be said that today it is the U.S. that exhibits the greatest fascist threat. Donald Trump and vice-presidential candidate JD Vance seem bent on fomenting the kind of race riots that broke out in the UK with their concocted stories about Haitian migrants in Springfield, Ohio. This is just one example among hundreds. Trump dominates the Republican Party almost completely, and even if he loses the election in November, it is doubtful he would receive a popular vote much below 47-48%. That this is happening to a political leader who staged a violent coup attempt in 2021 after he was defeated at the polls represents a grave danger not just to democracy, but also to our very existence on the planet of our species given his anti-environment stance.

For all its erratic nature, Trumpism has been consistent in terms of its Islamophobia, misogyny, xenophobia, and hostility to climate justice at a domestic level, and in terms of antagonism toward Iran and China and friendliness toward Putin's Russia at an international level. It is important to note that Trumpist forces already control a number of U.S. states, including large ones like Texas and Florida, the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Supreme Court. Even if Trump loses in November by traditional measures, it is very possible that Texas, Florida, and other states would not recognize such a defeat and threaten secession, that the House would refuse to recognize the vote,

and/or that the Supreme Court would find ways to undermine the election as well. In these senses, a constitutional coup is possible, either instead of or alongside one in the streets as in January 2021.

At the same time, as in the other countries governed by centrists, the Democratic Party of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris has armed and abetted politically Israel's genocidal war against the Palestinian people, while also undermining if not repressing dissent and opposition from student youth, the Arab community, and other progressive constituencies. In doing so, they have also ignored much of organized labor and a large coalition of Black churches, which have also come out strongly for a ceasefire, if not more decisive measures against Israel's genocide. The Democrats have also turned to the right on immigration, crime, and the environment (fracking everywhere). At the same time, they support to an extent bodily autonomy, LGBTQ rights, voting rights, environmental protection, and labor.

In the U.S., it is particularly notable how the holders of some of the largest capitalist fortunes, most notably the white South African immigrant Elon Musk, have gone Trumpist, while others are openly leaning toward Trump or remaining openly neutral. Large universities like Harvard have also bowed out of confronting the fascist threat by declaring they will no longer make moral statements about social justice or human rights issues.

The Democratic Party's support of outright genocide in Gaza, all the while making slight verbal criticisms while continuing the flow of arms and money to Israel, plus their crackdown on campus protest, has convinced many youth and progressives that it would make no large difference were Trump to assume power a second time.

This is utterly false, and goes against over a century of leftwing politics and principles whereby the genuine left (leaving off authoritarian and ultra-leftist currents) has always distinguished between democratic republics and militarist, fascist, or monarchical rule. This was true in the late 1870s, when Karl Marx supported the French republicans, some of whom had put down the Paris Commune, vs. the Bonapartist military. (This kind of issue was central to Marx's attack in the Critique of the Gotha Program what he insisted on calling the socialist "sect" founded by Ferdinand Lassalle.) It was true as Nazism was rising before 1933, when Leon Trotsky called for a united front with the reformists, even though just a few years before, they had been complicit in the murder of the great revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg and in the repression of the 1919 socialist workers' uprising she helped to lead. And it is true today, when we need to unite to oppose Trumpism with every fiber of our bodies.

But like our revolutionary predecessors, we need to unite with other forces to fight Trumpism - and fascism everywhere - in ways that make clear our own anti-capitalist politics. We need to show that the economy is not "strong" when one considers the vast poverty and homelessness, and on a larger scale, the decline in real wages since the 2008 crisis. We need to point out that centrist liberals or social democrats have not only helped create the conditions for fascism, but in places like France, are actually forming alliances with the neofascists. We need to show how social democrats, liberals, centrists, and conservatives in Germany, the UK, and the U.S. are adopting many neofascist policies themselves.

Overall, we need to consider the fact that the global fascist threat has been rising over the past decade, as a response to a whole series of revolutions and protests, from the Arab revolutions and Occupy in 2011 to the rise of Bernie Sanders and Corbyn, and from the global movement for Black lives of 2020 to the Gaza protests of 2023-24. Equally importantly, the 2008 global economic crisis exposed the fact that the higher profit rates of the 1950s/1960s were never coming back. Not only has this turned working people against the neoliberal consensus, but it has also led a section of the dominant classes to support outright neofascism in order to recover lost ground, or at least gain

something before the deluge, or out of fear of revolution or even redistribution.

Thus, fascism in the U.S. will remain a threat even if Trump loses the 2024 election and is unable to stage a coup. For as in Germany, even a 20% support level for such politics is extremely dangerous, and Trump's is at over twice that level.

One thing we need everywhere is a coalescence of revolutionary, anti-racist, and anti-authoritarian leftists. For the long haul, we may need to create a pole of opposition to both centrist liberalism and social democracy, the lesser threat, and to neofascism, the clear and present one. Such a pole of opposition, which would have to be international, would also need a politics separate from the campists as well. It would not seek hegemony over the anti-fascist movement but would form a revolutionary and democratic pole within it. A politics of combining class/race/nationality/gender issues, or one that says the true defense of democracy means opposing capitalism as well, or more specific watchwords like, "From Ukraine to Palestine, Occupation Is a Crime," would be of the utmost importance. But so would forming some real organizations, probably via regroupment. Here, the French left, which voted in a disciplined manner for all non-fascist candidates in July, while also keeping its coalition together and its political independence, has done the most to fulfill its responsibilities in the present period.

We need more serious thinking on these issues and more action. The hour is late and the danger is great !

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P.-S.

- New Politics. September 18, 2024 :
<https://newpol.org/facing-the-fascist-danger-autumn-2024/>
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