FASCISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Elements of Continuity and Change

Abhinav Sinha

FASCISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:

ELEMENTS OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Abhinav Sinha

Papers presented in the seventh Arvind Memorial Seminar

Arvind Memorial Trust

ISBN: 978-81-988016-4-7

Price: Rs 150

First Edition: January 2026

Published by: Arvind Memorial Trust 69 A-1, Baba ka Purwa, Paper Mill Road, Nishatgunj, Lucknow-226006

Website: www.arvindtrust.org, Email: arvind.trust@gmail.com

Cover Design: Rambabu

Typesetting: Computer Division, Rahul Foundation Printed by: Vikas Computers & Printers, E-33, Sector A 5/6, Tronica City, UPSIDC Ind. Area, Loni, Ghaziabad (U.P.) Main Distributor: Janchetna, D-68, Nirala Nagar, Lucknow-226020

Phone: 0522-4108495, Email: janchetna.books@gmail.com

Website: www.janchetnabooks.org

Note for the eBook This unofficial eBook was made by copying contents manually from the physical copy of the book using Google lens, and thus it can have various issues and mistakes even though I have taken extreme care while making the book. If you want to critique the author, please use and refer to the physical book.

Please buy the physical book to support the author and the movement.

Created on 04/03/2026

Contents

Foreword

Fascism in the twenty-first Century: Elements of Continuity and Change

1. Introduction
2. The General Universalities of Fascism
3. The General Particularities of Fascism in the Neoliberal phase of Imperialist stage
4. The General Tasks in the struggle against Fasicsm today
5. The particular tasks in the struggle against Fascism today

1.

Foreword

The following essay was presented as the key paper during the Seventh International Arvind Memorial Seminar on 'Fascism in the Twenty-First Century: Elements of Continuity and Change and the Question of the Contemporary Proletarian Strategy' held from 29th December, 2024 to 2nd January, 2025 in Hyderabad, India. The essay is a necessary intervention in the debate among Marxists and social scientists in India as well as in other parts of the world on understanding the elements of change and the elements of continuity in the contemporary rise of far-right movements and regimes and especially the rise of fascism in the Twenty-first century. Moreover, these debates have a global context. The period of nearly last two decades, in particular, has witnessed the rise of various far-right and fascist movements in different countries, some of which also have succeeded in seizing power.

It goes without saying that the question of the characterization of such reactionary movements and regimes is not an academic exercise for revolutionary communists and Marxists, but a political question of immediate significance as well as practical urgency. It is precisely on the basis of a correct Marxist analysis of the present far-right and fascist movements and regimes that the revolutionary communists can devise a correct strategy of resistance.

The present essay focuses, in the main, on the problem of fascism in the Twenty-first century or fascism since the last quarter of the Twentieth century, that is, in the neoliberal phase of the imperialist stage. In doing so, it sets the basic parameters of determining the character of various far-right movements and various forms of exceptional regimes of the bourgeoisie with particular emphasis on fascism. In the process, the general universal characteristic features of fascism which distinguishes it from other forms of far-right reaction are underlined and an attempt to identify the changes in the modus operandi and modus vivendi of fascist rise and regimes since the

beginning of the neoliberal phase of imperialism is made. The essay discusses in great detail these changes and the reasons behind the changes which have occurred in the rise of contemporary fascism as opposed to the rise of historical fascism. Thus, changes in the nature of economic crisis of capitalism, the changes in the state-forms of the bourgeois state, the rise of the interventionist state since the end of Second World War, the rise of authoritarian state since the beginning of the neoliberal offensive and what these changes mean for the rise of fascism and for the working class as a whole are closely examined and so are the consequent changes in the anti-fascist proletarian strategy and tactics.

It is because of these above-cited reasons that we felt the pressing need to publish this essay as a separate booklet especially given the political situation that has been emerging in our country during the past few years as well as at present. The analysis presented as well as scientific predictions and observations made in the essay have been proven correct by the unfolding of contemporary events in the Indian polity and society. We hope that this booklet, in its modest attempt to comprehend these aforementioned changes, will prove valuable to all those who are concerned with understanding the problem of fascism in its historicity as well as its contemporaneity and devising correct revolutionary strategy to fight against it today.

- Arvind Institute of Marxist Studies

Fascism in the Twenty-first Century: Elements of Continuity and Change

1. Introduction

The capitalist world is going through a 'long recession' since the 1970s. This long recession has periodically collapsed into depressions. This happened in 1981-82, 1987, 1991-92, early-2000s and finally, what Anwar Shaikh has called 'the first great depression of the Twenty-first century, which started with the subprime crisis in 2007. Different national economies felt the tremors caused by these global meltdowns in differential ways with some lead or lag in time. Besides, different national economies had also been rocked by various episodes of recession as well as depression due to the reasons immanent to these national economies, having limited global ripple effects. Whatever the different explanations may be, this much is clear that the world economy is in a mild recession since the 1970s, interspersed with short periods of economic boom, often fueled by speculative frenzy conjured up by finance capital. If we look at the world profit rates since the 1970s itself, despite the neoliberal offensive against labour rights and unions, the deregulation of labour and financial markets, the emergence of flexible exchange rates and the dominance of pure fiat money, the so-called economic recovery from 1982 to 2007 mostly fueled by speculation, failed to raise the average rate of profit to that of the period before 1967.[1]

In sum, the predictions of Engels regarding the changing nature of economic crisis have been vindicated. We will come to these observations of Engels made in the 1880s after a while. This much is certain that what we are witnessing since the 1970s is a protracted and chronic economic crisis of world capitalism, the crisis of the tendential fall in the rate of profit. From 2007-08, we have been witness to serious depression and short periods of elusory recovery repeatedly collapsing to the same bottom.

Especially in this period of nearly two decades, we have seen the rise of various far-right movements in different countries, some of which also succeeded in seizing power. Some of these movements are fascist and quasi-fascist movements, while others are new forms of Bonapartism and military rule. Some of the latter have the potential to cross-over into fascist or quasi-fascist movements, with the development of the fundamental elements of a fascist rise, namely, an *organized* reactionary movement of the petty-bourgeoisie, a cadre-based organization and the particular unity of fascist ideology. As Nicos Poulantzas has pointed out, it is possible for one form of exceptional bourgeois regime to transform into another form[2]. At any rate, there is a consensus, despite various differences and disagreements, among Marxists that the world has seen the rise of various forms of far-right and fascist movements and regimes, especially in the last two decades.

With this, there has been a renewal of the debate among Marxists and serious social scientists regarding the elements of change and the elements of continuity in the contemporary rise of far-right movements and regimes. Especially, the issue of contemporary fascism has been at the centre of the controversy. Various left scholars have used different epithets to characterize the new rise of fascism, from 'post-fascism' and 'neo-fascism' to 'late-fascism' and 'neo-Nazism. For some other far-right movements and regimes, terms like "bourgeois neo-Bonapartism, too, have been used. Various theorists like Gáspár Miklós Tamás, Ugo Palheta, Dave Renton, Alberto Toscano, Enzo Traverso, etc, have attempted to capture the elements of novelty and change in the present far-right upsurge from the countries of the Global North to the countries of the Global South.

It goes without saying that for revolutionary communists, the question of the characterization of such movements and regimes is not an academic question, but a political question of immediate importance. It is precisely on the basis of a correct Marxist assessment of the present far-right and fascist movements and

regimes that the revolutionary communists can devise a correct strategy of resistance.

Of all far-right political trends, the fascist movements and regimes stand out for obvious reasons. Unlike other forms of far-right reaction, fascism is a reactionary social movement based on a particular kind of reactionary and chauvinistic ideology and a peculiar type of cadre-based organization. In the present paper, we will focus on the problem of fascism in the Twenty-first century, or, to be accurate, fascism since the last quarter of the Twentieth century, or in the neoliberal phase of the imperialist stage. We will attempt in what follows to set the basic parameters of determining the character of various far-right movements and various forms of exceptional regimes of the bourgeoisie, with special emphasis on fascism; in the process, we will try to glean the *general universal characteristic features of fascism* which can be evidenced in every case of fascist rise and regimes and which distinguish fascism from other forms of far-right reaction; secondly, we will try to identify the exact changes in the *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* of fascist rise and regimes since the beginning of the neoliberal phase of the imperialist stage; this would lead us to probe the changes in the nature of the bourgeois state and its form due to the changes in the political economy of capitalism in the neoliberal phase. The question that we shall raise is this: *has something changed? If yes, what, exactly, are these changes?* We will focus on the changes in the nature of economic crisis of capitalism, the changes in the state-forms of the bourgeois state whose class-content is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, the rise of the interventionist state since the end of the Second World War, the rise of the authoritarian state since the beginning of the neoliberal offensive, and what this means for the changes in the rise of fascism and for the working class as a whole. Finally, we will make certain provisional observations, in the form of proposals, regarding the changes in the anti-fascist proletarian strategy and tactics which are in order today.

2. The General Universalities of Fascism

Without comprehending the general universalities of fascism, it would be difficult to develop an understanding of the elements of changes in the contemporary fascism. This also enables us to distinguish between the *conjunctural elements* and the *constitutive elements* in fascist rise and fascist regimes. This is essential because there is a tendency prevalent in certain sections of Marxist-Leninist movement to look for exact repetition of what fascism did in a particular historical and political conjuncture in the early-Twentieth century or to look for parallels with those acts. For instance, some people are waiting for concentration camps to reappear, while others are waiting for the exceptional laws to be introduced. They insist that till that time arrives, we cannot say that fascism has risen to power. The question that we need to ask here is this: are the concentration camps and the exceptional laws the *universal differentia specifica* of fascism? Or are these conjunctural elements that identified the fascist rise and regimes in the early-Twentieth century? In order to answer these questions, we need to identify those universal elements of fascism, which characterize it generally. We will try to underline precisely these elements in what follows.

A. Economic Crisis and Political Crisis

The first general universality of fascism is the fundamental contradiction behind every instance of fascist rise. This fundamental contradiction is economic crisis of capitalism. What is the underlying cause of the recurrent capitalist crises? It is the crisis of profitability. Marx's crisis theory has been at the centre of controversy for many years now. However, any serious study of Capital would reveal that for Marx the underlying cause of capitalist crises is the law of the tendential fall in the rate of profit. We cannot go into the details of the debate around crisis theory, but this much is certain: all other

explanations of crises, like overproduction, underconsumption, disproportionality or financialization, merely allude to the various symptoms of the crisis of profitability. The law of the secular tendency of the average rate of profit to fall is the manifestation of the contradiction between the social character of production and the private character of appropriation, the fundamental contradiction of capitalist mode of production.

The crisis of profitability leads, on the one hand, to the intensification of competition within the capitalist class due to the fall in the average rate of profit and decline in the opportunities of profitable investments, while on the other, it leads to decline in the rate of investment, increase in unemployment and the relative weight of the reserve army of labour, the attempts on the part of the capitalist class to depress the average wages of the working class through prolongation of the working-day, increase in the intensity of labour, decrease in the real wages of the working-class through various methods, and consequently to the emergence of possibilities of resistance by the working class.

At the same time, the crisis makes the situation of the lower echelons of the salaried as well as the entrepreneurial petty-bourgeoisie increasingly precarious. On the one hand, the lower echelons of the entrepreneurial petty-bourgeoisie are threatened with the ruin of their enterprise and consequent proletarianization, while on the other hand, the lower echelons of the salaried petty-bourgeoisie are threatened with the prospect of retrenchment and reel under the pressure of increasing burden of taxes as in times of crises the capitalist state relieves the capitalist class from tax-burden while the working masses are subjected to increased taxation, and face increasing social and economic insecurity and uncertainty. This creates potentialities of reaction in this class.

At the same time, the upper echelons of the entrepreneurial petty-bourgeoisie, too, gravitate towards right-wing reaction, as they hold the working class and the toiling masses responsible for the crisis and demand more deregulation, "the ease of doing business", end of

welfarism, etc. Their aspirations of turning into capitalists feel suffocated in the old regulatory framework. At least a part of the salaried sections of the upper petty-bourgeoisie, owing to their particular location in the capitalist mode of production, often as functionaries of capital, empathize with the interests of the bourgeoisie and politically veer towards the bourgeoisie. Their ideological and political position is articulated in a certain way, which is relatively autonomous from their economic position. Thus, for a very different set of reasons, various sections of the upper echelons of the petty-bourgeoisie, too, drift towards reaction.

In such an economic and political situation, there emerges *a possibility of political crisis*. Here we need to keep a couple of riders in mind. First, the economic crisis does not necessarily develop into a political crisis. It depends on the historical condition and the political situation of the country in question. In certain countries, the historical evolution of the class struggle and the emergent class political situation might lead to a conjuncture of contradictions, whereby, the bourgeoisie finds itself unable to collectivize its *long-term, general, political interests and package it as the national interest;* consequently, its fractional interests become dominant, no fraction of the 'power bloc' finds it possible to impose its hegemony within the 'power bloc'; the bourgeois state risks losing its mass legitimacy; and the absence of or defeat of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat prevents this situation from developing into *a revolutionary situation*. In such a situation, *political crisis of the bourgeois state emerges* which cannot be resolved within the regulatory framework of the existence, *in content*, of the bourgeois democracy. It is precisely in this kind of political conjuncture that fascism rises to power and resolves the political crisis of the 'power bloc' through exceptional means. What is exceptional in these means? Precisely that the fractional interests of different fractions of the bourgeoisie cannot be collectivized through the *bourgeois democratic* multi-party parliamentary system, that is, the regular and preferred form of the bourgeois state.

We can talk of another type of political crisis of the bourgeois state. which appears when the bourgeoisie is faced with the rising tide of the proletarian revolution and threatened with this situation, it resorts to other forms of exceptional bourgeois regimes, like Bonapartism or military dictatorship. Here, too, it is imperative to understand that in content the bourgeois democracy is destroyed, and it is quite possible that the shell/form of parliamentary system might be retained.

However, the political crisis which leads to these types of regimes, is different from the one which leads to fascist regime. The former is characterized by what Poulantzas has termed as the 'equilibrium crisis', identified by the relative balance of the warring classes. On the contrary, the latter is characterized by a situation where the proletariat has been decisively defeated or the proletarian offensive is absent altogether and the crisis is *immanent* to the 'power bloc' of the bourgeoisie.

Thus, we must be careful to see that in all cases of the economic crises, that is, the fundamental contradiction, it is not necessary that a political crisis, too, will emerge. In general, the economic factors play the role of fundamental contradiction, whereas it is the particular conjuncture of political class struggle, which plays the role of principal contradiction. Secondly, we must also understand the general relation of *the political* and *the economic*, which is a relation of relative autonomy. Besides, we must be cautious in identifying the particular kind of political crisis that leads to the emergence of fascism.

Finally, we must also remember that there are no rigid boundaries between different forms of exceptional regimes and it is possible for one form of exceptional form of regime to develop into another form of exceptional regime, depending upon the particular political conjuncture, and also develop into a hybrid form showing characteristic features of more than one form of exceptional regime. This latter case holds true in cases of many far-right regimes of present times as well as in history, like that of the Erdoğan regime

and the erstwhile Duterte regime, which demonstrate elements of Bonapartism as well as certain elements of fascism; the same holds true for the Francoist regime in Spain, which was at the intersection of military dictatorship and fascist regime, and therefore was identified as a quasi-fascist military regime by many, including Nicos Poulantzas[3].

In any case, we can conclude that without the existence of the fundamental contradiction, that is, the economic crisis of capitalism, there cannot be any fascist social movement. In the absence of this fundamental contradiction, fascism can exist mainly as an ideological and organizational phenomenon. In other words, without the general conditions of economic crisis, a fascist ideology and a fascist organization might emerge and continue to exist and even strengthen itself. However, a reactionary fascist social movement of the petty-bourgeoisie will emerge only in the general conditions of economic crisis, without which the ground for a general social and political reaction among the petty-bourgeois classes is not prepared. The opposite, too, can happen. For instance, in the general conditions of economic crisis, a petty-bourgeois reaction develops, but in the absence of a fascist cadre-based organization and driven by a fascist ideology, it remains scattered and fails to assume the shape of an organized fascist reactionary social movement. Such a political situation can lead to the rise to power of an extreme right-wing figure and/or a right-wing party, which might not even be the consensus candidate of the bourgeoisie. Besides, such a political situation might give rise to a variety of political outcomes. A somewhat similar situation is evident in the US today, where the social conditions of a fascist rise are, more-or-less, present but there is no 'fascist vanguard' to systematize the scattered petty-bourgeois reaction. Anyhow, this much is certain that *without the presence of the general conditions of economic crisis, fascist rise and its ascension to power is not possible*.

B. The Particular Unity of the Fascist Ideology

The particular kind of fascist ideology is another general universality of fascism. It is essential to differentiate between the fascist ideology and other far-right ideologies. What is the peculiarity of this ideology? Of course, it is identified by a general anti-humanism, anti-rationality and its anti-progress nature. However, these elements can be found in various other far-right ideologies as well. What constitutes the particular unity of the fascist ideology can be seen in its modus operandi or the particular steps of its operation.

Its most important element is *construction of a false or an imaginary enemy.* In general, a sizeable minority (racial, religious, ethnic or based on some other identity) is constructed as a false enemy. This false enemy is then blamed for the sins of capitalism, from unemployment, inflation and corruption to social and economic insecurity. In order to conjure up this image of the false enemy, all the prejudices and myths about this particular minority community are invoked, systematized, propagandized and weaponized in a planned way by the fascist forces. From the appeal to some perceived "historical injustice" to marshalling of other stereotypes and prejudices based on various perceived contradictions among the masses, everything is used for this purpose. It goes without saying that the use of the informal ideological state-apparatuses from the media to the fascist organization itself, is essential in this process. These myths about this minority community are, then, repeated *ad infinitum*, and transformed into *common sense*, which is beyond reasonable questioning and appears axiomatic, as opposed to scientific notion or knowledge. They do not need to be substantiated by facts or logic. In this way, the fascist ideology, *like a true ideology*, trains the subject to obey without questioning. The RSS has established a communal consensus about the Muslims in a considerable part of the Indian society in precisely this way. The statement of Nazi writer Wilhelm Stapel is remarkable in this context,

who had said: "Arguments could only be effective if the [Nazi] movement had grown by arguments."

An imaginary enemy can be constructed only *as the dialectical other* of an equally and *purely ideological community.*[4] Thus, the fascist ideology constructs a purely ideological community on the basis of a reactionary chauvinistic ideology, like racism, communalism, xenophobia, etc. In other words, the unit element of the construction of this purely ideological community can be race, religion, ethnicity, regional identity, etc. or something else. The members of this purely ideological community have nothing in common except the fact that they do not share the identity of the false enemy. For instance, the members of the 'German Aryan Nation' had nothing in common with each other except they were not Jews. Similarly, what do the members of the *'Hindu Rashtra'* ('Hindu Nation') have in common, except that they are not Muslims or Christians? Even Christians can be co-opted, under certain political conditions, within the fascist narrative as the polar image of the other, of the imaginary enemy, is that of the Muslims. Thus, the members of this community are defined *not by what they are*, but by *what they are not*. This purely ideological community based on the unit of some identity is then proclaimed as 'the nation' and a pathological form of ultra-nationalism based on this chauvinistic idea of nation is erected. Of course, this 'nation' of the fascists *generally* does not have anything to do with the historical category of the nation, as understood by Marxists and serious social scientists.

The third step of the fascist ideology is establishment of the fascist leader/leadership as *the sole spokesperson* of this purely ideological community. The *'führer'* is constructed as the sole leader, sole spokesperson and the 'emperor of the hearts' for this purely ideological community.

The fourth step which emanates from the third step itself is the swift enlargement of the enemy figure to include all forms of political opposition to the 'sole spokesperson' and the 'sole leader. Thus, anyone who opposes or criticizes the *führer* and his organization

automatically becomes the enemy of the state, anti-national, anti-patriotic, a traitor. For example, anyone opposing Hitler would immediately be proclaimed as anti-German, a Jew conspirator, non-Aryan, etc. Similarly, in our country, today, anyone opposing Modi and Shah or the RSS automatically becomes anti-Hindu, anti-national, a traitor, etc. Therefore, communists, trade union activists, civil and democratic rights activists, serious and genuine journalists, pro-people lawyers, students and youth fighting for right to education and employment, all become anti-national, anti-Hindu and traitors In this way, the fascist ideology quickly enlarges the enemy figure to envelope all forms of political opposition. This process might assume a variety of forms, depending upon the nature of the rise of fascism in a country.

C. A Cadre-based Organization

A cadre-based organization is the third general universality of fascism. The very political nature of fascism requires it to develop this organizational form. Without this organizational form, it cannot systematize the scattered petty-bourgeois reactions in the general conditions of economic crisis and turn it into an organized reactionary social movement of the petty-bourgeoisie. Also, without such organization, it cannot present itself as a political candidate for the big bourgeoisie in times of political crisis, which can resolve the political crisis of the 'power bloc' by using exceptional means. This is clearly another trait that distinguishes the fascist reaction from other forms of far-right bourgeois reaction.

Historically speaking, the model of a cadre-based organization was copied by Mussolini from the communists. However, except the formal structure, that is, the cadre-based organization, there are no other similarities between the fascist cadre-based organization and the communist cadre-based organization. The former is identified by total lack of internal democracy, paramount and unquestionable loyalty to the leader, complete obedience to and veneration for the

führer figure. On the contrary, the communist cadre-based organization is based on the principle of *democratic centralism*, a proletarian principle *by nature*. It means that the centralism of the organization is based on the foundation of democracy. The wider the base of democracy, the higher is the peak of centralism. There is a dialectical relation between the two. In principle, it means that complete democracy until the ideological line, political line and the program of the organization is determined by the majority of the party, and complete centralism once it has been done. In practice, it is manifested in the fact that the conference/congress of the organization is the highest body of the party, between two conferences/congresses, the elected central committee is the highest body, lower committees are subordinate to the higher committees and all committees are subordinate to the central committee. The two-line struggle is considered the life-line of the party, through which the party develops its line based on the abstraction, generalization and summation of the experience of historical and contemporary class struggle of the working class, Thus, the fascists only copied the structure of organization from the communists, not the principle, which is quite natural because the fascist politics has a purely fetishistic character, whereas the communist politics is the politics of truth and organizational line and principles do not exist in vacuum, but stem from the ideological and political line itself.

However, the fact remains that this cadre-based structure of the organization gives the fascists a clear-cut edge and advantage over all other bourgeois parties and puts them at a vantage-point to present themselves as the preferred choice of the bourgeoisie in the periods of the political crisis.

It is essential for revolutionary communists to comprehend the fact that the cadre-based organization is a particularity of the fascist organization which exists in all instances of fascism, irrespective of time and space. It applies in the case of the early-Twentieth century fascism as well as that of the present fascist rise. Without

understanding this fact, we cannot devise an effective strategy to fight against fascism.

D. An Organized Reactionary Movement of the Petty-Bourgeoisie

As far as the operative part of any communist theorization on fascism is concerned, this is without any doubt the most important general universality of fascism, which distinguishes it from all other forms of bourgeois far-right reaction. Fascism *is an organized reactionary social movement of the petty-bourgeoisie.* It is a mystical and romantic upheaval of the petty-bourgeoisie. It is mystical because it is based on the misarticulation of the real class contradictions into an ideological, for instance, racist or communal, form, which gives a fetishistic manifestation to the vague discontents, grievances and disenchantments of the petty-bourgeois classes, which emanate from the social and economic uncertainty and insecurity bred by the capitalist mode of production itself. It is romantic because it calls for a 'return' to an imagined glorious past, which was never actually there, and is purely a construction by the fascist ideology, for instance, the *'Ram Rajya'*, or, a particular construction of the 'Great Roman Empire.

It is essential to understand the impacts of the economic crisis of capitalism on the petty-bourgeoisie. In terms of political economy, the petty-bourgeoisie is a class which neither sells its own labour-power, nor exploits the wage-labour of others. However, it also includes a section of the class of higher echelons of non-productive salaried employees and workers, who get wages which are systematically higher than the average value of the labour-power of that particular category, because they play the role of the functionaries of capital, either in the very process of production, or in the non-production sectors like financial services, etc. Thus, they also get a share of the appropriated surplus-value. Moreover, it also

includes a section of the middle class, which, despite the fact that it sells its labour-power, is petty-bourgeois in its political and ideological articulations within the capitalist mode of production.

In the period of economic crisis, the entrepreneurial petty-bourgeoisie, which runs its businesses based on its own and its family's labour, is faced with a real threat of ruination and, indeed, a section of this class is ruined during the periods of the economic crises. It does not mean that those petty-bourgeois entrepreneurs who are ruined, immediately adopt a proletarian political position. They continue to harbor the idea of undoing this ruination, rise from their condition of proletarianization, become an entrepreneur once again and not only a petty-bourgeois entrepreneur, but a capitalist entrepreneur, even if a small capitalist entrepreneur. Another section of this class is not ruined but is faced with the perpetual threat of proletarianization, is hard-pressed economically as well as socially, has to implement extreme frugality and austerity, which also results in the disturbance of peace within the family, which only pronounces its patriarchal character, which again feeds into its reactionary tendencies.

On the other hand, the lower echelons of the salaried petty-bourgeoisie, too, are faced with the prospect of proletarianization because the period of economic crisis also witnesses the processes of privatization of the state sector, retrenchments, increasing inflationary pressure, and increasing burden of taxes. Faced with these problems, the lower echelons of the salaried petty-bourgeoisie, too, are faced with serious social and economic insecurity. This class, too, harbors vague and shapeless discontent and grievances, however, it does not have a clear view of who is the enemy and who is responsible for its pathetic state, This becomes the ground for a blind reaction.

If we take the upper echelons of the entrepreneurial petty-bourgeoisie, which stand on the threshold of transforming itself into a small capitalist, their economic and social situation is different and their grievances, too, are different. They already veer more towards

the bourgeoisie in their political and ideological outlook and have a more pronounced anti-working-class attitude. They want greater 'ease of doing business' which simply means unhindered freedom to exploit labour, easier conditions of expanding the business, less state regulation, etc. Their aspirations as well as dissatisfactions often overlap with those of the small and medium capitalist class with whom they identify. They are easily driven by the right-wing and fascist slogans for a "strong leadership", against "policy paralysis", calls for "industrial discipline", "end of anarchy", "establishment of order, etc.

On the other hand, the upper echelons of the salaried petty-bourgeoisie, due to their ideological and political articulations, as well as, their economic position, tend to drift towards the bourgeoisie and harbor anti-working-class feelings, holding them responsible for the various problems of the country.

Thus, various echelons and sections of petty-bourgeoisie veer towards reaction in the conditions of economic crisis either due to their economic as well as social insecurity and uncertainty or due to the frustration of their expectations of social and economic upward mobility. It is precisely before such vague and shapeless discontents and grievances of the petty-bourgeoisie that fascism places a false enemy and blames it for all the problems which the petty-bourgeoisie faces, in fact, due to the capitalism, so that the real enemy is hidden. Fascist ideology and politics misarticulate the real class contradictions into communal/racial/ethnic or some other identitarian contradiction, blame the othered minority for the crisis that the society faces at different levels, appeals for the return to some mythical glorious ideal, and invokes and summons the petty-bourgeois reaction for this purpose.

This is how the frenzy for establishment of 'Hindu rule' and *'Hindu Rashtra'* is invoked, a reactionary social movement of the petty-bourgeoisie is organized and used as a counter-weight to the possible resistance by the working masses as well as the working-class movement. It is precisely this general universality of fascism

which makes it a particularly dangerous form of far-right reaction and which demands us to devise particular revolutionary proletarian strategies against it.

Here a caveat is in order: fascism also wins over two different fractions of the working class, as well. One, a part of the white-collared workers, which can be specified as *labour aristocracy,* which often continues to be associated with the social-democratic trade unions for their pecuniary gains as the fascists do not generally have that kind of trade unions, but electorally shifts *en masse* to the fascists; two, a part of the *lumpenproletariat,* which is identified precisely by the lack of class consciousness or disintegrated class consciousness; it has the potential to develop class consciousness through the revolutionary intervention of the revolutionary communists; however, in the absence of this intervention, this section of the *lumpenproletariat*, totally bereft of any orientation or aim in life, veers towards fascism which gives them an idea, an aim to follow, a meaning in life, as it were. In terms of politics, these two sections of the working class are marked by either the decisive hegemony of the bourgeois political line or an absence of proletarian class consciousness altogether. In terms of social class, they are, indeed part of the working class, but in terms of political class, they might exhibit petty-bourgeoisfied consciousness and veer to fascist reaction.

Thus, despite the fact that certain fractions of the working class, too, are attracted towards fascism, fascism continues, in essence, to be *a reactionary social movement of the petty-bourgeoisie*, its mystical upheaval and romantic upsurge.

E. Welding of the Petty-Bourgeois Reaction to the Interests of the Big Capital

The last important general universality of fascism is that it subordinates the petty-bourgeois reaction into the service of the

interests of the big capital, in particular, and those of capital, in general. One can say that it is the historical function of fascism to weld the petty-bourgeois reaction in the general conditions of economic crisis and political crisis to the interests of the big bourgeoisie, in particular, and those the bourgeoisie, against their own interests, because it is precisely the of the bourgeoisie, in general. It makes the petty-bourgeoisie tail-end capitalist system and the bourgeoisie which are responsible for the social and economic insecurity and the ruin of the petty-bourgeoisie. However, the fascist organization, through the fetishizing function of the fascist ideology and fascist politics, misarticulates the real class contradictions, dislocates them, into communalism, racism or some other reactionary chauvinistic form, and thus, subordinates this class, potential ally of the socialist revolution, into the service of the capitalist class.

In this way, the reactionary social movement of the petty-bourgeoisie is transformed into a counter-weight of the possible resistance of the working masses and the working class and is also converted into the instrument through which the fascists move to impose the hegemony of the big monopoly capitalist class within the 'power bloc' through exceptional means. Without this instrument, the fascists cannot attain the capability to win over the trust and support of the big bourgeoisie, which due to its inherent nature is often sceptic, even apprehensive, about fascists and their hunger for power. However, the political crisis on the one hand, and the fascists' exhibition of their deserved candidacy as the force that can resolve this political crisis of the 'power bloc', on the other, drives the big bourgeoisie, ultimately, to give their nod. Besides, they also fear that even without their nod, the fascists might eventually seize power.

*

Besides these general universalities, there are some other factors, too, which can generally be found in most instances of fascist rise, for instance, a führer cult, a modern anti-rational and anti-humanist critique of modernity, street violence, etc. However, most of these

other universalities stem from the five general universalities that we have discussed above and they are their derivatives. We have focused on these fundamental universalities, which give rise to all other universal characteristic features of fascism, which are evident in all cases of fascist rise, whether we are talking about the early-Twentieth century fascist rise, or we are talking about the contemporary world, which is once again witnessing new forms of fascist rise in the general conditions of the long recession. These general universalities of fascism are the *differentia specifica* of fascism, distinguishing it from all other forms of far-right reaction, from all other forms of the exceptional regime.

On the basis of the five general universalities that we have discussed above, we can now embark upon a discussion of the changes in the *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* of fascism since the last quarter of the Twentieth century, or, in other words, in the neoliberal phase of imperialist stage.

3. General Particularities of Fascism in the Neoliberal Phase of the Imperialist Stage

Are there fundamental changes in the nature of the world capitalism, the nature of capitalist economic crises, the nature of the bourgeois state and its various forms, the labour regime, the mode of regulation and the regime of accumulation since the Second World War and especially since the beginning of the neoliberal phase in the 1970s? Can we talk about changes in the class structure of capitalist societies, in the very nature of the bourgeoisie as a political class, the balance of class forces worldwide and in different capitalist countries and the changes in the size as well as nature of the working class itself? There would be hardly any serious Marxist-Leninist revolutionary who would answer these questions in the negative. Without doubt, there have been profound changes on all the parameters mentioned above. Of course, the capital-relation and

wage-relation are still capital-relation and wage-relation; of course, the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is still the principal contradiction in all capitalist societies and with the process of decolonization almost complete, the contradiction between labour and capital has also become the most important transformative contradiction on the world level, even though, due to the excess of the weakness and vulnerability of the proletarian forces, on the world level, it is the inter-imperialist rivalry which is playing the role of the principal contradiction at present. However, the profound changes in the regime of accumulation, the mode of regulation, the nature and structure of world capitalism and the resultant changes in the neoliberal phase of imperialism are well-recorded and well-recognized facts among Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries as well as serious social scientists.

The next question that we need to pose is what do these changes mean for the rise of fascism in the present times? Are there any changes in the *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* of fascism, in particular, and other forms of far-right reaction, in general? Those who think there are no changes in the process of the rise of fascism, in the nature of the fascist regime and consequently the proletarian strategy of resistance today, those who are waiting for fascists to do exactly the same things that they did in Germany and Italy in the first part of the Twentieth century, those who are waiting for the set of exceptional laws abandoning the shell of parliamentary system to be introduced, for the reappearance of Auschwitz and Dachau, and the World War III, are imprisoned in the time-capsule and space-capsule. They are still in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, whereas the world has already seen the first quarter of the Twenty-first century pass into the darkness of reaction.

One of the basic teachings of history is precisely that history never repeats itself as it is. Not only the forces of progress learn from their past experience, the forces of reaction, too, perform this 'redemptive activity', to borrow terminologically from Walter Benjamin. The fact is that there have been profound changes in the process of fascist rise as well as in the nature of the fascist regime due to the changes in

the mode of regulation and regime of accumulation of capitalism in general. However, it does not suffice to talk about these changes in general form or in vague terms. We must be able to point out those changes in particular and in concrete sense. This is what we will try to do in this section of the paper.

A. Changes in the Nature of the Capitalist Crisis

The first point while discussing the nature of changes in world capitalism is the changes in the nature of occurrence of the crisis. In other words, the changes in the nature of industrial cycles and what have been called 'the long waves'[5]. These changes were predicted by Marx and Engels themselves, and especially Engels since the 1880s. What are these changes?

The most important change is evident in the fact that the capitalist crises are assuming a form which is chronic and protracted, peppered with periods of acute episodes. Since the 1970s itself, we have not been witness to any long significant period of boom in the productive economy. We have seen episodes of economic boom fueled mainly by speculative frenzy of the finance capital. Except the brief period following immediately after the beginning of the neoliberal offensive, that is, the deregulation of the labour-market, deregulation of the financial market, attack on the trade unions and labour rights, wave of privatization of the state sector as well as the so-called 'commons', and consequent depression of the average wages to restore profitability of capital, which definitively ended in 1982, the five decades since the 1973 Crisis, can be characterized as a period of 'long recession' which periodically collapses into serious depressions. In the absence of a world war or large-scale destruction of productive forces in any other form, the devalorization of capital has not been sufficient to restore the profitability of capital.

As a consequence, the world capitalist economy, as a terminally ill-patient, as it were, rises from its near-vegetative state for brief interregnums and then collapses back. The Coramine injections given by the finance capital lead to episodes of irrational exuberance of the fictitious capital, awakening this patient for some time, but only to collapse back into a deeper stupor, for instance, the dot-com bubble, the housing bubble, and then finally the subprime bubble which burst in 2007-08 to inaugurate what Anwar Shaikh has called the first great depression of the Twenty-first century and the likes of Michael Roberts have called 'the long depression[6].

What we are witnessing since the commencement of the neoliberal phase is this: prolongation of the periods of stagnation and crisis, and shortening of the periods of economic boom. This is something which was predicted by none other than Friedrich Engels himself.

Engels had begun to point out in the 1880s itself that the process of recurrent cyclical crises in capitalism does not form *a circle*, but *a spiral*, and *a downward spiral*. In other words, as the contradiction between socialized production and private accumulation grows, as the crisis of profitability which is a reflection of this fundamental contradiction, becomes more structural, the recurrent crises assume more chronic than acute form, more structural than apparently contingent form and become ever deeper. These predictions about capitalist crises were repeated by many classical Marxist political economists (the *Monthly Review School* cannot be counted among these, as they are not Marxist in strict sense of the term but a particular tendency within underconsumptionism and their idea of permanent stagnation is theoretically non-Marxist), with whom one can agree or disagree on many other points, like Henryk Grossman.

First, we must briefly look at Engels' comments on these changes towards the end of the Nineteenth century and also interpret them correctly, in order to avoid underconsumptionist interpretations the same, as some have tried to undertake. The process of crises is recurrent and cyclical, however, this process does not form *a circle* but *a spiral*, as we pointed out above. What does that mean? Again,

as we stipulated above, *it means that as a secular tendency, the crises become more structural, more protracted and deeper. They assume a chronic form, along with periods of acuteness*. In the 1886 Preface to the English edition of the first volume of Capital, Engels wrote:

> "While the productive power increases in a geometric ratio, the extension of markets proceeds at best in an arithmetic one. The decennial cycle of stagnation, prosperity, overproduction and crisis, ever recurrent from 1825 to 1867, seems indeed to have run its course; *but only to land us in the slough of despond of a permanent and chronic depression*."[7] (emphasis ours)

Now, we need to be clear about one thing. Engels is talking about the 'permanence' of the crisis in the *historical sense*, not *theoretical sense*. For Engels, too, the crises continued to be a cathartic mechanism, through which the capitalist system deals with the fall in profitability by the devalorization of capital. However, without large-scale destruction of productive forces (such as in a war, etc.), sufficient devalorization of capital does not happen, as the capitalist mode of production develops further, which pushes the capitalist system into a *long recession* and sometimes, a *long depression.* The protracted recession since the 1970s with short-lived interregnums of prosperity, often fueled by speculative frenzy, is a proof of the correctness of this prognosis of Engels.

Secondly, when Engels is talking about the growth of markets, he is not simply raising *the question of realization*, but both, the question of markets for selling, as well as, markets of cheap labour and cheap raw material, in other words, *opportunities of profitable investments*.

Again, in an editorial note in the third volume of *Capital*, Engels points out that the *chronic nature* of crisis was not something on which Marx could work in his manuscripts of *Capital* in detail, that had largely been written in the 1860s, because this emerging change in the nature of crisis is a product of the tendencies that were only in embryonic forms at the time when Marx was writing and they

manifested themselves in fuller form only after that period. Engels also points out that as monopoly stage of capitalism approaches, the problem of realization, too, *aggravates* the crisis of profitability. In the following excerpt, too, Engels talks about "cessation" of restoration of profitability in a *historical sense*, and not in the *theoretical sense*. Engels points out:

> "Since Marx wrote the above passage, new forms of industrial organization have been developed, as is well-known, representing the second and third degree of joint-stock company. The speed with which production can nowadays be increased in all fields of large-scale industry, which is greater every day, is confronted by the ever-increasing slowness in expanding the market for this increased volume of products. What production produces in months the market can absorb only in years. On top of this there are the protectionist policies by which each industrial country puts up a barrier against others, particularly against England, and artificially boosts domestic productive capacity still further. *The results are general and chronic overproduction, depressed prices, falling profits, even their complete cessation*; in brief, the ancient and celebrated freedom of competition is at the end of its road and must itself confess its evident and scandalous bankruptcy. A further reason is that in each country the big industrialists in a particular branch of industry come together to form a cartel to regulate production, a committee fixes the quantity each establishment is to produce, and has the last word in dividing up the incoming orders. In a few cases it came to the formation of temporary international cartels, for instance between the English and the German Iron producers. But even this form of socialization of production did not suffice. The conflict of interests between the individual businesses broke through too often and restored competition. The next stage, therefore, in certain branches where the scale of production permitted was to concentrate the entire production of the branch of industry in

question into one big Joint-stock company with a unified management." (emphasis ours)[8]

Again, one of the footnotes inserted by Engels as part of his editing of the third volume of *Capital* makes it clear that Engels is not talking about a 'permanent' crisis in the theoretical sense, but *the prolongation of the phase of crisis in the industrial cycle.* The concept of industrial cycles and waves occupy a very central place in Marx's analysis of the overall dynamic of the capitalist system, as we have pointed out above. Later, these concepts were empirically proven by various scholars like Kondratiev, Mandel, Shaikh, etc. Engels points out:

> "As I have already noted elsewhere, (Engels is referring here to the 1886 Preface to the first volume of *Capital*, that we have quoted above - *author*) the last great general crisis represented a turning-point*. The acute form of the periodic process with its former ten-year cycle seems to have given way to a more chronic and drawn-out alternation, affecting the various industrial countries at different times, between a relatively short and weak improvement in trade and a relatively long and indecisive depression.* Perhaps ***what is involved is simply an extension of the cycle's duration. When world trade was in its infancy, 1815-47, cycles of approximately five years could be discerned; between 1847 and 1867 the cycle was definitely a ten-year one; might we now be in the preparatory phase of a new world crash of unheard-of severity?*** *Many things seem to point this way...And so each of the elements that counteracts a repetition of the old crises, conceals within it the nucleus of a far more violent future crisis."*[9] *(emphasis ours)*

Engels brilliantly captured the ongoing development of the phenomenon, when it was still in its infancy. Again, in a letter to August Bebel in 1885, Engels pointed out the increasing chronic nature of crisis as capitalist mode of production road-rolls all obstructions, hurdles and hindrances in its path. Engels wrote:

> “The *chronic depression* in all the decisive branches of industry also still continues unbroken here, in France and in America. Especially in iron and cotton. It is an unheard-of situation, though entirely the inevitable result of the capitalist system: *such colossal over-production that it cannot even bring things to a crisis! The over-production of disposable capital seeking investment is so great that the rate of discount here actually fluctuates between 1 and 12 percent per annum, and for money invested in short term credits, which can be called in or paid off from day to day (money on call) one can hardly get 1/2 percent per annum. But by choosing to invest his money in this way rather than in new industrial undertakings the money capitalist is admitting how rotten the whole business looks to him*. And this fear of new investments and old enterprises, which had already manifested itself in the crisis of 1867, is the main reason why things are not brought to an acute crisis.”[10] (emphasis ours)

It is noteworthy that Engels is not simply talking about general overproduction here, but mainly about the overproduction of capital, which has led to decline in the interest rates next to nothing. Now, any Marxist acquainted with the basics of Marxist political economy knows the meaning of the "overproduction" or "plethora" of capital. As Marx himself pointed out, any plethora of capital is the capital which cannot be invested profitably. It points to the crisis of profitability. Engels, too, here is alluding to the crisis of profitability. where capital cannot find opportunities of profitable investment. As the capitalist mode of production develops, Engels argues, the chronic and protracted nature of crises is enhanced and increased. And Engels is correct and has been proven historically correct on this point: *as a secular tendency, the capitalist crises will assume more chronic and protracted character giving rise to what we are witnessing todays namely, a long recession since the 1970s which periodically collapses into serious depressions, like the long depression that began in 2007-08.*

Needless to say, this does not mean that what we are witnessing today is *permanent crisis* in the *theoretical sense*. Theoretically speaking, there can be no such thing as a 'permanent crisis'. Of course, some crisis will eventually prove to be the last crisis of capitalism. However, what we are witnessing today is a long, chronic, protracted crisis, from which the world capitalism is unable to emerge due to insufficient devalorization of capital, which is required today at an unprecedented level. Such devalorization of capital can happen with such events, that are, at least presently, *politically* unfeasible and inexpedient for the bourgeoisie of the imperialist powers, in particular, and those of the capitalist countries, in general. Andrew Kliman has, more-or-less correctly, discussed this condition of insufficient devalorization of capital due to which the world capitalist system is bogged down in the mire of a long recession.[11]

World capitalism had already begun to emerge from the Great Depression (1929) before the outbreak of the Second World War and the unprecedentedly large-scale destruction of Europe and Japan in the war led to destruction of the productive forces on a scale that had not been seen before. This large-scale devalorization of capital and destruction of productive forces inaugurated the so-called long boom that lasted till the end of the 1960s, though slow-down had begun by the mid-1960s itself. By this time, the rate of increase in the organic composition of capital had overwhelmed the rate of surplus-value resulting in the decline in the rate of profit and finally stagnation and ultimately decline in the mass of profit, too. The crisis announced itself in 1973 with the collapse of the Dollar-Gold Standard and proper beginning of the era of pure fiat currency. All the Keynesian prescriptions had insisted that deficit spending and increasing the aggregate demand will not create a problem, namely inflation, as long as there is continuing supply of labour, that is, as long as the system does not reach full or near-full employment. Deficit spending will increase inflation only after that point. However, all such prescriptions fell flat. This crisis was characterized by rising inflation, economic stagnation as well as growing unemployment.

Marx's law of tendential fall in the rate of profit (LTFRP) had struck like a force of nature.

The bourgeoisie in the most advanced capitalist countries took the lead and gave a reactionary response to this crisis in the form of policies which were later collectively termed as neoliberalism. These policies involved deregulation of labour and financial markets, authoritarian onslaught against the trade unions and labour rights, attack on civil and democratic rights, privatization of the state sector enterprises and the so-called 'commons, bringing in new opportunities of profitable investment and other pro-capital policies, for instance, shifting the burden of taxes increasingly from the bourgeoisie to the working class and the middle classes. This neoliberal onslaught did temporarily relieve the capitalist class in the leading capitalist countries from the crisis of profitability. However, by the early-1980s, the capitalist world was again mired in deep crisis. From then on, it has emerged from crisis only for short periods through fictitious and speculative capital.

In most of the relatively-backward post-colonial capitalist countries, the neoliberal policies were introduced with a time-lag, around the mid- and late-1980s and mainly from the early-1990s. It was not simply because of the imperialist pressure, but owing to the needs of the bourgeoisie in these countries themselves, which were feeling suffocated under the old mode of regulation. The purpose of import-substitution industrialization under the aegis of the state and accompanied by the strict protectionist policies was already served. It had helped the indigenous bourgeoisie to stand on its feet and become capable of dealing with the imperialist capital in a better way. The old regulatory framework was now a hindrance to further accumulation. As a consequence, the deregulation was initiated. In some countries of the so-called 'Third World', the dominant classes implemented these policies of liberalization according to the dictates of the imperialist bodies like IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organization, whereas in other countries, the bourgeoisie implemented the policies of liberalization and privatization in a very incremental, gradual and regulated fashion, keeping its own interests

in command. India was one such country. It can be demonstrated with evidence that the last almost 4 decades of these policies in India have benefitted the Indian big capital more than it has benefitted the imperialist capital. Anyhow the attack on the labour rights, trade unions, the privatization of public sector enterprises and the privatization of the 'commons, attack on the civil and democratic rights began on a qualitatively new scale in India, too, with the commencement of these policies and the authoritarian character of the state continued to increasingly grow.

However, globally, the policies of neoliberalism could not prevent the world capitalism from being bogged down in the mire of crisis, a long recession, and since 2007-08 a long depression. The reason is simple: the rate of surplus-value continues to fail to overwhelm the rate of increase in the organic composition of capital. As a consequence, the only alternative for the capitalist class is depressing the average wages in order to maintain the declining profitability, which has its own limits. And the second way is more of a short-term Coramine administration: conjuring up speculative bubbles of finance capital. In general, the capitalist class is obliged to continue policies of depression of the average wages, prolongation of working-day and intensification of labour through the processes of informalization, casualization and contractualization. At the same time, it is obliged to decrease the taxes on capitalists and increase the burden of indirect taxes on the working masses and the middle classes. Besides, it is compelled to follow the policies of privatization of 'the commons' to commodify whatever is still uncommodified in order to create new opportunities of profitable investment. Due to the non-availability of the sufficient opportunities of profitable investments, there is a scramble among the bourgeoisie, too. This creates a situation where the unity of the 'power bloc', too, remains under constant strain and the hegemony of any particular fraction within the 'power bloc' is constantly threatened. Thus, a specter of emergence of a political crisis is constantly hovering over it and this possibility is often realized due to

the conjuncture of political class struggle, in the general conditions of economic crisis.

Such a situation is no more a contingent or cataclysmic event which arises seldom. This has become a new normal for at least last five decades and unless and until a large-scale war or catastrophe leads to sufficient devalorization of capital, this situation is likely to continue. However, the ruling classes in most of the capitalist countries are politically much more fragile and unstable than before and they understand that such a large-scale war might also create political possibility of major social upheavals in many countries. At the same time, the nuclear deterrent, too, plays a secondary role in preventing such a global scale war.

As a consequence, the *apparent contingency* inherent in the alternating of the industrial cycles in the world capitalist system, before the 1970s, has disappeared. It has been replaced with a different rhythm of the cycles, characterized by a long, chronic crisis, interspersed with brief episodes of economic boom, often fueled by speculation. Therefore, the political situation of the dominant classes is fragile and their unity hangs in the balance. Fascism, too, is not characterized by cataclysmic rise and cataclysmic fall anymore, the latter often taking the shape of total destruction and banishment of fascism from the stage of history for a long time to come. Its rise is now characterized by *a long incubation period, a protracted 'war of positions', deep infiltration of the bourgeois state-apparatus, molecular permeation into the society and brief periods of 'wars of movement' which resemble repeated paroxysms*. Whether in governmental power or not, fascist forces continue to hold their positions within the apparatus of the state and the pores of the society. In the neoliberal phase, therefore, fascism (along with other forms of far-right reaction), too, has become a protracted, chronic and, more-or-less, 'permanent' phenomenon of the capitalist society.

Since the economic crisis, too, has assumed a chronic, protracted nature, the resultant petty-bourgeois insecurity and uncertainty, too, have assumed a more-or-less 'permanent' character; the conditions

of political crisis of the ruling classes, too, exists continuously, which in particular conjunctures of class struggle, is materialized into a concrete reality; as a consequence, the bourgeoisie in this particular phase of imperialism has a much more pronounced tendency to drift into the arms of a variety of forms of far-right reaction, including fascism. In countries, where for particular historical and political reasons, strong fascist organizations and their social base exists. such a political situation is always pregnant with their rise to power. In countries, where such a fascist 'vanguard' is not present, other forms of authoritarian right-wing regimes can come to power, for instance, Putin's, Erdoğan's, Duterte or Marcos Jr.'s, or Trump's regime.

At any rate, the conditions which give rise to fascism do not exist as cataclysmic events anymore; they exist continuously and perpetually in the neoliberal phase of imperialism. This situation is embedded in the very political economy of this phase and the consequent political class situation.

B. Rise of Fascism Today: Long Incubation Period, Protracted Positional War, Deep Infiltration into the State-apparatus and Molecular Permeation into the Society

Since fascism as a political tendency has ceased to be a cataclysmic event characterized by sudden rise and then sudden fall and total destruction, and has become a more-or-less 'permanent' presence in the capitalist society in the neoliberal phase of the imperialist stage, it is now characterized by *a long incubation period.* In this period, it conducts *a protracted 'war of positions'*. This protracted 'war of positions' is materialized through two main elements*: deep infiltration into the state-apparatus (repressive as well as ideological) and molecular permeation into the pores of the society through*

institutionalized reform and cultural work. This results in consolidation of entrenched positions within the apparatus of the state, from the executive to judiciary, from police, armed forces and military to all the echelons of the bureaucracy, from celebrated check-and-balance institutions of the bourgeois democracy like the Election Commission, Enforcement Directorate, CBI, etc., to the very pores of the society. In the general conditions of crisis and stagnation, the potentialities of organizing the vague petty-bourgeois discontent, disgruntlement and frustration into a reactionary fascist social movement continue to exist and the fascist organization continuously misarticulates their grievances in order to achieve this; at the same time, the reactionary inclination of the bourgeoisie, too, exists perpetually in this period as it is continuously faced with the prospects of political crisis, in the general conditions of economic crisis.

In the conditions of economic crisis, the bourgeoisie, in the absence of any leap in the development of productivity of labour, is obliged to resort to the policies of depression of average wages. Such policies, in general, give rise to the possibilities of the resistance of working class. Also, the policies of privatization and liberalization evoke the discontent of the common working masses and sections of the middle class, as well. This pushes the bourgeoisie to incline towards various forms of reaction, including fascism. Of course, wherever the fascist option is available, a considerable section of the dominant classes veers towards it, because owing to its *movement-character* and wider social base, it is not as fragile as a military dictatorship or Bonapartist regime. In general, the bourgeoisie looks for a "strong leadership, which has the "will-power" to end the "policy paralysis" and take "stringent steps". In the absence of any revolutionary alternative, the middle classes, too, owing to the misarticulation of their own disgruntlement with the system due to consistent economic as well as social insecurity and uncertainty, look for a "strong leadership", for their own fantastic reasons. This gives rise to petty-bourgeois reaction. The fascists simply organize this reaction into an organized social movement and, secondly, put this movement into

the service of the big capital, in particular, and that of the capital, in general.

The "strong leader", that is, fascism, is needed by the bourgeoisie for two purposes: one, the state repression of popular resistance to the pro-capital policies of wage depression, income deflation and privatization, suppression of all political opposition and establishment of the hegemony of the big bourgeoisie within the 'power bloc'; and two, the destruction of the unity of the masses and elimination of any potential of establishment of such unity, through dividing them along the lines of race, religion, region, language, ethnicity, etc. using the chauvinist ideology based on one of these identities, which disarms and disables the masses from mounting any effective resistance. Both these tasks cannot be fulfilled in this way by any centre-left, centrist or centre-right bourgeois party due to their political nature itself.

Today fascism rises to power in a different way than the early Twentieth century. Instead of seizing power in frontal and decisive 'war of movement' (whether it happens after or before coming to power through elections, does not matter here), by consummating and completing the fascization of the state in an eventual form: it rather assumes the form of what Aijaz Ahmad has termed as, the ‘hurricane from below’[12], through what Sumit Sarkar has termed as a ‘long gestation period’[13]. In this ‘long gestation period’, the fascists perform a gradual internal take-over of the apparatus of the state and develop their entrenched positions in the civil society, through their institutional work ranging from reform work such as running schools, hospitals, etc. to running ideological and cultural work, like *shakhas*, various cultural forums, etc. Only when this process reaches a throughput limit and the social and economic insecurity among the petty-bourgeois classes is acute in the general conditions of crisis that the fascist forces move to certain periods of 'war of movement and ‘war of maneuver’.

However, when such episodes come, and the fascist forces are able to rise to governmental power, they do not abandon the form of

bourgeois democracy, the causes of which, we will discuss shortly. They retain the form of bourgeois parliamentary system, even though they constantly keep gnawing at the bourgeois democratic content of this form from within, which has become already extremely weak, shallow and increasingly empty in the phase of neoliberalism. If and when the fascists go out of governmental power, a possibility which naturally comes with the contradictions of retaining the shell/form of bourgeois democracy, they are not totally destroyed and banished from the stage of history, as it happened with the Italian fascists and the German Nazis. On the contrary, they *only go out* of *governmental* power, but continue to hold on to and even consolidate their positions within the state-apparatus as well as the society, undertake a tactical retreat, and prepare for mounting the next offensive, to regain the governmental power as well, the opportunities for which keep coming frequently and periodically in the period of long recession in the neoliberal phase of imperialism.

These are certain characteristic features or elements of the long incubation period which characterize the rise of fascism in the Twenty-first century, or, instead, since the last quarter of the Twentieth century.

There is one more point that we must mention before moving on to the next particularity of fascism in the neoliberal phase. We have talked about the *temporal specificity* of fascism. However, there is also an element of *spatial specificity*. There is a spatial specificity of rise of fascism in the *post-colonial relatively-backward capitalist societies like ours.* Fascism can exist as an ideological and political phenomenon and also as an organizational phenomenon in colonial or semi-colonial societies; however, being a reactionary social movement, a romantic upsurge and mystical upheaval of the petty-bourgeoisie, it cannot develop a wide social support base and cannot develop into a social movement in colonial or semi-colonial societies. The reason is simple: first of all, the petty-bourgeoisie as a social class gravitates towards the national liberation movement; even the revivalist and ideologically reactionary elements are subsumed into the reactionary streams of nationalist movement

itself. For example, in India too, various ideologically reactionary, millenarian and revivalist elements within the petty-bourgeois class as well as within the landlordist reactionary classes, joined the stream of Hindu nationalism, which was revivalist and reformist at the same time. It is an altogether different issue that in the process of congealing of the fascist ideology and sprouting of fascist politics in the shape of Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, one of the streams that fed into it came from the revivalist and reformist Hindu nationalist political tendency. However, Hindu nationalist tendency itself was not yet fascist, for instance, B. G. Tilak or Lala Lajpat Rai themselves were not fascists. However, their political thought and tendency, at least partially, did feed into the early shaping up of fascist ideology and politics. Anyway, during the colonial period, the national movement was the principal ideological and political magnet for the petty-bourgeois masses, which particularly felt the brunt of colonial oppression.

Secondly, the colonial or semi-colonial societies might experience a variety of forms of economic crisis, but not the capitalist economic crisis in its proper form, broadly speaking. The crises of world capitalist system do affect the colonial world as well, but mainly in terms of trade and commerce and only secondarily in terms of crisis of profitability of the industrial sectors, for the simple reason that the industrial sectors in colonial economy remain at best underdeveloped and mostly regulated by the colonial state. Thus, economic crisis and the resultant ruination of the petty-bourgeoisie does not happen in the same way as it happens in a capitalist economy. The ruin of the petty-bourgeois classes, especially the peasant and artisans, mostly happens due to excessive burden of the feudal rent, colonial plunder or owing to the processes of unequal exchange and this particular economic process evokes a different kind of political response, which is mainly shaped by anti-feudal and anti-imperialist contradictions. This process is qualitatively different from the ruination of or the threat of ruination faced by the petty-bourgeois classes under capitalism due to the competition from the big capital and the pro-big capital policies of the

state, which might lead to different forms of political response: either a revolutionary response, whereby, the petty-bourgeois masses join hands with the proletarian forces under the leadership of the latter led by a revolutionary communist party, or, a reactionary response, where the grievances of the petty-bourgeois masses are misarticulated and fetishized into a blind reaction in the absence of revolutionary alternative, which then is used to erect a reactionary social movement of the petty-bourgeoisie if a fascist organization exists.

Thus, fascism cannot emerge as a reactionary social movement in colonial or semi-colonial countries as it lacks the general conditions and fundamental pre-requisites to emerge as a social movement. Nonetheless, a fascist organization can come into existence in a colonial or semi-colonial society due to the ideological influences which travel across national boundaries with the emergence of a world market, international trade and commerce, processes of colonization, and the resultant flow of information and ideas, and due to the partial presence of a small social base for that kind of far-right reaction. They can continue to exist ideologically and organizationally with limited social support base, especially among the landlordist reactionary classes and also certain sections of the petty-bourgeoisie. However, they can evolve into a reactionary social movement of the petty- bourgeoisie only in a capitalist country, in the general conditions of capitalist economic crisis, and a conjuncture of class struggle that can lead to a political crisis of the 'power bloc. In India, too, the RSS existed since 1925 itself. It continued to consolidate itself ideologically and organizationally before the independence; after the independence, except for a few years after the assassination of Gandhi, when it was relegated to the margins of the Indian bourgeois politics, it continued to build its organizational structure and expand its social base, systematically infiltrate into the apparatus of the state, and perform a molecular permeation into the pores of the civil society, through a dense network of institutional work; however, it emerged as a swift shift to a period of a reactionary social movement, through 'war of movement, only in the 1980s,

when Indian capitalism faced its first serious crisis of accumulation, uprooting of a section of the petty-bourgeoisie and the fractional interests of the bourgeoisie becoming dominant.

Thus, in India, as it could have been in a post-colonial, relatively-backward capitalist country, the long incubation period of fascism was even longer and consequently it allowed the fascist forces to perform the deep infiltration into the state-apparatus and molecular permeation into the society, in a much more systematic and hegemonic way. In other capitalist countries, too, today, fascism will have a long incubation period. However, the spatial specificity of fascism in the post-colonial relatively-backward capitalist country is that this gestation period might be even longer for the reasons discussed above.

C. Retention of the Form/Shell of Bourgeois Parliamentary Democracy and the Perpetual Decay of Its Content

As we have pointed out above, in the general context of the changes in the modus operandi of world capitalism since the 1970s, that is, in the neoliberal phase, fascist forces will not abandon the form/shell of the bourgeois democratic parliamentary republic, while at the same time, the already emaciated bourgeois democratic substance or content of this form/shell will undergo a process of decay, a process which will be contradictory and will never be complete, but will assume a form of a perpetually ongoing project. In other words, the fascization of the state will not assume the form of *an event* but *a constantly ongoing project*. Let us elaborate this point.

The bourgeois state as well as the bourgeoisie as a political class have undergone profound changes since the beginning of the imperialist stage itself. Lenin had pointed out that imperialism means reaction all the way and, in this period, the democratic republican

bourgeoisie will be replaced by the reactionary, authoritarian and chauvinistic bourgeoisie. This change is embedded in the political economy of capitalism itself in the stage of imperialism. The process which had begun in Lenin's period, reached a qualitatively new higher stage with the onset of the crisis of the 1970s and the beginning of the neoliberal policies. However, this general comment would not suffice. We need to put our fingers on the concrete tangible changes in the bourgeois democratic form of the capitalist state in the neoliberal phase. Therefore, under this subhead we will go in relatively greater detail and will try to comprehend these changes. Because without understanding these changes properly, we cannot see why, in 20th century, it was essential for fascism to destroy bourgeois democracy in form as well as in content and why today fascism can perform its historical function while retaining the form of bourgeois democracy, that is, the parliamentary system. Consequently, we will discuss the works of certain Marxist scholars, and left scholars in general, who have worked on this question in detail. We request a greater degree of patience from the readers here.

We shall first stipulate the basic elements of our own understanding and subsequently attempt to trace various other Marxist attempts since the late-1970s itself, which clearly pointed to these qualitative changes from Nicos Poulantzas and Bob Jessop to other Marxist scholars in the 1980s, 1990s and the 2000s. This will allow us to demonstrate why fascism was a particular type of state-project in the early-Twentieth century, where the seizure of power and fascization of the state took the form of cataclysmic events and why in the neoliberal phase fascism is another particular kind of state-project, where the seizure of power does not assume the form of a cataclysmic event, a frontal 'war of movement, but a long 'war of positions' and 'hurricane from below' and why the fascization of the state, too, does not assume the form of the event of the introduction of some set of exceptional laws, which formally abandoned the shell/form of bourgeois democracy, by abolishing the parliament and assemblies and the elections, but a long process of internal takeover

of the state-apparatus, supported by a concomitant process of molecular permeation into the pores of the society? Why it became possible for the fascist forces to retain the shell of bourgeois democracy, and still do essentially all the tasks entrusted to them in the times of economic and political crisis, by the big bourgeoisie? What are the objective factors which allowed for this change? We will come to the subjective factors in the next subhead. Here we will focus on the above-mentioned objective factors.

The nature of the bourgeois democratic *form/shell* of the capitalist state has undergone some profound changes in the neoliberal phase. We have already discussed some of the fundamental elements of the political economy and the mode of regulation of capitalism in the neoliberal phase of the imperialist stage, which involved systematic attack on labour rights and trade unions, privatization of the state sector as well as the so-called 'commons', the deregulation of the financial markets, the emergence of post-Fordism characterized in the informalization, casualization and contractualization of labour and disintegration of the integrated Fordist assembly line, shrinking democratic and civil liberties, increasing tax burden on the working people and the middle classes to benefit the big capital, deregulation for 'ease of doing business', etc. It is precisely these policies which have been collectively termed as the neoliberal policies of privatization. liberalization and globalization. In congruence with these policies the bourgeois state, too, must undergo certain qualitative changes.

In general, we can define these changes as increasing shift of power from the legislative to the executive, increasing weight of the non-elected authorities within the executive in the process of decision-making, overall increase in the control of the state on all aspects of social and political life, etc. Collectively, these changes result in the decline or decay of the democratic content of the bourgeois parliamentary system. Thus, the particular state-form, the bourgeois democratic form, becomes increasingly bereft of its democratic content to the extent that most of the democratic freedoms and rights become merely formal. Most of the bourgeois parties lose their

representational ties, become more-or-less direct instruments or levers of the economic interests of the capitalist class and interact with the capitalist state in the neoliberal phase, in this very function. In other words, the bourgeois democratic content of the bourgeois democratic state-form becomes so fragile, shallow and empty, that the fascist forces do not need to abolish it completely, as it has more costs than benefits. Instead, they take-over this capitalist state of the neoliberal phase from within, through infiltration into, especially, the institutions of the executive, like the bureaucracy, the police, the army, election commission, enforcement directorate, central bureau of investigation, etc. as well as the judiciary. As far as the governmental power is concerned, with the above changes, they are always at the vantage-point to win it, through elections, which are at least partially rigged, through institutions like the Election Commission, etc. and, through the collusion of the bureaucratic bodies, the police, etc., which have already been taken over from within by the fascist forces.

It is true that there are certain contradictions which emerge with the retention of the form/shell of bourgeois democracy. One such contradiction is that the fascists might go out of the governmental power, in periods of unprecedented mass economic discontent, or some other contingent event leading to political disgruntlement. In such less frequent cases, the fascists continue to hold on to and consolidate their entrenched positions within the state as well as the society and in the general conditions of economic crisis, they necessarily capture the governmental power again, too, as any interregnum of a centrist, right-centrist, or left-centrist bourgeois government only prepares the ground for renewed offensive by fascist forces. Thus, with repeated *paroxysms*, the fascists return to governmental power again and again with increased ferocity, and with more consolidated positions within the state and the society. This is precisely what we have been witnessing at least since 1998 itself in India, if we look at things in the *longue durée.* The other contradiction which comes with this change is that the fascization of the state is never complete and it generally does not assume the

form of a cataclysmic event. On the contrary, the fascist state project, or the fascization of the state, assumes the form of a *perpetually ongoing project* which alludes to its contradictory nature as a complex dialectic.

Now let us consider the studies of certain Marxist scholars who have attempted to understand the changes in the nature of bourgeois democratic state-form in the neoliberal phase. It goes without saying that we might not agree with different elements of the overall analyses of these scholars, or their political prescriptions, which often smack of liberalism or "leftism". However, as Marxist political scientists, these scholars have captured some very pertinent elements of the capitalist state in the neoliberal phase. We shall start with Nicos Poulantzas who was among the first Marxist scholars, who identified these changes in the capitalist state after the Second World War in general, and after the beginning of the neoliberalism in the 1970s, in particular.

It is noteworthy that the betrayal of the revisionists first in the USSR and then in China, the sins of the social imperialism, the collapse of the socialist experiments in Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and then in China, had led various Marxists to pathological reaction and/or pessimism about the future of proletarian revolutions. Some of them deviated from Marxism itself and went into the camp of postmodernism, post-colonial theory or so-called 'post-Marxism'; there were others who remained within the camp of Marxism, but sought to consider about some 'democratic path' to socialism, or some other 'new way' to socialism, etc. Towards the end of his life Poulantzas, too, committed this mistake. However, his analysis of the changes in the very nature of capitalist state in the neoliberal phase in his last work *State, Power, Socialism* provides us with some brilliant and prophetic insights. That is why, we have chosen Poulantzas to begin this discussion on the Marxists who were able to see these changes since the 1970s itself.

We wrote about these changes in the bourgeois democratic form of the capitalist state in the neoliberal phase for the first time in 2009

and continued to develop these ideas after the 2014 electoral victory of Narendra Modi, his re-election in 2019 and afterwards. By 2016 the main elements of our understanding had congealed fairly well, though certain aspects and dimensions of it have continued to develop till this day. After our position on fascism in the Twenty-first century had assumed a relatively more complete form, with its foundations firmly consolidated, we read the last work of Poulantzas: *State, Power, Socialism.*

Despite several serious weaknesses, especially in terms of its political prescriptions which clearly drift towards liberalism and reformism, and which stemmed in some way from the logical culmination of the Althusserian Marxism of Poulantzas itself and his shift to left-Eurocommunism towards the last years of his life, besides the pathology of the European left that emerged due to the failure of socialist experiment in the Soviet Union and the subsequent misdeeds of social-imperialism; Poulantzas makes certain accurate observations, though in undeveloped form and in the form of allusions, which revealed the changes in the bourgeois democratic form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in the phase of neoliberalism. This particular aspect of Poulantzas' analysis in *State, Power, Socialism* continues to be relevant for Marxists even today. These are precisely the elements which had been undergoing development in Poulantzas' work since his classics *Political Power and Social Classes and Fascism and Dictatorship*. His last work *State, Power, Socialism* was published when a half decade of neoliberal policies in Europe and America had already lapsed. However, in the short period itself, many of the new elements of the bourgeois democratic form of the capitalist state in the phase of neoliberalism had manifested themselves. Poulantzas was one of the first Marxists to mark these changes.

Poulantzas argued that capitalism is in a long-term crisis now and this also creates a new political situation. In this new political situation, the power within the bourgeois state-apparatus would shift increasingly to the executive from the legislative, from elected representative bodies to non-elected non-representative state-

apparatuses. While the form of bourgeois parliamentary democracy would be retained, it would become increasingly empty, and this brings several qualitative changes in the way in which fascism and other exceptional forms would emerge. Needless to say, the process would not be completely gradual, but the ruptures inherent in the process would assume novel forms. This was the last work of Poulantzas. Let us hear from Poulantzas himself, what he has to say regarding the profound changes in the nature of the bourgeois state as well as its forms in the phase of neoliberalism.

Poulantzas points out:

> "In western capitalist societies, the State is undergoing considerable modification. A new form of State is currently being imposed - we would have to be blind not to notice (and passion always blinds, even if it springs from the noblest motives). For want of a better term, I shall refer to this state form as *authoritarian statism.* This will perhaps indicate the general direction of change: *namely, intensified state control over every sphere of socio-economic life combined with radical decline of the institutions of political democracy and with draconian and multiform curtailment of so-called 'formal liberties, whose reality is being discovered now that they are going overboard.* Although some of these changes have been operating for a long time, the present-day State marks a veritable turn in relation to previous state forms."[14] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas opines that these changes are taking place due to the changes in the *modus operandi* of world capitalism in the present (neoliberal) phase of imperialism:

"More fundamentally, therefore, authoritarian statism is bound up with the periodization of capitalism *into distinct stages and phases. It seems to correspond to the current phase of imperialism and monopoly capitalism* in the dominant countries, in the way that the liberal State referred to the competitive stage of capitalism and the various forins of interventionist State to the previous phases of

monopoly capitalism. *Authoritarian statism is thus dependent upon those structural modifications in the relations of production and the processes and social division of labour which characterize the present phase at both the world and national levels"*[15] *(emphasis ours)*

What is the essence of this new phase of imperialist stage and how is it related to the new emerging political situation? Poulantzas refers to the current phase of world capitalism and elaborates:

> "*The whole of the current phase is permanently and structurally characterized by a peculiar sharpening of the generic elements of political crisis and state crisis - a sharpening which is itself articulated to the economic crisis of capitalism.* Authoritarian statism appears also as the result of, and as a response to, the sharpening of these elements of crisis. But in certain European countries, we are witnessing a real political crisis which finds expression, moreover, in a crisis of the State"[16] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas is very careful in pointing out that this authoritarian state is *still not an exceptional state-form* like fascism, but a new reality of the present phase of capitalism in which the bourgeois democratic *form* is retained, whereas the *content* is in perpetual decay:

> "Thus, the emergence of authoritarian statism cannot be identified either with a new fascist order or with a tendency towards fascism. The present-day State is neither the new form of a genuine exceptional State nor, *in itself*, a transitional form on the road to such a State*: it rather represents the new 'democratic' form of the bourgeois republic in the current phase of capitalism. If I may dare say so, it is both better (in maintaining a certain democratic reality) and worse (in that it is not merely the fruit of a conjuncture which need only be reversed for shrunken liberties to be restored).*"[17] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas immediately reminds us that he is not implicating that in this stage exceptional states cannot emerge:

> “I am by no means arguing that the possibility of an exceptional State is henceforth excluded in Europe - *whether in the shape of fascism or in that of military dictatorship or a strong-arm neo-Bonapartism*.”[18] (emphasis ours)

Here Poulantzas' comments need to be understood in the historical context in which they were made. It is the late-1970s. Many countries were still colonies, semi-colonies or neo-colonies. However, today these observations have *a universal applicability to the bourgeois state in all capitalist countries*, and not only to those of Europe. Even at that time, they perfectly applied to the US, too. However, Poulantzas refers only to Europe as it was his particular area of research.

Then Poulantzas alludes to the persistent and protracted nature of the present crisis, the resultant changes in the state-form of bourgeois democracy (rise of authoritarian state and decay of the democratic potentialities of the bourgeois democratic form) and the fact that in the new conjuncture, the rise of fascism would not assume the old form:

> “The present-day State exhibits a certain peculiarity which we should now note. In a phase when the generic elements of crisis undergo structural intensification, even corresponding in some countries to a real political or state crisis, fascistic elements or tendencies appear in the democratic form of State to a much more marked degree than previously. Authoritarian statism also involves the establishment of an entire institutional structure serving to prevent a rise in popular struggles and the dangers which that holds for class hegemony. This veritable arsenal, which is not simply of a legal-constitutional character, does not always come to the fore in the exercise of power: it is revealed to the mass of the population (that is, to all except certain 'anti-social' elements) above all through sudden jolts to its functioning. *Hidden under a bushel, this arsenal is still in the*

republic's reserve-stock, ready to be unleashed in a fascist-type enterprise. Probably for the first time in the history of democratic States, the present form not only contains scattered elements of totalitarianism, but crystallizes their organic disposition in a permanent structure running parallel to the official State. Indeed, this duplication of the State seems to be a structural feature of authoritarian statism, *involving not a watertight dissociation between the official State and the structure in question, but their functional overlapping and constant symbiosis.* ***As a result, any fascist-type process that may be unleashed will undoubtedly not take the form that it did in the past*****."**[19] (emphasis ours)

This is a very important observation of Poulantzas. The point that in the period of neoliberalism, and as a result of the consequent changes in the bourgeois democratic state-form, the exceptional regimes like fascism will not emerge in the same process in which they emerged in the early-Twentieth century, is an essential point if we hope to understand the present incarnations of fascism. The new forms which fascist rise will assume, would consist in the internal take-over of the state and infiltration into the state-apparatus from within, rather than 'outside' infiltration, as happened in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Poulantzas argues further:

> "*Unlike the previous experiences of fascism, however, such a process would involve not so much outside infiltration or investment of the state-apparatus* as a break within the State following lines that have already been traced in its present configuration."[20] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas alludes to the reason for this change:

> "In a parallel process, the sharpening of contradictions within the dominant classes has also become *a permanent, structural feature of the current phase*. This is true of contradictions between monopoly and non-monopoly capital stemming from the present forms and rhythms of the concentration of capital and from the transformations which these induce in the

> relations of production; and it is also true of the contradictions that have grown within monopoly capital itself. All these contradictions are becoming intensified in the context of economic crisis and can only be fully grasped if we take into account the present conditions of the internationalization of capital... Taken as a whole, these factors define a structural characteristic of the present phase: namely, *the hidden but permanent instability of the bourgeoisie's hegemony in the dominant countries*."[21] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas correctly points out that neoliberal onslaught is basically a reactionary response to the crisis of profitability which struck capitalism in a shattering way after its long boom towards the end of the 1960s. However, this reactionary response to crisis did not resolve the crisis but only exacerbated it. He points out:

> "The paradox lies in the fact that authoritarian statism is not simply the means with which the State equips itself to tackle the crisis, but the response to a crisis which it itself helps to produce. This role of the State proves to be at once the accelerator of the generic elements of political crisis and the generating force of that crisis itself. *The counter-tendencies to the falling rate of profit, which are brought into play by the State in order to avoid crises, become factors of a crisis that, for this very reason, goes beyond a straightforward economic crisis*."[22] (emphasis ours)

Subsequently, Poulantzas points to central and essential element that characterizes the changes in the political situation in the general conditions of the economic crisis, namely, the decline of the democratic potential of the form of bourgeois democracy, with the rise of authoritarian statism in the neoliberal phase. Poulantzas reminds us that these changes have not appeared as something contingent. They had been underway since the beginning of the imperialist stage itself. However, they have assumed qualitatively new forms in the phase of neoliberalism. Poulantzas opines:

> “*The decline of parliament, the strengthening of the Executive, the political role currently assumed by the state administration - these now constitute the leitmotiv of political studies.* But while they are the most evident features of change in the State, they are also the most difficult to grasp in their real dimensions.
> "Now, these changes have marked the State since the end of competitive capitalism and the beginnings of monopoly capitalism. Of course, just as the State's economic role under the latter should not make us think that the liberal State of competitive capitalism did not intervene in the economy, so the strengthening of the Executive does not imply that the liberal State rested on an all-powerful parliament and the virtual absence of an Executive. Varying from country to country, the state-bureaucracy-administration has always occupied an important place in the organization and functioning of the bourgeois State. The fact remains, however, that the strengthening of executive power has been under way since the emergence of monopoly capitalism, thereby marking the passage from the liberal to the interventionist State. *Moreover, the phenomenon has now assumed quite novel forms, which to an uneven degree affect the developed capitalist countries as a whole.”*[23] (emphasis ours)

The role of parliament (the legislative) becomes increasingly formal whereas the executive becomes all powerful:

> “...because the phenomenon is much more general: the decline of parliament and the strengthening of the *Executive are intimately related to the growing economic role of the State.*”[24] (emphasis ours)

Through the example of legislations, Poulantzas shows how the process of decay of the bourgeois democratic content of the parliamentary form and autocratization have progressed in the current phase of neoliberalism:

> “Thus, the relative distinction between legislative and executive power is becoming less sharp: through a process correlative

with changes in the nature of such regulation, the power to fix norms and enact rules is shifting towards the Executive and the state administration. That legitimacy embodied by parliament which had as its frame of reference a universal rationality is gradually passing over into a legitimacy characterized by the instrumental rationality of efficiency and embodied by the Executive-administration. *Indeed, the general and universal laws still enacted by parliament -which are, at bottom, merely framework-laws are applied only after the Executive has passed them through a process of concretization and particularization. This is the stage of decrees, judicial interpretation and civil service adjustment, without which the norms enacted by parliament do not enter into the practice of the law. It is by now quite widely known that this allows parliamentary decisions to be not only obstructed but actually distorted.*"[25] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas argues further that the changes in the relations between the legislative and executive have profound implications for the nature and functioning of the bourgeois multi-party representative democracy, that is, this particular state-form:

> "Today, however, the Executive and the administration monopolize the role of organizing and directing the State with regard to the power bloc as a whole: *that is to say, they elaborate the bloc's long-term political interests and ensure the reproduction of its hegemony.* They therefore concentrate the role of legitimizing the State in the eyes of the dominated classes. As a result, the place of the parties of power not only declines but undergoes complete transformation. *This change has important effects on the entire state structure, involving representative democracy in a radically new mode of political functioning."*[26] (emphasis ours)

Summarizing this particular point, Poulantzas writes:

“Real power is thus rapidly being concentrated in tighter and tighter structures, tending to move towards the pole of the governmental and administrative summits. Always of a more or less fictitious nature, the already greatly reduced separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers in the bourgeois State is itself subject to final elimination. This process is displacing the limited distribution of power among various centres that used to characterize the configuration of the State. In the same way, the political centralism of the state-apparatus is continually being strengthened.”[27]

Poulantzas then moves on to the question of changes in the very nature of various bourgeois parties, their relation with the masses on the one hand, and their relation with the state-apparatus, on the other. If we look at these changes alluded by Poulantzas, we can understand why it is possible today for exceptional regimes, like fascism, Bonapartism or a military regime, to avoid formally suppressing various bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties. Poulantzas writes:

> “Transformation of the parties of power, transformation of their personnel from class representatives acting in the summits of the State to state representatives and plenipotentiaries (or even *missi dominici*) among social classes, transformation of the same kind in the role of parliament and of deputies - *all these developments involve an important shift away from representative democracy towards authoritarian statism...* In *however limited a way*, and of course in combination with direct popular struggle, the representative party system was always an essential mechanism whereby citizens exerted *some control* over state activity and ensured a *certain* maintenance of democratic liberties. Within the modern State, extension or curtailment, retention or suppression of political freedoms was always a direct function of the existence and role of parties. *Fascism, military dictatorship and Bonapartism have suppressed not only working-class or revolutionary parties, but all the traditional democratic parties, including bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ones. They have done so because these*

> *parties, while discharging class functions, expressed the presence of certain popular demands of which they had to take account.* The maintenance of representative democracy and democratic liberties is strictly correlated not just with plurality of parties, but also with parties functioning in an organic manner and at a certain distance from the State's central administrative apparatus. It is the present subversion of this mode of functioning - often disguised by a continuing plurality of parties which determines the curtailment of democratic liberties under authoritarian statism...
>
> *Authoritarian statism hardly leaves parties with any choice: either they must subordinate themselves to the administration, or else they must give up all access to it*. Citizens are obliged to face the administration head-on, and it is not surprising that, beyond their participation in elections, they are generally disaffected with parties that are supposed to represent them in the state administration. We know only too well that, besides the considerable restriction of democratic liberties already incurred, this situation lays the ground for a possible evolution of power towards Bonapartism."[28] (emphasis ours)

These are certain tendencies within the bourgeois democratic state-form in the neoliberal phase, some of which can be found in one case, while others can be found in another. The point is to understand that precisely due to these tendencies, if and when fascists rise to power in present neoliberal phase, it is not necessary for them to either abolish the form of representative multi-party parliamentary bourgeois democracy or formally suppress the various political parties of the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie. The reason is that the form of the bourgeois democracy as well as the bourgeoisie as a political class have become increasingly bereft of their democratic potential and content in the neoliberal phase, because the policies of neoliberalism cannot but accompany such changes in the bourgeois democratic state-form, that is, its authoritarian turn.

The observations of Poulantzas are very original, though under-developed. The reason is obvious: Poulantzas was trying to theorize about changes which were still unfolding. These changes in the nature of the particular form of bourgeois state were still in their initial stages. One has to give credit to Poulantzas for at least identifying these initial trends in a highly original manner. One does not have to agree with every point that Poulantzas makes in *State, Power, Socialism*, nor has one to agree to the thoroughly incorrect political prescription that he proposes. These observations of Poulantzas hold relevance in any case.

Finally, Poulantzas points to a development which is remarkable in the study of present fascism. He points out that the concentration and centralization of power in the executive runs against certain limits repeatedly, because while retaining the form/shell of bourgeois democracy, the executive cannot directly fulfil all the functions required to sustain the fragile political hegemony of the ruling class. The role of, what Poulantzas calls, the *dominant mass party* becomes important here. Poulantzas points out that on the one hand, the functionaries in bureaucracy gravitate towards this party and on the other, the party itself infiltrates into the state-apparatus. Poulantzas is not directly talking about a fascist party here but making a general point. However, when we read his observations, at least some of them apply to fascists today and the way they infiltrate into the state-apparatus. Poulantzas argues:

> “It can play its role only by being directly present (as a state party) at the heart of the administration. But this presence is not the main factor in politicizing the administration: it is rather the effect of the political role that has now devolved upon the state administration an effect which, in turn, extends the scope of such politicization. Charged with the role of organizing hegemony and directly confronted with socioeconomic interests that it must itself handle politically, the state administration is less and less successful in maintaining the fictitious distinction between administrative and political decisions. Of course, it was never neutral in any real sense; but it is now being openly

> and massively politicized as the decision-making centres become lodged in its own circuits*. In a parallel course, the dominant party lays siege to the upper reaches of the administration: it pushes its pawns forward, monopolizes the command-posts for its members or sympathizers, expels or neutralizes persistent offenders by shunting them into side-tracks, breaks the* traditional civil- service hierarchy, and bends state institutions in order to create the best conditions for action."[29] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas explains further:

> "It is a two-way trajectory: *given the direct politicization of the administration, civil servants gravitate towards the dominant party just as much as the party propels its trusted men into the administration. Now inscribed in the materiality of institutions is a veritable symbiosis of the state-apparatus and the dominant party*."[30] (emphasis ours)

These are extremely pertinent pointers or allusions to what was to come. Of course, Poulantzas is referring to *a generic and general possibility* in the era of authoritarian state and is not talking in particular about a fascist party, and he could not have talked in such particular sense, because that would have been engaging in pure speculation; still, these observations hold immense importance for analyzing the internal take-over of the state-apparatus by the fascists.

It is noteworthy that Poulantzas died in 1979. This book was published in 1978. He had not seen the rise of fascism to power in the neoliberal phase of the imperialist stage, as yet. However, the changes in the *modus operandi* of the bourgeois state, the changes in the nature of bourgeoisie as a political class and therefore the nature of the bourgeois political parties themselves, the necessity and possibility of the emergence of a dominant mass party, which infiltrates the state-apparatus to sustain the political hegemony of the bourgeoisie in the conditions of the rise of the authoritarian state are keenly observed by Poulantzas. Of course, he could not have

predicted the particular forms that this process would assume. However, in terms of the essential character of the overall process, he makes some very important observations. The conclusions that he draws from these observations *vis-à-vis* a new way to socialism, the 'democratic socialism', reeks of the basest kind of reformism characteristic of that. However, as a researcher of the bourgeois state and state-forms Eurocommunism and no revolutionary communist can agree with that. However, as a researcher of the bourgeois state and state-forms, Poulantzas certainly makes sense on certain important points.

Poulantzas also points out that the above factor of dominant mass party does not formally abolish the multi-party system:

> “Of course, as I said earlier, present-day authoritarian statism is not a disguised form of totalitarianism, similar to regimes with a one-party system in the strict sense of the term.”[31]

Summarizing the changes in the form of bourgeois democracy with the autocratization of the state-apparatus in the neoliberal phase, Poulantzas writes:

> “At any rate, we should be quite clear that *authoritarian statism corresponds to important changes in democracy*. These transformations may be summarized as follows: greater exclusion of the masses from the centres of political decision-making; widening of the distance between citizens and the state-apparatus, just when the State is invading the life of society as a whole; an unprecedented degree of state centralism; increased attempts to regiment the masses through 'participation' schemes; in essence, therefore, a sharpening of the authoritarian character of political mechanisms.”[32] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas reminds repeatedly that the authoritarian state of the neoliberal phase itself is not yet fascism:

> “Authoritarian statism is thus distinct from totalitarianism and cannot be regarded as a new type of fascism or as a process of

> creeping fascism. *Nevertheless, it is unlike the previous democratic forms of State. It does not merely carry the seeds or certain scattered elements of fascism, but crystallizes their organic arrangement in a permanent structure running parallel to the official State*."[33] (emphasis ours)

We have quoted Poulantzas' last work in such a detailed fashion for the reasons that must already be clear and apparent to the readers. These are some of the pertinent observations regarding the significant changes in the form of bourgeois representative democracy that Poulantzas made in 1978, that is, the first phase of the neoliberal offensive. Many of these elements have become much more pronounced today and many of the tendencies identified by Poulantzas have developed further and assumed myriad forms. Despite the fact that Poulantzas' political prescriptions during this time (that of "democratic socialism") smack of his desperation, pessimism and pathological response to what had happened in the Soviet Union and what was happening in China, besides his Althusserianism, any serious Marxist would take note of these observations, as Poulantzas was not alone in making these observations. However, his unfinished, vague and scattered observations pertaining to the authoritarian state in the neoliberal phase allude to a new-emerging reality of the capitalist state in the neoliberal phase.

What is this new reality? *This new reality refers to the perpetual emptying of the bourgeois democratic content of a particular form of the bourgeois state, namely, multi-party, parliamentary, representative bourgeois democracy. Precisely due to the very form becoming increasingly bereft of most of the substance, the need to abandon or abolish it becomes superfluous*. As a consequence, as Poulantzas points out, in the process of the rise of fascism (as well as other forms of exceptional state), there will still be some elements of rupture, but this rise will assume qualitatively new and different forms since the beginning of the neoliberal phase and the rise of what he calls 'the authoritarian state'.

Here a caveat is necessary. Poulantzas has used the term 'totalitarianism and 'totalitarian state. However, his meaning and usage has nothing to do with anti-communist Arendtian usage of the term. Even in terms of nuances of political analysis, Poulantzas distances himself from all non-class Arendtian notions of totalitarianism in his earlier work *Fascism and Dictatorship* itself. In his last work, he never refers to Arendt, whatever be his own bourgeois democratic and reformist illusions stemming from his shift to left-Eurocommunism, which he had developed by the time of his last work.

Poulantzas in his original work on fascism itself, had pointed, rather inadvertently, to something which anticipated his later analysis of new forms of fascism. Poulantzas points to a certain stage in the rise of fascism where the parliamentary form is retained, while the nature of relationship between the executive and legislative undergoes qualitative changes and the role of bourgeois parties, too, undergoes changes. The only thing that Poulantzas could not see in his earlier work (which is quite natural) is that fascism does not have the necessity to move to the stage of formal abolition of the bourgeois parliamentary form in the phase of neoliberalism. In his later work, that we have already quoted, he was beginning to realize this. However, the following excerpt from the earlier work *Fascism and Dictatorship*, reveals that there is a continuity in his thought process:

> “To come back to the question of the breaking of representational ties, it was a progressive break, firstly affecting the relation of 'representation'*. With the beginning of the rise of fascism, while the 'parliamentary democratic' form of State apparently remains intact,* the relations between the ruling classes and class fractions on the one hand, and the State-apparatus on the other, are no longer mainly established through the medium of these political parties, but increasingly directly.”[34] (emphasis ours)

One of the implications of the above, Poulantzas argues further, is this:

> “A new growth in the role of the State-apparatus itself (i.e. the army, the police, the courts, the administration) to some extent *short-circuiting the role of formal government, characteristically reversing the established juridical order, displacing the real power from the forum of the parties, now mere cliques (i.e. from Parliament) to the State machinery proper.*
> In short, by analogy with the situation of 'dual power' which specifies the revolutionary situation, we may call what we see here a characteristic which specifies *the distortion between formal' power and 'real' power political crisis.”*[35] (emphasis ours)

In the same work, Poulantzas had already pointed to the general theoretical foundations of determining what form a particular type of bourgeois state (normal or exceptional) would assume*. It is not given, but historically determined. It is not necessary for an exceptional bourgeois state (Bonapartist or fascist or even military rule) to formally abandon the form of bourgeois parliamentary system. Whether an exceptional state would abandon the parliamentary form or not, depends on the general relationships of the repressive state-apparatus and ideological state-apparatus, relationship among the various branches of the repressive as well as ideological state-apparatuses, the particular conjuncture of class struggle, the relationship between the executive and the legislative, etc. Here, Poulantzas points to* ***the distinction between the conjunctural and contingent elements on the one hand and the systemic and structural elements on the other*****.**

Poulantzas, in his earlier work on fascism itself, had pointed out that fascism need not take the same forms today, as the forms it will assume will depend on the particular phase of the capitalist mode of production, resultant changes in the form and the nature of the bourgeois state, and the internal changes in the bourgeois state-apparatus. Poulantzas pointed out:

> “It is possible for fascism itself to recur*, but of course it would not necessarily arise or come to power in the same forms as in*

the past. History never repeats itself exactly. A given form of exceptional regime and a given type of political crisis have different features according to the historical periods in which they appear."[36] (emphasis ours)

There are elements in the rise of any political phenomenon which are conjuctural and contingent, which are determined by the particular historical context and political situation. Then, there are general systemic and structural elements which are immanent and intrinsic to the very content of that political phenomenon. This does not change and they represent the general systemic elements, which, indeed, can assume and do assume a variety of particular historical forms in the different stages and phases of the capitalist mode of production, because these are determined by the particular political conjuncture of the historical moment in question. Poulantzas argues:

> "Before embarking on the concrete examination of the fascist State, a few words are required about *the relevant criteria which specify it as a form of State and a form of regime... I would simply point out that the factors for differentiating forms of the capitalist State are: (a) the relationship of the economic, the political and ideology at a given stage of the capitalist mode of production; (b) the general characteristics of the class struggle in the corresponding period of capitalist formations: in this instance, the general features of political crisis, leading to the exceptional State*. The factors in differentiating the forms of regime are the concrete methods of political class struggle in a determinate conjuncture: in this instance, the specific political crisis to which fascism corresponds.
>
> In the framework of a capitalist State, these factors are expressed according to a rigorously governed set of criteria. For the form of State these are:
>
> 1. The *forms and modalities of State intervention in the economic and in social relations in general,* and the forms and modalities of the relative autonomy of the State from the dominant classes.

2. The role, forms and inter-relationship of the State-apparatus proper and the ideological State-apparatuses, corresponding to modifications in the law, which is precisely what governs them.
3. The general relationship of the branches of the repressive State-apparatus itself, corresponding, for the capitalist State*, to the general relationship between executive and legislative.*
4. The general relationship between the ideological State-apparatuses."[37](emphasis ours)

Let us understand what Poulantzas is arguing here.

In the above excerpt, the first point refers *to the particular mode of regulation* and *regime of accumulation,* if we may borrow purely terminologically from the French Regulation School. Neoliberalism refers to a particular regime of accumulation characterized by deregulation of labour and financial markets, privatization of the state sector and the so-called 'commons, attack on the democratic rights of the labour, busting of unions and other working-class organizations, and globalization of capital to new limits. The changes in the nature and form of the bourgeois state in the neoliberal phase stem precisely from this new regime of accumulation. *Neoliberal capitalist state stems from a new mode of regulation characterized by directly authoritarian and interventionist role of the state (those who see neoliberalism as the 'retreat of state' suffer from political blindness) on the behalf of big capital in particular and capital in general, which expresses itself in new forms of legality, formulation and implementation of policy, and dealing with the mass resistance.*

The second point of Poulantzas refers to the new ways of *constructing the bourgeois hegemony through direct plebiscitary model through new methods; today the mass media plays a dominant role in unprecedented ways, scale and forms for the fulfilment of this task*. We have quoted the later work of Poulantzas where he has directly pointed to this element of novelty in the ideological state-apparatus and Bob Jessop has clearly pointed out the role of mass media in this phase, as we shall see. The same holds true for the case of law.

The third point refers to, what we have discussed above in detail, namely, the change in the relationship of the executive and legislative, that is, a change in the relative weight of different parts of the state-apparatus according to the needs of collectivization of bourgeois class interests. Finally, the role of different branches of the ISAs are referred to in the fourth point, namely, family, school, religion, law, media, through which the subject is interpellated.

Can we say that nothing has changed vis-à-vis these elements or aspects in the phase of neoliberalism? Of course, not. Even a politically-blind novice groping in the dark, cannot say something like that. Moreover, the changes have been qualitative. Due to these changes, the very forms of different types of bourgeois state have undergone a profound change. With the perpetual decay of the democratic potential of the form of bourgeois parliamentary democracy and the bourgeoise as a political class, the exceptional types of the bourgeois state have been, as it were, liberated from the compulsion of abandoning *the form* of bourgeoise parliamentary democracy and this has made the rise of fascism and other exceptional types of bourgeois state even more hegemonic. There is no *essential anti-thesis* between the various types of the exceptional state which represent, just like the bourgeois liberal democracy, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and, the form of bourgeois democracy, that is, a multi-party parliamentary system. Poulantzas makes this point clear:

> “But again, distinctions have to be made, especially in the case of the fascist State, because the prevailing line of analysis sees the fascist State (or the 'totalitarian State') as the antithesis of the 'liberal State'. This is quite incorrect, *as the liberal State is only a State form* corresponding to the stage of competitive capitalism.”[38] (emphasis ours)

As the competitive stage of capitalism comes to an end, the imperialist stage passes through various phases, where the various forms of the bourgeois state themselves undergo changes. The present phase is the neoliberal phase, where the very form of

bourgeois multi-party representative democracy increasingly becomes an empty container, which can be used by various exceptional bourgeois states, too. The history of the contemporary world, especially since the last quarter of the Twentieth century, bears witness to this fact. Poulantzas already recognized this fact with the emergence of what he calls 'the authoritarian state' especially since the late-1960s. However, when he was writing *Fascism and Dictatorship*, he had not yet formulated many of the concepts that he formulated later with his notion of the 'authoritarian state'. Poulantzas wrote in *Fascism and Dictatorship*:

> “The liberal and interventionist State forms are also different in this respect: the executive prevails over the legislative in the interventionist State, 'parliamentary democracy' declines in importance, and so on. Going beyond the juridical level, the differences in the relationship between the 'executive' and the 'legislative' essentially coincide with modifications in the functioning of the political parties, within an overall modification of the functioning of the ideological State-apparatuses. There are resulting modifications in the means of representation, because of the difficulties monopoly capitalism experiences in organizing its hegemony in Parliament; for example, corporatist forms may spring up. The fascist State therefore has points in common with the interventionist State, since they originate in the same stage.”[39]

In the context of the experience of historical fascism in Italy, too, Poulantzas makes certain observations which are pertinent. Poulantzas points out:

> “The relevant criteria for distinguishing between *forms of exceptional regime* show the identical nature of the two cases, though the Italian fascist regime *kept up a façade of constitutionality,* because of the particular compromises it had to resort to. The king in principle still had the power to dismiss and nominate the Prime Minister (Mussolini); parliament was 'elected' on a single slate drawn up by the fascist Grand

> Council on the nomination of the various corporate bodies, *though it had only a decorative function*; alongside it was the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, nominated by the fascist leadership; the Senate, appointed by the king, continued to exist, as did the State Council and the Court of Appeal. This was clearly only a façade, though it helped give Mussolini real standing in the eyes of some heroes of 'Western freedom': first among them, of course, being Churchill, the future executioner of Greece."[40]

These are some of the allusions and pointers that Poulantzas presents in his works. We can see the evolution of his views from *Political Power and Social Classes*, through *Fascism and Dictatorship*, to *State, Power, Socialism*. There are various elements in his analysis which betray the Althusserian *ideologism* and *politicism*. However, Poulantzas has been able to capture several important elements in the changes in the nature of the capitalist state after the Second World War. We consider it beneficial for Marxist-Leninists today to take cue from this analysis and develop its correct Marxist elements further in the light of *actual historical experience* of the rise of fascism in *our times*. Poulantzas did what he could when he made these allusions. However, the world is not standing in the same conjuncture. The political situation in different countries and internationally, in general, has drastically changed.

Methodologically, the elements of the later analysis of Poulantzas as evident in *State, Power, Socialism* were present in his early classic work, too, that is, *Political Power and Social Classes*. In this work itself, Poulantzas makes some pertinent points about various exceptional bourgeois state-forms. He also points out that the relation between the exceptional regimes and the particular state-forms that they involve is not a given, but depends upon the specific relationships between the various component parts of the state-apparatus. It would be useful to cast a cursory glance on these allusions made by Poulantzas.

Poulantzas argues that the capitalist state:

> “takes charge, as it were, of the bourgeoisie's political interests and realizes the function of political hegemony which the bourgeoisie is unable to achieve. But in order to do this, the capitalist state *assumes a relative autonomy with regard to the bourgeoisie. This is why Marx's analyses of Bonapartism as a capitalist type of state are so significant. For this relative autonomy allows the state to intervene not only in order to arrange compromises vis-à-vis the dominated classes, which in the long turn, are useful for the actual economic interests of the dominant classes or fractions, but also (depending on the concrete conjuncture) to intervene against the long term interests of one or other fraction of the dominant class: for such compromises and sacrifices are sometimes necessary for the realization of their political class interests*.”[41] (emphasis ours)

For Poulantzas, Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* is discussing inherent structural tendency of the capitalist state to acquire relative autonomy in order to be able to efficiently organize the interests of the ruling class. Bob Jessop points out that what is exceptional are the circumstances under which the autonomy comes into existence and not the autonomy itself.[42]

Just because the way in which Bonapartism did this in the Nineteenth century, *by formally dismantling the bourgeois democracy*, does not directly imply that even today Bonapartism will do exactly the same and exist precisely in that mode, in which it existed in the Nineteenth century. Poulantzas is careful enough to point out that the *archetypal* forms in which the exceptional state of the bourgeoisie came into existence in history must not lead us to believe or assume that it would take exactly the same archetypal forms in the future. Putin's bourgeois neo-Bonapartist rule is a testimony to this fact, among others.

Further, Poulantzas discusses the functions of legislative and executive and their mutual relations which determine the form of the state and the conditions in which they are retained or abandoned in the situations of crises. Here Poulantzas points out that the relation

between the two is essential to comprehend in order to properly understand the particularities of various forms of state and their relative autonomy. Poulantzas writes:

> "This relation between the legislative and the executive provides us with an excellent example for the concrete analysis of the problem *of forms of state and the degrees of unity and relative autonomy characterizing each form.* In the light of the preceding analyses, this will help us to establish *the exact relevance of the criterion of legislative/executive relations for distinguishing between forms of state*."[43] (emphasis ours)

Thus, the very particularity and the very nature of *various forms of the state* are determined by the relationship between the executive and the legislative, as well as relationship among the other components of the state-apparatus. He points out further:

> "Apart from its political significance in the relations of class power, and *leaving aside its constitutional-juridical expression* which is most often an ideological product, this legislative/executive distinction covers several heterogeneous factors. *First of all, it covers factors of a technical order which concern the functioning of the state, in so far as the executive, in the broad sense of the term, encompasses in particular what has been called the state-apparatus, i.e., the bureaucracy, administration, police, army. Its functioning within the capitalist state cannot be absorbed into the functions peculiar to the directly elective assemblies, i.e. the representatives in the strict sense. As a result, the distinction between these powers and the dominance of one of them over the other undoubtedly cover differential forms of the articulation of the economic and the political and indeed of the intervention/non-intervention of one in the other:* for example, a predominance of the executive often implies a specific intervention of the political in the economic."[44] (emphasis ours)

Further:

> “The distinction between the forms of state is, of course, related to variations of the articulation of the economic and the political within the limits set by the dominance of the CMP in the periodization into phases of a capitalist formation: it concerns a whole series of transformations of state functions, of displacements of dominance between these functions, of differentiations of forms of the intervention of the political in the economic and of the economic in the political.”[45] (emphasis ours)

What is Poulantzas pointing to here? He is arguing that within the state-apparatus, the relation between the legislative and executive vary according to the economic condition and political situation in which the capitalist social formation finds itself. In certain political situations, it might be necessary for the bourgeoisie that the executive dominates the legislative, because a particular kind of political intervention is required to maintain the *status quo*. Poulantzas moves on to show that it is very much possible that the executive becomes dominant and all-powerful, whereas the legislative *formally* maintains its existence. He contends:

> “In fact, although in the framework in which parliament predominates, legitimacy tends to be conflated with legality, that is to say with a specific normative system of rule-making, which presents itself as the general will decreed by the people's representatives, the ideological processes function in a different way as regards the legitimacy of the executive: the role of parliamentary publicity decreases and this produces a masking of real knowledge about the bureaucracy (i.e. about the preponderant role of the state-apparatus indicated by the predominance of the executive); 'charismatic' elements inserted, of course, in the type of bourgeois legitimacy, become important since they concentrate hierarchical legitimacy by delegating the power of the state-apparatus to the person of a 'leader' (chef). *This 'leader' presents himself as the representative of the unity of the people-nation, through a whole gamut of ideological weapons, grasped today by the*

ideological phrase 'personalization of power. Thus, the state's relation as 'representative' to the social classes is short-circuited and operates here by embezzling the role of parties and by the state-apparatus's direct manipulating of public opinion, etc.

Marx's analyses (and in particular those of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*) in which he points to the displacement of dominance from the legislative to the executive as the relevant criterion for *forms of state* must be interpreted in this sense. The bourgeois forms of legitimacy are transformed: and this, it seems to me, is exactly what Marx wished to stress when he said that 'the executive power, as opposed to the legislative power, expresses the nation's heteronomy as opposed to its autonomy. This point must be stressed, for a whole parliamentary tradition of the working-class movement has expressed its distrust of the executive power (a distrust due in particular to its idyllic illusions of the legislative) by interpreting these analyses as a challenge to the executive's legitimacy. This has allowed them to make a cheap critique of the executive's predominance and to refuse to make an adequate critique of the capitalist state as such.

In short, this tradition sees parliamentary legitimacy as the only 'authentic' legitimacy of bourgeois political democracy (i.e. the sole legitimate expression of the 'people'); and it sees in the predominance of the executive an illegitimate power, a kind of deformation of the national popular-class-state. It could not be more false: in the framework of the capitalist class state, parliamentary legitimacy is no 'closer to the people' than that legitimacy which corresponds to the predominance of the executive. *In fact, these are always ideological processes in both cases. In the case of a predominance of the executive, legitimacy can perfectly well be inserted in the framework of the popular sovereignty of the capitalist type of state: unlike other types of legitimacy (e.g., charismatic legitimacy through divine right) which it resembles only in a very superficial way, this legitimacy is only a differential form of the type of bourgeois*

legitimacy. In his analyses of the Second Empire, *Marx demonstrates quite clearly how Louis Bonaparte managed to get his executive power to pass as the representative of the unity of the people-nation, as the incarnation of popular sovereignty, by even actually re-establishing the universal suffrage previously abolished by the parliamentary Republic.*
Thus, the executive's legitimacy is often characterized as a series of ruses, *whereby the predominance of the executive attempts to mask its illegitimacy by borrowing features from the one possible kind of popular sovereignty, that of parliament.* In fact, the situation is not at all like this: rather their common characteristics are based on the fact that they are merely differential forms of the popular sovereignty of the people-nation. The ideological processes which govern classical parliamentary legitimacy, and therefore the legitimacy of French Bonapartism, are in fact only differential forms of the same type. ***The proof, as history has shown, is that the popular sovereignty of political democracy finds its expression equally well in a classical parliamentarism and in a Bonapartist semi-dictatorship***."[46] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas points out further:

"In fact, as far as the conquest of parliament by the dominated classes is concerned, class domination has at its disposal a whole gamut of defences to protect itself from such misadventures. Besides, the dominant classes have never in the long run been mistaken on this point. It is only in very rare cases that a predominance of the executive characteristic of a form of state has corresponded to any risk that the dominated classes might conquer parliament. *This is proved by the numerous western countries in which the predominance of the executive is nowadays asserted, but which, for the most part, are far from running this risk: a risk which has for a long time been defused in the classical parliamentary framework."*[47] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas argues further:

> "In the state's relation to the power bloc*, the displacement of dominance from the legislative to the executive is a relevant criterion for differentiating between forms of state,* in that it concerns the modifications of the hegemonic fraction of the power bloc according to the stages of a formation and the displacement of those places in which the political power of this fraction with regard to the power bloc is reflected: cf. the displacements of hegemony from the industrial fraction to the financial fraction, and then the monopolist fraction. For example*, the characteristic predominance of the executive where the monopolies are hegemonic is a direct response to a particular incapacity to organize this hegemony, with regard to the power bloc, in the parliamentary framework*."[48] (emphasis ours)

Thus, the forms of state themselves depend on the relationship between the legislative and the executive. Finally, Poulantzas points out:

> "It is now necessary to consider the problem of *the unity of the capitalist state in the case in which the legislative and executive are differentiated,* in the manner established above. The predominance of one of these powers represents the central instance of the unity of the state in that it concentrates within it the two following principles of state unity: (i) it reflects the political legitimacy of a formation and (ii) it is the seat of the hegemonic fraction's organization. *In a given period, however, certain dislocations may occur:* ***parliament may continue to present itself as the representative place of popular sovereignty, of the unity of the people-nation, whilst the hegemonic fraction is reflected in the executive****."*[49] (emphasis ours)

Thus, even in his early works, Poulantzas dealt with the problematic of the state and state-forms and their relation with each other in different phases of the capitalist social formation and mode of

production. What is essential to understand here is that the different forms that the bourgeois state assumes depends on a variety of economic and political factors and this relation is not something that is *always-already* given. One must probe the different historical context, economic condition and political situation in which a capitalist formation finds itself, in order to situate the discussion on bourgeois state, its various forms and their relations.

We have quoted observations of Poulantzas in such a detailed fashion for a reason. It is clear from Poulantzas' above analyses that *the dominance of executive over legislative in exceptional forms of bourgeois rule is not only possible with the formal retention of bourgeois parliamentary system, it is becoming more likely in the neoliberal phase, that exceptional forms of bourgeois rule would not dismantle parliamentary system formally. It can destroy the content of this particular modus vivendi from within in a variety of ways.*

Poulantzas is not alone in making these observations and presenting these analyses. In fact, since the 1970s itself, there have been so many Marxist scholarly studies which have demonstrated with evidence, that in the neoliberal phase, Bonapartism, military dictatorship as well as fascism can realize themselves without doing away with the form of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. As we have already seen, towards the end of his life, in his last work *State, Power, Socialism*, Poulantzas himself had begun working on this problem, even though by this time, on several questions he had been assuming thoroughly incorrect positions due to his own pessimistic and pathological response to the contemporary crisis of the communist movement worldwide and his consequent shift to the reformist left-Eurocommunism. Now we shall move to another scholar, Bob Jessop, who has specialized on the question of state and state-forms and closely follows Poulantzas in some of his analyses.

Bob Jessop presents a succinct summarization of Poulantzas observations regarding the changes in the form of the state in the neoliberal phase in his last work *State, Power, Socialism* and also

situates these changes in the overall economic conditions and political situations that emerged after the death of Poulantzas. Jessop points out:

> “He (Poulantzas) identified this new form as 'authoritarian statism'. Its basic developmental tendency is described as 'intensified state control over every sphere of socio-economic life combined with *radical decline of the institutions of political democracy* and with draconian and multiform curtailment of so-called 'formal' liberties' (SPS, pp. 203-4). More specifically, Poulantzas argued that the principal elements of authoritarian statism' and its implications for representative democracy comprise: first, a transfer of power from the legislature to the executive and the concentration of power within the latter second, an accelerated fusion between the three branches of the state-legislature, executive, and judiciary - accompanied by a decline in the rule of law; third, the functional decline of political parties as the leading channels for political dialogue with the administration and as the major forces in organizing hegemony; and finally, the growth of parallel power networks cross-cutting the formal organization of the state and holding a decisive share in its various activities.”[50] (emphasis ours)

Jessop points out further that this change is permanent and belongs to the particular neoliberal phase of the imperialist stage of the capitalist mode of production:

> “*These changes are a permanent, structural feature of the modern state*. They correspond to a peculiar sharpening of the generic elements of political and state crisis accompanying the *long-term economic crisis* that is supposedly besetting the entire current phase of the CMP”[51] (emphasis ours)

Jessop explains how the parliamentary system is retained but becomes increasingly bereft of whatever political power it has, whereas the organs of the executive, the real and the most important part of the state-apparatus, becomes all powerful:

> “There is also a strong tendency towards fusion of the legislature, executive, and judiciary each of which enjoyed at least a formal autonomy in the liberal state... *Thus, the institution of parliament has become a mere electoral 'registration chamber' with very limited powers.*”[52] (emphasis ours)

Elsewhere, Jessop directly links Poulantzas' theory of authoritarian statism with the long recession since the 1970s:

> “Thus, Poulantzas argued that the capitalist type of state is now 'permanently and structurally characterized by a peculiar sharpening of the generic elements of political crisis and state crisis'*. This reflected the long-term structural economic crisis of contemporary capitalism that was manifest in the 1970s and its condensation in a variety of political and ideological crises* that were fracturing the social bases of the interventionist state...”[53] (emphasis ours)

Jessop rightly points out that after the death of Poulantzas, the same tendencies *vis-à-vis* the changes in the nature and form of the bourgeois state, that the latter had identified, had become even more pronounced:

> “Moreover, reflecting the much greater integration of the world market now than in the mid-1970s, crisis tendencies have become more multiform, more multiscalar, and more polycentric than Poulantzas envisaged and are motivated by many more cleavages, material and ideal interests, and identities.”[54]

Jessop continues:

> “*The various trends that Poulantzas identified in his analysis of authoritarian statism have become more marked in response to the growing political crisis in the power bloc, the representational crisis of the political system, the legitimacy and state crises associated with the twin failures of the postwar interventionist state and the neoliberal turn,* and the growing

> challenge to the primacy of the national territorial state in the face of globalization. We should particularly note *the continued decline of parliament and rule of law, the growing autonomy of the executive, the increased importance of presidential or prime ministerial powers, the consolidation of authoritarian, plebiscitary parties that largely represent the state to the popular masses, and something neglected by Poulantzas the mediatization of politics as the mass media play an increasing role in shaping political imaginaries, programmes, and debates*."[55] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas and later Jessop are only two from among a continuously growing body of Marxist scholars, political scientists and historians, who have identified these changes in the neoliberal phase of the imperialist stage.

Greek Marxist scholar Spyros Sakellaropoulos, too, has captured some very important elements, while explaining that Bonapartism does not especially in the neoliberal phase. What applies to one exceptional necessarily entail the formal dismantling of parliamentary democracy, bourgeois regime here, also applies to the other exceptional bourgeois regimes, because the underlying reason is the same, as we shall see. The following rather lengthy quote from Sakellaropoulos is noteworthy. He begins with the process in which Bonapartism came into existence in the Nineteenth century:

> "The story begins when the proletariat takes the initiative of staging an uprising that results in the emergence of a democratic state, grounded in universal suffrage in which all social classes are *represented in the decisive political institutions.* The proletariat harboured the illusion that enlargement of the electorate and popular mobilization would be sufficient for moving forward in a transition to socialism. *But without social alliances, without political organization, without a political program, none of this was possible when faced with an opponent that was preparing from day one to neutralize the proletariat*. The bourgeoisie, by contrast, on the one hand

forged social alliances, isolating the proletariat, and on the other constructed a materiality of state (military fortifications, normalization of the functions of parliament so as to preclude any overruling 'from the street, activation of ideological apparatuses for the enforcement of 'order') whose functioning led to the defeat of the proletariat.

“Of great interest is the sequel, when the democratic faction of the bourgeoisie came into conflict with the Party of Order which, however, rallied the great mass of the bourgeoisie. What was created in consequence was *a political schism within the bourgeoisie, but not a social schism*. The bourgeoisie did not judge that it was represented only by the Party of Order. And because the bourgeois democrats, the petty-bourgeoisie and even the socialists continued to be a presence in the representative institutions, the Party of Order was obliged to enter into alliance *with Bonaparte and the executive.* On the other hand, Bonaparte was elected President, supported by a broad alliance of social and political forces opposed to the policies of the moderate bourgeoisie.

…

“Does all this signify a process of delinking of the political from the economic? This depends on what we mean. If we mean the relative autonomy of the state from the individual interests of various factions of the bourgeoisie, this is something inherent in the materiality of the bourgeois state. *If, however, we are referring to the endeavour of the great mass of the bourgeoisie, to use the exact expression of Marx, to free itself from the restrictions imposed by bourgeois democracy, then we are coming closer to the truth*. The February Revolution gave the bourgeoisie in toto access to political power, on the precondition, however, of its granting numerous concessions to its allies. Gradually with the development of the class struggle (a process in which the maneuvers of Bonaparte are also to be included) *it succeeded in disencumbering itself of its allies, and in consequence was also able to revoke the institutional compromises it had already made, in other words, to be rid of*

France's Second Republic. It was of *little significance to the great mass of the bourgeois class whether this liquidation should be the accomplishment of a political party or an individual personage...*

“This is a critical point. *Contrary to a fairly widespread belief that capitalism and parliamentary democracy go together*, in fact the institutions of mass political representation were imposed on the dominant classes through the struggles of the dominated classes. Nowadays the disjuncture between relations of representation and capitalism is becoming ever more obvious: what is involved is an inexorable erosion of the powers of representative institutions and, in consequence, the shift of power to centres impermeable to popular control (from committees of technocrats in the various ministries to the all-powerful - for the countries in the Eurozone - European Central Bank)...When the intensity of popular reactions diminishes, *the bourgeoisie prefers to be represented directly by the state mechanisms and not by the representative institutions* that are characterized by the materiality of the presence of b the dominated classes...

"As for the question of whether Bonapartism is to be categorized as a form of national emergency state, or in other words a marginal variety of authoritarian state whose further oscillations will result in breakage and transformation into a dictatorship, we have two basic objections to this. *The first is historical in character in the sense that in the 19th century the bipolar schema of parliamentary versus anti-parliamentary regime is not present*, precisely because parliamentary democracy is not the rule, at least in the contemporary sense, in most national formations. The second is methodological and rejects the bipolar model one extreme of which is the healthy parliamentary democracy and the other the national emergency state*. On the contrary we believe that there are no impermeable dividing walls between these different forms of state because in reality they are the results of class struggle, or more properly opposing trends within the tendency of the*

> *capitalist system not to have its dynamic restricted by institutions of popular representation*."[56] (emphasis ours)

The point that Sakellaropoulos makes here is simply this: whether Bonapartism would assume the form of an *open* dictatorship, by dismantling the very *form* of bourgeois democracy, that is, the parliamentary system, or it will retain the form of bourgeois parliamentary system, which has become increasingly devoid of its democratic and representative content, with all the real power shifting to executive bodies of the state, is not a question of theoretical necessity for the bourgeoisie as a political class. It will depend on the condition of the bourgeois democracy and the political situation of class struggle. This is a very simple point that most of the Marxist scholars of exceptional forms of the bourgeois rule are understanding and underlining today, as we shall see later in this essay, even though one does not need to agree with everything that these scholars say. We will discuss the views of some of these representative left scholars in brief.

One such left scholar is Ugo Palheta. Of course, one can disagree with a lot of what Palheta argues, in terms of general political line. However, there are certain observations made by Palheta which are significant. Ugo Palheta, who has worked on the emergence of far-right and fascism in the contemporary neoliberal phase, especially in France, argues:

> "*Fascists of our times cannot use exactly the same means to achieve their ends*, neither can they express their goals clearly or refer explicitly to fascism, as this would condemn them to the electoral margins.
> "*But they still maintain most of fascism's objectives and their strategy largely borrows from that of the fascist leaders of the interwar years, albeit in a historical context that, unlike the 1920s and 30s, lends itself more to a "war of position" than to a "war of manoeuvre"*[57] *(emphasis ours)*

Palheta also alludes to the rise of authoritarian bourgeois state in the neoliberal phase, whereby, the bourgeois democratic form, that is,

the parliamentary system, increasingly becomes empty of its bourgeois democratic content. Palheta discusses the case of France:

> “There is also the way in which political institutions function in France, with *enormous power concentrated in the executive* and the marginalization of the National Assembly, which is essentially a shadow theatre: during the health crisis, all decisions were taken by the president in the Defence Council, in complete opacity. If the institutions of the Fifth Republic have always been very undemocratic, Macronism has further accentuated their most authoritarian features, to the point where we are no longer within the framework of what used to be called 'bourgeois democracy',”[58](emphasis ours)

Despite disagreeing with Palheta on a number of points, we must say that on this particular point, Palheta has captured a very remarkable feature of contemporary fascism: *rise of fascism as a long 'passive revolution' through what Gramsci called a 'war of positions’*. We were pleasantly surprised to find this point in Palheta, as we, too, had pointed precisely to this feature of contemporary fascism in embryonic form in 2009 itself and in clear terms since 2016 itself. In 2016, we wrote:

> “Instead of a short ‘war of positions’ and then swiftly moving to a spectacular ‘war of movement’, *the present fascist rise is marked by a long period of ‘war of positions’ and its rise to power can be characterized by a long ‘passive revolution’.* Needless to say, this phenomenon is particularly visible in the post-colonial backward capitalist societies, though not limited too them. *Indian Fascism, particularly, is characterized by a long period of ‘war of positions’ and it moved to the stage of ‘war of movement’ only in the late-1980s for a few years and then in the first decade of the new millennium*. To sum up, the nature of the long depression that we are witnessing, the nature of the rise of fascism too has undergone profound change.”[59] (emphasis ours)

In fact, many other scholars have been able to see this particular trait of contemporary fascism, namely, *the long incubation period, molecular permeation, protracted rise through the dialectic of 'war of positions' instead of 'war of movement, even though even today, fascism resorts to 'war of movement' for short periods*. As we saw earlier in this essay, Aijaz Ahmad and Sumit Sarkar had alluded to these specificities of the contemporary fascism several years ago. Noted Historian Mukul Kesavan, too, writes:

> “Nazism, in this view, is majoritarianism speeded up. *Alternately, contemporary majoritarianism in south Asia, is fascism in slow motion*.”[60] (emphasis ours)

Marxists from Marx to Lenin and Mao have learnt from serious progressive liberal and other non-Marxist as well left academicians who have done objective research on social, political and economic phenomena. Lenin using the work of Hobson or Marx using the empirical research of university academia, factory inspectors, etc. are few examples of this fact. In India, too, there are various serious and distinguished political economists, historians and other social scientists who are observing the changes in the form of bourgeois parliamentary democracy in the neoliberal phase of imperialist stage, whether we agree or not with the general approach and method and political prescriptions of their studies. Prof. Neera Chandhoke is one such political scientist. Prof. Chandhoke has keenly observed the developments in the Indian politics for a long time. She points out:

> “Over the past decade, Indians have helplessly borne witness to the imprisonment of civil society activists, journalists, university students, and dissidents; institutional capture; dissemination of hate-speech and violence against Muslim and Christian minorities; and suppression of a civil society that has been wonderfully chaotic and messy but creative. The visual and print media have been brought to their knees. And universities have been stripped of their primary function: to inculcate the spirit of critical reasoning in students.

“Some have already exercised their franchise, and others will do so, in a society where *democratic institutions and practices have hollowed out*. The vote will be cast against the backdrop of *diminished democracy.*

“India is not the only country that presents the spectacle of *democratic backsliding.* There was a time when democracies in significant parts of the world were murdered by ceremonially decorated army generals in midnight coups. *Authoritarian leaders have learnt their lessons*. The take-over of governments by the use of violence propels simmering discontent at the least, if not outrage and uprising. The price countries have paid for army coups has been heavy.

…

“Today aspirant autocrats do not commit mass murder or carry out the proverbial midnight coup. These carry the risk of provoking mass uprisings. *Instead, they slowly but surely whittle away at democratic institutions and practices, until the point when only elections are left as a symbol of their democratic credentials. This process is called autocratization.*

“Less than 25 years after the political scientist Francis Fukuyama's declaration, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, that the future belonged to liberal democracy, significant parts of the world has seen waves of autocratization. *Notably, the gradual erosion of democracy is carried out under the guise of legalism. Constitutions are not dispensed with, institutions remain in place, and rituals of democracy are observed.* ***But they have become hollow shells.***

“The hollowing out of institutions that restrain power, the gradual chipping away at civil society activism and a free media, the weakening of the opposition through intimidation and the use of financial regulatory institutions, the attempts to control the judiciary, and the relentless concentration of power in the executive all these marked a process of autocratization.

“The key element of autocratization is the concentration of power in the chief executive at the expense of other institutions... This has been observed in India, particularly in the

> case of the Election Commission of India (ECI), or the use of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to threaten leaders of the opposition.
> "*Autocratization is a process, not an end*. It is a process that is designed to lead to the establishment of authoritarianism. But it is impossible to predict the end, for politics is chancy, contingent, and unpredictable."[61] (emphasis ours)

Notwithstanding the terminological differences, Prof. Chandhoke has certainly captured some salient features of the process whereby in the neoliberal phase, the democratic potential of the form of bourgeois parliamentary system as well as the other democratic processes and institutions are undergoing a process of perpetual decay. She has also correctly pointed out that this process is not going to assume the shape of a cataclysmic event, unlike the early-Twentieth century examples of the rise of fascism. Notwithstanding the liberal illusions, which afflict all liberal academicians, Prof. Chandhoke has certainly made some very pertinent comments and observations regarding this process.

Another left scholar Dave Renton has engaged with Palheta on the question of contemporary fascism and has criticized Palheta on the question of the role of non-state street violence in the rise of fascism (which the latter does not consider a necessary characteristic of fascism, whereas the former sees it as a constitutive element of fascism). However, Renton agrees with one fundamental point made by Palheta:

> "Thanks are owed to *Historical Materialism* for publishing Palheta's piece, which is wide-ranging and compelling. I have learned from it, and I am sure other readers feel the same. His article begins from an instinct *that we have to explain the crisis of the present, rather than merely repeat models developed from the past. Like him, I despair of the tendency of the left to assume that, because some writer in the distant past said that fascism must take certain forms, so it is necessary to read*

those forms into the present, even where they do not exist."[62] (emphasis ours)

Alberto Toscano is yet another scholar who has worked on the present. incarnations of the fascist right. His analysis is prone to a number of over-generalizations regarding the character of the imperialist racist state in the US and other North-Western countries, which are off the mark. However, he, too, has correctly identified some of the significant features of fascism in the neoliberal phase. Toscano argues:

> "Ruthless hostility to a substantive, socio-economic notion of democracy, such as Polanyi's, is not simply something that the anti-state state, as rhetoric and practice of neoliberalism, shares with the new faces of reaction. *Neoliberalism's racialized anti-democratic animus creates the material and ideological conditions for efforts to win popular interpellations for the far right, in the electoral arena and beyond*."[63] (emphasis ours)

On this particular point pertaining to the versions of fascism that appeared after the Second World War in certain countries, Toscano also refers to an observation made by Adorno:

> "In a famous lecture first delivered in 1959, 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past', Adorno declared that he considered *'the survival of National Socialism within democracy to be potentially more menacing than the survival of fascist tendencies against democracy'.*"[64] (emphasis ours)

Similarly, Enzo Traverso, too, has captured this point, despite his problematic analyses on various questions pertaining to the contemporary forms of fascism:

> "In the twenty-first century, fascism will not take the face of Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco; nor (we might hope) will it take the form of totalitarian terror*. Yet it is also clear that there are many different ways to destroy democracy. Ritual references to the threats to democracy -and in particular Islamic terrorism -*

> *usually depict the enemy as external, but they forget a fundamental lesson from the history of fascism: that democracy can be destroyed from within."*[65] (emphasis ours)

Richard Saull, too, has made some remarkable comments regarding the new versions of fascism which have appeared after the Second World War and especially since the beginning of the neoliberal phase. Saull writes in the 'Introduction' of his book on the contemporary rise of far-right and fascism:

> "*The far-right's embrace of democracy rests on the evisceration of some of the core features of democratic processes and institutions*. Democracy is reduced to the role of sanctifying the sovereignty of majoritarian power, defined as representing 'the people'. In this framing, *the substantive workings of a democratic politics* - whether those of parliamentary representation and the politics of negotiation, deliberation and compromise in law-making, or of civil society as representative of social and cultural plurality in the democratic process - *are all marginalized or actively undermined*."[66] (emphasis ours)

It is precisely the point that we have been making for more than one a decade and a half, that is, since 2009. Various scholars that we have quoted till now, have pointed to the same changes, though in their own different words.

Another scholar who has persuaded us to think about the changes in the content of the particular form of bourgeois democracy, in the neoliberal phase, is Gáspár Miklós Tamás. The Hungarian Marxist thinker Tamás is misguided on a lot of other political issues pertaining to Marxist theory. However, despite several shortcomings, his analysis of present fascism (which he calls as 'post-fascism') has certainly stimulated us to observe several elements of novelty, even when we do not agree with his analysis in totality. Tamás points out:

> "Post-fascism finds its *niche* easily in the new world of global *capitalism without upsetting the dominant political forms of electoral democracy and representative government*. It does

> what I consider to be central to all varieties of fascism, including the post-totalitarian version. *Sans* Führer, *sans* one-party rule, *sans* SA or SS, post-fascism *reverses the Enlightenment tendency to assimilate citizenship to the human condition*."[67](emphasis ours)

Tamás argues further:

> "We are, then, faced with a new kind of extremism of the center. This new extremism, which I call post-fascism, *does not threaten, unlike its predecessor, liberal and democratic rule within the core constituency of "homogeneous society*"".[68] (emphasis ours)

Finally, Tamás points to certain elements of what he calls "post-fascism", which we consider an unnecessary epithet:

> "Post-fascism does not need stormtroopers and dictators. *It is perfectly compatible with an anti-Enlightenment liberal democracy* that rehabilitates citizenship as a grant from the sovereign instead of a universal human right."[69] (emphasis ours)

These are some of the contemporary scholars and observers who have captured various elements of novelty in the rise of fascism and the hollowing out of the bourgeois democratic state-form, that is, multi-party parliamentary democracy, in the neoliberal phase of imperialism.

However, even Dimitrov had not rejected this possibility completely in the 1930s, though this was not the principal form that fascism had assumed till that time. Notwithstanding his prescription of the incorrect policy of the 'popular front, Dimitrov acknowledged the possibility of the retention of the form of the bourgeois democracy, that is, multi-party parliamentary system, by the fascists, in his speech in the Comintern itself. Dimitrov points out:

> “The development of fascism, and the fascist dictatorship itself, assume different forms in different countries, according to historical, social and economic conditions and to the national peculiarities and the international position of the given country. In certain countries, principally those in which fascism has no extensive mass basis and in which the struggle of the various groups within the camp of the fascist bourgeoisie itself is fairly acute, fascism does not immediately venture to abolish parliament, but allows the other bourgeois parties, as well as the Social-Democratic Parties, to retain a certain degree of legality. In other countries, where the ruling bourgeoisie fears an early outbreak of revolution, fascism establishes its unrestricted political monopoly, either immediately or by intensifying its reign of terror against and persecution of all competing parties and groups. *This does not prevent fascism, when its position becomes particularly acute, from trying to extend its basis and, without altering its class nature, trying to combine open terrorist dictatorship with a crude sham of parliamentarism*.”[70] (emphasis ours)

Here we will stop on this particular issue, as we have dealt with it in sufficient detail. We have seen the objective changes in the nature of crisis, the nature of the bourgeois democratic form of the bourgeois state and consequently the changes in the *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi* of fascist rise. However, the changes are not simply objective. The fascists of the contemporary neoliberal phase have summed up the experience of their predecessors from the early-Twentieth century and have come to realize that neither is there any need to abandon the shell of the bourgeois democracy now, the reasons for which have already been discussed, nor is it desirable. Even the fascists perform what Walter Benjamin had termed 'redemptive activity': the act of redeeming oneself by correcting their mistakes through learning from history. It would be foolish to think that it is only communists who perform this activity.

D. The Redemptive Activity of the Fascists and the Far-Right

This is a very important issue that any serious study on contemporary fascism will have to take into consideration. In order to understand this point, we need to ask a simple question: do the reactionaries learn from their historical experience? Do the fascists take lessons from their past experiments? I think the answer to both these questions is 'yes'. Of course, they have their own 'analytical' tools, which are congruent with their ideological and political line and their aims and objectives. However, to think that the fascists do not learn from their history would be a grave mistake.

In the neoliberal phase, the fascists have consciously transformed their strategy and their tactics. It goes without saying that this change became possible only within the context of the objective changes in the nature of crisis, the nature of the form of bourgeois democracy, and the particular changes in the very nature of the bourgeois state and state-apparatus, which we have discussed in the previous subheads. The fascists have gleaned important lessons from the fascist experiments of the early-Twentieth century. They understand that the abandoning of the very form of the bourgeois democracy and the abolition of the elections, parliament, legislative assemblies and all forms of constitutionality only made their rule much less hegemonic and much more fragile. The cataclysmic rise, the swift shift to 'war of movement' and 'war of maneuver', frontal seizure of power, fascization of the state in the form of an event through the introduction of the exceptional laws, meant that their end, too, was bound to be cataclysmic.

They also understand that not only the end would be cataclysmic, it would be *total* and would mean the banishment of the fascists from the stage of history for a long time and would also mean that fascists would not be able to openly proclaim their true ideological and political name. Instead, they would be obliged to resort to new

nomenclatura. It is not without reason that after the defeat of Germany and Italy in the Second World War due to the Soviet Union's heroic resistance, the internal resistance of the communists and other anti-fascist forces and secondarily due to the war efforts of other allied forces, the fascists in Germany and Italy were not able to proclaim their true ideological and political ancestry for a long time; in the neoliberal phase, they re-surfaced in new forms but they still go by other names and remain apologetic about the historical fascists of their country, even though, in essence, they share their ideology and politics. Of course, the image of the 'false enemy' has changed. From Jews, Romanis and others, it has changed to the immigrants and especially Muslim immigrants. However, the essence of the politics and ideology are not very different.

Secondly, the fascists of neoliberal phase, have received considerable fillip from the nature of changes in the bourgeois state and state-apparatus. They have seen how the bourgeois state in the neoliberal phase has taken a clear-cut authoritarian turn, how the democratic rights and liberties have decayed, how the overall democratic content of the bourgeois democratic state-form has become hollowed out. All these changes are summoned by the general economic condition (long depression) and the political situation in which capitalism finds itself in the era of neoliberal globalization. The fascists have not been totally oblivious about them. These changes are welcome changes for them as they have allowed them to wage a long 'war of positions, instead of frontal war to seize power, to lay a siege around the state, to perform a deep infiltration into the state-apparatus and a molecular permeation into the pores of the society and consequently to retain the shell/form of the bourgeois democracy, while seizing the governmental power repeatedly and frequently.

Thirdly, even when the fascists are out of governmental power, they continue to hold their entrenched positions within the state-apparatus as well as within the society. Moreover, any other bourgeois government in the phase of neoliberalism cannot be expected to curb the power and attack the positions of the fascists in political

society (the state) as well as the civil society. The reason for this is simple: all other bourgeois parties, too, are representatives of the interests of the bourgeoisie and in the neoliberal phase, in the general conditions of the chronic and protracted crisis, and due to constant threat of a hovering political crisis, the big bourgeoisie in particular and the bourgeoisie in general would not allow any other bourgeois party's government to attack the fascists or even limit or curb their power. The case of Karnataka and Telangana are an illustration of this fact. Even after winning the elections, the Congress government, despite its electoral promise of banning the stormtrooper organizations of the fascists like the Bajrang Dal, refused to fulfil this promise. We can expect the same in Jharkhand, where the RSS has been developing its political work and social base among the tribal population as well as the petty-bourgeois masses, in general. It is not the question of the will or intention of leaders like Rahul Gandhi. It is about the structural necessities of the capitalist class and capitalist system in the present conjecture.

Palheta has correctly pointed out that *“Fascists of our times cannot use exactly the same means to achieve their ends,* neither can they express their goals clearly or refer explicitly to fascism, as this would condemn them to the electoral margins” (*quoted above*). It would be naïve to the tasks entrusted to them by the big bourgeoisie in the same way in assume that the fascists will implement their project and accomplish which they did it in the early-Twentieth century. It would be equally knicidal to wait for the exact re-enactment of the fascist drama of the early-Twentieth century, and then copy the same strategy and tactics to counter the fascists, which were devised by the revolutionaries at that time. The fascists have learnt from history and have situated these lessons in the contemporary economic conditions of the capitalist mode of production as well as in the political situation which has stemmed from this general context.

Is there any possibility that the contemporary fascists (as well the far-right Bonapartist leaders like Putin or Erdoğan) would abandon the shell/form of bourgeois democracy, that is, elections, parliaments, legislative assemblies, etc.? Yes, but this possibility is

negligible. The possibility exists because in most of the exceptional regimes, the relative autonomy of the state exists at multiple levels. In general, the very materiality of bourgeois state ensures that the state is relatively autonomous from the concrete economic interests of the particular fractions and factions of the bourgeoisie. In case of the exceptional regimes of the bourgeoisie, this relative autonomy is enhanced because without the increased relative autonomy of the state, the political crisis of the 'power bloc' or that of the bourgeoisie as a whole, cannot be resolved. The fascist party itself is relatively autonomous from the state-apparatus, despite increasing amalgamation of the personnel of the state and the cadre of the party. It maintains, what can be called, 'an informal state power' in the form of its stormtroopers, goon brigades, etc. Moreover, within the fascist party, the supreme leader, the führer, too, maintains a relative autonomy, as this image is an immanent part of the very *modus operandi* of fascist politics and ideology. Due to these complexities, in the situation of an exceptionally acute political crisis within the fascist party, the state and its apparatus and the question of mass legitimacy of such authoritarian fascist regime, it is possible that the fascists might give up the shell of the bourgeois democracy and establish an open and naked dictatorship. However, the possibility of such an event is extremely negligible today, for the reasons that we have discussed above, namely, the economic and political particularities of the neoliberal phase of imperialist stage. Yet, theoretically, the possibility, indeed, exists. In what exceptional situations this possibility might be realized cannot be predicted and any attempt at doing so would be a purely speculative exercise. Therefore, we shall stop at mentioning this negligible possibility, which, theoretically speaking, does exist.

E. Definitive End of All Forms of Popular-Frontism

Due to the changes discussed above, the strategy of proletarian anti-fascist resistance and struggle naturally undergoes a profound change. Before embarking upon a separate discussion on the contemporary anti-fascist proletarian strategy and general tactics, it is imperative to have a brief discussion on the history of evolution of anti-fascist communist strategy and tactics since the 1920s. Under this subhead, we will focus only on the communist strategy of united front against fascism. Later, we will positively discuss the overall anti-fascist proletarian strategy.

First of all, let us dispel the incorrect notion that the strategy of 'popular front' was the definitive anti-fascist communist strategy from the very beginning. The 'popular front' strategy characterized fascism as the naked and barbaric dictatorship of the most reactionary and chauvinistic elements of the big monopoly finance capital. On the basis of this characterization, it was argued that against fascism, the revolutionary communist parties should form a united front with all non-fascist bourgeois parties, including various kinds of workers parties and the social-democratic parties. At the very outset, we must understand that the very characterization of fascism as the dictatorship of 'the most reactionary, imperialistic and chauvinistic elements of the big monopoly finance capital' was thoroughly incorrect and non-Marxist. Such a characterization was bound to lead to class-collaborationism and class-capitulationism, because if fascism represents the interests of 'the most reactionary elements of big monopoly finance capital' (not even the entire class representing the big monopoly finance capital in general!), then the strategic conclusion was simple: alliance with all against fascism (including the rest of the big monopoly finance capital, the rest of the bourgeoisie in general). This also meant that the immediate aim of this united front *must be* restoration of bourgeois democracy (not even people's democracy, as Mao and Kang Sheng had objected to the Spanish communists). Such a communist strategy against fascism was doomed to fail from the very beginning and it did fail, so miserably, that from November 1938, the Comintern (including Dimitrov and Manuilsky) referred to it only in negative and

derogatory terms and called on repeatedly to revert to the strategy of the united front of the working class.

Secondly, the history of evolution of anti-fascist communist strategy within the Comintern began from its Third Congress, when the revolutionary communists took serious note of the rise of fascism and far-right reaction as a result of the collapse of the revolutionary offensive of the proletariat in various European countries, but especially in Germany and Italy. Against the rising tide of reaction, Lenin gave the slogan of 'to the masses'. This practically meant the conscious attempt on the part of the revolutionary proletariat to win over, not only the masses of the working class, but also lower and middle peasantry and urban lower and middle classes, that is, in general, the masses of the petty-bourgeoisie. The concrete policy that was prescribed was that of 'united front of the working class'. This policy did not preclude the possibility of the forming particular issue-based alliances 'from above' with the social-democratic parties and other workers parties, and even other progressive democratic bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties. However, this was the of workers in all trade unions and mass organizations, led by other secondary task. The first and principal task was to win over the masses bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties, and, win over the masses of working peasantry and urban petty-bourgeoisie. In other words, the principal task was to form united front against fascism 'from below, while the secondary task. subordinate to the first task, was to form united front 'from above, which meant forming particular issue-based alliances against fascism with social-democratic, other workers and other bourgeois parties, mortatio

In general, this policy was correct. However, from the Fourth Congress of the Comintern itself, the twins of "left" and right opportunist deviations in the implementation of this Leninist policy began. On the one hand, there was the tendency to reject even the masses of workers associated with social-democratic and other non-communist unions or the tendency to form only economic alliances to win-over these masses, but no political alliance (as reflected by the likes of Amadeo Bordiga and Ernst Thälman), while on the other

hand, there was the right-wing deviation on the question of forming 'workers governments' as a transitional step against fascism and making political compromises with the social-democracy.

In the Fifth Congress of the Comintern, too, these two deviations continued to co-exist, but the "left" tendency was becoming more dominant at least theoretically. This was the first congress where the social-democracy was equated with fascism as its twin. It is true that social-democracy bore the principal responsibility for the rise of fascism, yet, to see direct complicity or collusion was certainly an over-statement. However, in practice, the right deviationism, too, continued unabated.

The Sixth Congress marked a clear shift. The extreme "left" deviation had become dominant. This deviation led to the characterization of the social-democracy as the principal enemy, rather than fascism. Immediately after this congress, in the plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), social-democracy was characterized as 'social fascism' and the main enemy. The term itself was not the problem. The problem was the characterization of the social-democracy as the main enemy. This was thoroughly incorrect. At the superficial and formal level, the united front of the working class was still the proclaimed anti-fascist policy. However, with the above-mentioned blunder, there remained neither anything 'united' about it, nor anything 'working class' about it. On the one hand, everywhere main attacks were directed against the social- social-democratic unions and parties, too. On the other hand, struggle democrats, which often led to attack on the mass of workers in the against the rising tide of fascism in Germany and consolidation of fascism in Italy, besides the serious situations in France and Spain, was compromised.

Thus, neither was there a united front from below, nor was there any united front from above. Sectarianism reigned supreme, isolating the revolutionary communists among the masses. Moreover, to defeat the social-democrats and their economism, the revolutionary communists economism. This systematically employed the tactic of

militant econ prevented the communists from becoming the political leader of the political leader of the masses of working people and thus paved the masses of the workers, prevented the proletariat from becoming the way for the rise of fascism. The mistake can be summarized in two aspects: first, the prevalence of economism and second, the absence of massline, which was the exact negation of the Leninist line and Lenin's call: *to the masses.*

It must be mentioned here in passing that the responsibility of the failure in the formation of the united front (from above) lies not only at the door of the revolutionary communists, but equally and sometimes to a greater degree, at the door of the social-democrats, who often collaborated with the far-right forces in suppression of the communists and even when faced with fascism standing at the entrance of the corridor of power, refused to form any united front with the communists. When both finally agreed just around the time of Hitler's ascension to power, it was already too late.

The disastrous results of the far "left" deviation among revolutionary communists became evident by 1932-33, with the resistible rise of fascism becoming irresistible in Germany, the complete decimation of the organized workers' movement, the suppression of all political opposition, the abolition of all the democratic liberties. What was the reaction of the Comintern? The reaction had set in especially in France, where, within the Communist Party of France (PCF), there was a section led by one Doriot, which had been calling for alliance with all workers' parties as well as bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties, against fascists. In the beginning, other leaders like Thorez disagreed with him. Those who were more to the "left" also accused Doriot of hobnobbing with the Trotskyites. Whatever the case may be, it was clear that Doriot had been advocating for some sort of 'popular front. Also, there is no doubt that Doriot, himself represented a right-deviationist tendency, which was at margins before 1933-34. However, in Moscow, Dimitrov and Manuilsky themselves had shifted to the policy of the 'popular front, though the leadership of the PCF was not aware about it. The Comintern leaders were aware of the dispute within the French party and summoned Thorez as well as

Doriot to Moscow. However, Doriot, by this time alienated from the PCF did not go. Thorez went and was surprised to know about the proposed policy shift to 'popular frontism, though he was convinced. Much before the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, from 1934 itself, in France, the communists began to form 'popular front' with social-democrats and petty-bourgeois parties. Initially, the front saw some successes in terms of elections and in terms of fighting against fascists, though the fighting was mainly done by the communists. The same developments were unfolding in Spain, too.

Impressed by early electoral and non-electoral successes of the 'popular front, Dimitrov formulated his theses on the 'popular front, which were finally presented in the Seventh Congress. The very political economy behind this policy was incorrect. The essence of this political economy can be summarized as 'monopoly vs. all'. This right-deviation is present in most of the political economy textbooks of this period. The political economy and class analysis behind the policy of the 'popular front' stemmed from this line itself, but was even more vulgar and cruder as it did not talk about the entire class of big monopoly capitalists as the antagonists, but only 'the most reactionary and chauvinistic elements, against whom the rest must be united. The line of 'popular front' was presented in the Seventh Congress and was passed.

However, the implementation of the policy of the 'popular front' began to face serious problems and hurdles in France as well as Spain, not to speak of Germany and Italy. On the one hand, the working class was struggling against the bourgeoisie, as the latter attempted to depress the wages, crack down on strikes, etc., which put the communists in the popular front' into a tough spot; on the other hand, the social-democrats and other bourgeois parties soon showed their true colour and attacked communists, trade union leaders and others while giving leeway to the far-right and fascist forces. As a consequence, in Spain Those interested in knowing the history of the evolution of the policy as well as in France, the 'popular fronts' collapsed by the end of 1938. of anti-fascist united front in

brief, can read it in this book: *Menagerie of Dogmatic Blunders* published by Rahul Foundation, Lucknow.

One thing became clear by the end of 1938: the policy of the 'popular front' does not work, not because of some contingent factor, but because of the immanent flaw in the class character of the policy itself. Even Dimitrov and those who heralded the formulation of this policy accepted this fact, though in other-way-round manner. Others in the Comintern clearly accepted that the revolutionary communists must revert to the Leninist policy of the united front of the working class, which primarily and principally meant united front from below (to the masses), or the *general united front*, and secondarily meant, united front from above (through leadership-to-leadership talks, with the social-democrats and other bourgeois parties), or, the *particular united fronts*.

The real and concrete practice of the 'popular front' clearly revealed that this policy based on an incorrect political economy and consequently an incorrect idea of class alliances, was doomed to fail from the very beginning. It is true that depending upon the concrete class political situation, at one time, the element of *united front from above*, might assume an immediately more important role, while in general and in the fundamental sense, *united front from below*, continues to be the main task, but immediately assumes a backseat. For instance, in periods of total defeat, complete suppression of all political opposition and the decimation of workers' movement decisively (here we are not talking about the revolutionary political offensive of the proletariat but only an organized workers' movement), the element of united front from above, through talks among revolutionary communist parties/organization, social-democrats, other bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties ready to assume an anti-fascist stance on a question, might become the main task. However, in such conjunctures, too, the revolutionary communists must maintain their complete political independence of carrying out revolutionary communist propaganda and agitation. Popular-frontism, despite the opposite theoretical proclamations in the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, practically meant the

surrender of this political freedom itself. It was no accident because the policy itself led to such practical outcome.

Another practical outcome of this policy of 'popular front was that a false binary of fascist dictatorship and bourgeois democracy was presented. This itself was tantamount to surrendering the political independence of the proletariat. Subjectively, the first attempt of the communists should have been establishing a people's/new democracy, or, the socialist democracy or the dictatorship of the proletariat, depending upon the particular class situation. To assume that since the bourgeois democratic state-form has been replaced by an open fascist dictatorship, the immediate task, *as a matter of rule*, will be the restoration of the bourgeois democracy, was basically *formalism*. The content of the state was still the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, albeit through an exceptional form of the state, because the regular and preferred form of the bourgeois state, namely, the multi-party parliamentary system, was unable to collectivize the class interests of the bourgeoisie, establish the hegemony of one fraction within the 'power bloc', and restore the mass legitimacy of the system. However, it was not as if the fascist dictatorship represented some other class. It still represented the interests of the capitalist class, under the general hegemony of the interests of the big capital. Therefore, it was not *always-already* a given fact, or an axiom that the strategic aim of the communists, or the stage of revolution, in conditions of fascist dictatorship will be bourgeois democratic.

Even in the past experience of fascism, when even the shell/form of the bourgeois democracy was given up by the fascists in power, the stage of revolution, and the class character of the leadership of such revolution, depended on the relative balance and alignment of the class forces. Whether the proletariat in such a political situation would fight for the restoration of the bourgeois democracy (*the excess of the weakness of the proletarian forces over that of the bourgeois forces*), or people's democracy/new democracy (*the excess of the weakness of the bourgeois forces over that of the proletarian forces*) or socialist democracy or the dictatorship of the proletariat (*the decisive strength would depend on the accumulation*

and alignment of the class forces, of the proletarian forces and the decisive weakness of the bourgeoisie), or in other words, on the particular conjuncture of the class struggle.

This was precisely the point made by Kang Sheng, who argued, under the guidance of Mao:

> "On *New Democracy* is of great significance for the world communist movement. *I asked Spanish comrades, and they said the problem for them was to establish bourgeois democracy, not to establish New Democracy. In their country, they did not concern themselves with the three points: army, countryside, political power*. They wholly subordinated themselves to the exigencies of Soviet foreign policy, and achieved nothing at all. (Mao: These are the policies of Chen Tu-hsiu*!) They say the Communist Party organized an army, and then turned it over to others*. (Mao: This is useless.) *They also did not want political power, nor did they mobilize the peasantry*."[71] (emphasis ours)

Thus, instead of analyzing the particular class political situation, the policy of 'popular front, took it as axiomatic that faced with a fascist dictatorship, the only option open for communists was restoration of bourgeois democracy, in alliance with all except, of course, the fascists. This was a systematic refusal to take power even if situation allowed. It was incorrect in the early-Twentieth century and today such a policy would be absurd for many reasons.[72]

First of all, as we have discussed above in detail, today, the fascists, in general, would not abolish the bourgeois democratic form, that is to say, the bourgeois multi-party parliamentary system, while its democratic content would be in perpetual decay, a process which will continue but would not become complete, due to the obvious contradictions that stem from the retention of the bourgeois democratic form. The nature of other bourgeois parties, too, would undergo profound changes, as we have discussed above. In fact, the very nature of the bourgeoisie as a political class and the bourgeois state have transformed significantly in the neoliberal phase of the

imperialist stage of capitalism. Since, the shell/form of the bourgeois democracy is retained, the binary of fascist dictatorship/bourgeois democracy becomes meaningless, except in the sense of the perpetual struggle which the proletariat has to carry on to expand the bourgeois democratic rights and liberties under capitalism in general. In the sense of a strategic stage against fascism, it makes no possible sense today.

Secondly, since the democratic content of the bourgeoisie as a political class has decayed to a qualitatively new level in the phase of neoliberalism and rise of the authoritarian state as the new normal, there can be no *general united front* with any section of the bourgeoisie against fascism. The reason is simple: *mainly and essentially*, the bourgeoisie as a political class has lost its remaining democratic potential and resultantly, the potency to be an ally in the fight against fascism in a systematic way; no fraction of this class can be a general ally against fascism. Of course, issue-based tactical particular alliances can be formed with any non-fascist non-fundamentalist and non-chauvinistic bourgeois party (though, elements of arch reaction and chauvinism are present in most of the bourgeois parties today). However, *a general anti-fascist united front with any fraction of the bourgeoisie is not only doomed to fail, but it would also be suicidal for the proletarian forces today.*

Finally, the bourgeois democracy itself has become so empty of its democratic content that a strategic call of return to bourgeois democracy when faced with a fascist regime would be farcical. It would be a call to return from a fascist regime to a neoliberal authoritarian regime.

Due to the above structural factors, today the policy of the 'popular front' cannot even have any temporally and spatially-specific particular and limited applicability. What we need today is a revisualizing of the Leninist policy of united front of the working class from below, in general, and the policy of *particular* united front of the working class from above, that is, forming of particular tactical issue-based alliances with social-democrats and other non-fascist

bourgeois parties/organizations, while maintaining complete political independence of the proletariat. We have also seen the failures of 'new popular fronts' in a few European countries, especially, France recently. The curious case of attempts of forming something of the sorts of 'popular front' in India, too, is revealing.

In nutshell, the new incarnations of fascism in the neoliberal phase of imperialism have put a definitive end to all sorts of popular-frontism, though, it was not very successful even in the 1930s or 1940s. Today, proposing a policy of 'popular front' against fascism cannot be done without openly exhibiting one's class-collaborationism and class-capitulationism.

*

On the basis of above changes, we can say that fascism, wherever it emerges due to the particular political situation of the country, has become a more-or-less 'permanent phenomenon of the capitalist society in the period of long and chronic capitalist crisis, or, the long recession, and in the neoliberal phase of imperialism. It has a long incubation period in which it performs the internal takeover of the state-apparatus and a molecular permeation into the pores of the civil society. It maintains its entrenched positions within the state and the society. Its strategy is one of a long 'war of positions' and paroxysmic shifts to short periods of 'war of maneuver' and 'war of movement' intermittently, in the periods of severe economic crisis and exacerbation of the political crisis.

In this entire period, it can come into and go out of *governmental power*, even though due to the internal takeover of the state-apparatus, in most of the elections it will be in the winning positions. However, even when in times of exceptionally high levels of economic discontent and political disgruntlement it goes out of *governmental power* despite all the attempts to rig the elections (sometimes, it is simply not possible due to mass discontent and it can be done only at the peril of abandoning the form of bourgeois democracy itself and establishing open dictatorship), it will continue to hold onto and even consolidate anew its entrenched positions

within the state-apparatus and the society, and prepare for its next offensive to recapture the governmental power, too. In such periods, no bourgeois government will take any decisive step against the fascists without the real risk of losing the support of the bourgeoisie itself. Thus, a period of non-fascist authoritarianism in terms of policy and hollow and symbolic welfarism might continue, which, in the absence of any revolutionary political offensive, will only prepare grounds for the seizure of governmental power by the fascists once again and often in more ferocious and aggressive manner than before.

Fascism is not characterized by cataclysmic rise and equally cataclysmic fall anymore. Its electoral defeats would not mean its total defeat and banishment from the stage of history. At the same time, in general, the fascization of the state would not assume the form of an *event*, which happens through the introduction of a set of exceptional laws that abolish the very form of the bourgeois democracy. As a consequence, the fascist state-project would not assume the form of an event. Instead, it would assume the form of *a perpetually and constantly ongoing project which would never be complete.* Due to its whittling away and hollowing out, the shell/form of the bourgeois democracy does not pose a threat to the fascist project today. The bourgeois democratic content of this shell/form has already decayed to such an extent, that the fascists can do what they have been entrusted with by the big bourgeoisie, without abandoning this shell. Thus, the objective conditions have changed because to which fascism had to abandon the shell/form of bourgeois democracy in the early-Twentieth century. Moreover, the fascists, too, have summed up their historical experience as well as the new political situation and socio-economic conditions prevailing in the neoliberal phase. They have understood fairly well that abandoning the shell/form of the bourgeois democracy is neither needed today, nor is it desirable, as in such cases the only possible end for fascists would be complete destruction and a long-term political and historical exile and ostracization. Simply speaking, they are not dumb or idiots.

Therefore, those who deny the rise of fascism in the present times on the basis of the absence of Dachau or Auschwitz, or continued existence of parliaments, legislative assemblies, elections etc. are grossly mistaken. Those who are still waiting for the concentration camps to re-appear and the abolition of the multi-party parliamentary system have been sleeping through the entire period of neoliberalism till now, that is, since the 1970s itself. They are oblivious to the profound changes that the capitalist system as a whole has undergone, the significant changes in the *modus operandi* and nature of the bourgeois state and its regular state-form, that is, the bourgeois parliamentary system; they have missed the changes in the nature of the capitalist crisis itself since the late-1960s. In nutshell, they are imprisoned in a time-capsule and a space-capsule. They are still in the Germany of the 1930s and 1940s and the Italy of the 1920s, 1930s and 19405, whereas the world is standing in a qualitatively different conjuncture. The capitalist mode of production and its political articulations are in a new phase. Without recognizing these tectonic shifts, we cannot hope to devise an effective revolutionary proletarian strategy to fight against fascism in the Twenty-first century in a decisive manner.

This brings us to our proposal for an effective anti-fascist communist strategy for present times. We shall be brief here and limit ourselves to making some point-wise remarks on this question.

4. The General in the Struggle Against Fascism Today

The tasks that we are going to propose in this section stem directly from the foregoing analysis. For us, this analysis is not an academic exercise, but a thoroughly political exercise pertaining to the most pressing tasks of the revolutionary communist movement today. We shall begin with the *three general tasks.* We are calling them *general* because these three tasks are relevant even without the fascist rise, under capitalism. However, these tasks are still discussed here because among all other general tasks, these three have assumed particular importance in the political situation of the fascist rise. Without further ado, let us first discuss the three general tasks in the struggle against fascism.

A. Building and Formation of a New Revolutionary Communist Party

If we hope to defeat fascism today, the first most important general task for us is *to build a new revolutionary communist party in India*. Communist party is the headquarter of the class struggles of the proletariat, it is the centre for the centralization, abstraction and generalization of its historical experience and formulation of its strategy and general tactics. Without the leadership of the truly vanguard Bolshevik organization, the proletariat cannot constitute and organize itself as *a political class*, a class equipped with a political project, that is, the project to establish its own state. In other words, without a revolutionary communist party, the working class will be able to think only about its *particular, short-term, economic interests* and as a consequence its struggles cannot go beyond the pecuniary logic and trade-unionism. Secondly, when the working class fails to constitute itself as a political class, limits itself to particular, short-term, economic interests, it also fails to emerge as the political leader of the masses, because precisely due to the mistake of economism, it fails to implement a revolutionary massline.

It fails to establish the hegemony of its political line, against the political line of the bourgeoisie, within the masses.

One of the basic teachings of the science of Marxism is that *masses make history, not the proletariat alone*. Second basic teaching of Marxism is that *masses do not make history without the leadership of the vanguard class, that is, the proletariat*. Third basic teaching of Marxist science is that without the institutionalized leadership of the vanguard proletarian party, which itself is the *advanced detachment of the proletariat and the embodiment of the proletarian ideology,* the proletariat cannot constitute itself as a political class, which gives primacy to its *general, long-term, political interests*. Thus, in order to correctly handle the dialectic of masses and the ruling class and its state (the *mass-capitalist state dialectic*), the dialectic of masses and the proletariat must be resolved (the class-mass dialectic); however, in order for the proletariat to be able to handle this dialectic correctly, the institutionalized leadership of the vanguard party is essential (the party-class dialectic). Thus, the formation of the revolutionary communist party is essential for the working class to constitute and organize itself as a political class, rid itself of economism, anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism and workerism, to become the leader of the masses and establish its political hegemony in the masses and mass movements in order to render them effective against the bourgeois state.

Fascist ideology and politics are particular forms of bourgeois ideology and politics. Fascists are constantly active to make their ideology and politics hegemonic among the masses. They get active support of the bourgeoisie and especially the big bourgeoisie in their endeavors. However, besides these objective factors, it is also the failure of the proletariat in the absence of a correct political line and a Leninist organization to impose the hegemony of its own line among the masses that allows the fascists to win over the masses, especially the petty-bourgeois masses. Therefore, one of the principal reasons for the defeat of the revolutionary communists historically, too, was their failure to implement a revolutionary massline to win over the petty-bourgeois masses, including the

working peasant population and the urban lower-middle and middle classes. It was precisely these classes whose political discontent was misarticulated into a reactionary, fetishistic and chauvinistic form by the fascists to erect a reactionary fascist social movement of the petty-bourgeoisie. What is a general mistake for the revolutionary communists, becomes a particular suicidal mistake, when faced with rising tide of fascism.

Moreover, without an all-India revolutionary communist party, the mass struggles and movements against fascism will be scattered, unsystematic and unplanned. They would not be able to transcend the limits of spontaneity in the lack of a systematic and long-term political program and in the absence of linking of various mass struggles and movements. Thus, the mass resistance against fascism will be seriously limited in the absence of a revolutionary vanguard party, which alone has the ability to centralize these scattered mass movements around a mass political program against fascism. Without such united resistance, the effectivity of mass resistance will be partial at best.

B. Building Militant Mass Movements

This is the second general task, which holds good under capitalism in general, but has become particularly important against fascist rise. It is true that in and by themselves even the most militant mass movements can challenge fascists only in the immediate sense, because fascists can devise ways to deal with scattered mass movements, howsoever radical and militant they are. A revolutionary party centralizes these mass movements by giving them a concrete political program and thus giving them a general political form. However, we must remind our readers that the task of building a revolutionary vanguard party and the task of building mass movements are not metaphysically and mechanically separate. Instead, they are closely related with each other and they can be fulfilled only together. Revolutionary communists can take forward the process of building a revolutionary communist party only by establishing the hegemony of their political line among the masses,

recruiting from among the masses in the same process, and it is precisely under the leadership of the communist party that these mass movements can pose a *general* challenge to the fascists.

There is another reason why militant mass movements of different classes and sections of the masses, built on their concrete day-to-day issues, on concrete demands and concrete slogans, can become a challenge for the fascists and vaccinate the masses against the promiscuously adaptable fascist propaganda, which misarticulates the real class contradictions into fetishistic form (racist, communal, xenophobic, etc.). Fascists utilize the social and economic insecurity and uncertainty among the petty-bourgeoisie created by capitalism particularly during the periods of economic crisis, by misarticulating them and presenting a false enemy to the masses of the petty-bourgeoisie and absolving the real culprit, that the capitalist system and the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, the militant mass movements of the sections and classes of the masses do exactly the opposite. The mass movements against unemployment, inflation, homelessness, hunger and malnutrition, etc. built on a concrete program and concrete slogans, reveal the real causes of these problems and the true enemy before the masses. They put the capitalist system into the dock and expose the capitalist class and its profit-mongering as the factors responsible for the misery and insecurity of the masses. In the process of mass struggles, the masses learn from their experience and develop comparatively better understanding of their friends and their enemies. If the communists are able to win the leadership of such mass movements, they can transcend the limits of spontaneous anti-capitalism, and become truly revolutionary and general political mass movements against capitalism. This can create the most serious immediate challenge for the fascists at the grass-root level.

C. A United Front of the Working Class Against Fascism

We have already presented our understanding of the contemporary anti-fascist united front. We will only briefly enumerate the basic

points of our understanding.

First of all, the policy of the 'popular front' was not correct and successful even in the 1930s and 1940s, as the Comintern itself began to accept since the end of 1938, but today it will spell unprecedented disaster for the revolutionary communists. Secondly, in the 1930s, too, the communist leadership eventually understood that the correct policy of united front against fascism is the Leninist policy of the united front of the working class. Today, the revolutionary communists need to develop a version of this policy itself, according to the changes in the political conjuncture which have developed in the neoliberal phase.

To state the obvious, the policy of the united front of the working class against fascism would first of all mean the implementation of Leninist slogan of ‘to the masses’. This would entail the winning over of the masses of workers in various social-democratic and even bourgeois unions into anti-fascist fronts and organizations, the winning over of the masses of working people including the petty-bourgeoisie and semi-proletariat in general and the winning over of the working peasants (lower and middle peasantry which does not exploit wage-labour) on anti-fascist program through militant mass movements on their concrete issues. Secondly, it would *mean a general anti-fascist united front* between revolutionary communist organizations. Thirdly, it would mean *particular tactical issue-based anti-fascist alliances* with social-democrats and if and when feasible with other bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties who are ready to assume a genuinely anti-fascist stand on the issue in question, while maintaining the complete political independence of the proletariat and the communist party. Developing the nitty-gritty of such united front of the working class cannot purely be a theoretical exercise and it can be done through practice only.

These are the three general tasks facing the revolutionary communists today against fascism. After discussing these tasks in brief, we can discuss some of the particular short-term and long-term tasks in our struggle against fascism.

5. The Particular Tasks Against Fascism Today

A. Particular Tasks on the Working-Class Front

We must first of all discuss our particular tasks in the working-class movement. The principal task on the working-class front is a consistent, uncompromising and continuous struggle against revisionism, social-democracy, economism, anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism and various forms of workerism. Why?

The history of fascism reveals without any shred of doubt that it was precisely the sins of the social-democracy that led to the fascist rise becoming irresistible. What was this sin? It was limiting the working-class movement within the ambit of economism and pecuniary logic. Social-democracy systematically trained the working class to measure all its gains through wage and other economic benefits. It advocated for a compromise between labour and capital and persuaded the bourgeoisie to accept certain “reasonable” demands of the working class in return of sustainable peace and industrial discipline from the working class. In the periods of prosperity, the bourgeoisie, too, was willing to concede to these demands because it has a sizeable surplus at its disposal to finance this labour-capital compromise. Social-democracy thrived in this period. However, once the economic crisis of capitalism struck and the system was in distress, the social-democracy was at complete loss, because it knew how to deal with the system in prosperity but not with system in distress. As a result of the economic crisis, the capitalist system was hitting the bottleneck, the bourgeoisie was rapidly drifting towards various forms of far-right reaction and was experimenting with one form of reaction after the other. It was the time for revolution. However, social-democracy trained the workers to stubbornly cling to the already-won economic benefits, which the bourgeoisie was unable to accept in the general conditions of crisis. In response, the

social-democracy adopted the liberal logic of 'lesser evil' and in Germany it went to the extreme of supporting Hindenburg against Hitler! Thus, the refusal to go beyond the limits of capitalism, rank opportunism, incorrigible reformism and economism of the social-democracy disarmed and disabled the working class politically, even though the organized workers tended to cling to their economic benefits. This pushed the bourgeoisie further right into the arms of fascist reaction. Thus, social-democracy and its economism and trade-unionism exacted a heavy price.

However, economism was not the monopoly of social-democracy and various shades of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism, too, practiced different varieties of economism. Even revolutionary communists cannot be absolved of the charge of economism, though of a more militant kind. In general, economism exacted a heavy price by preventing the working class to organize itself as a political class and emerge as the leader of the masses. This left the vast masses of the working people including the petty-bourgeoisie at the mercy of the seductions of the fascist demagoguery.

Therefore, the principal task in the working-class movement is to wage a consistent struggle against social-democracy and revisionism, various forms of economism, trade-unionism and workerism, against anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism and fight for a revolutionary massline in order for the proletariat to constitute itself as a political class and emerge as the political leader of the masses by establishing the hegemony of its political line among the masses. It is precisely in the lack or absence of this struggle that the fascist rise becomes irresistible from being resistible.

B. Propaganda and Organizing Among the Masses of the Petty-bourgeoisie

It is the second most important particular anti-fascist task for the revolutionary communists and it is not difficult to understand why.

Fascism is the reactionary social movement of the petty-bourgeoisie which puts the petty-bourgeois reaction into the service of the interests of the big capital, in particular, and that of capital, in general. It is precisely this particular trait of fascism, above all other traits, that makes fascism a particularly dangerous form of far-right reaction for the working class. Faced with the economic and social insecurity and uncertainty and in the absence of any revolutionary alternative, the petty-bourgeoisie is driven into the arms of reaction. Fascism organizes this reaction and gives it a false enemy by misarticulating its real class grievances into a fetishistic form. If the petty-bourgeois masses are organized against their real enemy, that is, capitalism and the bourgeoisie, and organized into militant mass movements against capitalism and the bourgeoisie, fascism is deprived of its main social support base.

The revolutionary communists must organize the petty-bourgeois masses into militant mass movements and mass organizations. In this, the most important section is the lower echelons of the salaried petty-bourgeoisie because economically they have an element of wage-labour as they, too, sell their labour-power; however, due to their specific place in the process of production and circulation as functionaries of capital involved often in the non-production labour, in their political and ideological articulations they belong to the class of the petty-bourgeoisie; secondly, a part of this section also gets wages over and above the average social value of the labour-power of this category, which comes from the appropriated surplus value; the second section of the petty-bourgeoisie which is important forus is the lower echelons of the entrepreneurial petty-bourgeoisie, which runs small-time businesses with their and their family labour and constantly face the threat of proletarianization during the times of crisis. It is precisely these sections of the petty-bourgeoisie which form its majority and which in particular faces social and economic insecurity during capitalist crises. This class is pregnant with dual potential. On the one hand, in the lack of access to the knowledge about the real causes of their fragile and precarious situation, they are prone to move towards reaction and this precisely is the

possibility which the fascists try to realize. On the other hand, if the revolutionary communist forces are able to expose the capitalist system and the bourgeoisie as the real cause behind their misery and as their real enemy, this class can be won over to the side of revolution and socialism. Immediately, the masses of the petty-bourgeoisie must be organized on the questions of right to work, right to free and equal education, abolition of indirect taxes and establishment of the system of progressive taxation, right to food, right to public housing, right to free and equal healthcare, etc. These are the issues which affect them directly and they can be awakened, mobilized and organized on these issues into mass movements and mass organizations.

However, only mobilizing and organizing the masses of the petty-bourgeoisie on these concrete issues does not suffice. The revolutionary communists must organize systematic ideological propaganda among them. Due to their specific location in the capitalist society and its political economy, the petty-bourgeois masses are naturally under the ideological hegemony of bourgeoisie. Nicos Poulantzas has mentioned three forms of such ideologies: *status-quo anti-capitalism, statolatry* and *the myth of ladder*.[73] Poulantzas is broadly correct to identify these forms prevalent among the petty-bourgeoisie. Moreover, owing to its particular economic nature, the impact of bourgeois patriarchy within the petty-bourgeois families is particularly strong. Generally, the male breadwinner is the head of the family and the continued existence of patriarchal family structure is a pre-requisite for its economic survival. The rest of the members, especially the women and children, surrender their freedom in lieu of economic and social security as well as moral stability. The existence of this patriarchal father-figure within the petty-bourgeois family has been effectively pointed out by Wilhelm Reich[74] in his classic *The Mass Psychology of Fascism,* which despite its idealist deviations on various points, has been able to capture some very important aspects of fascism. This father-figure, which ensures economic, social and moral stability to the petty-bourgeois family, can easily be replaced by a führer-

figure that promises social, economic and moral security at the social level. The roots of this phenomenon lie in the very political economic foundation of the petty-bourgeoisie as a social class in a capitalist society.

The task that emerges from this analysis is that precisely due to the impact of these bourgeois ideologies among the petty-bourgeois classes, they are more prone to fall before the fascist demagoguery and therefore consistent revolutionary ideological propaganda in the petty-bourgeoisie based on institutionalized cultural and reform work is essential. Such ideological propaganda includes the propagation of rationalism, the refutation of the myths and revivalist propaganda of the fascists regarding the imagined glorious past of "*Ram Rajya*", etc. However, the communists have often engaged in what Dimitrov had called "national nihilism" in response to the fascist revivalism and construction of mythic past. They have outright rejected the entire history and heritage of the past of India. Thus, they abandon their claim on the materialist and rationalist traditions of Indian subcontinent, the struggle of the so-called lower castes against Brahmanical hegemony, the heritage of *Lokayat, Ajivikas, Samkhya, Nyaya, Vaisesika* and the likes of *Ajit Kesakambali, Kanād, Kapila*, etc. This approach only feeds into the false propaganda of the fascists and allows them to establish their claim on the entire ancient Indian past, through its mythic construction.

Besides, such ideological propaganda would also include the exposure of the real anti-patriotic and anti-people character and pro-colonial treachery of the fascists. Their own history is their biggest enemy. The fascist politics is based on the aesthetization of politics itself. One can say that fascist politics itself is a 'work of art'. It is based on the sanitization of their image, the construction of an infallible image based on *'chaal-chehra-charitra'*, that is, morality, purity, incorruptibility, etc. However, this image is based on lies. Revolutionary propaganda must dismantle these lies systematically before the masses.

However, all this propaganda would succeed not simply on the basis of its *truth*. The impact of the politics of truth also depends, besides the truth itself, on the social base of the revolutionary forces that carry out this propaganda based on the politics of truth. The wider this social base, the stronger the resonance that the revolutionary propaganda finds among the masses. This brings us to the third important particular task.

C. Building An Organic Mass Base Through Revolutionary Institutionalized Reform and Cultural Work

The revolutionary communists can hope to effectively and successfully repel and eventually defeat the fascist offensive only if they succeed in building an organic social base among the masses of the people through what we can term as *revolutionary institutionalized reform and cultural work.* In other words, against the fascist ‘war of positions’ and molecular permeation into the pores of the society, the communists must organize their own ‘war of positions’ and perform their own molecular permeation, in order to build anti-fascist counter-hegemony. We must not forget that the fascists in the initial phase learned the methods of focusing on the neighborhoods of the working people and that of the petty-bourgeoisie, developing their organic base, building institutions and entrenching their positions in the very pores of the society, from the communists themselves. However, tragically the revolutionary communists themselves forgot this fine tradition and method of work due to the tendencies of economism, trade-unionism and workerism dominant within the working-class movement, especially in the period following the Second World War.

In the heyday of Fordism, integrated assembly line, a sizeable state and private organized sector, a sizeable organized workers' movement, Keynesianism and a kind of labour-capital compromise

prevailed in the North-Western capitalist countries after the Second World War and also, albeit in a different form, in many of the newly-independent backward capitalist countries, due to the policies of state-led industrialization, import-substitution, and strict protectioníism. At the same time, an incorrect understanding of the political economy of the monopoly stage of capitalism, too, had been emerging among the communists since the 1930s itself, which saw the main contradiction as the one between the monopoly and all the rest. Moreover, in the same period the tendencies of economism and trade-unionism, too, flourished. As a consequence, not only social-democrats, but the revolutionary communists, too, focused only on the work-place and all class struggle was reduced to economic struggle for pecuniary demands. A near-total lack of massline was evident.

The fascists and other far-right quasi-fascist forces made good of it since the beginning of the long-recession and neoliberalism, targeted the working-class and petty-bourgeois neighborhoods, developed deep roots in them through institutional reform and cultural work. We are reminded, here, of the destruction of the working-class movement in Mumbai and the rise of Shiv Sena. The fascists and other quasi-fascist far-right forces developed a network of their institutions from schools, hospitals, gyms, friend clubs, sports clubs, libraries, clinics, hearse vehicle services, various cultural and recreational organizations, building fund-pools among working people, etc. The Indian fascists have been particularly successful in these endeavors. Also, they had been doing this even before the break out of the global crisis in the 1970s. In the period following this crisis, they accelerated this work and the result is before us. Using the dense network of their organizational branches (*shakhas*) and various other institutions that we mentioned above, the Indian fascists have built a 'communal consensus' as well as an organic support base and loyalty networks among the working masses, including the petty-bourgeois classes.

Again, it goes without saying, that it was the revolutionary communist organizations in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s which already carried

out such political work among the people; however, they developed a collective amnesia during the dominance of Fordism, economism. trade-unionism and workerism, particularly after the end of the Second World War and gave up these practices,

Thus, today the communists do not need to learn this from the fascists. Instead, they need to revive this method of mass work in the new context, develop their own organic support base among the masses through revolutionary institutionalized reform and cultural work, perform a molecular permeation, and entrench their positions in the society and carry on a ‘war of positions’ to decisively break the ideological and political hegemony of the fascists. Mao's directive of ‘serve the masses’ assumes a particular significance here, which must be implemented with new proletarian creativity. Only then we shall be able to fulfil this task.

D. Development of Revolutionary Communist Work in the Countryside and Struggle Against the Politics of Rich Farmers and Kulaks

There is no reason to believe that fascism is bound to be weak in the countryside. In fact, historically, the countries where fascism could not develop roots in the countryside, it could not rise to power. Geoff Eley makes precisely this point:

> “On the one hand, *peasants proved especially important to a fascist party's ultimate prospects, because the transition from ideological sect to mass movement was achieved as much in the countryside as the towns.* This was true of both Italy (1920-21) and Germany (1928-32). Conversely, some of the smaller fascist movements owed their weakness to country population's relative immunity to their appeal.”[75] (emphasis ours)

The fascist movements, in general, were able to rise to power only in those countries where they had been able to win over the petty-bourgeois peasant masses as well as capitalist farmers and landlords Both these different classes were won over in different ways by the fascists. Moreover, these ways were quite different from those in which the urban petty-bourgeoisie was won over by the fascists, for obvious reasons. The urban petty-bourgeoisie, the lower and lower-middle peasantry and the rural bourgeoisie (farmers as well as landlords) stand in different locations in and in different relations to the capitalist mode of production. Poulantzas has correctly explained the ideological processes through which fascism emerges as a dominant force in the countryside. He argues:

> “On the basis of this secondary contradiction, fascism manages to disguise the principal contradiction in the countryside, between the big landowners and the popular classes, in a quite specific way. Fascism originally appears much more as a reaction of the whole agricultural sector against the capitalization of agriculture, than as the direct expression of the reaction of the poor peasantry, i.e. the rural petty-bourgeoisie, against the big landowners. Under fascism, this petty-bourgeois revolt is directed almost exclusively against credit (banking capital) and the 'profiteering Jew, against falling prices on the urban market, and against the industrial proletariat.”[76] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas argues further:

> “Because it can present itself as the protector of agriculture as a whole, fascism has from the beginning much closer political and organizational ties with big property in the countryside than in the towns, where it expresses the reaction of the urban petty-bourgeoisie to monopoly capital in a new way. *This does not of course mean that fascism has no ideological or even demagogic role among the poor peasantry. It means that, in the countryside, fascism is much more an ideological and military movement with direct ties to big property*, rather than a

> movement that stems from the rural petty-bourgeoisie. Fascism anyway had to pay the landed proprietors this price for the domination of monopoly capital, which it effected at their expense. Lastly, one of the basic tasks of fascism was to divide the popular classes of the towns from the popular classes in the countryside, by using the myth of peasant 'unity'."[77] (emphasis ours)

Poulantzas's position on this question is best summarized in the following excerpt:

> "Fascism, then, presented a demagogic face to the poor peasantry, making false promises of 'colonization' and land distribution. But there was more to it: *fascism thoroughly exploited both the particular forms assumed by petty-bourgeois rebel ideology in the countryside, and the ideological theme of the solidarity and community of the soil.* It was this corporatist aspect which prevailed in the ideological role of fascism in the countryside*. Like the emphasis on ties of blood and ties of the soil, on personal loyalty, etc., this aspect linked up with the survivals of feudal ideology in 'rural* fascism'.
> "*This fusion of rural petty-bourgeois rebel ideology with the relics of feudal ideology is what gives rural fascism its originality*. It is to be distinguished from urban fascism, in which monopoly capitalist forms of ideology are much more pronounced."[78] (emphasis ours)

Thus, we can see the various ways in which fascism makes political inroads into the countryside, and which are qualitatively different from the ways in which it wins over the urban petty-bourgeois masses, the social class, from which fascism stems as a reactionary social movement.

The one change which we might allude to is the qualitatively changed balance of class forces today in most of the capitalist countries, including the relatively-backward post-colonial capitalist

countries like India. In Germany and Italy of the early-Twentieth century, an additional reason why fascism could not have emerged victorious without winning over the masses of the rural petty-bourgeoisie, besides other classes, can be understood by the fact that the share of rural population in total population, the share of agrarian population in the rural population and the share of peasant population in the agrarian population was much bigger as compared to the situation today, even in the relatively-backward, post-colonial capitalist countries like India.

It is noteworthy that at present in India, the agrarian population has become a minority among the rural population, land-owning peasant population has become a minority in the agrarian population, the small and marginal farmers (poor peasants) form the overwhelming majority of the peasant population and the agricultural proletariat is the largest class in agrarian population. The overall class structure has drastically changed even in a post-colonial relatively-backward capitalist country like India. Still, it would be a serious mistake to assume that fascism can seize power even today, while remaining purely an urban phenomenon, and we must be conscious of fascist inroads in the countryside.

Like Germany and Italy, in India, too, fascism has successfully penetrated into the countryside, politically as well as ideologically, with the help of alms-welfarism and the use of various rural and peasant petty-bourgeois ideologies. In such a situation, one of the important tasks before the revolutionary communists in India is to develop strong mass base in the countryside. Today, it can be accomplished, without surrendering the proletarian political independence, only by effecting a political cleavage between the poor and middle peasantry and the rural proletariat on the one hand, and the rich kulaks and capitalist farmers on the other. However, the majority of ML groups/organizations have adopted a neo-Narodist position and are tail-ending the rich kulaks and capitalist farmers, by supporting their anti-people demand of higher and legally-guaranteed MSP. Consequently, they are also making the working

poor of the countryside, too, tail-end the agrarian and rural bourgeoisie.

The anti-farm laws movement, politically speaking, was not anti-fascist movement, just because it was against Modi government. The Punjab, Haryana and Western UP farmers had been agitating and are still agitating for the legal guarantee of MSP and higher MSP, an economic demand of the agrarian bourgeoisie. It is their economic demand for protection from the big monopoly capital and for surplus-profit that they get through the monopoly-rent ensured by a monopoly-price, namely, the MSP. The anti-BJP sentiment in Punjab has its own particular reasons and this sentiment, too, is not something that is permanent or unshakeable. The conflict between the Modi government and the rich farmers and kulaks represents the contradiction between a fraction of the agricultural bourgeoisie (principal beneficiaries of the MSP regime) and the financial-industrial bourgeoisie regarding the sharing of the appropriated surplus value; the former wants to retain the protection of the political monopoly-price accorded to it in the 1960s when Indian capitalism was standing at a different conjuncture, required rapid development of capitalism and productivity in agriculture and food security, by relying upon and also erecting a class of capitalist owner as well as tenant farmers. Now this political monopoly-price has become a factor which increases the prices of the principal wage-goods, creates upward pressure on the wages and leads either to the decline in the average rate of profit (if the working class is organized and able to fight for better wages or to prevent depression of wages) or deductions from the wages and incomes of the working people.

Recent elections have shown that, politically speaking, there is no insurmountable obstacle for the BJP to win over the votes of the rich kulaks and farmers, because there is no inherent antagonistic political class contradiction between these two fractions of the bourgeoisie and secondly, *vis-à-vis* the working class, these two fractions are united.

In order to counter fascism in the countryside, therefore, it is essential for communists to organize the poor working peasants separately in poor peasant organizations, as Lenin had directed, on their particular class demands which are completely different from the demands of the rich capitalist farmers and kulaks. More importantly, it is absolutely indispensable to the organize the agricultural proletariat which is the largest class within the agrarian population now, into their own unions. Without the politically independent organizations of the rural poor constituted on their own particular economic and political demands, the growing incursions of fascism in the countryside cannot be halted.

What are some of the particular economic and political demands of the rural poor? The common demands of the working peasantry and the rural proletariat are the demand of right to work and the right to free and equal education, to bring agricultural work under the purview of the labour laws, right to public housing, right to free and equal healthcare, etc. The particular demands of the poor and working peasantry include provision of all the agricultural inputs at subsidized rate by levying special cess on the rich classes, including the rich kulaks and capitalist farmers in order to decrease the costs, easy and cheap institutional credit, development of state infrastructure for agriculture like canal and irrigation network, government purchase of agricultural produce which ensures the average rate of profit of the economy, provision of help in co-operativization of agriculture, etc. These are the demands which will never find support among the rich kulaks and capitalist farmers because it is precisely through rent and interest, besides extraction of surplus-value directly as capitalist entrepreneurs, that the rich kulaks and farmers plunder the rural poor.[79]

It is precisely in the absence of communist political intervention in the countryside that the overwhelming majority of the rural population, that is, the agricultural workers and the poor and marginal peasants, tail-end the rich kulaks and farmers in their tussle with the industrial-financial bourgeoisie for a larger share in the appropriated surplus, that is, the struggle for higher and guaranteed

MSP, a demand which clearly goes against the interests of the above-mentioned classes of the rural poor.

In general, fascism penetrates the countryside on the basis of these very affluent classes and then wins over sections of the poor and middle peasantry (the agricultural/rural petty-bourgeoisie) through different kinds of ideological instruments, besides the economic instrument of alms-welfarism. Unless and until, the revolutionary communists organize the rural poor in their politically-independent mass organizations, separate from the ‘rich farmers and kulaks’ organizations, fascism will continue to succeed in the countryside. The classical kulak politics led by the likes of Charan Singh has departed and its remnants have been successfully co-opted by the fascist politics, as evident from the politics in Western UP, Haryana, Rajasthan, UP, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar and other states. The political void created is being filled most effectively by the Hindutva fascists. Punjab's case is peculiar, due to which BJP finds it difficult to develop its base firmly and on its own. One reason is that the struggle between the agricultural bourgeoisie and the industrial-financial bourgeoisie on the question of the MSP is led by the Punjab's agricultural bourgeoisie, the chief beneficiary of the MSP regime; the second reason is that historically this Punjabi agricultural bourgeoisie, mostly Jatt Sikhs, have had their own far-right and/or religious fundamentalist organizations, like the Akali Dal, which presently is in tatters and which had been a long-term ally of the BJP. However, these are conjuctural factors and one cannot assert that they would remain as it is forever. We cannot deny in case of Punjab, too, that things can see a turn-around in a different conjuncture.

At any rate, this much is certain: to stop the forward march of fascism in the countryside, the revolutionary communists must organize the rural poor in their own politically-independent organizations on their own particular economic and political demands, separately and autonomously from the rich kulaks and capitalist farmers.

E. Building a Class-based Anti-Caste Movement

The fifth important particular anti-fascist task for the revolutionary communists is building *a class-based anti-caste movement* in the country. On the question of caste and the struggle against it, the politics of identity as well as the Ambedkarite pragmatism have always benefitted the fascist forces in the long run. The politics of identity always bases itself on the logic of *othering*. In the case of oppressed sections of society, it ends up at assertion of identity, demand for accommodation and representation, in the best cases. In the worst cases it leads to endless fragmentation within the oppressed the identitarian politics has led to the disintegration of the dalit movement is evident to everyone, even though the latter itself is nothing but a version of identity politics with a bigger unit. The fix is that when a minority oppressed people or section of society base their strategy on the assertion of their identity, they cannot do so, without, *always-already* underlining the opposite or the 'antagonistic' identity, because it is based on the logic of othering. The oppressed minority identities can effectively fight against their oppression only on the basis of class unity, that is to say, on the basis of the unity of all oppressed and exploited people. Only through such struggle the caste-based prejudices prevalent among the classes and sections of the working people, too, can be eliminated in a long process. Solidarity is the key here.[80]

Similarly, the Ambedkarite thought is based on the Deweyan pragmatism, instrumentalism and what Dewey called 'progressive experimentation'. We cannot go into the detail of the critique of Deweyan pragmatism and the Ambedkarite political thought based on it here, and we will limit ourselves to making some brief comments on this question[81]. The very nature of Deweyan

pragmatism of Ambedkarite politics is that on certain particular issues it can stand against fascism, while on others, it can also join hands with fascism or support it. In the long run, pragmatist politics helps the fascists, because one of its basic ideological and political prejudices is that the government/the state is the 'most rational agent' or the 'great mediator' and therefore it is the government or the state that determines the general orientation of the development of the society. Another argument of pragmatism is that all changes in the nature as well as in the society are incremental and gradual and there is no leap or rupture. What it translates into in terms of politics, can easily be understood: reformism and constitutionalism. Similarly, it sees violence as 'waste' irrespective of whether the violence is revolutionary violence, that is, the violence done by the organized masses against the perpetuation of systemic violence by the state of the ruling classes against the exploited and oppressed people to maintain the *status quo*, or, it is the violence of the ruling classes and their state to perpetuate the prevalent system of exploitation and oppression. More interestingly, Ambedkarite political thought (essentially Deweyan pragmatism) is blind and oblivious to the violence perpetuated by the state of the dominant classes.

It can easily be understood that not only such an ideology and such a politics cannot fight against fascism in a consistent fashion, it would rather help the fascists, sometimes directly and at others indirectly, in the *longue durée*. That is why, despite the trenchant textual criticism of Hindu scriptures presented by Ambedkar, Ambedkar or Ambedkarite politics never became a real challenge or threat to the fascists. That is the truth, whether one likes it or not.

Brahmanical ideology is one of the component parts of fascist ideology in our country, even though the most important component of fascism is a different variety of pragmatism itself, which trumps most of the other components. It is noteworthy that a major pragmatist thinker William James was one of the sources of ideological inspiration for Benito Mussolini.[82] Thus, even in their use of Brahmanical ideology, the fascists are extremely pragmatist. That is the reason why they have been able to win over considerable

section of the non-dominant dalit castes in most of the states in India.

However, still, there is no doubt that the Brahmanical ideology, too, is a component part of ideological ensemble of fascist ideology. We must be clear as to what is the nature of this ideology. It is an ideology which has been used by the various ruling classes in the history of India, since the Later Vedic Period itself and has been co-opted, readjusted, restructured and remolded by different modes of production. It is not an ideology which makes a particular hierarchy permanent (as many think basing themselves on an idealist textual analysis); rather it is an ideology which legitimates the structural subordination of the most exploited and most oppressed sections and classes of society through what we call *religious and ritualistic ossification*.[83] Secondly, it also divides the working people into a multi-level hierarchy (this is something that Ambedkar, too, understood). In the epochs of different social formations in Indian subcontinent, it has ideologically served the different ruling classes in different ways, be it Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya or Shudra and even the Turk and Afghan rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals. The Brahmanical ideology has justified the rule of different ruling classes in different ways by providing the "divine" justification for their rule by constructing new mythologies and new ritualistic and religious constructions. Many, even among so-called Marxists, fail to understand the essence of this ideology due to their reliance on *ideology-critique* of texts, assuming that texts/codes like *Manusmriti* engendered caste system, whereas it was the *real relations of social oppression* which had come into existence in *the moment of class and production relations*, which had engendered the Brahmanical texts and codes. That is why, they speak in so many different tongues in different times and in different spaces.

Once we understand the essence of the Brahmanical ideology, it becomes clear that identity politics and pragmatism cannot challenge it for various reasons, that we have discussed. Moreover, precisely for this reason, such ideological trends only feed into fascism, rather than challenging it. In the anti-fascist revolutionary strategy and

tactics, building a class-based anti-caste movement, therefore, assumes a great importance. It includes uncompromising ideological struggle against identitarianism as well as pragmatism. Only through such a movement, the caste system and the Brahmanical ideology can be effectively challenged and the revolutionary forces can mount an offensive against the fascist forces.

F. Building a Class-based Anti-Patriarchy Movement

The preceding discussion on the role of patriarchy especially in the petty-bourgeoisie and how it makes the masses of the petty-bourgeoisie prone to the fascist demagoguery, has already made it clear that the struggle against patriarchy is an inherent part of the ideological struggle against fascism. However, the anti-patriarchy and women's movements, too, are afflicted with the malaise of identitarianism and various kinds of feminism (which itself is a bourgeois ideology; there is no such thing as "proletarian/socialist feminism"). Identitarianism, here too, is an admission of defeat and is tantamount to surrender even before the battle has begun. No oppressed community, especially oppressed minority, can liberate itself through identity politics, which is based on the prejudice that only those who directly face a certain form of oppression have the right to speak against it and have the capability to fight against it, because all others are part of the problem, as they are beneficiaries of the oppression. Moreover, the real enemy, that is, the capitalist patriarchy, the capitalist system and the capitalist state, are put out of the dock in such politics. Once the real culprit is absolved, the movements of the oppressed based on identitarianism go round and round *ad infinitum*, causing a lot of “sound and fury” regarding creating “safe spaces”, “sensitizing the oppressor”, “using politically correct language”, “demand for accommodation and representation”, etc. which “signifies nothing” as far as the emancipatory politics is concerned.

We must understand that the liberation of the women and the fight against the patriarchy in general, which subsumes the struggle of the homosexual, transgender and transsexual people, too, must be organized along class lines. We must understand that men do not oppress women because they are men, and so on. These identities become sites of oppression only in the moment or the framework of class. Only by uniting the masses of the working people against patriarchy, only by showing to them how patriarchy not simply oppresses women but also men, only by showing that, objectively and collectively speaking, men are not beneficiaries of the oppression of women (in fact, there is sufficient evidence to show that the more oppressed and vulnerable the women are, the more exploited and vulnerable the men of the working masses are), can we mount an effective offensive against capitalist patriarchy and capitalism as such. Patriarchy is linked with capitalism and class society through a naval cord. It helps capitalism economize the costs of the reproduction of the labour-power; moreover, it plays a central role in making the working masses prone to the fascist ideology and demagoguery. A strong class-based anti-patriarchy movement and the liberation of women will cause irreparable damage to the fascists. However, such a movement can be built only by consistent struggle against the bourgeois lines in the women's movement and the anti-patriarchy movement, in general, namely, identitarianism and feminism.

G. A Consistent Fight for Genuine Secularism

In the specific Indian context where the ideological and political unit of fascism is religious identity, a consistent and uncompromising struggle for genuine secularism becomes essential in the struggle against fascism. We must organize intensive agitation and propaganda on this issue and acquaint the masses with the idea of genuine secularism, which has nothing whatsoever to do with *sarva*

dharma sambhaav (*all religions are equal*). The idea of genuine and revolutionary secularism means total separation of religion from the political and social life of the people, that is, from the state as well as from social life and relegating religion to the private sphere. This is precisely the idea that Bhagat Singh and his comrades supported and we must familiarize the masses with their secular legacy. Concrete experience shows that if the rationality behind the idea of genuine secularism is explained to the masses in their language and in simple terms, they support it and welcome it. If it is explained and demonstrated, with facts and evidence, to the masses in the language and terminology that they understand, that the fascist politicization of religion and religious identity spells disaster precisely for the working people, that all communal riots, genocide and violence always affects the working masses in the most cruel and brutal ways and it always strengthens and helps our class enemies, the capitalist class and their political representatives; then they understand and support the fight for genuine secularism.

If the revolutionary communists fight for genuine secularism, build a mass movement on this question by organizing intensive and extensive propaganda as well as agitation, if they wage this struggle in totally unapologetic manner, unlike the social-democrats and revisionists, who regularly dabble in religious appeasement for petty electoral gains, we have no doubt that the working masses can be won over on this question. Such a movement will cause irremediable loss to the fascists. Today, no fraction or faction of the bourgeoisie has the courage and capability to fight for genuine secularism. The bourgeoisie could do it only in its revolutionary phase, when capitalism was fighting against feudalism and church. In the stage of monopoly capitalism, the bourgeoisie as a political class as well as social class, has become totally bereft of this democratic and secular potential. The fallen flag of revolutionary secularism must be picked up by the revolutionary proletariat, the only class able to fight against all forms of communalism, religious fundamentalism and chauvinism, medievalism and revivalism, and authoritarianism in the most resolute manner. If the revolutionary communists are able to

organize the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat for this task, it will be a great step forward in the anti-fascist struggle.

H. A Mass Campaign for Scientific Temperament and Rationalism

Connected with the question of secularism is the more general question of mass initiative for propagation of reason and rationality and scientific temperament in general. We must be clear that this is not atheistic propaganda in itself. Fascism is a modern ideology which is anti-modernity. This is not a contradiction in terms. The bourgeois modernity was bound to bifurcate into its progressive, humanist, rationalist and scientific stream and its regressive, anti-humanist, anti-reason and anti-science stream. The origins of fascist ideology can be traced in the latter which assumed definite shape especially in the beginning of the monopoly stage of capitalism, as exemplified by the philosophy of the likes of Nietzsche, Spengler, etc. This *modern* anti-modernism, anti-humanism, anti-rationalism runs through all the contemporary machinations of fascism, as they are its constitutive elements, even though they assume ever new forms according to the particular historical context in which they emerge.

In India, too, fascism mobilizes all the anti-modern, anti-reason and anti-humanist elements, medieval and pre-modern as well as modern capitalist ones, and articulates them in the modern fascist fashion. We have seen this happening before our own eyes in the last few decades in the most naked form. The fascist attack on the rationalists and activists fighting against superstition is not without reason. They feel threatened with the spread of rational and scientific, humanist and secular ideas among the masses and those who do this, are some of their principal enemies. However, there are limits to the propagation of reason, rationality and scientific temperament by the brave but lone warriors.

We need a revolutionary mass campaign, rather movement, for this and it is only the revolutionary communists who can organize such propaganda in the most consistent, systematic and militant fashion. Such political and ideological work is particularly important among the youth, adolescents and children. One can call it as a 'generation building campaign or movement. It is true that in and by itself, such propaganda alone cannot seriously dent the fascist ideology and politics. However, as a constitutive component of the overall anti-fascist proletarian strategy and tactics, such propaganda assumes particular importance. It will attack at the recruitment centres of the fascist forces, immunize the masses of lumpenproletariat as well as lumpen petty-bourgeoisie, which supply the fascists with the frenzied mob that is used as violent counter-vailing force against the working class and working masses in general.

I. Building a Mass Movement for Civil and Democratic Rights

This is a very important task of the anti-fascist proletarian strategy. We have seen how fascist leadership is established as the sole spokesperson of the majority community (racial, communal, or otherwise) with the construction of a false enemy out of a sizeable minority community, and that of a 'purely ideological community' like 'German Aryan Nation' or *'Hindu Rashtra'*. We have also seen how with the establishment of the fascist führer as the sole spokesperson and the 'emperor of hearts' for the 'purely ideological community, anyone and everyone standing in opposition to the führer is included in the figure of the enemy and thus the enemy figure is rapidly expanded. This naturally includes vicious attacks against the civil and democratic rights of the people in general. As a consequence, the militant defense of the democratic and civil rights against the fascists, based on a mass movement, assumes particular importance in the anti-fascist strategy of the revolutionary proletariat.

The old movement for civil and democratic rights, that originated immediately after the Independence itself, has more-or-less run its course after making considerable contributions. In its heyday, it produced stellar fighters for the democratic and civil rights of the people. However, India never *had a truly genuine mass movement* for civil and democratic rights. The reason is that it never had a wide mass base and was mostly a middle-class phenomenon limited to the intellectual circles and university campuses. It never truly assumed the character of a mass movement, except periods when the issues of civil and democratic rights were included in overall charter of certain general political movements, such as, in the mass movement against the Emergency.

However, as the nature of the middle class itself has undergone significant changes in the neoliberal phase, with its most enlightened and intellectually superior parts being co-opted by the system, economically as well as politically, the old civil rights and democratic rights movement witnessed a gradual decline. There has been a tendency to view the working class as indifferent to the question of civil and democratic rights and as mostly interested merely in the labour rights. The idea that underlies such notions is that the workers are not citizens. However, the workers, too, are citizens and they must not forgo their claims on their citizenship, which entails certain civil and democratic rights. It is precisely the act of over-identifying with these formal promises of the capitalist system which, among other things, brings the system to a point of impossibility.

From Marx and Lenin, we know that it is the proletariat and the working masses whose struggle brought the basic democratic rights such as universal franchise, the right to assemble and expression, free press, the rights of political prisoners, etc. and they are not benevolent gifts from the ruling class; from Lenin we also know that it is the working class which has the potential to become the most resolute and militant defender of the bourgeois democratic rights; again, Lenin has also taught us that without the fight for the democratic rights of the masses, the proletariat cannot move even a single step in the direction of socialism; and finally, it is the duty of

the proletariat to understand not only the relation between itself and the bourgeoisie, but the relations among all the classes of the modern capitalist society; only then, it can emerge as a political class leading the working masses against capitalism; that is the reason why the working class must fight against every instance of injustice and oppression which takes place in any part of the world.

On the basis of the above understanding, the concrete conclusion that we can draw is that without transforming the civil and democratic rights movement into a *genuinely mass movement* we cannot revive it and consequently we cannot fight against the fascist onslaught on the civil and democratic rights of the masses; secondly, no other class in the present society is capable of fulfilling this task, except the proletariat; third, without getting rid of the malaise of economism and trade-unionism, the proletariat cannot perform this task; fourth, the proletariat can do this only under the institutionalized leadership of the vanguard proletarian party; and fifth, consequently, the revolutionary communists must devise ways to awaken, mobilize and organize the working class in the most creative ways for the struggle for civil and democratic rights.

J. Organizing the Unorganized

No amount of iteration and reiteration, emphasizing and re-emphasizing suffices on the need for organizing the massive majority of the informal/unorganized workers, who constitute 93 percent of the working class in India. The central trade union federations affiliated with different bourgeois parties, including the social-democratic parties, do not represent these workers and are limited to the small privileged conclave of the organized workers. As a consequence, this overwhelming majority of the workers remains unorganized and at the mercy of the employers.

Moreover, the RSS and its organizations are making efforts to make in-roads into the unorganized and informal sector workers and also

winning over a part of it, mainly the *lumpenproletariat*. It is not that this section of the working class is inherently backward, lacking class consciousness and having backward linkages. In fact, potentially, this section of the working class is politically much more advanced for a variety of reasons. One reason is that they are not the old informal workers of the Fordist era, who had primordial consciousness and were backward. A considerable part of this new informal working class often works in the modern and advanced industries, in a precarious situation, without any security of job and other labour rights. Moreover, it is what scholars have termed as the 'footloose labour', that is, workers who work in many different branches of industries, including using advanced technology, due to their casualization and contractualization. Consequently, they are at a vantage point to see the class of employers as the enemy, rather than one particular employer. Also, this part of the working class also faces different kinds of state regulation by the state agencies and the functionaries of law enforcement. Some scholars have pointed out that the informal sector lacks formal regulation (through laws, etc.) but not regulation itself[84]. As a result, it is also at a vantage point to see the state not as a proverbial 'third actor, but as a representative of the capitalist class. Therefore, if there is revolutionary communist intervention, this class of informal and unorganized workers, who is now working not only in the informal sector but also in the formal sector ('the informal within the formal'), has immense potential to develop political class consciousness and become the immediate vanguard of the working-class movement.

Organizing the vast ocean of informal/unorganized workers will impart great strength to the revolutionary communist movement, in general, as well as the anti-fascist revolutionary movement, in particular. In the absence of appropriate and sufficient revolutionary intervention, considerable sections of this working class run the risk of the petty-bourgeois transformation of its consciousness and tail-end the fascist reactionary social movement of the petty-bourgeoisie, as their foot-soldiers, supplying the ranks of the fascist storm-

troopers. It is already happening and the revolutionary communists must take up the task of organizing them as an important urgent task.

*

These are some of the particular political tasks that face the revolutionary communist movement, *vis-à-vis* building a strong anti-fascist movement. However, this is neither a laundry-list nor an exhaustive list. These tasks are enumerated in the order of their political importance, but they do not constitute an exhaustive or final list. There are many other tasks which must be taken up and fulfilled in order to resist the fascists which include *supporting the national liberation struggle of the oppressed nations as well as the struggle of the oppressed nationalities for consistent democracy; building a strong revolutionary cultural movement on the widest possible scale in order to build counter-hegemony against the fascists in the cultural sphere, where they are most active; the building of a revolutionary alternative media which makes the most efficient, subtlest, and widest use of all kinds of media, including the so-called 'new media'; organizing anti-fascist brigades of workers, students and youth who can retaliate the attacks of the fascist terror-gangs on the minorities in particular and working people in general, etc.* However, most of these tasks stem from the fundamental political and ideological tasks that we have enumerated above, if we take the analysis to its logical conclusions. In the end, we would like to reiterate at the risk of being tautological that we must understand fascism in its *historicity* as well as its *contemporaneity*. We must be able to comprehend the universal generalities of fascism, which differentiate it from all other forms of far-right reaction and which are present in all instances of fascist rise, and, we must also be able to see the particularities of fascism in the neoliberal phase of the imperialist stage, which differentiate it from these two elements, that is, the element of continuity and the element its early-Twentieth century incarnations.

Without understanding of change, we cannot devise the correct revolutionary communist strategy to fight against fascism today. In this paper, we have humbly presented our own understanding of these questions, which has been developing since last one-and-a-half decades and some of the elements of which are still undergoing development, which is natural, as we are talking about a phenomenon which is still unfolding before our eyes.

We must also make it clear that precisely for the reasons stated above, we do not make any frivolous claim regarding our understanding to be the final word on the subject, Quite the contrary. We regard it as a humble proposal before our revolutionary communist comrades, our fraternal revolutionary communist organizations and groups, open for debates and discussion. We believe that the debates and discussions on this question is the need of the hour and we must engage in them without any further delay.

Publications from Arvind Memorial Trust

Working Class Movement in the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change, Orientation and Possibilities, Problems and Challenges (Papers presented in the Second Arvind Memorial Seminar)

Democratic Rights Movement in India: Orientation, Problems and Challenges (Papers presented in the Third Arvind Memorial Seminar)

Caste Question and Marxism

(Papers presented in the Fourth Arvind Memorial Seminar)

Fascism in the Twenty-first Century: Elements of Continuity and Change (Papers presented in the Seventh Arvind Memorial Seminar)

For new and forthcoming publications and publications in other languages, visit the Arvind Memorial Trust website: www.arvindtrust.in

Main distributor of all Arvind Memorial Trust publications: Janchetna, D-68, Nirala Nagar, Lucknow 226020

Phone: 0522-4108495, Email: janchetna.books@gmail.com

Website: www.janchetnabooks.org

Notes

[←1] Shaikh, Anwar. 2011. "The First Great Depression of the 21" Century' in Socialist Register 2011, Leftword Books, New Delhi

[←2] Poulantzas, Nicos. 1979. Fascism and Dictatorship, Verso, London, p. 357-58

[←3]
Poulantzas, Nicos. 1979. Fascism and Dictatorship, Verso, p. 13

[←4]
Eley, Geoff. 2003. 'What produces Fascism: Preindustrial Traditions or a Crisis of the Capitalist State', in Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann (eds.) Radical Perspectives on the Rise of Fascism in Germany, 1919-45. Cornerstone Publications, Kharagpur, p. 86

[←5]

Long waves refer to the long-term curve of the capitalist economy based on the movements of profitability, which has a secular tendency to fall; the short-term (inventory) cycles of 3 to 5 years, now also called "business cycles", depend on the movements of aggregate supply and demand (themselves regulated by changes in the rate of profit) and the medium-term or 'fixed capital cycles of 7 to 10 years depend on the aggregate capacity and supply (again, themselves regulated by movements of profitability) are embedded in these very long-waves, which are 40-50 years long. During the upward long-waves, periods of prosperity dominate, whereas during the downward long-waves, periods of depression and crises dominate. For elaboration, please see: Shaikh, Anwar. 1992. "The Falling Rate of Profit as the Cause of Long Waves: Theory and Empirical Evidence' in Kleinknecht, A., Ernest Mandel, I. Wallerstein (eds.) New Findings in Long-Wave Research, Macmillan Press, London.

[←6]

Anwar Shaikh. 2011. "The First Great Depression of the 21st Century, in Socialist Register 2011, The Merlin Press; Roberts, Michael. 2016. The Long Depression Haymarket Books

[←7]

Engels, Friedrich. 1982. Preface' to 1886 English edition, Capital, Penguin Edition, p. 113

[←8]
Engels, Friedrich, 1991. Editorial note, Capital, Vol. III, Penguin Books, p. 568-69

[←9]
ibid, p. 620-21

[←10]

Engels to Bebel, 28 October 1885, London

[←11]
Kliman, Andrew. 2012. The Failure of Capitalist Production, Pluto Press

[←12]

Ahmad, Aijaz. 2016. 'Right-wing Politics, and the Cultures of Cruelty, in On Communalism and Globalization: Offensives of the Far-Right, Three Essays Collective, p. 65

[←13]

Sarkar, Sumit. 2017. 'Fascism of the Sangh Parivar' in Ram Puniyani (ed.) Fascism in India: Debating RSS-BJP Politics, Media House, p. 76

[←14]
Poulantzas. Nicos. 2000. State, Power, Socialism, Verso, London, p. 203-04

[←15]
ibid, p. 204

[←16]
ibid, p. 206

[←17]
ibid, p. 208-09

[←18]
ibid, p. 209

[←19]
ibid, p. 209-10

[←20]
ibid, p. 210

[←21]
ibid, p. 211-12

[←22]
ibid, p. 212

[←23]
ibid, p. 217

[←24]
ibid, p. 218

[←25]
ibid, p. 218-19

[←26]
ibid, p. 222

[←27]
ibid, p. 227

[←28]
ibid, p. 230-31

[←29]
ibid, p. 234

[←30]
ibid, p. 235

[←31]
ibid, p. 236

[←32]
ibid, p. 238

[←33]
ibid, p. 239

[←34]
Poulantzas. Nicos. 1979. Fascism and Dictatorship, Verso, London, p. 74

[←35]
ibid, p. 74

[←36]
ibid, p.

[←37]
ibid, p. 311

[←38]
ibid, p. 320

[←39]
ibid, p. 327

[←40]
ibid, p. 354

[←41]
Poulantzas, Nicos. 1976. Political Power and Social Classes, NLB, London, 284-285

[←42]
Jessop, Bob, 2002. "The Politics of Representation and the Eighteenth Brumaire" in M. Cowling and I. Martin (eds.) The Eighteenth Brumaire Today, Pluto Press, p. 179

[←43]
Poulantzas, Nicos. 1976. op.cit. p. 308

[←44]
ibid, p. 308

[←45]
ibid, p. 309

[←46]
ibid, p. 311-12

[←47]
ibid, p. 313

[←48]
ibid, p. 314

[←49]
ibid, p. 316-17

[←50]

Jessop, Bob. 1985. Nicos Poulantzas: Marxist Theory and Political Strategy, Macmillan, p. 98

[←51]
ibid, p. 98

[←52]
ibid, p. 101

[←53]
Jessop, Bob. 2016. The State: Past, Present and Future, Polity, p. 225

[←54]
ibid, p. 225

[←55]
ibid, p. 245-46

[←56]
Sakellaropoulos, Spyros. 2020. 'Re-*reading The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: The Phenomenon of Bonapartism as a Capitalist State Without Popular Representation', in *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Enquiry,* Vol. 11, No. 1 (Summer 2020)

[←57]
Palheta, Ugo. 2019. 'How Fascism Has Been Re-invented; https://socialistworker.co.uk/socialist-review-archive/how-fascism-has-been-reinvented/

[←58]
Palheta, Ugo. 2022. https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7629

[←59]
Sinha, Abhinav. 2016. ‘The Resistible Rise of Fascism and the Challenges of the Working-Class Movement in India’, https://redpolemique.wordpress.com/2016/06/09/the-resistible-rise-of-fascism-and-the-challenges-of-the-working-class-movement-in-india/

[←60]
Kesavan, Mukul. 2024.
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/sep/08/india-slow-motion-rise-of-fascism

[←61]
Chadhoke. Neera. 2024. 'Rise of the Autocrats, in Frontline. Vol. 41, No. 10, 31 May, 2024

[←62]
Renton, Dave. 2021. https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/on-violence-a-reply-to-ugo-palhetas-fascism-fascisation-antifascism/

[←63]
Toscano, Alberto. 2023. *Late Fascism*, Verso, p. 77

[←64]
ibid, p. 89

[←65]

Traverso, Enzo. 2019. *The New Faces of Fascism*, Verso, p. 12

[←66]

Saull, Richard. 2023. Capital, Race and Space: The Far Right from Bonapartism to Fascism, Volume 1, Brill, p. 11

[←67]
Tamás, G. M. 2000. https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/g-m-tamas-post-fascism/

[←68]
ibid

[←69]
ibid

[←70]
Dimitrov, Georgi. 2020. The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International, Foreign Languages Press, Paris, p. 5

[←71]
Quoted in Schram, Stuart. 1974. *Chairman Mao talks to the People*, Pantheon Books, p. 218

[←72]

We might do well to point out in passing that some new research has shown that Stalin did not play any significant role in the formulation of the policy of the popular front. The role of the PCF as the originator of the line and then the role the Comintern was central, and Stalin, due to being involved in urgent domestic of Dimitrov in systematizing and legitimizing this line in the Seventh Congress of matters did not pay much heed to it. Of course, as the principal leader of the world proletariat at that time, some responsibility is, indeed, shared by Stalin. Those interested in knowing about the historical context of the formulation of the policy of the 'popular front' might refer to: Sinha, Abhinav. 2024. *Menagerie of Dogmatic Blunders*, Rahul Foundation Lucknow.

[←73]
Poulantzas, Nicos. 1979. op.cit., p. 241-43

[←74]
Reich, Wilhelm. 2016. *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Aakar Books (See Chapter 2)

[←75]
Eley, Geoff. 2003. *'What Produces Fascism*?" in Dobkowski, Wallimann (eds.) Radical Perspectives on the Rise of Fascism in Germany, 1919-1945, Cornerstone Publication, Kharagpur, p. 83

[←76]
Poulantzas, N. 1979. op.cit., p. 281

[←77]
ibid, p. 281-82

[←78]
ibid, p. 280

[←79]

On the question of MSP, peasant question in India and the need for independent political organization of the rural poor, that is, poor and middle peasantry, agricultural semi-proletariat and proletariat, please see: Sinha, Abhinav. 2024. *For a Proletarian Line*, Rahul Foundation, Lucknow, p. 139-409

[←80]

On this particular question, please see: Sinha, Abhinav. 2019. 'Marxism and the Question of Identity' in *Subversive Interventions*, Rahul Foundation, Lucknow

[←81]

Those interested in reading a detailed critique of Ambedkarite thought can refer to the following: Sinha, Abhinav, 2019. 'Caste Question, Marxism and the Political Legacy of B. R. Ambedkar' in Subversive Interventions, Rahul Foundation, Lucknow; Sinha, Abhinav. 2019. "The Tragic Regression of Anand Teltumbde - From 'Mahad: The Making of the First Dalit Revolt' to 'Bridging the Unholy Rift" in *Subversive Interventions*, Rahul Foundation, Lucknow

[←82]
Stewart, William K. 1928. "The Mentors of Mussolini' in The American Political Science Review, Vol. 22, No. 4. Nov. 1928, p. 843-869

[←83]
Sinha, Abhinav. 2019. 'Historiography of Caste: Some Critical Observations and Some Methodological Interventions' in *Subversive Interventions*, Rahul Foundation, Lucknow

[←84]
Mohapatra, Prabhu P. 2004. 'Making of the Coolie: Legal construction of Labour relations in colonial India and in the Caribbean: *Labour in the Public Arena*, V.V. Giri National Labour institute, Noida