

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY ROB URIE
06.02.2021

Fascism is Capitalism That Really Means It



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

Broad characterizations of political acts are themselves political in the sense that they emerge from views of the world that give them meaning. They can be descriptive, in which case why not let political actors speak for themselves? The contemporary fear of giving a 'platform' to disagreeable views begs the question, how do you know they are disagreeable unless you've heard people out? For instance, I've read Mein Kampf, and thought even less of Adolf Hitler and his theories after doing so. The goal so was to understand the man, not to agree with him. Why is the contemporary premise that people are too stupid to come to their own conclusions?

One of the reasons for this belief is that the Federal government and its agencies have been actively engaged in using disinformation and psychological manipulation to affect political outcomes that serve the purposes of the governing class for a century or more. While the case of Russiagate is still too raw for most Democrats to confront, it is a classic in the genre of merging fear with fake history to produce reactionary right-wing nationalism amongst the 'sophisticated' classes. However, and in contrast, right and left-wing political movements tie in history to material triggers. European fascism arose after capitalists destroyed the economies they had come to control.

To understand this point, Russiagate was widely dismissed as manufactured nonsense by the same people who in 2003 went willingly to Iraq to fight a war launched by a cabal of ex-oil industry executives in the George W. Bush administration. In other words, the call of reactionary nationalism ‘worked’ when people perceived a unity of interests in the national good. By 2008 or so these same people understood that they had been played for fools. Barack Obama was elected to lead a different path forward. The people who found Russiagate plausible were those who benefitted from Mr. Obama’s policies. The people who didn’t benefit were either disinterested in, or actively skeptical of, Russiagate.

The point: for disinformation to ‘work’ requires both actors disseminating it and a receptive audience for it. Another slice of the group that found Russiagate plausible is the bourgeois who sold the war against Iraq but who didn’t fight it. This isn’t to imply that there is valor in warfare. It is to state that those who supported the war from comfortable chairs at The New Yorker, NPR, the New York Times and the Washington Post were also the central proponents of Russiagate. This leaves the state, its intermediaries who distribute state propaganda, the bourgeois who support wars they don’t fight, and the people who fought in Iraq. It was the latter who concluded that Russiagate was bullshit.

However, this view of the state as distinct from Wall Street, the military-industrial-complex, the technology industry, social media, the oil and gas industry, pharma and the healthcare-industrial complex, requires looking past not simply control, but joined motivating logic. With the U.S. war against Iraq, the oil and gas and military industries developed national policy in conjunction with the White House. The façade of national defense was demonstrated to be a fraud. Did the Bush administration believe its own bullshit? All of its central protagonists had worked in the oil and gas industry. Their view was from a joined corporate-state perspective.

This is fascism. The militarization of the police, the build-out of the surveillance state, the largest relative and absolute carceral populations in the world, the elevation of homeland security while Americans are more likely to die from having furniture fall on them than in a terrorist attack, trade agreements that transfer sovereign power to corporations, and the primacy of corporate interests in the development of Federal government policies. The complaint about social media— that psychological coercion is its business model and its users are the product, points to the issue of control. Official panic began when a significant segment of the population no longer responded to government propaganda as expected.

The implied delusion that hanging a portrait of FDR was all that the Weimar leadership needed to do to deflect the rise of German fascists depends on a selective read of history. That the U.S. has the largest relative and absolute carceral populations in the world— built by quasi-fascists (Nixon, Reagan) working in tandem with enlightened liberals (Clinton, Biden), suggests that oligarchs were / are testing strategies of governance to suit their needs. That

German Concentration Camps housed anti-capitalist activists (communists) and ‘deplorables’ before they were racialized is addressed in more depth below.

In the documentary film [The Fog of War](#), former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara made the point that it wasn’t until years after the Vietnam War had ended that he realized that no one from the U.S. had ever asked the North Vietnamese what they wanted politically? While this is simplistic historically— the answer was no doubt diffuse and the American political and military leadership believed that it had gotten answers through self-serving intermediaries, it illustrates the problem of deciding how other people will live or die from eight thousand miles away. The threat to empire would be the conclusion on the part of the American people that doing so is a really bad idea.

Another rationale for not giving people a voice is that those in power fear that it might find resonance more broadly. Adolf Hitler’s motives for writing Mein Kampf likely included its power to sway people to support him politically. The question then, pulled from above, is: was the rise of Nazism the result of the Nazi’s power of persuasion, or from the historical circumstances of the Great Depression given the residual of WWI that Germany was living with? These aren’t mutually exclusive considerations. However, the coincidence of the worst global economic downturn since the Great Depression in 2008 with the demobilization from the Iraq War presents eerily rhyming circumstances in the present.

That the American bourgeois were utterly oblivious to this threat from 2008 – 2016 suggests that they either didn’t recognize it, or imagined that they could ‘manage’ their way out of it. However, a third possibility also exists. As long as state-corporatism can be used to keep the rich in yachts and vacation homes and the bourgeois in dream kitchens, not much else matters (to them). Conversely, if the Biden administration shared the fear of fascism that has so motivated bourgeois discourse in recent years, it might conclude that the very same corporate-state establishment that brought it to power is the problem.

That Ashli Babbitt, the woman who was shot and killed during the Capitol invasion, was an Iraq War veteran who had [supported Barack Obama](#) suggests that descriptors like fascist and racist serve the political purposes of those doing the describing. Given the number of Confederate flags and fascist symbols on display, there is little doubt that lot of Americans have views that I don’t share. However, in terms of distribution, [a quarter of Democrats are openly racist](#) versus a third of Republicans. In lieu of class in Marxist terms, proximity to corporate-state power now appears to separate fascists in suits from those who can wire or plumb a house.

While George W. Bush eventually learned that use of the term ‘Crusade’ to describe the mal-adventure in Iraq was less than politically advantageous, that he and the rest of officialdom were comfortable lobbing charges as moral and political arbiters after killing a million Iraqis and destroying various and sundry nation-states, certainly looks like a view from power.

FWIW, in various American social agglomerations, the asshole is always the fall person. Real power knows how to get what it wants and come out the other side appearing blameless.

It is through parsing society by alleged ideology, rather than by the political and economic alliances of class, that The New Yorker, NPR, the New York Times and the Washington Post haven't been held politically and morally liable for the U.S. war against Iraq. These are the propaganda arm of the state that sold the war. They sold a misguided and wildly destructive war in Iraq and then doubled down with Russiagate, where 'liberals' were ready to nuke Russia for \$75,000 in internet ads mostly run after the 2016 election. Yet they have now successfully postured themselves as an anti-fascist vanguard?

In contrast to liberal mythology, soon after the Nazis rose to power, German communists were the first people placed into 'protective custody,' a.k.a. indefinite detention, in Concentration Camps. The second group fell into what today would be described by liberals as 'deplorables'— the WWI veterans who were destroyed by the war, and those dispossessed by the Great Depression who didn't align themselves with the Nazis. In 'meta' terms, the Concentration Camps initially imprisoned the opponents of capitalism and those dispossessed through imperialist war and capitalist crisis.

The idea that 'the rabble' represented the Nazi's political base defies both history and basic political logic. The Nazis aligned themselves with existing economic power. German fascism was and foremost a form of political economy. It was a merging of state militarism with corporate-industrialism. The idea that the Nazis either were, or would have had sympathy for, the mixed-bag of small business owners, tradespeople and right-wing radicals who invaded the Capitol is a mischaracterization. Their 'partners' were industrialists— the German ruling class.

The '[Business Plot](#),' the only widely reported effort to affect a fascist coup in the U.S., was conceived and executed by Wall Street titans and business executives, not by pet groomers from Des Moines. The plot fell apart when the plotters tried to enlist General Smedley Butler. Luckily, General Butler was enthusiastically unsympathetic to the fascist cause. The Plot was a struggle for power between competing ruling class interests. That the [U.S. allied with the former Nazi leadership](#) after WWII, rather than the communists, provides an indication of where official sympathies lie.

During the Great Depression, the sympathies of dispossessed industrial and agricultural workers migrated toward labor unionism, and to a lesser extent, communism. The Business Plotters saw this writing on the wall. Veterans had been camped out in D.C. threatening to burn the White House to the ground until bonuses were paid. And those who wanted them were offered jobs in the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). The point: while some of 'the rabble' had fascist sympathies, the Business Plot was motivated by ruling class antipathy toward the reforms of the New Deal.

More recently, [here](#) is hedge fund titan Steve Schwarzmann in 2010 comparing the threat to tax hedge fund managers under the same rules that apply to cashiers at Walgreens to the Nazi invasion of Poland. On the one hand, you had twenty-five million unemployed workers in 2010. On the other, you had one of the villains who had crashed the economy complaining that his eighth yacht might only have 32 bathrooms because of excessive taxation. Guess [who got taken care of](#)? By 2016, employment had not yet returned to its pre-Great Recession levels. But the stock market had tripled from its 2009 lows.

The cliché / warning that the Nazis ascended to power by democratic means portrays capital as an innocent bystander. That the Nazi hierarchy, including both Hitler and Goebbels, [studied the U.S. process](#) of industrialization— including the ‘contributions’ of slavery and genocide to capital accumulation, points to Nazism as managed industrialization. In terms likely blunter than Americans are used to, the [BBC lays out the role](#) of American finance capital in the failures of the Weimar regime. The racialization of this role by the Nazis has been used to dismiss it. But it was communists and ‘deplorables’ who were initially imprisoned by the Nazis, not bankers.

It is telling that liberals in the U.S. see racial iniquity as ‘the problem’ with mass incarceration. If it was racially representative of the larger population, would it be socially legitimate? Fixing the carceral distribution by race would do nothing to fix it by class. Poor people are sent to prison in the U.S., rich people aren’t. This isn’t reductive— if the class maldistribution were fixed, the race maldistribution would be fixed (mostly). But if the race maldistribution were fixed, it would still overwhelmingly be poor people in prison. American prisons are [warehouses for inconvenient populations](#). This makes them (definitionally) Concentration Camps.

The alliance of the American left with right-wing nationalist national security and surveillance state officials since 2016 in fighting ‘fascists’ seems inexplicable in ideological terms. The reason? The national security and surveillance states are corporate-state amalgams that exist to enforce an imperial world order. The attempted U.S. coup in Bolivia was to control lithium for liberal, green EVs (Electric Vehicles). The U.S. coup in Venezuela that is still under way is to control oil. The build-out of the surveillance state domestically is to secure control of domestic politics by and for capital. This is fascism.

One of the many good arguments against George W. Bush’s 2003 war against Iraq was that combat forces turn into reactionary armies when they return home. Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, was a veteran of the first Gulf War. The militia movement of the early 1990s was made up of veterans of U.S. dirty wars in Central America and the first Gulf War. Veterans returning from W. Bush’s Iraq fiasco were unable to find meaningful employment during the Great Recession. What this meant practically is a choice between becoming a cop or stocking shelves at Target for minimum wage.

Those most capable of inflicting harm amongst the Capitol invaders appear to be those who had military training combined with an alleged willingness to use it. That a lot of cops appeared sympathetic to the invaders more likely than not ties to real or imagined shared experience in the military. The militarization of the police includes the psychology of seeing others as enemy combatants, as well as a duty to commit violence for imagined right. This is manifested in varying solidarities including class and the residual detritus of American history, including race. What is missing from assertions of what people 'are,' fascist, racist, etc., is any notion of relative power.

Consider: do liberals really believe that the U.S. is trying to restore democracy in Bolivia or Venezuela by ousting democratically elected leaders and replacing them with hard-right pawns of the U.S.? Why then would the CIA care about democracy in the U.S.? The [CIA brought Saddam Hussein to power](#) in Iraq. The CIA [helped install Pinochet](#) in Chile. The CIA ousted [Mosaddeq](#) in Iran and [Arbenz](#) in Guatemala. While it is a large and complex organization, some fair proportion of everything dark and evil that has taken place since 1948 can be laid at its feet.

The point: between the alliance of corporate and state interests reflected in the Iraq War and the Wall Street bailouts, and the CIA's long history of destroying functioning democracies for the benefit of American business interests, lies the approximate locus of American power. Few of the players involved in these machinations are motivated by ideology. One of Howard Zinn's contributions in *A People's History* is his explication of the economic motives that powerful people and organizations hide with ideological explanations of their actions. In other words, what people are, e.g. racist, fascist, does little to explain history.

Now that Donald Trump is out of power, what do the liberal opponents of fascism intend to do to disentangle the corporate from political power that defines it? One of the early answers is to [redefine it](#) as exclusively the province of authoritarian leaders. In fact, the Nazis based much of their political economy on the American model. The Americans provided eugenics, slavery, genocide, the legal framework for Nazi race laws, and an industrial model that motivated some fair portion of German militarism. In the present, the Americans have mass incarceration, a militarized police force, a large and intrusive surveillance apparatus, political police (FBI) and a public-private domestic spying operation.

The functional definition making the rounds is: do we control the state or does the state control us? To quibble, this definition excludes economic power and coercion. Lambert Strether jokes that liberals call it 'our democracy,' meaning that it is their democracy. But that is ultimately a class argument. Whoever wins an election, the CIA is still going to try to overthrow the Venezuelan government and domestic political repression will increase.

FEBRUARY 5, 2021

Rob Urie is an artist and political economist. His book [Zen Economics](#) is published by CounterPunch Books.