Anarchism Against Fascism

The Eclipse Committee

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PART I – THE STATE AND FASCIST IDEAS

Today, much of the global core seems to be sliding towards fascism. In the USA, the liberal establishment is paralysed by the rise of Trump. In the UK, both Labour and the Tories have reacted to the rise of Reform not by opposing its ideas, but pandering to them; and this seems to be the common tactic of the established political parties across Europe. Now more than ever, there needs to be a radical response to the far right.

This radical response requires understanding the basis of fascism and why supposedly liberal and social democratic societies keep failing to offer meaningful opposition. The traditional socialist account of this problem is that fascism develops out of capitalism as it decays and fails to resolve its internal contradictions. While this explanation is not necessarily wrong, it is also not necessarily complete, and we think that it is also important to examine how the state structure also plays an important key role in encouraging fascism.

The modern state has two requirements that it needs above all else in order to function:

1. **Obedience from its agents and citizens:** The power of any dictator, oligarchy, or democratic parliament is dependent on this obedience; without which, the state will collapse. No political elite has the ability to enforce its will over an entire country without the obedient cooperation of the state hierarchy, and even then a state will struggle to impose its will in the face of widespread disobedience from its own citizens. This fact is what makes revolution possible and forces states to compromise when they face widespread internal resistance.

2. **Borders:** Borders are the boundaries that define where one state's authority ends and another starts; without an ability to define and maintain those borders, state authority is fatally undermined.

These requirements mean that any state must encourage ideals that support obedience and borders – any ideology that holds ideals which conflict with these two things is a threat to the strength and stability of the state. Many modern ideologies sit awkwardly with these needs: liberal support for freedom and universalism, socialist support for equality and internationalism, and even principled conservatism's support for local traditions and religious solidarity all represent ideological commitments that can conflict with obedience to the state and strong national borders.

Fascism, on the other hand, is perfectly compatible with the requirements of the state. Absolute obedience to a strong leader and the social norms they dictate are part of the package of fascism. Fascism also brings with it a violent nationalism that super-empowers the state border regime. On top of this, fascists revels in the idea of using force to suppress their enemies, freeing the state apparatus to take whatever measures it deems necessary – up to and including the genocide of entire populations – to beat society into a form that best maintains its power.

This does not mean that all those who are involved in maintaining the state are fascists, but instead that the needs of the state constantly pressure its rulers, agents, and supporters in a fascist direction. The principled liberal, socialist, or conservative will always face a tension between their ideals and the requirements of the state, and therefore be forced into uncomfortable compromises. Non-ideological state technocrats and amoral grifters will always see a practical appeal to fascistic ideas and policies to empower them. From both the practical perspective and the perspective of having ideals that match your actions, drifting towards fascism is the path of least resistance for those who maintain the state, unless there is an even stronger pressure pushing people onto other paths.

This has important implications for anti-fascist strategy. Firstly, the state can never be relied on as a tool to fight fascism. Analyses of fascism that only understand it as a reaction to the collapse of capitalism often make the mistake of seeing social democratic reforms or Leninist revolution as a potential counter-strategy against fascism, but as such strategies empower the state they only re-enforce one of the wellsprings of fascist ideas. The modern global resurgence of fascism has as much to do with the collapse of social democratic and Leninist parties into increasingly fascistic authoritarianism, as it does the contradictions of capitalism.

In the short term, we need to build institutions outside of the state that can create anti-fascist pressure to push back against the fascistic tendencies of the state. The politicians, technocrats, and agents of the state need to be put in a position where they are forced to accept compromises between the needs of the state and the needs of their subjects because they fear the level of resistance and disruption they will face if they do not. In the long term, we need to abolish the state if we want to defeat fascism. As long as the state exists, it will always require obedience and control of its borders – and that requirement will always be a structural basis from which fascist ideas will develop. Such a strategy is inherently anarchist, in that it organises outside and against the state, with the ultimate aim of replacing it.

PART II – THE STATE AND FASCIST PEOPLE

In our previous post we argued that the state as a structure will always encourage fascist ideas. The state requires obedience and strong borders to function, and this is far more compatible with fascism than it is with liberalism, socialism, or even conservatism. However, while fascism may be the ideology that best aligns with the needs of the state, this does not fully explain its ability to embed itself in our society. If everyone within our society held anti-fascist attitudes then any fascist tendencies inherent in the state would result in rebellion instead of a slow drift towards fascism. We need to look at how the structure of the state not only encourages fascist ideas, but creates people who are open to those ideas.

The ways in which the state does this are similar to the ways in which capitalism does. Among the capitalist class profit must come before everything else, including commitment to any kind of ideals. People and ideas are evaluated only by their potential to make profit, and any capitalist who does not tend towards this approach will end up outcompeted by other capitalists with less scruples. The political class and the technocrats that actually manage most of the hierarchies within both business and government face a similar pressure to cast aside ideals. At the top of the state hierarchy political parties or factions are in competition with each other over positions of power, and those parties or factions that hold any ideals above taking power are at a disadvantage against those willing to do whatever is necessary to win.

This creates a class of rulers who are conditioned to see the people below them as disposable to their needs, and the needs of the hierarchy that empowers them. Ideas that are not useful for securing power or profit are seen as impractical distractions to be ignored. Those climbing either state or corporate hierarchies in order to secure better pay and conditions for themselves face increasing pressures to put power or profit ahead of everything else as they progress, weeding out anyone who is not willing to engage with the system on those terms. This creates a ruling class that is ripe for adopting a fascist ideology; they have no scruples beyond the pursuits of power and profit.

The structure of state and capital also incentivise fascist attitudes among those at the bottom of society. Workers exist in a position that encourages them to see themselves as in competition with each other for jobs and promotions, and to see fulfilling their boss's desires as the key to securing their own safety and comfort within the economy. Again, people are in a similar structural position as citizens look to the government to provide them with the infrastructure and services they need, and other potential claimants on government resources are competitors. Just as fascism exploits fear of migrants and "undesirables" taking jobs, it also exploits fear around those same people taking welfare.

This encourages the lower classes to adopt ideas that give them special claim to economic or political support from capitalists and politicians. This can manifest as demands for better treatment when raised by oppressed groups, but when raised by sections of the lower class that already have some kind of privilege it results in ideas that are easily compatible with fascism; appeals for preferential treatment on the basis of nativeness, whiteness, gender, straightness, legality, and the rejection of others on the basis that they are foreign, black, queer, criminals, or just weird.

In order to oppose this we must not only oppose fascism as an ideology, but build structures in our workplaces and our communities that discourage fascist attitudes. We need to focus on working from the bottom-up, along lines of free association and consensus, based on the idea that people should look to their peers for support instead of looking up their rulers. In organisations built along these lines, people are encouraged to see each other as potential collaborators instead of competitors, to discuss and understand each other's desires as people instead of dismissing each other as stereotypes, and to bridge divisions in order to cooperate – instead of attempting to leverage them for preferential treatment, because there is no one at the top who can grant that preferential treatment, only a web of equals supporting each other.

As a practical example of this, take workplace organising when compared to climbing a workplace hierarchy; be that workplace a government department or a capitalist corporation. If someone is looking to secure their wellbeing through promotion, then they must look to the desires and preferences of their superior above those of their co-workers, and find reasons as to why they are more deserving than their co-workers. On the other hand, if someone is looking to secure their wellbeing by organising with their fellow workers against management through strikes and other workplace direct action, their wellbeing is based on the ability of everyone within the workplace to come together as a collective regardless of what divisions may exist among them.

Combined with the conclusions of our last post, this means that we need to not only build organisations independent from the state that can put pressure on it, but build them in a way so that they provide a different lived experience compared to the hierarchies of the state. We need a movement that is bottom-up and anti-authoritarian in order to promote a more accepting and egalitarian ethic within society. Just the best strategy to oppose fascism is inherently anarchist, so are the best organisational structures.

PART III – THE FAILURE TO FIGHT FASCISM

In the last two posts we have discussed how the structure of the state promotes fascism and how we need a movement based on opposition to the state, and bottom-up structures that encourage anti-fascist ideas. In this post we will take a look at what this analysis means for how we understand the development of fascism, and how the failures of liberalism and mainstream social-

ism have helped fascist or fascistic ideologies position themselves as the only viable alternative to mainstream politics.

The modern state is, historically-speaking, an unusually hegemonic hierarchy. Across much of history any tendencies a hierarchy might have towards a certain ideology were at least partly countered by other structures in society that could threaten the power of that hierarchy. Partly this was simply a matter of capacity; society did not produce enough wealth or have the technological means of communication and surveillance to allow any central hierarchy to become truly hegemonic, and regardless of whatever a king or emperor might claim about their own absolute power, in reality they relied on the cooperation of other social structures that had significant independence and could turn against them if angered.

As society developed the wealth and technological capacity to enable the modern hegemonic state, the ideologies and social movements that developed along with it were often ambivalent to the implications of this hegemony, and built counter-power that could keep the state in line. Sometimes these were holdovers from the old social order like village collectives and free cities defending customary freedoms, or factions of the old elite defending privileges that the state now threatened.

But new progressive movements that developed in opposition to traditional social structures also had reason to organise in opposition to the state. While progressive ideologies like liberalism and socialism often backed the state against the old order, they also based themselves in ideals like freedom, equality, solidarity, and reason, which just as often put them in opposition to the social norms and structures which the state created to secure the obedience of its citizens and the security of its borders. Liberals and socialists formed political parties, but they also build independent protest movements, revolutionary cells, community mutual aid groups, and workplace unions that would defend the interests and ideals of their members against the state.

Today's conditions are very different to those of the early modern nation state. The state has either absorbed or destroyed the vast majority of independent social structures, or it has regulated the economy to replace them with allied capitalist firms. While historically there might have been large parts of the population that mostly served their own needs through their own traditions of organisation and only interacted with the state to pay tax or face conscription, today such self-organisation is greatly suppressed. Within the modern state most people either buy what they need from a capitalist business or rely on state services to provide for them. Society lacks any strong independent structures of cooperation that might provide the basis to push back against the state, or provide people with a lived experience outside of state power and capitalist profit.

Both liberalism and socialism have also resolved the historic contradictions between their ideals and the state by compromising their ideals. Most progressive political ideologies not only take the state for granted, but believe that any kind of functional social order outside of the state is impossible and the state must now be maintained above all else. The leaders of progressive parties have systematically demobilised and dismantled the bottom-up social movements that they grew out of, because such bottom-up power is a threat to the top-down state hierarchy they believe is needed to keep social order.

This has left the modern state in a position of ideological and organisational domination that might be unprecedented in all of human history. In terms of its integration into the everyday lives of its citizens and its ability to surveil and regulate their relationships, even the most progressive modern states eclipse any previous form of centralised hierarchy. In terms of our ability to think of solutions to social problems, the vast majority of society believes that the state is the only tool

worth seriously considering, even when dealing problems that the state has created in order to maintain itself and has no reason to fix.

But this has put liberalism and mainstream socialism in a disastrous position when it comes to both offering solutions to structural social problems and opposing fascism. Progressive political parties have accepted that certain kinds of social change in pursuit of their ideals or even the basic needs of the majority of society are impossible because they would endanger the state, and that any social movement attempting to create this social change outside of or against the state is a threat to social order. Most progressive thinkers now oppose the development of any independent power-base that might prevent the structure of the state from pushing society in fascistic directions, or provide the basis for real resistance when fascists eventually take power.

This has also allowed fascists to make valid critiques of mainstream progressive politics. When fascists claim that progressive politics are either a hypocritical cover for the will to power or impractical utopianism that will weaken the structure of the state, they are for the most part correct. If the state is necessary, then the fascists are the ones most honest and practical about what it requires and progressive ideals are misguided nonsense at best, or dishonest manipulations at worse.

However, this fascist critique is only valid if the state is an unavoidable necessity. The way out of the bind that modern liberalism and socialism have put society in is to reject the necessity of the state, and propose it be replaced with social structures that are actually compatible with ideals like freedom, equality, solidarity, and reason. Only by arguing for ways to organise society that both grow out of progressive ideals and reinforce them, can we undermine the fascist argument that such ideals are a threat to social order.

This means that we can not afford to be mistaken for mainstream liberals or socialists who have discredited themselves by their own hypocrisy and impracticality. If we share our ideals without offering anti-authoritarian strategies and organisational structures, we risk coming off as another set of useless dreamers in a world full of failed dreams. If we share our strategy and our structures without being explicit about our ideals, then our motivations will be unclear and we risk coming off as untrustworthy in a world of grifters. Defeating fascism does not just require us to be anarchists, it requires us to be open and honest about it and have concrete proposals for the world we want and how to get there.

PART IV – AN ANARCHIST ANTI-FASCIST MOVEMENT

In the three previous posts we have argued that the structure of the state causes an inherent drift towards fascism if not opposed, that anarchism is the ideology that offers the best strategies and organisational structures to build such opposition, and that other progressive ideologies are too confused and compromised to do the job. However, the current anarchist movement in the UK does not live up to this anti-fascist potential, and there are three interrelated problems that we have to overcome in order to effectively fight fascism. The first is that, while individuals and groups are often doing good work in their specific areas of interest, we often do not do the work needed to maintain anarchism as a movement.

The current anarchist movement is incredibly diverse but also incredibly fractured, with any given person or group active within it only knowing a fraction of what is going on in the wider movement based on their own personal ties. There is no universal infrastructure to allow groups

and projects to spread information and gather as much support as possible. In most cases, there is little in the way of intentional support to help new people into the movement. Those interested in anarchism often struggle to find a place for themselves in the movement and end up drifting away.

We also lack the infrastructure to push anarchism into areas were it does not already exist as an organised force. Even among groups with a national reach there is rarely an attempt to directly organise new local groups in areas without an existing anarchist presence. The burden of forming new groups often falls on relatively new anarchists, and these new groups often fail or succeed based entirely on their own capabilities, without receiving much support from the wider movement. Many groups end up making their own materials, building their own organisational form, and learning from the same old mistakes without any outside support, re-inventing the wheel over and over again.

This creates a vicious circle of fragmentation; new anarchists who can not find a place for themselves in the movement or build a new group from scratch end up going into apolitical community organising, mainstream political projects, or trade unions, and end up isolated in structures that offer little potential for real change. New anarchist groups are often isolated from the wider movement because the wider movement played little role in their foundation, and so remain stuck in a position where they must put all their energy into maintaining themselves and their local projects, because they have no safety net to support them in attempting more ambitious projects.

The second of these problems is that anarchists are often very timid about announcing or advocating our anarchism. Many anarchists are involved in bottom-up, egalitarian, and liberatory projects that build solidarity in our workplaces and our communities and provide living counter-examples to the kind of isolated and paranoid existence that fascism feeds off of, but far fewer of us actively evangelise for anarchism in a way that spreads an understanding of the broader theory and strategy behind our actions. If we want to position anarchism as an answer to the failures of liberalism and socialism and a real alternative to fascism, we need to be loud and proud about what anarchism is and why people should be anarchists.

The third problem is that the anarchist movement does very little in the way of strategic planning. I do not think the current situation is much of a surprise to long-term anarchists. It has been clear for a while now that liberal capitalism was failing, that fascists would use issues like migration and transphobia as pivot points around which to turn society to the right, and that mainstream liberals and socialists would bungle the response, because of their inability to live up to their ideals or critique the features of the state that breed fascistic ideas.

Yet we have failed to really do anything about this in a coordinated manner. Some may blame divisions within the movement for this, but we have failed to organise even around topics we all agree on. Take migration as an example; from the most traditional of anarcho-communist class warriors, to the most contemporary of punk insurrectionaries, to the fluffiest of horizontal community organisers, we are united in opposition to state borders and supportive of migrants. This is a topic that the right has developed a successful narrative around which established political parties have failed to counter, and that anarchists should have been able to organise against across our differences.

These three problems have all fed into each other. The fragmentation and division within the movement has meant that we have been unable to to articulate our ideas in a coherent manner to wider society, and that we have failed to develop any kind of shared strategy to confront the far

right. Our timidity in committing to an explicit anarchism has also hindered our ability to build our own movement infrastructure for better onboarding, communication, and cooperation, and our ability to think and act in a more strategic manner. Lastly, our lack of strategy has hindered our movement-building and our ability to spread anarchist ideas.

We need to start fixing these weaknesses as soon as we can, because if things continue as they are now Britain will have a fascist government sooner rather than later. We need to do everything we can to prevent this and build the capacity to resist a future British state that may be more authoritarian and violent than it has been within living memory. We need to make sure that before the election in 2029 we have the strongest movement possible, one which can resist not just locally but coordinate to resist nationally and eclipse both mainstream political parties and the far right.