

The dissolution of collectives and associations, ever-increasing repression of social movements, the stigmatization of Muslims to create an “internal enemy,” escalating racism and xenophobia, the militarization of the police, increasingly frequent bans on demonstrations, and the government’s adoption of far-right rhetoric... For several years now in France, a whole host of factors have pointed to an authoritarian and racist radicalization of the ruling power. To describe this phenomenon, a growing segment of the left is using the concept of “fascisation.” [fascistization]. While the term—with its powerful symbolic weight, evoking the darkest periods of European history—helps spark a reaction, it is worth taking a closer look at those who are developing this concept.

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At a time when pushing back against the fascists is more urgent than ever, this article aims to take stock of the issue. Who is talking about “fascisation,” and what do they mean by it? What are the strategic implications of this analysis, and what are its limitations?

Given that the validity of any political analysis is measured by its strategic and practical consequences, this is not a purely theoretical debate. The goal is indeed to refine our understanding of the fascist phenomenon so that we can better determine how to combat it and emerge victorious.

Fighting Fascistization: Through Revolution...

Saïd Bouamama, a sociologist and activist with the United Front for Immigration and Working-Class Neighbourhoods (FUIQP), gave a lecture on fascism as part of a series of Marxist training sessions, in which he presented his definition of fascism and fascistisation.¹ In line with a certain orthodox Marxism, Bouamama adopts the definition offered by Dimitrov, Secretary of the Communist International, in 1935, stating that fascism is the “open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist, and most imperialist elements of finance capital.” From this perspective, fascism is the bourgeoisie’s last resort in times of crisis. For [Bouamama?], “there is therefore a ‘supply’ of fascism consisting of fascist organizations and a ‘demand’ for fascism consisting first of certain factions of the ruling class and then of larger factions.”

Expanding on this, Bouamama goes on to explain that fascistisation “is the result of the accumulation of successive authoritarian responses to manage social protests in a context of a crisis of legitimacy”²; however, “as long as the bourgeoisie does not feel sufficiently threatened, fascism does not find the conditions necessary to come to power. However, in circumstances marked by the significant growth and radicalization of social struggles, the ruling class will not hesitate to borrow from fascism its analyses, its proposals, and some of its methods. “We are thus witnessing a process of fascistisation of the state apparatus.” Bouamama concludes his presentation as follows: “It is illusory to fight fascism while underestimating the gravity of the fascistisation of the state apparatus. It is just as illusory to underestimate the struggle against explicitly fascist groups. Once in power, these groups can only be fought through armed struggle, as was the case during the Nazi era. We are already facing the dual struggle against fascistisation and against fascist groups. ”

In line with this, Action Antifasciste Paris-Banlieues, the best-known autonomous French antifascist group today, declares that focusing exclusively on the fight against the far right is a twofold mistake: on

the one hand, because this struggle could easily be co-opted and stripped of its substance by state- and government-sponsored antifascism; and second, because it would amount to ignoring the process of fascisation that allows fascism to reemerge in new, modern forms distinct from historical fascisms. Thus, for AFA Paris-Banlieues, we must today fight head-on and with equal intensity against both the organized far right and the traditional governing parties—whether liberal or conservative—which all contribute to this fascisation. For them, “the deadliest militia today is not Génération Identitaire or the Zouaves, but rather the French police.”³

The biggest problem here lies in the general lack of interest in the fascists themselves. This analysis of fascisation completely overlooks how fascists build their movement—namely, by creating a mass, cross-class movement—and not merely by courting the bourgeoisie. Indeed, aside from street battles and physical self-defense against violent far-right militants, autonomous antifascism sets aside the need to hinder the building of mass fascist organizations such as the FN/RN. Antifascism, conditioned by revolutionary anti-capitalism, thus finds itself cut off from an entire segment of our class that would nevertheless be willing to take up the fight against the organized far right. These positions serve more as a means of asserting a political line than of equipping ourselves with the means for an effective response. In short, it comes down to overthrowing capitalism or nothing: that sounds nice on paper, but isn’t very useful in reality.

... or through the unity of the left?

On a different note, Ugo Palheta⁴ analyzes fascism as a political project in its own right—“the ‘regeneration’ of an imagined community—generally the nation—involving a vast operation of racial and political ‘purification’”⁵. Unlike Saïd Bouamama, his analysis focuses on the French fascist movement and its “flagship,” the FN/RN. Palheta is well aware that the rise of fascism requires the establishment of a mass organization capable of uniting and mobilizing a large segment of the population. Thus, he takes seriously the relative autonomy that the fascist movement enjoys vis-à-vis the state and the bourgeoisie.

Nevertheless, he, too, asserts that we are currently facing a process of fascisation—that “historical phase of both ideological and material permeation” that paves the way for fascism “through a shift in the internal balances of the state in favour of the apparatus of repression and an ideological legitimization of the purge”⁶ in mainstream discourse and media. He thus takes up—as the concept of fascisation implies—the idea that “fascism arises ‘from within’”⁷, that is, from the state itself as it transforms in the wake of capitalist crises, an idea often illustrated by a quote from the writer Bertolt Brecht: “Fascism is not the opposite of democracy but its evolution in times of crisis.”

Thus, when it comes to strategy, Ugo Palheta does indeed raise the idea that it is necessary to halt the rise of fascist organizations—and in particular the FN/RN—by, for example, opposing any public appearances by the far right. But he immediately goes on to call for “the formation of a united front [bringing together multiple labour unions, political parties, and civic organizations] targeting not only the FN but all policies that facilitate its rise.”⁸ A front whose “objectives should be both defensive and offensive: seeking to stimulate and coordinate resistance to the far right, while at the same time promoting the need for an alternative society that requires a political break—and thus the seizure of power.”

While it is true that fascism thrives on our camp's inability to build a sufficiently strong political and social alternative, it is nevertheless illusory to believe that such an alternative can be built from above by attempting to unite the various existing organizations. This would lead to watering down all the fundamental political contradictions and disagreements under the pretext of defending ourselves against the fascist threat. In reality, this risky strategic proposal dilutes antifascism and what could be very concrete prospects for action here and now into a vague call for the left to come together and unite. A sort of top-down anti-fascism. But we don't have time to wait for some sort of unity of the left—we must fight the fascists right now! It is even likely that such unity of action is needed to build the unity of our class, from the bottom up, as happened in February 1934.⁹

Distinguishing Between the Trajectory of Capital and the Fascist Threat

In short, this is what theories of “fascisation” can lead to: blurring the distinction between the bourgeoisie and the fascists, between fascism and capitalism, in order to call for fighting them head-on as a whole, by anchoring antifascist action either in a revolutionary perspective or in a project for the unity of the left and global emancipation. But ultimately, this leaves us defenseless on both fronts: in the anticapitalist struggle, on the one hand, by downplaying the very logic of racist and authoritarian capitalism; and in the antifascist struggle, on the other hand, by downplaying the distinct nature of fascists and their autonomy from the state and the bourgeoisie. However, when Saïd Bouamama states that fascisation “is the result of the accumulation of successive authoritarian responses” by the bourgeoisie in a crisis of legitimacy, he is indeed referring to something that is not the doing of the fascists.

This racist and authoritarian radicalization is indeed the work of the bourgeoisie itself, which seeks at all costs to maintain its domination and profit rates. To do so, it must exploit workers ever more intensely to extract greater surplus value (dismantling social gains, lowering real wages, overexploiting precarious labour, etc.) and, to achieve this, not only must it crush all opposition but also divide our class through racism. All of this follows a specific logic: this is what we call the trajectory of capital.¹⁰ And while this trajectory currently leads to the strengthening of the fascists and to the bourgeoisie eventually handing over power to them, it can also take other paths to resolve its crises depending on the balance of political forces: co-opting reformists, establishing a purely authoritarian regime, etc. However, the term “fascisation” implies—whether we like it or not—that the process will inevitably lead to fascism if no revolutionary overthrow occurs.

Would we speak of “fascisation” if there were an equal radicalization of power but no far right? For while the core of the problem lies in the conditions that foster fascism—namely, the crisis of bourgeois hegemony¹¹ and the complicity of the ruling elites with fascism—we must not overlook a crucial factor: to come to power, fascists need a strong movement and a mass organization.

What if we focused on the fascists themselves?

While discussing “fascisation” aims to address the need to understand that fascism does not emerge overnight, it is nonetheless essential to examine what the fascists themselves are doing. This is precisely what historian Robert Paxton has set out to do by describing, step by step, the choices, actions, and trajectories of fascist movements and their leaders—some of whom succeeded in seizing

power (Nazism in Germany and Mussolini's fascism in Italy), while others failed in other European countries.¹² In this way, he identifies several key stages in the development of fascist movements.

To gain a clearer understanding, let us refer to the summary provided by Vanina Giudicelli in issue No. 3 of the *Cahiers d'A2C*:

"In *Fascism in Action*, Paxton identifies the two factors that enabled the fascists to come to power in Italy in 1922 and in Germany in 1933: the fact that the bourgeoisie felt so threatened that it agreed to collaborate with them, and the fact that fascist organizations were sufficiently entrenched to establish themselves as partners.

Fascism is not an instrument created by the bourgeoisie; it has an autonomous political agenda (the extermination of the Jews was not the agenda of the German bourgeoisie, but that of the Nazis). This agenda—which could be defined as the desire to bring about a renewal of society through the struggle for national purity and greatness—is not merely a slightly more radical version of the agenda put forward by bourgeois candidates. What sets fascism apart is its aim to actively mobilize broad segments of society—whereas the bourgeoisie seeks instead to ensure their passivity. At the heart of this movement is the petty bourgeoisie, a social class that hates both the ruling big bourgeoisie—which is driving them into bankruptcy—and the working class, which is demanding greater social and political gains. [...] But fascist movements also seek to rally other social forces around the enemies that must be crushed. Fascism's strategy is therefore to poach a portion of our class and turn it against the other. In this sense, fascism may be of interest to the bourgeoisie if it succeeds in building the large-scale movement to which it aspires, providing the manpower and determination capable of "resolving" the obstacles the bourgeoisie faces."¹³

Placing the fascists back at the centre of the anti-fascist struggle in this way is essential. Ultimately, the debate is tactical and centres on "where to strike." Yet when we talk about fascisation, as we have seen, the risk is that we forget the fascists by pushing them into the background. It is, however, essential to understand the specific characteristics of fascism in order to grasp, by contrast, the necessity of a specifically anti-fascist struggle. Protests against asylum seeker reception centres or drag queen shows, attacks on LGBT+ centres, assaults on trans people or left-wing activists, the breaking of blockades at universities protesting pension reform, mobilizations against Médine's concerts... All of this is certainly tolerated to a certain extent by the ruling powers, but it is indeed far-right activists who are at work here, not Macronist voters.

Building anti-fascist unity of action from the bottom up

The fascists are playing on our turf: they aim to mobilize the masses—and thus a large part of our class as well—but against another part of our class. Let's keep in mind that a fascist regime isn't simply one where the police crack down harder; it's a regime where everyone becomes a cop and actively collaborates in the repression. That is why the battle we are waging against the fascists is not a race in which it is simply a matter of going faster and farther; it is a boxing match that must be fought, a hand-to-hand struggle to prevent them from recruiting and gaining further footholds, from spreading their poison, and from enlisting a portion of our class.

Every village, neighbourhood, or university where the far right carries out its activities without an antifascist response is one step closer to widespread complicity in their deadly project. Every individual who joins the fascist camp is one step closer to the annihilation of our camp, of our organizations—from the most reformist to the most revolutionary—but more profoundly, of all our bonds of solidarity.

Many people share this common interest in pushing back against the fascists—well beyond the usual activist circles—and that is certain; it can only give us hope and strength. Building this unity happens at the grassroots level and through the action of as many people as possible: we must start from the bottom up—in our villages, neighbourhoods, or universities—and through concrete, on-the-ground action against the far right and its activities. Leading a town hall meeting, launching a committee, and organizing public gatherings to act collectively are vital for rallying and mobilizing all those of good will against the fascists.

While we agree that, in the long run, the only way to permanently rid ourselves of fascism and the conditions that foster it is through a revolutionary break with capitalism and imperialism, we also believe that today the anti-fascist struggle is a prerequisite—a condition for the unity of our class that is necessary for the revolution. Given the state of our camp today, repelling the fascists is a vital objective for restoring our class's strength, conviction, and confidence to move beyond this stage.

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