



STRATEGIES AGAINST THE FAR RIGHT

**REPORTING BACK
AND MOVING FORWARD**

June 15-18, 2017
Stony Point Center, NY



**ROSA
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The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation is an internationally operating, progressive non-profit institution for civic education. In cooperation with many organizations around the globe, it works on democratic and social participation, empowerment of disadvantaged groups, alternatives for economic and social development, and peaceful conflict resolution.

The New York Office serves two major tasks: to work around issues concerning the United Nations and to engage in dialogue with North American progressives in universities, unions, social movements, and politics.

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Strategies Against the Far Right

Reporting Back and Moving Forward

From June 15-18, 2017, the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung—New York Office held a retreat in Stony Point, New York. An hour north of New York City in the Hudson River Valley, this scenic town is best known as the location of a Revolutionary War battle. In 2016, like much of New York State, the town voted for Donald Trump, but we were on more friendly terrain, enjoying the hospitality of the intentional community at the Stony Point Center, a space that is dedicated to “welcoming across boundaries, nurturing inclusive community, and cultivating peace and justice.”

The setting was bucolic, with ample common areas both inside and out. Deer traipsed threw the grounds, menacing the center’s ample gardens and delighting visitors who had never seen this exotic North American beast before. Chickens clucked. Gentle rains came and went.

The goal of the retreat was to identify the array of rising far right formations across North America and Europe, and to discuss tactics and strategies to counter their increasing influence on both sides of the Atlantic and indeed globally. To do this, we gathered leading progressive voices ranging from the state of California to the country of Turkey, from the American South to Quebec, from Germany to Greece, and beyond. Among our participants were journalists, movement activists, trade unionists, political party members, and, of course, academics and experts working in NGOs and watch-dog organizations.

Over two full days and two half days, we discussed a wide range of issues. We traced out

explanations for the recent rise of the far right, including: economic crisis and the threatened middle classes; the draw of authoritarian personalities; racism and anti-Semitism; the failure of the liberal model of neoliberal governance; and the enduring grip of heteropatriarchy. We also analyzed a number of comparative case studies: Trump, Brexit, and the electoral upset; Hungary, Poland, Turkey and the far right in government; France’s Front National versus Germany’s AfD; and views from Greece and Spain on how to fight the right with left populism.

We also mapped out right-wing organizations and their international networks; discussed how to fight the right through education; and analyzed how to connect frontline strategies to long-term transformation, including through the use of media strategies. Throughout, we had both formal and informal spaces for smaller groups to break into discussion. More broadly, the retreat gave our approximately 55 participants plenty of chances to get to know each other, strengthen their own networks, and also to unwind.

Like all such gatherings, much of the work of the retreat took place in between formal sessions, over meals, or over drinks. This report cannot give a full sense of the connections that were forged or the discussions that took place in these informal spaces, but it seeks to provide an overview of the prepared contributions and the rich discussions that followed.

This report reflects one interpretation of several days that were rich in conversation about

complex and highly debated topics. There could hardly be a critical participant who would agree with the totality of what they heard over these days or with the entirety of what they will read below. As such this report in no way seeks

to be an exhaustive or authoritative account of this retreat. Rather, we hope that it will be read as another piece in the ongoing discussions about how progressive forces may strengthen strategies against the rise of the far right.

Framing the Conference

**Stefanie Ehmsen and Albert Scharenberg,
Co-Directors, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung—
New York Office**

The topic of the workshop is timely. From Rodrigo Duterte to Narendra Modi to Michel Temer to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Donald Trump, we are confronted with an authoritarian style of politics that used to be rare but is now catching on, especially in the West. Even though the far right has not performed as well as expected in some recent elections in Europe, these politicians are still gaining votes.

First we need to analyze the phenomenon. Then we need to talk about strategies to confront the far right. We want to explore these issues with open minds. We need to revisit the assumptions that progressives often bring with them if we are going to develop effective strategies. All too often, we base our politics on assumptions that don't reflect the world we live in.

Neoliberal transformation must be considered as a factor in the rise of the far right. Neoliberalism is often left out of mainstream explanations for the rise of the far right because it is a threat to the powers-that-be. If it is a factor, though, then we need to change policies. Austerity has been undermining community and solidarity and challenging even the notion of society. In Margaret Thatcher's infamous words, "there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families."

Neoliberalism has reshaped society, as well as our own hearts and mind—how we feel and think. It has succeeded in replacing the old hegemony with a new one. Combined with the weakening and collapse of mediating institutions, democracy is becoming weaker as the radical right is attacking this very notion of democracy.

We regularly make fun of the myriad leftist groups that exist, but the political right faces a similar challenge. There are numerous formations, and they are very different from each other. Saying that everyone to the right of Angela Merkel is a "fascist" is at best an oversimplification and—more bluntly—far from the truth. The transatlantic right includes anti-Semites and anti-Muslims, neoliberals and anti-neoliberals, post-fascists and right-wing populists. Is there a hegemony in the making among these groups?

There is no simple class analysis of these groups. Some of them have achieved a mass following among working-class people. None of them have the clear support of the elite—not even Trump. How is it that the radical right has achieved such a large—if uneven—following among the working class? After all, not even the Nazis were able to achieve a majority of working-class support.

While Trump's white working-class support may have been exaggerated by the media, he did attract wide support among the white working class. At least forty percent of people in households earning less than \$50,000 per year voted

for Trump. Given the solid support for Hillary Clinton among Black and Latina/o voters, this would indicate majority support for Trump from lower-income white voters. A similar story has unfolded in France, where groups that once solidly voted Communist now support the Front National.

Today we are producing much more wealth as a society than in 1980, but working people have not gotten any of it—or their position has even declined. Working people's lives have become much more precarious while, over the same time period, struggles for immigrant rights, Black liberation, and LGBT equality have yielded impressive victories and transformed other aspects of society. Some leftists seem to be in denial of resulting tensions, claiming, for example, that "the working class is inherently anti-racist," but large parts of the working class seem to have abandoned social democracy. Instead of turning left, though, they have turned to the right for responses to neoliberalism.

Have we on the left failed to engage with working-class people? The left has become much more middle class: there is a sharp divide between the post-modern and traditionalist left, but they both may be getting it wrong. The post-modern left writes off the (white) working class while the traditionalist left seems like it wants to walk back on LGBT rights, immigrant rights, and other achievements of the so-called "culture wars." We must not do this!

These are some of the questions that we want to see addressed, in an open-minded way: Are there left demands that threaten working people? Have we turned our justified positions into moral purity and a secret identity that reproduces our own powerlessness? Have we substituted affinity groups for mass political action? Have we been welcoming enough to people with grievances that might be incorporated into our platforms? Can left populism be an effective force to counter the rise of the far right?

Participant Feedback

The floor was then opened to responses and input from the participants. The following is an overview that contains excerpts of the feedback and discussions that followed.

The right is just as fragmented as the left in the US. They come from very different, often contradictory, places. They have now converged around proximity to state power: They have never been this close before. There is a lack of understanding on the left of what a real, violent right on the offensive is like. This generation will be struck by this. We need to prepare ourselves for it.

The alt-right is in a moment of expectation right now. As Richard Spencer says, we are in Weimar. He was turned on by the Battle of Berkeley. American society is fragmented and polarized. We are moving in different directions. We have not had fascism, where militias are combined with political parties. He sees their foil as the "antifa" black bloc. They will force people to choose a side. They are self-consciously forming themselves in this direction.

There is a need for the left, social movements, and progressives not to limit their analysis to the economic level. There is also the imposed hegemony of the neoliberal state that has been preparing people to accept a radical shrinking of democratic spaces. Gramsci's "era of monsters" does not only refer to the likes of Marine Le Pen, it also refers to the mainstream, tie-wearing version of authoritarianism.

One thing that was missing from the introductory comments is war, militarization, and securitization of our societies. Our societies have accepted torture. All the European far-right parties are working for a return to the death penalty. What impacts are the wars having on our societies? Stopping fascism is not just about the ballot box. It's about stopping the infiltration of

far-right groups into the police, military, and judiciary. Austerity cuts regular police while counter-terrorist police, riot police, and other more militarized formations are being expanded.

It's hard to have this conversation without first talking about failures of the left, how the movements that were generated out of 1848 failed, how the New Communist Movement failed, and how the right succeeded. They had a strategy and they went county by county to implement it.

After the first few months of this horrible new administration, we have more political dialogue going on and more political resistance than in a long time. In addition to talking about the dangers of the far right, we have an opportunity to talk about hope, about building a meaningful social justice movement that can build a broad-based majority to challenge the right. Broader and more violent repression is a likelihood in the coming years, but there is cause to be filled with hope about the power and resilience of our communities.

SNCC made the suggestion decades ago that if white people want to stop racism, they should organize white people. Hundreds did this and moved into white working-class communities. It takes at least ten years to achieve results since there is a long learning curve, but the only way to challenge this kind of oppression is to embed yourself in the communities that are creating the oppression. One participant took objection to the admonition not to use the term "fascism" too quickly. He had recently heard Bobby Seale talking about how the Black Panther Party talked about fascism in the 1970s. When talking about police brutality, they clearly perceived a fascist tendency. We should use the term "fascism," but in a critical way. While some participants say that we haven't experienced fascism, Black people may see it differently. We haven't man-

aged to build a society that works for all of us. Another participant observed that, in his view, what the Panthers faced was not fascism. Rather, it was white supremacist repression of a very strong variety. At the same time, there were quasi-fascist movements. We've had strong right-wing mass movements, particularly in the South and Southwest, such as Black Legion, Texas Rangers, and Arizona Rangers. These fascist or quasi-fascist movements have operated at the same time as the white supremacist state. There is a tendency among the left to describe any repression in a bourgeois state as fascist, which has the effect of romanticizing bourgeois democracy. Now, a far-right international seems to be forming. There is some striving at a global level to bring these forces together.

A participant from Poland indicated that his country has been facing the illiberal revolution for longer, and based on his experience, he recommended building connections between the US and Europe—and not just Western Europe.

A participant from Turkey addressed the Americans: "welcome to hell." The left in developed countries is going to start to understand what the left in Turkey has been facing. We need to stop petty discussions and stand together—like the right has done—in order to stop this hell.

There is a tendency on the German radical left to refuse to talk with people who espouse reactionary views. We want to force people to choose sides.

A participant from Canada said it is hard to speak of the far right when you come from Canada, but a few months ago, a man killed six people in a mosque in Quebec City. There are hundreds and hundreds of small groups organized on a militia level just in Quebec. There is Islamophobic, anti-immigrant, and xenophobic

ideology seeping into the mainstream. In Quebec, the Parti Quebecois developed a violent, racist tendency. Right-wing media has been advancing this ideology. We need a mass political left-wing movement in order to have enough tools to counter the far right. We've done it on a very small scale in Quebec, but in France, Melançon has shown us that it can start working on a larger scale.

A participant from Ireland speculated about what is different about countries that haven't had far-right movements, like Ireland. Maybe

it's that Irish nationalism is rooted in anti-imperialism. We need to understand why the far right appeals to people. They offer a collective identity in a time of extreme individualism. Every city is in crisis and says there are no resources, leaving it open to claims that new people are coming in and taking resources. This is false scarcity, but we need to offer a response that has some beauty, some sense that you'd want to be part of it. We need a cultural revival and movement that will create the music and literature that will help us envision the future we want.

Explanations for the Rise of the Far Right

Economic Crisis and Threatened Middle Classes

Chip Berlet, Former Senior Analyst, Political Research Associates

Benito Mussolini is often quoted as having said that fascism "is the merger of state and corporate power." Mussolini, however, never said this, and it's not what fascism is.

Our explanations for the rise of the far right are missing misogyny and heteropatriarchy. Populist right rhetoric always focuses its rhetoric on the sycophants who don't deserve us and defines the lower sectors who are different from us as lazy and sinful. For the populist right, the deserving people are oppressed from above by a decadent and exploitative elite who are de facto allied with the racialized, parasitic lower strata. The people, as defined here, have an active role to play in liberating themselves from the parasites above and below. Fascism offers, as Robert Griffin observed, a revolutionary form of nationalism in which a heroic people stems the tide of decadence.

Authoritarian Personality

Julian Plenefisch, RLS Berlin

As Adorno, Horkheimer, and others have argued, the family is the principal institution that makes people receptive to authoritarianism. The development of authoritarian personality traits takes place during early childhood and is understood to be the result of hierarchical and exploitative parent-child relationships. What exactly are the traits in a person that lead toward an authoritarian personality? As Adorno observed, a weak ego and a constant fear of one's own desires make a person most vulnerable to fascism's appeal. For Adorno, et al. the authoritarian personality consists of a cluster of traits such as conventionalism, authoritarian submission and aggression, thinking in rigid categories, concern with toughness and domination, and an obsession with modern sexual mores. The authoritarian personality is pried to be submissive to in-group leaders and their values while being domineering and violent toward perceived outsiders, who are seen as threatening.

Racism and Anti-Semitism

Audrey Sasson and Dania Rajendra, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ)

Audrey Sasson opened this presentation, which focused on the topic of anti-Semitism, how it relates to racism, and JFREJ's work around these issues. Previously, JFREJ had bought into the silence on the left around anti-Semitism, considering Jews, or at least white Jews, to be a privileged group whose role is to be good allies. They began a process of self-examination as to why they were a left-wing Jewish group that was not talking about anti-Semitism. If we are not aware of the role of anti-Semitism in relation to racism and capitalism, JFREJ asked, how can we critique others for not being clear about it?

Dania Rajendra continued by observing that nobody is more racist than the ruling class. Anti-Semitism gets mapped onto the one-percent and ninety-nine percent discourse, with Jews taking the role of the nefarious ruling classes. Here, anti-Semitism continues to function as the socialism of fools, as can be seen in the Trump campaign's final television ad. When anti-Semites talk about "the Jew," it has nothing to do with actual Jews. Rather, it's about the idea of the Jew. It is a projection of power. Similarly, the Muslim functions as a stand-in, a bogey man for a kind of response to the economic

and social system, as a displacement and a projection.

Failure of the Liberal Model of Neoliberal Governance

Peter Frase, *Jacobin Magazine*

The liberal model of neoliberal governance has failed. To what extent is neoliberalism responsible for the rise of the far right? To some degree, the current model, now zombie-like, creates openings, but not only for the far right, as can be seen in the example of Jeremy Corbyn.

It is important to note that neoliberalism had a positive vision to sell that had to do with many workers' dissatisfaction. By the 1970s, despite economic advancement, there was the prevalent idea of the blue-collar blues, where even people who were making good money were bucking against the alienating conditions of their labor. Neoliberalism addressed this with a vision of liberalization: You can be your own boss! You can be an entrepreneur! There is a structural problem with the neoliberal project, which depended on bubble economies that, once popped, undid whatever good had been achieved. Now we are in a post-crisis period where there are established neoliberal parties. In some cases, these parties are in collapse, but this situation creates openings.

Discussion Groups

Following this plenary, we formed breakout groups to consider the material that had been introduced during the plenaries. The groups considered authoritarian personalities, war and militarism, class, gender, race, and what our movements need to do.

Is the analysis of individual personalities helpful to explain and understand authoritarianism? The discussion suggests a differentiated picture, and some participants were highly critical of the concept of the authoritarian personality, arguing that this approach is neither suf-

ficient nor desirable. Others, however, found the concept to be helpful, especially when focused on leaders rather than followers.

The dynamics of authoritarianism play out differently in different national contexts. In countries like Turkey, family and family structure can certainly be a key element in strengthening the image of the leader and imposing a vision, where a leader like Erdoğan is regarded as a father figure. In this case, the importance of a stable, strong personality or institution in power is stressed.

The US example is different. There is more diversity, and other institutions intervene in the formation of authoritarianism. Militarism serves as a model, and it is now deeply ingrained in US society: Fifteen years of war have made a deep social impact. The religious right also plays a role in promoting authoritarianism.

Participants cautioned against limiting discussion to class when discussing Trump, Brexit, and other right-wing populist victories. While the left has clearly failed to mobilize large sectors of the working class—and this was a factor in flipping the election—the Trump coalition did not differ that much from the typical Republican coalition.

The Democratic Party may have left the door open to someone like Trump by not having a strong progressive vision. The rise of the radical right can be understood in part as a push-back against “progressive neoliberalism,” i.e. the ideological—and quite practical—marriage of economic neoliberalism and progressive cultural liberalism embodied by the Clintons and (most of) the Democratic leadership.

One aspect of the alt-right is the online anti-feminist movement. These young men see themselves as part of a rebellion and a counter-culture. They view feminism as an agent of emasculation of Western men.

How can we explain why so many (white) women voted for Trump? Black women overwhelmingly voted for Hillary Clinton, so there is a bit of dissonance regarding the recent women’s march. The focus on white working-class men often causes observers to miss the point. We need to be careful about embracing a social contract that was never whole or complete. The shattering of the social contract happened for Black people first. Now a lot of people are saying, “no more,” even if it’s in a manner that might not make sense. But the Democratic Party does not seem to understand this. They continue to talk about Trump voters as if they’re idiots. The Democratic Party had an economic message: We’re going to keep going as we have been.

The struggle for Black people in the US has always been about the franchise: Who is in and who is out? The current administration has legitimated a deep racist trend in this country. For people of color, this has always been there, contrary to the popular myth of a post-racial society.

But we have evolved, and part of the rise of the far right is a reaction to this. With Obama, we saw a victim of racism who led a political system that actively perpetuates racism. The rebellion is not just on the far right. It’s also on the far left.

Trump has managed to combine racism, xenophobia, and economic dissatisfaction into one compelling package. While there is not a long history of civil rights struggles in Europe, refugees and Roma have been “racialized.”

What do our movements need to do? With the failure of neoliberalism, we see a lack of analysis and imagination. Bernie Sanders managed to talk about the one percent not just as resentment but as a question of what we can do with our social wealth. It’s the system that creates the one percent.

There does not seem to be the same idea of a social contract in the US and Europe. Many European far-right leaders make an effort to talk about the commons and the common good, sounding a lot like Sanders, but the social good can be defined instrumentally: What do I want

from the state? In the US, there is not a universal embrace of the social contract. A failure of the Clinton campaign was the total absence of an economic justice message: We need good jobs. Meanwhile, Trump offered a kind of privatized social contract for white America.

Case Study I: The Electoral Upset

United States

John Feffer, Director of Foreign Policy in Focus, Institute for Policy Studies

Trump came into office through what can be described as the “triple backlash versus the triple hack.”

The first backlash is the economic backlash. There is a sharp contrast between “America A”—that is those who have benefited from economic transition—and “America B”—those who have not benefited from these changes and who are not much represented in US power structures. US wages hit their peak in January 1973, and American capitalism has been in crisis since then. Neoliberalism is a response to a crisis.

The second backlash is political. People are disgusted with their leaders, and they have become cynical about the value of democracy. People have stopped believing that anything they do can have an impact on public policy.

The third backlash is cultural. We’ve been successful in fighting for LGBT rights, for example, but there is a backlash among those who have the impression that we’ve gone “too far.” This backlash is built on three “Cs”: conservative, Christian, Caucasian. These are also the means by which the US right connects internationally and builds ties to other far-right movements.

The triple hack refers to three ways of exploiting weaknesses of the system. These hacks are understanding the electoral college, media (such as “fake news”), and voter targeting through social media. This targeting was calibrated almost on a voter-by-voter basis and included “dark ads” that aimed to suppress the turnout among Bernie Sanders supporters, African Americans, and women.

The Democratic Party is focusing on responding to voter targeting on social media. They are looking for a quick technological fix to win the midterms and the next election.

Social movements are responding to the triple backlash more comprehensively. A focus on jobs is necessary, and new faces are needed. We need inside-outsiders who appeal to majoritarian values. We need to appeal to America B with the goal of eliminating the distinction altogether.

United Kingdom

Sofia Vasilopoulou, Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of York

We still don’t know what Brexit means. In the referendum, British voters chose on a binary: leave the European Union or remain within it. People often look to parties for guidance on

these questions, but in this campaign, the Tories and Labour were both ambivalent.

For people who voted to leave, sovereignty and immigration were the main reasons stated. The Leave campaign used posters designed to elicit anger among many people. Anger makes people more open to risk-taking, more likely to want to change the status quo, and more likely to mobilize.

The Remain campaign was characterized by fear. Fear is related to risk-avoidance, support for the status quo, and aversion to mobilization—so they are less likely to vote and less likely to talk to others.

The Leave campaign elicited enthusiasm: “Take back control!” “Be/leave in Britain!”

Remain did not do anything like this.

Right-wing Organizations and Their International Networks

Lawrence Rosenthal, Founder, Chair, and Lead Researcher, Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies

There has never been a fascist international. Movements based in ultra-nationalism have the deck stacked against them when trying to develop trans-national solidarity among themselves. Hierarchy is essential among these groups, and they tend to be fratricidal by nature.

Wolfgang Streeck has called the Trump campaign a movement of identity politics, but he missed the point that it is *reverse* identity politics. It is identity politics turned on itself. Usually, with identity politics, people are organizing to seek a seat at the table for the first time.

With Trump and his analogues, we see people seeking to restore a seat at the table that they feel has been taken away from them. In reverse identity politics, identity is established in contrast to an *other*.

On both sides of the Atlantic, these movements agree on who the *other* is: immigrants and refugees. They have a shared understanding that people of color and political correctness have

displaced white people, making white people the new oppressed group.

The Tea Party began a month after Barack Obama’s inauguration. The racial dimension became sublimated into “birtherism.” From the outset, the Tea Party showed antipathy toward the Republican establishment. But between 2012 and 2016, this antipathy turned into a sense of betrayal. Those who they once called “Rinos” (Republicans in name only), they now call globalists. This has been internationally reproduced, creating a sense of a single global elite.

These groups have also made a shared turn toward the Russians. Since at least 2012, Russia has become a bastion of illiberal conservatism and a darling of white supremacists.

People like Steve Bannon are deliberately ambiguous. His goal—and Trump’s—is political support. The movement is less dependent on Trump than he is on them. They have gotten what they need from Trump. They have come in from the fringe. They used to be simply on the outside of American electoral politics, but they are not dependent on him to maintain their presence.

This is because they have established a media presence. *Breitbart* is the second most clicked political site in the US, after the *Huffington Post*. Just as Fox News channel institutionalized the conservatism of the Bush era, *Breitbart* is institutionalizing Trumpian nationalism.

Far-right international networking faces several vulnerabilities. There is an inherent contradiction: They are “the global anti-globalists.”

But politics has thrown up major surprises. The right may not hold as a basis for solidarity. The populations drawn to these new nationalisms are given to grasping the divisions between themselves and others, and that worm may turn again.

**Heidi Beirich, Intelligence Project Director,
Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)**

Today is the anniversary of Jo Cox’s murder and the day before the second anniversary of the Charleston mass shooting. White supremacy is cross border. Thank God they have so much difficulty working together.

White supremacist themes—animosity towards immigrants, Jews, and Black people—are portable. International networking along these lines has been going on forever, but in the last decade, there had been less of it. Now it is picking up again.

Trump and Bannon see themselves as natural partners to parties like the UK Independence Party and the Front National. Bannon has said that he wants to build a real robust network of these kinds of parties.

There is a strong connection between racist propaganda in the United States and violence overseas. Representatives of the Hungarian radical right party Jobbik, or Movement for a

Better Hungary, are currently in the United States raising money.

This interplay is becoming more complex both at the level of the hard right as well as at a more populist level. There are networks around particular issues—like Islamophobia—and identitarian practices are being imported from Europe.

The far-right website *Stormfront* now has 300,000 registered users, having doubled since Barack Obama came into office. Many of these users are overseas, and the non-English sections of the website have not even been analyzed yet. Another website, the neo-nazi *Daily Stormer*, is now the largest hate site in the world, largely due to their vocal support of the Trump campaign.

The racial backlash was building before Obama arrived to the presidency. White ethno-nationalists have seen a slight upward trend since the 2000 Census said that white people would one day be a minority in the United States. Post-2000, the number of hate groups suddenly started to increase.

White nationalists are solidifying around a couple propaganda points, and they are sharing them. It used to require some legwork to join these groups. Now it can be done in an instant online. There is a lot of false information online and a breakdown of civility in online communications.

These extremists used to be outside the political process in the US, but that has completely changed. Trump has opened the door to them and invited them in. He has been very slow to condemn hate violence, and there are high levels of violence coming from these people. Naming and shaming far-right extremists and white supremacists does not work as well as it used to.

Case Study II: The Far Right in Government

How did the far right come to power in some countries? How do they remain in power? How do we remove them from there?

Hungary

Kristóf Szombati, Central European University, Budapest

Victor Orbán and his Fidesz party have been in power now for seven years. He is best known for building a fence on the southern border. This action converted him into a player on the international level. Why does Europe tolerate what is happening in Hungary? This state is still being built, still moving down the illiberal path, while the left and the liberals need to rebuild almost from scratch.

Orbán's policies are collectively known as the "System of National Cooperation." Since 2004, there has been a rapid decline in support for EU membership. One of the preconditions for the rise of the nationalist right was the existence of a very neoliberal left, what Nancy Fraser calls progressive neoliberalism. The System of National Cooperation is clientelistic, which means EU subsidies ironically play a major role in propping up Orbán's state. These subsidies are transferred hierarchically to cronies.

Orbán has an anti-egalitarian populist discourse. Anti-Gypsism—antipathy to the Roma people—has been advanced as a redemptive force, with Roma being blamed for dispossession in rural areas. Media control helps to keep Orbán in power. There is propaganda that Fidesz is a true populist party, protecting the nation against both European Union elites in Brussels and Roma in Hungary—and now against immigrants as well.

Poland

Bartosz Rydliński, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Warsaw

Law and Justice (PiS), Poland's governing party, does not define itself as far right. It defines itself as a patriotic force, as euro-realist, as the righteous successor of the Solidarity movement, as pro-American, and as pro-NATO.

PiS positions itself in terms of stark socio-political divisions. It defends "Poland B"—those who see themselves as left out of the current economic and political order. It promotes Christianity over Islam. It defends Central Europe from German hegemony, and it supports patriots against traitors.

PiS's strength comes from its clear political vision and courage, from its anti-neoliberal agenda, from the weakness of the opposition, and from institutional support from conservative groups.

Central European illiberalism opposes checks and balances as well as the independence of the Constitutional Court. PiS is "marching through the institutions."

Illiberalism has a future in Hungary and Poland. Young people strongly support right-wing parties. Why do central European youth vote for these radicals? Young adults in these countries face dismal prospects. They tend to still live with their parents. They are young, educated, and unemployed.

So what is to be done? From the left, PiS can be attacked in terms of its incoherent economic policies. The left in central Europe still has a problem with engaging in political activity.

They present themselves as enlightened and above the fray, so they do not engage with people who say reactionary things. If we want to engage young people in the European project, the EU needs to stop being neoliberal.

Turkey

Pinar Çakıroğlu-Bournous, University of Crete

Far-right ideology in Turkey is essentially nationalist *and* Islamist. Simple nationalist ideology does not work in Turkey as identities are very complex. “Turkishness” is not enough to contain everyone. The Kemalists tried this, but it did not work as an umbrella identity. The result is a Turkish-Islamic synthesis.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has pursued a range of policies—including privatization, export subsidies, permission to Islamic financial institutions, and construction subsidies—that have allowed it to create its own bourgeoisie while taming the incumbent bourgeoisie to be compliant enough to benefit from the distribution of rents.

Municipalities—which tend to be very conservative, especially in Anatolia—are growing in im-

portance. They have been given great latitude to distribute rents and state benefits locally.

Political and economic hegemony is established through all these processes. For the lower classes, supporting the AKP means that their children can find jobs and that they can benefit from state aid and philanthropic activities. The middle classes can receive education in Islamic schools and use connections to gain employment. The Islamic bourgeoisie owes its existence to the AKP. The upper classes more generally benefit from the AKP’s promise of economic stability, and they don’t want to be excluded from Erdoğan’s generosity.

In Turkey, resistance, opposition, and thought crime have been brutally suppressed, especially in the aftermath of the attempted coup. Tens of thousands have been imprisoned, many have fled the country, and the opposition appears to be crushed.

But the AKP does have weaknesses. It lacks cultural capital and hegemony. The whole system is dependent on the economy. There is a huge polarization in the society right now. How long can they continue like this? Erdoğan’s involvement in the wider Middle East and the wars there may be another crack in the system.

Case Study III: Workerism or Neoliberalism?

The discussion then shifted to countries at the core of the European political project, where the welfare state and social democracy are still strong, though under siege.

As Tsafirir Cohen, director of RLS’s Tel Aviv office observed, far-right parties are not simply racist and xenophobic. They exist in a political and social context.

France

Anne Sabourin, member of the Executive Committee, French Communist Party

This May, the Front National (FN) reached the second round of the presidential election and received 35% of the vote, which is to say two million more votes than in the first round.

This result stems from a project of making the party respectable. Jean-Marie Le Pen founded the FN to bring together all varieties of the extreme right in France. It is the continuation of a radical stream that has been around for a long time. It had a stable electorate of around 15%.

His daughter Marine Le Pen became the leader of the party and presented a new face. She welcomed left sovereigntists and promoted them. She excluded her father from the executive of the party and changed strategy and communications to target young people, women, and middle-class workers fearing precarity and poverty. The FN became a catch-all party able to speak to their traditional constituency as well as a broader electorate.

The FN has a neoliberal program serving a racist and nationalist vision. They promote economic patriotism (close the borders, exit Europe, etcetera), but they also promote the competitiveness of French enterprise through lower taxes. This offers the possibility of rapprochement between the bourgeoisie and the far right. They promote cultural protectionism. They opportunistically claim that Muslims are incompatible with particularly chosen progressive individual rights, and they advocate for national preference in the implementation of social policies.

The FN does not publicly advocate anti-Semitism—rather they target Muslims and find linkages with the Israeli extreme right—but when you talk to party members, their discourse is full of anti-Semitic rhetoric.

Fighting the Right Through Education

This panel brought together representatives of very different organizations to discuss how they use education to fight the far right. They reflect-

Germany

Gerd Wiesel, Left Party (DIE LINKE)

The Alternative for Germany (AfD) is neither workerist nor neoliberal. They do not serve workers' interests, but they have developed a particular appeal to white male blue-collar workers by focusing on immigrants as a competitive threat. Many believe that the left cannot protect them from this threat as they will be unable to implement their program.

The AfD started as a truly neoliberal party but does not feature neoliberalism in its public presentation that much anymore. The party's leaders still argue, however, that they should not be too close to the FN, not because of racism but because the FN is "socialist."

The AfD has had two peaks of electoral success. When the focus of their campaign has been on refugee policies, they have become the strongest political party in state elections among blue-collar workers and the unemployed. In absolute numbers, however, these groups do not reflect the largest group of AfD voters. These are white-collar workers and the middle class. This is no reason for the left to be reassured. The shrinking working class is moving right while the left is failing to gain support from the middle class.

The AfD includes many anti-Semites, but their public program presents them as protectors of the Jewish population of Germany and strong supporters of Israel.

ed a diversity of approaches and various understandings of what education means and how it functions. From supporting the victims of racist

violence to bringing the activities of the far right into the light to preserving the tragic lessons of history, there are many ways in which education is part of this struggle.

Evelyn Schlatter, Senior Analyst, SPLC Intelligence Project

At the heart of neo-fascist and far-right groups is gender. There is a weaponization of toxic masculinity. The internet is being used to recruit young men into white nationalist groups. The men's rights movement started as ideology but became strategy. The right now owns "family," "religious liberty," and "free speech." We need to reclaim this language.

The right has programs to train and educate youth in basic civics, etcetera. We should be doing this as well. Politics is local. We need to get to know our neighbors. We need to get involved in our communities.

A favorite tactic of mine is the big gay dance party. This provides a fun way to oppose campus provocateurs who are looking for confrontation. Anti-fascist groups that show up to shut down these speakers are playing into their hands and helping to create "proud boys" and neo-Nazi fight clubs.

Heike Kleffner, University of Applied Sciences in Magdeburg-Stendal

It is crucial to provide support and counseling for victims of racist and anti-Semitic attacks. Refugees have been most affected by the new wave of racist right-wing violence. Since 2015, there have been more than two-hundred arson attacks against refugee shelters in Germany. We need to empower those who are attacked to make them important players in the fight against racism and violence.

Peter Montgomery, Senior Fellow, People for the American Way

People for the American Way serves as a counter force to this. Its *Right-Wing Watch* uses direct video and audio showing extremism. The religious right is using the language of religious liberty.

The global nature of the culture wars has become more evident, with US groups creating international organizations and branches. We need to be cautious about copying the right, but they do some things well. We should do those things too.

Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson, Co-Executive Director, Highlander Research and Education Center

Using education as a tactic to respond to the right is not copying the right. It is reclaiming our old ways. Having the strategies and tactics to respond to the right is life-saving for Black people in the United States and everywhere else. The folks who are most affected by injustice need to lead the struggles against it. This is not new work. We are still about the work of bringing people together across borders to save their own lives. We actually teach people what the difference is between strategies and tactics. We teach people that what transforms society is building up mutuality and trust—in other words, kinship—not transactional campaigns.

Terri Johnson, Executive Director, Center for New Community

We sometimes assume that education works such that if people know better, they will do better. We ask, "How can we train people out of this?" We are missing so much because our strategies have been limited. We have to be

honest that we are not dealing with our own liberal Islamophobia, our own anti-Blackness, etcetera. We let ourselves off the hook around the class question because we are “on the left.” We cannot talk about class without talking about race, gender, and all the rest.

Soya Jung, ChangeLab

Racist violence is nothing new. It is central to the entire history of the United States. It is embedded in the political economy of the US. Education is not just about a PowerPoint slide or a curriculum. We need people on the ground with knowledge of right-wing movements applying this knowledge in real time. We need to grapple with platitudes about organizing that do not make sense in all contexts.

Discussion Groups

During the second breakout session, we broke into small groups where we discussed organizing, education, and strategy.

There is a need to engage in deep grassroots organizing. We need to build alternative institutions in order to overcome alienation, which breeds attraction to the far right. We need movement centers, especially in rural areas, fighting to take down and weaken the far right. We need a platform—a membership organization funded by its members. We need to build a greenhouse to develop our ideas.

Education is an important area of focus. European and American models of political education are very different. In the US, political education is funded by philanthropic institutions, NGOs, and charities. Liberal organizations get

Karin Heddinga, Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial Center

With every group that visits the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial Center, we seek to show them continuities with the past as well as fractures. People are often surprised to learn when the National Socialists began.

They learn that giving people numbers instead of names, along with triangles, stars, and so on, was done in order to deprive them of the humanity that is needed for resistance, as well as to divide and conquer them.

When people vote, they need to know that those who they vote for will gain power. Don't vote to teach someone a lesson. There are consequences.

more funds while smaller or more radical organizations are mostly self-financed by individual contributions. Work around hate crimes and anti-radicalism can function like industries. In the EU, public money and state programs are dominant.

Within universities, at least in the United States, politicization happens almost completely at an individual level. Academic institutions are pressured to keep a bipartisan image in order to get approval and funding. Progressive institutions are reluctant to fund research. They tend to support organizations that are focused on offering solutions, not analysis. And more analysis is needed.

The right is attacking students and faculty at universities. We need to defend them.

In Europe, schools still function as the main space for primary politicization. Text books, history curricula, and memory politics are important in this process.

There is a tension between short-term tactics and long-term strategies, between immediate action and transformative demands. We do not all need to do the same things. There is a need for division of labor on the left.

We need collaboration, not just coordination. We need to communicate face-to-face, not just online. We need to have opportunities to reunite. There is a need to collectivize and amplify offline voices. We need bridges. We need to talk to each other.

We need to construct a left pole that offers people an alternative in real life. Left populism is one way to fight the far right.

Voting rights need protection. The 2020 census and election will make this a crucial year.

We need to address the coalescence of the far right with the center right. We need to fight the normalization of the far right.

There is a need to build out tactics, strategies, and visions in ways that emphasize their potential connective tissue. It is important to include and to center the most affected people. Only then is there the possibility to show a real impact.

Case Study IV: Fighting the Right with Left Populism?

Spain

Vicente Rubio-Pueyo, Podemos

Spain is a sort of exception. There is no significant party to the right of the ruling Popular Party (PP). To be sure, the PP is one of the most right-wing parties among traditional conservative parties in Europe. However, the Indignados Movement helped to stem the emergence of a right-wing interpretation of the crisis and built a progressive framing of the crisis.

Podemos' vocabulary is influenced by Gramscian vocabulary. Since its formation, Podemos has done the opposite of what the left usually does. There was a break with the traditional formations of the left. In the crisis, there was room to go beyond the usual responses of the left. Everything was shaken up, and there was room for a complete political realignment. There was an opportunity to build a new center and a new

political common sense. There was a winning attitude, breaking with the often melancholy mood on the left. Podemos has always stressed the practicality of its proposals.

Podemos' secretary-general, Pablo Iglesias, became famous as a television commentator before the party formed. There has been an effort to enter mainstream TV and much thought about how to get radical ideas into the public sphere.

A populist movement needs an enemy. For Podemos, this enemy is "*la casta*." *La casta* is a popular way to indicate the collusion between political and economic elites. There has been the development of a left patriotism. To be a patriot is to pay taxes that help sustain public services and social rights. There has been a stress on sovereignty in relation to Europe but also as part of a critique of the European division of labor, which seems to relegate Spain to a reliance on tourism and real estate.

Greece

Yiannis Bournous, Head Responsible for European and International Affairs, SYRIZA

SYRIZA provides an example of a left populism that helped stem the rise of right populism. Greece does not have a Front National, and Golden Dawn's support seems to have stabilized at a very low level.

In Greece, populism has been labeled as hollow demagoguery and clientelism. PASOK—the social democratic party—was guilty of this, but so were the conservative parties. The so-called Alexis Tsipras generation that took control of SYRIZA learned the notion of hegemonic politics from Latin American left populists like Luiz

Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, and Evo Morales in Bolivia.

Prior to elections, SYRIZA was energetically involved in the Movement of the Squares, which emerged out of the economic crisis and subsequent austerity. People in the squares demanded a voice and became the people against austerity. SYRIZA inserted itself into the new polarities: The people versus the elite and anti-austerity versus austerity. They claimed patriotism for the left and allied it with anti-establishment discourse: There are two Greeces.

The right have been better Gramscians than us. They have been doing hegemonic politics better than we have. That needs to change, now.

Media Strategies Against the Far Right

Angela Nagle, Author of *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right*

There are several very popular alt-right online video channels, including Rebel Media. They are expert at the use of media.

They are like Gramscians: We can't get into normal politics, so we will change the culture then politics will come to us. They are also Chomskian, in a way: They hate the mainstream media (MSM) and are convinced the MSM is conspiring against them.

There is a great danger in giving too much coverage to the far right. We need more video content to counter their content, which is very influential. We need people who can go on television and make an argument in five seconds.

Sarah Jaffe, Nation Institute Fellow

MSM is used as a slur by both the right and the left. It's not an exaggeration to say that corporate broadcast media made Trump president, but there are levers we can move. Fewer and fewer corporations own the media, and without middle-of-the-road publications, the only option is being in your own bubble.

We need to get our stories into the media that people are consuming. I talk to people in the heartland, but I haven't been writing for them. People at the Carrier plant are not reading *The Nation*. When BLM came onto the scene, there was a bump in hiring Black reporters because even left-wing publications didn't have any.

The mainstream beltway press has a really inflated understanding of its own importance. Trump's slights against them make them mad,

so they start acting like journalists. Budget cuts mean that a lot of editors are young, and this generation has more sympathy for people like us. There are openings in non-explicitly political parts of the mainstream media.

Max Böhnelt, US Correspondent, *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin)

The MSM in German-speaking countries has no strategy against the populist right. The AfD's media strategy was leaked, so we know what it is. They provoke the media with taboo-breaking statements. Then they distance themselves from the original statement. Then others accuse the media of lying. They get coverage at each turn. This strategy has led to massive media coverage, and any story about the AfD gets high click rates on social media. The media can hide behind their mandate and their place in the national media landscape. They are bound by law to be neutral and balanced and to cover all voices. The whole media framework, which is public, is being pulled further and further to the right.

Neues Deutschland—a socialist daily associated with the Left Party—has a policy of no interviews with the far right and no advertisements from them. There is no possibility of democratic exchange with them. *Neues Deutschland* has also decided to report extensively on anti-fascist activities.

Compared to German-speaking countries, what is striking about the United States is the

ubiquity of far right-wing media. For millions of Americans, this is the only source of information. In Europe, privately owned far-right media remains on the margins.

Bhaskar Sunkara, Founding Editor and Publisher, *Jacobin* Magazine

By numbers, *Jacobin* is the largest socialist publication in the United States since at least the 1970s, but the circulation is very small considering the size of the country. *Jacobin* has an online audience of around 1.5 million readers. There are opportunities for left-wing niches in a the current fragmented media environment.

The media we need as part of a majoritarian movement will look different than what we see now on the left and will truly reflect people's lived experiences. *Jacobin* can be a spark to start moving toward this. The best way to oppose the right is to promote an alternative to the center.

One of the reasons that a provocateur like Milo Yiannopoulos is so successful is that the American rhetorical tradition is dying off. We need to train people for media appearances. We need a cult of extreme competency. We need the best design and polished videos. We should be aware of our own niche and recognize that this is just step one in a broader media strategy.

In the last instance, media reflects its class interests, even though editors and journalists may have relative autonomy.

Connective Tissue: From Frontline Strategies to Long-term Transformation

Bill Fletcher Jr, Senior Scholar, Institute for Policy Studies; Kent Wong, Director, Labor Center at UCLA; Maria Svart, National Di-

rector, Democratic Socialists of America; and Liz Fekete, Director, Institute of Race Relations

We on the left neither know ourselves nor our enemy. That's why we keep losing. In order to start the process of knowing ourselves and our enemy, Bill Fletcher led the group in a preliminary "SWOT" exercise to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the far right and of our side, as well as the opportunities and threats that we face.

In the United States, the right has many strengths, including control of all three branches of government, money, corporate media, their own media, a committed core constituency, a clear narrative and vision for the future, a sophisticated online apparatus, guns, a willingness to use violence, ruthless demagoguery, alternative facts, home schooling, partnership with the religious right, international momentum, diversity of tactics, an intellectual infrastructure, and an implementation strategy.

The US left, however, also has many strengths, including anger, sensitivity, and common sense; the support of young people; facts; stories of success, in the US and elsewhere; media representation; fighting a system that is prone to crisis; young, thoughtful, and effective leaders; an ability to change the narrative; moral superiority (though this may also be a weakness); respected leaders; a history of resistance; feminists; our own momentum; humor; the global human rights movement; international solidarity; and diversity.

The US right faces a number of weaknesses, including opposition from segments of the corporate media, a reliance on empty promises and lies, loss of the popular vote, rivalries within the right, an unpopular agenda, corruption and consequent anger, a lack of facility with pop culture, shifting demographics, fear, lack of control of the big cities, a crisis-prone system, institutional resistance, overreach, declining diplomatic relations, inability to mobilize large groups, scandals, and a lack of explicit policy goals.

Donald Trump is bad for the extreme right in Europe. He is a con man. The extreme right in Europe is loud, arrogant, and full of hubris. The momentum is with us. When they are in power, they make a mess of it. We have a coherent program. They don't. We have to move with the times, and we need an inclusive discussion of who the left is. People are full of rage, and a single spark can start a prairie fire.

The US left has weaknesses, including a sense of moral superiority, fragmentation, loss of working class jobs, a lack of class consciousness, political correctness and "call out" culture, lack of mass organization, the Democratic Party and its zombie leadership, lack of money and dependence on wealthy funders, the abandonment of electoral politics by the ideological left, elitism, generational discontinuity, a lack of investment in movement infrastructure outside of cities, aversion to risk-taking, racial division and racism, the reproduction of a toxic culture within the movement, lack of discipline, lack of vision, being overly critical of each other, a lack of unified narrative, a strong divide between theory and practice, territorialism and competition, inaccessible spaces and language, and a lack of spaces to discuss and develop strategy.

The US labor movement is in deep crisis. Only one in twenty private-sector workers are union members. At the same time, there are significant organizing campaigns and victories.

There are numerous opportunities for the US left, including the necessity of action around climate change, frustration with war, the unpopularity of "Trumpcare," the growing capitalist crisis and the increasing willingness of people to oppose capitalism, the movement to protect one another, growing political polarization, the internet, the election and census of 2020, the discrediting of mainstream political parties, legal tools, and the instability of the right.

Young people are more willing to step up and out than ever before, and they're lining up on the right side. There is a real opportunity to develop new leadership.

The challenges facing young graduates today are serious. Demographic shifts alone do not make change. Organizing and building power make change.

Bernie Sanders introduced a class analysis to US politics. We need to work on our practice and theory. We need organic intellectuals. We

need to create spaces that overcome the alienation that people feel.

The US left faces a number of threats, some of which are also opportunities: climate change, nuclear weapons, instability of the state, war and terrorism, automation and job loss, a polarizing society, the internet, the collapse of the labor movement, the appointment of right-wing judges, state violence, the possibility of a constitutional convention, electoral manipulation of campaigns, voter suppression, and the structures of the Democratic Party.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the retreat, the participants gifted the RLS-NYC staff and co-directors a signed first edition of the classic George Seldes book *The People Don't Know: The American Press and the Cold War*. We closed in song and assembled for the bus ride back to Manhattan. Unfortunately, on its way to pick us up, our driver made a wrong a turn and the bus got stuck in a ditch. Was this a metaphor for the difficult work that lies ahead? Hopefully

not. While we waited for our transportation issues to be resolved, the Stony Point Center expressed their commitment to radical hospitality by inviting us to a delicious and unexpected lunch. Before long, our bus was extracted from the ditch, and we were on our way back to New York City and beyond, armed with new relationships, new strategic ideas, and—surprisingly, given the subject matter—smiles on our faces.