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Is Trump a 21st century fascist?

What is the Fascism of 21st century?

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Summary

Fascism's historical forms varied greatly, drawing from diverse intellectual and political backgrounds. In short, classical fascism emphasized 'All within the State', Strasserism utilized 'socialism of the fools,' and neo-fascism embodies 'Blood and Soil' politics. The extreme "paleo libertarianism" and "national conservatism", the hybrids of anti-establishment libertarianism and nationalist identitarian movement could be all about "Libertarian-Nationalist Alliance". Nonetheless, the effective anti-fascism, therefore, entails upholding individual rights as well as civil liberties, and opposing nationalism universally.

Alice Weidel, in an interview with Bloomberg Television, described her party, AfD, as a libertarian conservative party, distinguishing it from historical fascist movements, including Nazism even though AfD practise the far-right identitarian concepts. Similarly, Vivek Ramaswamy defines ‘nationalist’ as a resurgence of national identity, a concept he deems compatible with libertarianism. This perspective is mirrored by self-identified libertarian nationalists or national conservatives like Charlie Kirk and others. Consequently, it is plausible to argue that figures such as Alice Weidel, Vivek Ramaswamy, Elon Musk, and Donald Trump exemplify the ongoing convergence of nationalist and libertarian ideologies. This blend of nationalism and conservatism, differs from classical fascism, which fused Sorelian Marxism with nationalism, notably in its lack of a shared messianic tradition. Whether paleoliberalism and national conservatives constitutes 21st-century fascism is open to debate. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that paleoliberalism and national conservatism serve as the key ideological foundations for the contemporary resurgence of right-wing populism.

Liberal values such as civil liberties, limited government, rationalism, individualism, capitalism, and universalism were always been the enemies of querfront fascist politics, were considered bourgeoisie by the authoritarian far-left politics, and considered anti-national by the far-right identitarian movement. Regardless of their ideological distinctions—Stalinism, querfront fascism, and Hitlerism—these extreme political systems all implemented bureaucratic states that suppressed individual civil liberties through extensive government control.

There’s a growing tendency to label the political movement associated with prominent right-wing figures and their right-wing populist supporters as fascist. Just as George Orwell warned since last century, fascism indeed has become a slur for something not desirable and had lost its original political meaning.

A recent debate at the Cambridge Union, titled “This House Believes Trump is a 21st century fascist,” showcased varying perspectives. The proponents of this view, including Zack Polanski, Javid Rahimli, and Martha Lucas, largely relied on the propaganda of the mainstream left-wing professional managerial class, often blurring the lines between fascism and simple authoritarianism. They struggled to provide a nuanced definition of fascism, appearing to equate it with actions like contesting election results or making controversial statements.

Conversely, the opposition, featuring Tom Slater, Roger Griffin, and Erin McGurk, presented more robust arguments. Tom Slater, the editor of Spiked, narrowly defined fascism as solely equivalent to Nazism, neglecting the broader historical context of classical fascism. Roger Griffin provided the most insightful perspective, highlighting the role of “palingenetic ultranationalism” in fascist movements. Erin McGurk effectively countered the proponents’ simplistic accusations. Ultimately, the opposition demonstrated a clearer understanding of fascism and presented a more factually grounded case. The arguments supporting the characterization of Trump as a 21st-century fascist were not compelling; however, the position itself reflects valid concerns requiring further examination.

First form of Fascism: Classical Fascism

To properly analyse the claim of Trump being 21st-century fascist, it’s crucial to understand the historical origins of fascism. It’s mostly unknown to the public that the classical

fascism stemmed from a syncretic interpretation of Marxism, merging revolutionary socialist ideals with nationalist sentiments. Popular communist figures like Amadeo Bordiga noted that Georges Sorel considered revolutionary syndicalism as a true successor tradition of Marx against social-democratic legalitarian revisionism. He warned that Sorel's ideas were not a faithful continuation of Marx's work but a departure from it—a form of “revisionist Marxism”. The Cercle Proudhon, a think tank led by Georges Sorel, bridging revolutionary syndicalism and nationalism, facilitated the fusion of these ideologies. This synthesis, known as national syndicalism, subsequently influenced the development of classical fascism as a populist movement. The classical fascism was against both Bolsheviks style communism and liberal capitalism, suggesting itself as the third position, equally considered both liberal capitalism and communism as its enemies.

Second form of Fascism: Strasserism

Nazism, while sharing certain characteristics with fascism, emerged from a distinct intellectual tradition. Strasserism, an early form of Nazism, combined nationalism, and socialism, with antisemitic conspiracy theories. Most Strasserites nazis were addressed as “left-wing nazis”, and they hold economic antisemitism. August Bebel used to call their precursor version of such “left-wing economic antisemitism” as “socialism of the fools”.

Both classical fascism and Strasserism were neither purely left-wing nor right-wing but rather “querfront” ideologies, uniting elements of the left (anti-capitalism) and right (nationalism) in a populist coalition.

Third form of Fascism: Hitlerism

Hitlerism, distinguishing itself from both classical fascism and Strasserism, abandoned ‘querfront’ political strategies and shifted sharply to the extreme right. This involved adopting racial pseudoscience and repudiating its earlier left-wing connections, culminating in the violent suppression of the Strasserites faction during the Night of the Long Knives. Consequently, the European New Right, a neo-fascist movement drawing inspiration from the anti-Enlightenment “Conservative Revolution” philosophical tradition and the dominant Hitlerite form of Nazism, no longer adheres to its original ‘querfront’ approach. Influenced by figures such as Martin Heidegger, Julius Evola, and Carl Schmitt, these ideologies prioritized racial identity as well as national purity, considering rationalism, materialism, individualism, universalism, civil liberties, capitalism, and liberalism as their enemies. This shift entailed a rejection of the economically left-leaning elements present in classical fascism and Strasserism, resulting in a descent into a purely far-right, identitarian, racist, anti-Enlightenment, and authoritarian populist movement.

21st century fascism?

The 21st century has witnessed the emergence of a syncretic political trend: a fusion of right-wing libertarianism (classical liberalism) with far-right identitarian populism. This alliance diverges from traditional free-market capitalism, which historically championed immigration, individualism, civil liberties, and universalism. Unlike past iterations of fascism, including those led by Francisco Franco and Oswald Mosley, which advocated for state-controlled economies with limited privatization, this new phenomenon presents a different economic stance.