CAPITALISM, CRISES AND THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF THE FAR-RIGHT

'Whoever is not prepared to talk about capitalism should also remain silent about fascism.'
Max Horkheimer (1939)

'You can't know what fascism is if you don't know imperialism'. Palmirio Togliatti (1935)

Abstract

Far-right politics continue to occupy a significant presence within many European states and in recent years have become associated with a distinct strand of anti-globalization politics. This suggests that there is a connection between the socio-economic instabilities associated with capitalist development and the political fortunes of the far-right. Whilst some scholars have recognized the significance of socio-economic factors in the (re)emergence and evolution of European far-right movements much of this work has either: (a) failed to adequately historically contextualize the specifically contemporary connections between capitalist development and far-right politics compared to previous historical episodes of significant far-right activity; and/or (b) failed to sufficiently single-out capitalist development as a *determining* analytical factor in accounting for the far-right – then and now – in contrast to other factors. It is the objective of this paper to address these two analytical lacunae in the discussion of far-right politics. Thus, I will offer a historical overview of the relationship between capitalist development across (Western) European states and the politics of the far-right to examine the *causal connection* between capitalism and the shifting periodic moments of far-right activity. Secondly, the article will assess the historically-evolving connections – antagonistic or compliant – between the ideas and movements of the European far-right and the interests of dominant *qua* capitalist socio-economic and political interests. More specifically, in engaging with Marxist writings on the far-right (and fascism in particular), the paper will offer a comparative historical-spatial analysis which properly locates the material bases of far-right mobilizations *beyond* the national capitalist economies of particular locales of far-right activity in the evolving and unevenly developing global capitalist economy. In doing so I will offer an improved historical materialist account of the far-right through (1) explaining the role played by the *global* character of capitalist development and the place of particular national economies within it on the evolution of the far-right; and (2) a comparison of the *changing historical* character of capitalist development in shaping the far-right within these different states.

Introduction

Far-right forms of politics – as evidenced in the performance of a number of far-right parties in European and national parliamentary elections[1] in recent years – continue to occupy a significant presence in the politics of many European states. Indeed, since the late 1980s, dovetailing with the end of the Cold War and the spread and intensification of neoliberal globalization far-right movements and parties have come to be identified with a particular strand of the anti-globalization movement through their hostility to liberalized trade regimes, immigration and the development of international/global governance structures.[2] Such developments appear to be indicative of the way in which the globalized character of capitalist development combined with the contradictions, contortions and crises associated with it continue to condition, indeed, *constitute* the politics of the far-right.

Whilst some scholars have recognized the significance of socio-economic factors in the (re)emergence and evolution of European far-right movements[3] much of this work has either: (a)

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[1] French and Dutch far-right movements also played important roles in mobilizing voters in the referendum opposing the so-called 'European Constitutional Treaty' in May 2005.
[2] See Rupert, 2000: **xx-xx**.
[3] See Betz, 1994; Betz and Immerfall, 1998; Kitschelt 1995.

failed to adequately historically contextualize the specifically contemporary connections between capitalist development and far-right politics compared to previous historical episodes of significant far-right activity; or (b) failed to sufficiently single-out capitalist development as a *determining* analytical factor in accounting for the far-right – then and now – in contrast to other factors.[4] It is the objective of this article to address these two analytical lacunae in the discussion of far-right politics. Thus, the article will offer a historical overview of the relationship between capitalist development across (Western) European states and the politics of the far-right to examine the *causal connection* between capitalism and the shifting periodic moments of far-right activity.[5] Secondly, the article will assess the historically-evolving connections – antagonistic or compliant – between the ideas and movements of the European far-right and the interests of dominant *qua* capitalist socio-economic and political interests. Simply put, then, the article will assess the degree to which the rise of the far-right is an outcome of periodic moments of capitalist crises and the degree to which the far-right can be regarded as a social and political grouping that, in spite of its populist and 'anti-capitalist' rhetoric ultimately serves the interest of the capitalist class.

Consequently, the discussion will take seriously and will engage with those – notably Marxist-informed scholars – who have sought to explain the far-right as the product of a uniquely modern pathology of capitalist societies and who have also tended to question the radical and 'revolutionary' credentials of the far-right. In doing so, the aim of the article is to provide a better historical materialist account of the historical relationship between capitalist development and the far-right than currently exists in the English-language literature on the far-right.

The article is organized into three sections. First, I provide a brief discussion of the definitional intricacies of the far-right across space and time. Whilst recognizing the complexities of historical and spatial singularity in defining the far-right I will put forward a general definition of the far-right as a distinct form of modern politics applicable across different historical moments and spatial locales. Secondly, I discuss the existing literature on the far-right that has addressed the questions of the causal connection between capitalism and the far-right and the connections between far-right movements and the capitalist class. The final section, before the conclusion, provides the main analytical substance of the article in outlining an explanation as to (a) the causal connection between the rise of the far-right and the shifting contortions and crises associated with capitalist development; and (b) the degree to which the far-right can be considered a form of anti-capitalism.

Defining the Far-Right

Defining or labelling any social or political grouping obviously needs to be sensitive to the uniqueness and specificities of the historical context within which such movements are located. This is particularly so with regard to the 'far,' 'extreme', 'radical' or 'reactionary' right, which has been the subject of major scholarly debates within the field of 'fascist studies' and comparative politics over

[4] This is particularly the case in the work of Mudde, 2000; Ignazi, 1997, 2003; Eatwell, 2004.

[5] Whilst the far-right has maintained a continuous presence in the politics of European states since the late nineteenth century, its political fortunes have fluctuated. In spite of local variations we can identify three moments where it has had a relatively significant presence that the historical survey will cover: the late nineteenth century and the early years of the 20th century; the inter-war 'fascist' episode; and the post-Cold War period. Whilst there were some localized exceptions far-right political activity within Europe was relatively minor from the period after World War Two to the late 1980s.

its core definitional dimensions.[6] In spite of the consequences of historical change and the specificities of particular moments and locales, however, I think that we are able to identify attributes and characteristics that link forms of political activity across time and space that could be considered broadly emblematic of a 'far right' politics.

In recognizing this it is also clear that since the 1980s the far-right has become a much more complex and fragmented set of political and ideological currents than in the past. This is due to the declining significance – if not rupture with – the legacy of fascism (highlighted by the transformation of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) into the 'post-fascist' National Alliance)[7] and, more broadly, the re-shaping of the political-ideological spectrum of European political systems through the disintegration and realignment of the socialist left. These changes have been compounded by the way in which political and economic developments associated with neoliberalism and the liberal-conservative 'New Right' have come to transform the social and political fabric of European states since the 1980s.[8] The result is that the ideological attributes of the far-right and the social constituencies that it has sought to mobilize have become more multifaceted, which, in part, reflects the consequences of the changes that have occurred within European societies over the last two-to-three decades.

This complexity is revealed in the way in which analysts within comparative politics have struggled to arrive at a consensus as to the defining commonalities of the far-right. Thus, whilst Betz has focused on the populist dimension of what he labels the 'radical right' distinguishing between a neo-libertarian strand influenced by the ideological and socio-economic impact of neoliberalism and an authoritarian and racist dimension[9], Ignazi refers to the far-right as reflecting the post-material and post-industrial developments of European societies revealed in a greater focus on issues of immigration and identity than on material concerns over employment.[10] Mudde, on the other hand, argues that the experience of the far-right after 1945 is such that any definition needs to factor in the fundamental break with the fascist experience,[11] whilst others[12] see the term 'extreme right' as a convenient if flawed short-hand for a more complex phenomenon. In what follows I do not intend to provide a taxonomy of the far-right, contemporary or otherwise[13] but, instead, attempt to highlight some common attributes that have travelled across time and space, whilst – as the penultimate section will more clearly demonstrate – recognise the peculiarities of the different historical expressions of the far-right.

The key point that I want to emphasise in my discussion of the definition of the far-right – and where I distinguish myself from much of the definitional debates on the far-right within the comparative politics and history of ideas literatures – takes its cue from Michael Mann and others[14] in that the far-right is both an ideology and socio-political movement whereby the rhetoric and textual statements of the far-right need to be connected to the actual behaviour of far-right

[6] On the debate over the definition of 'fascism' see Eatwell, 1992, 1996, 2003; Griffin, 1993, 1998; Payne, 1995 Mann, 2004; Paxton, 2004. On the contemporary far-right see Betz, 1994, 1998; Kitschelt, 1995; Mudde, 1995, 2000; Hainsworth, 2000, 2008; Ignazi, 1992a, 1992b, 1997, 2003.
[7] See Hainsworth, 2008: 8.
[8] See Betz, 1994; Hainsworth, 2008: 5; Ignazi, 2003; Mudde, 1995: 205; 2000.
[9] Thus, Betz identifies the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the Italian Liga Nord as exemplars of a neo-libertarian populist strand and the British National Party, French Front National and Belgium Vlaams Blok as reflecting a more traditional authoritarian-populist strand of the far-right. Betz, 1994: 107-39; 1998; 2003.
[10] Ignazi, 2003: 2-3.
[11] Mudde, 1995: 204-5.
[12] Eatwell, 2004: 14.
[13] On the analytical weaknesses of such taxonomic approaches to defining the far-right or fascism see Eley, 1983: 55; Mann, 2004: 4-5; Paxton, 2004: 15-18.
[14] Mann, 2004; Renton, 1999: 1-5, 18-29.

movements and their respective material impact on society and state. In consequence, the search for an ideal type or the determination to identify a core 'objective' definition of the far-right – or, indeed, fascism – based on an ideational account[15] alone is likely to overlook the socio-economic and political substance of such movements. Further still, it may also end up leading to quite perverse analytical and political judgements about the far-right such that they can be considered as forms of socialism or revolutionary movement because they happen to share a number of common ideational attributes with socialist and/or revolutionary movements.[16] Specifically, in the case of the ideas, texts and rhetoric of some fascists, fascism does have a superficial similarity to socialist and revolutionary movements but in what fascists *did* and in their impact on capitalist societies quite the opposite was the case.

The far-right, then, is a complex and dynamic political movement whereby both evolving historical and shifting spatial contexts have conditioned the momentary reality of the far-right on the ground at any one time or place in the same ways that other political-ideological currents of modernity have evolved. Indeed, perhaps more than any other modern/post-modern political current the far-right – though its utilization of populist techniques of political mobilization – has tended to be both very vague and also highly contradictory in its ideological and rhetorical pronouncements. Thus, it has tried to appeal to as wide a social constituency as possible – transcending class identities in particular – but in doing so has tended to make commitments that have been in mutual tension with each other, particularly with regard to the relations between workers and employers and state authorities and the market. This has obviously been a means to secure electoral advantage and to obscure its more specific and divisive key social, economic and political objectives, which was particularly successful in cases of inter-war German and Italian fascism. The significance of this ambiguity not only concerns the acceptance – at face value – of what fascists and the far-right more generally have said and written, in defining the far-right, but also with regard to their apparent political 'normalization' in the contemporary era as post-fascist. Of course any serious analysis has to be sensitive to the ideological coherency of the terms applied to particular movements but not at the expense of emptying-out the active and political dimensions of these movements and the evolving structural contexts that have conditioned their development.

Where then, do we start with our definition of the far-right? Well, an important contextual and ideational aspect of the far-right is to historically situate it with regard to other political currents of modernity and, in this respect, the ideological values, social basis and political objectives of the far right have and continue to overlap – to varying degrees – with those of the traditional or conservative right.[17] Thus, the far right tends to be committed to preserving the social, ethnic, moral and cultural basis of society in the face of change and, further, opposing – like traditional conservative forces – the advances of (cosmopolitan) liberalism and the wider left in these domains, which are perceived as undermining and corrupting what are regarded as 'natural' and organic values and institutions. There is, then, with conservatism, a shared sense of an idealisation of the past, a

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[15] See Eatwell, 1992, 1996 and Griffin, 1998 in particular.

[16] As Renton (1999: 25-6) notes this fixation with ideology has led some scholars to adopt a rather ambivalent posture regarding the political consequences of fascism and effectively accepting how fascists described themselves.

[17] Indeed, the political fortunes of the far-right – evidenced by the decline in support of the far-right in Britain after the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and in France when Charles Pasqua was Interior Minister between 1986-88 – have been influenced by the ideological and policy emphasis of the traditional-conservative right particularly regarding issues such as immigration. This continues to be the case, particularly with regard to immigration whereby, to a not insignificant extent, far-right assumptions about the cultural threat of the 'other' (especially Muslims) and the economic threat of migrants have become normalised as a 'common sense' amongst mainstream political parties on the left as much as the right in recent years.

sense of cultural pessimism[18] and an importance attached to what are regarded as 'natural' social hierarchies. Such structures of 'naturalised inequality' and cultural value-systems are seen as producing distinct social and political benefits contributing to social and political order opposed to political and ethical doctrines promoting cosmopolitanism, egalitarianism, democracy and forms of (transnational) solidarity beyond that of a particular national or ethnic community.

Such ideological and cultural affinities with conservativism have played an important role in accounting for the varying historical fortunes of the far-right. Indeed, we could argue that the strength of the far-right has, ultimately, tended to be contingent on the vitality, legitimacy and mass-mobilizing potential of conservative forces. Where conservatives have managed to cultivate a populist and mass-mobilizing political profile and where they have flirted with elements of a far-right agenda this has tended to come at the expense of the autonomous far-right. Where this has not been the case and/or where conservative forces have been associated with a failure to resolve a political and economic crisis, as was the case during the inter-war period, the far-right has tended to benefit. In this sense whilst it is important to recognise the differences between the traditional right and the far-right it is also necessary to examine this relationship dialectically rather than treating each political-ideological current in isolation and outside of a evolving – sometimes crisis-ridden – historical context.

The relationship between the 'two-rights' and the changing historical context is evident in the emergence of the far-right as a distinct political-ideological current within European societies in the late nineteenth century. The surfacing of an autonomous far-right politics was closely connected to the decline of the social basis, ideological legitimacy and political success of the European *ancien régime* and the strategies employed by traditional social and political elites to thwart the advances of the democratic left through cultivating far-right forces 'from below.'[19]Further, and as already suggested, the subsequent political successes of the far-right – most notably in Italy and Germany – after World War One needs to be contextualised with regard to the failings of traditional conservative forces – embedded in the structures of states – to successfully address the crisis that engulfed many European states after 1918 and their willingness to accept far-right political advances as a way of countering the perceived threat of revolution and socialism.[20]Indeed, the dialectical connection is such that the far-right came to govern through the invitation, co-operation and support of the traditional-conservative right. Fascism, then, did not seize power but, rather, was *given* power. These developments contrast with a contemporary context where the mainstream right has largely accepted and embraced many of the social and political changes of post-war liberal democracy thus diluting its defence of traditional, iniquitous and authoritarian social frameworks and cultural patterns that much of the far-right continues to uphold.

What we might regard as the conservative-aligned dimensions of the far-right contrast with its distinct political characteristics that distinguish it and – sometimes – place it in a stance of opposition to conservatism as a method of politics. Conservatism, as a politics of the political right is distinct from the far right in its origins – in the late eighteenth century – as a reaction against the dawn, consolidation and spread of the values, processes, relationships, institutions and outcomes associated with modernity, encapsulated in the 1789 French Revolution. In contrast, the politics of the far right is a product of this modernity and – as reflected in fascism – could be regarded as representing a form of modernity, or a particular 'resolution' of some of the contradictions,

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[18] Mudde, 2000: 11. On cultural despair and the origins of fascism see Stern, 1965.

[19] Much of the literature on the pre-World War One German Far-Right emphasizes the 'manipulative character' of these movements whereby traditional (Junker) elites mobilized subaltern rural constituencies in defence of the political and socio-economic status quo. For a survey and critique see Eley, 1980, 1986.

[20] See Blinkhorn, 1990.

challenges and dislocations inspired by modernity.[21] The distinction, then, is that whereas conservatism tends to be concerned with *preserving* existing institutions, the far right has a more 'radical' orientation evidenced in a commitment to a more fundamental restructuring of the state-society relationship at the domestic *and* international levels. To a significant extent this continues to be the case.

The issue here is the radical or revolutionary pretensions of the far-right regarding its mode of politics and its objectives. This 'revolutionary' dimension of the far-right was most evident in the inter-war fascist episode and was obviously dialectically associated with the wider revolutionary spectre haunting Europe at the time after the Bolshevik Revolution. The post-1989 context is important in this respect – the idea of a post-revolutionary era – has helped undercut the revolutionary pretensions of the far-right as, in most, if not all European states there is no revolutionary threat to speak of. The absence of a revolutionary political threat to the existing social order (from within and without) is paralleled by the absence of external geopolitical threats. Consequently, whilst the extinguishing of revolutionary flames has tended to moderate the tactics and objectives of the contemporary far-right and redirect their ideological mobilizations compared to the past, the absence of inter-state war has also reduced the political currency of militarism on the contemporary far-right. Indeed, we could take this one-step further in that the contemporary far-right's xenophobia and racism appears to be much less about foreign conquest and imperial domination (and extermination) and more concerned with a defensive separation from external (state) forces and international institutions and domestic ' non-indigenous' ethnic, racial and cultural minorities.

Whilst these developments suggest that the contemporary far-right may have broken the link with fascism and could be considered as post-fascist the reality is less clear-cut, highlighting the more fragmented and diffuse character of the contemporary far-right. Thus, some, though not all, contemporary far-right movements continue to have an extra-parliamentary and violent dimension associated with racist attacks and other forms of violence and intimidation and/or through attempting to deliberately provoke – through staging protests in areas with large concentrations of ethnic minorities – violent responses by minority communities, as has occurred in a number of British cities in recent years and elsewhere in Europe. Even if far from comparable to the Italian *squadristsi*, Nazi SA or BUF 'black shirts' this suggests that these movements and parties are still some way from 'normalisation'. Further, their policies also continue to have more radical and anti-system dimensions than other political currents and particularly those on the right. This is evidenced in their opposition to the existing liberal-democratic political-institutional arrangements, particularly with regard to the limits on executive power, protection of minorities and non-racial/ethnic forms of citizenship, and the operation of the rule of law (as well as their pronounced racism and xenophobia). In the post-Cold War context this hostility is also now increasingly channelled towards the rules, processes and institutions of regional and global governance – with calls for national separation and exclusivity – that have become much more involved in the policy-making domains of most European states. And, further, in their opposition to conventional approaches to political economy through withdrawal from multilateral governance frameworks such as the EU and WTO and a broader hostility to the globalizing dimensions of neoliberalism.

What is important to recognise in these developments and which further distinguishes the contemporary far-right from its predecessors is the general absence of sympathy and support from

[21] See Neocleous, 1997.

dominant socio-economic elements and parts of the state apparatus.[22] In the past – to varying degrees – the far-right could count on either the sympathy and/or explicit support from ruling class interests highlighting the deeper and structural socio-economic, political and ideational connections between the far-right and ruling elites concerned about the progress of the socialist left and democratic forces and the close association between a domestic politics of chauvinism and imperialism with a mercantilist political economy rooted in geopolitical competition and rivalry. This is obviously an important factor in contextualizing and explaining the reduced political appeal of the current far-right and it also highlights the metamorphosis of post-war capitalist development, notably the increasing internationalization/globalization of circuits of production, investment, consumption and accumulation and the de-coupling of capitalist accumulation from territorial aggrandisement and geopolitical conflict. In a word it questions the orthodox Marxist assumption – most explicitly articulated in Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* – that capitalist development is, organically, constituted by geopolitical rivalry and conflict. And, further, it also suggests that the dominant socio-economic interests or, in Marxian language, 'fractions of capital' are committed to a political-economy very much at odds with the nationalist-protectionist far-right.

Notwithstanding the contemporary differences between ruling classes and the far-right compared to the past there is a need – in any examination of the far-right (historical or contemporary) – to factor in the role played by dominant social forces and state elites[23]on the historical evolution of the far-right. This is not repeat the problems of much Marxist analysis of the far-right during the inter-war period which ended up reducing fascism to a 'terroristic dictatorship of a fraction of the capitalist class;'[24] instead, it correctly points us towards the ambivalent character of the far-right as an 'extreme' or 'radical' political-ideological current with regard to the maintenance of capitalist social property relations and the organization and workings of the state in particular.

The distinctions or tensions between the far-right and the mainstream right and the question of the 'revolutionary' tendencies within the far-right are also evident in the far-right's position towards possessive individualism. In general then, the far-right ideological armoury consists of a tendency towards xenophobia, 'racial exclusionism'[25]and a commitment to institutionalizing and upholding inequalities in the spheres of gender, race, nationality and ethnicity, that combine with a strong dosage of anti-individualism whereby the autonomy of the individual is supposed to submit to the will of the nation via the state.[26] This anti-individualism – linked to its general enmity towards liberalism – exposes a major tension with the far-right's general defence of capitalist social-property relations and its hostility towards the materialism and individualism that emerge from capitalism.

The far right's anti-individualism and anti-materialism has tended to be couched in a quasi-socialist language that suggest – superficially and rhetorically – a strong element of anti-capitalism. However, as will be detailed, below, these socialist pretences tend to be focused on the globalized or foreign forms of capital rather than the systemic properties of capitalism as such. Further, there continues to be a strong 'productivist' current in the political economy of the far-right meaning that

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[22] Further, as Kitschelt, 1995: 33-4 notes unlike earlier far-right groupings contemporary movements are characterized by a pronounced anti-intellectualism with no endorsements from significant intellectual public figures that allowed the far-right to claim – as in the past – some degree of intellectual (and moral) credibility and legitimacy.

[23] See Blinkorn, 1990: 1-13 for a discussion of the relationship between conservative forces and the far-right during the inter-war period.

[24] For an excellent survey of inter-war Marxist debates on fascism see Beetham, 1983. See also Poulantzas, 1974; Prowe 1994.

[25] Carter, 2005: 14.

[26] However, see the ambivalence over the relationship between individualism and communitarianism in the Austrian Freedom Party and Italian Liga Nord compared to other contemporary far-right parties. Betz, 1994: 110-19; Ignazi, 2003: **xx**.

traditional and manufacturing trades are particularly valued and defended against finance and 'speculative' economic activities associated with external influences.[27] This position informs much of the populism of the far-right – 'hard-working families' as against 'benefit scroungers' and 'foreign speculators' – and continues to contain strong hints of anti-Semitism.

This ideological-ethical distinction is also reflected in the different ways in which conservatives and members of the far-right tend to view the state and its relationship to society and other social institutions. Thus, conservatism – partly due to origins – is as concerned to preserve specific social institutions (such as the church) and, consequently, sees the power and authority of the state over society and individuals *mediated* by these traditional and established societal institutions, in contrast to the far right, which tends to be much less concerned with the role of other social institutions, regarding a revitalized and strengthened state as the key – and solitary – institution for the realization of its ideological vision.

However, a distinction does need to be made with some strands of the contemporary far-right that have absorbed much of the neo-liberal critique of the post-war social democratic state. In these cases – the Austrian FPÖ and Italian Liga Nord in particular, and some Scandinavian anti-immigrant parties – the state is seen quite differently to the historical far-right as a vehicle for transformation. Rather, it is seen as the primary problem that the far-right must confront through re-ordering civil society.[28]This loosening of the ideological coherence of the far-right stretches – to breaking point – any attempt to provide a general definition. In some respects these anti-statist and 'post-materialist' dimensions of the far-right[29] can be explained through the structural transformation of the political economy of advanced capitalist states over the last two–to–three decades, which demonstrates the need to properly contextualise the ideas and movements of the far-right within a changing historical context.[30] However, it is also possible to see these neo-libertarian dimensions of the far-right (which tend to be linked to virulent forms of xenophobia and, more recently, Islamaphobia), as consistent with a general tendency within the far-right. Thus, the 'neoliberal turn' of parts of the far-right needs to be understood as part of a populist hostility to the legacies of the post-war social democratic welfare state and, correspondingly, the continuing class power of the organized working class. Consequently, whilst the 'neo-libertarian far-right' proposes a populist agenda of privatization, cutting state regulation of the economy and eviscerating the welfare state and reinforcing the policing and coercive mechanism of the state, the primary social, ideological and political objective is the transformation of the state into a pro-business, nationalist and xenophobic institution dedicated to reversing post-war social democratic victories and resting on a generic far-right hostility to egalitarianism, cosmopolitanism and democracy.

The far-right's general tendency – historical and contemporary – towards the state is played out in the far-right's different orientation towards existing political institutions and modes of political behaviour and campaigning, which – perversely and counter-intuitively – locates the far-

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[27] The declining significance of agricultural with regard to its contribution to overall economic activity and the proportion of the population dependent on agrarian sources of income has been a significant development in the political economy of the far-right. Thus, whilst in the pre-1945 period the far-right drew significant support from a range of agrarian elements based on a political vision grounded in an idealisation of a rural idyll, protectionist measures for farmers and other limits on commercial-market imperatives on the agrarian economy, such rural concerns and social constituencies have been much less evident in the contemporary far-right.

[28] Betz, 1994: 141; Kitschelt, 1995: 21-2, 31-2.

[29] See Ignazi, 1997.

[30] Indeed, taking seriously the structural political-economic context for the development of the far-right we can see that the original forms of far-right politics – that soon morphed into fascism after 1918 – were products of a societal transition from one of a largely agrarian to an industrial experience. In contrast, what defines the contemporary far-right and distinguishes it from the earlier and fascist tradition is the fact that it is a product of another societal transformation from one of industrial to post-industrial society.

right on a similar part of the political spectrum to that of the far left with regard to the objective of *radically* reconstituting the state in order to more forcibly involve itself in society to uphold specific value systems and defend (or create) particular social institutions and practices. The far right, then, is much more willing to employ tactics that see it by-pass traditional political institutions and channels of representation (such as parliamentary democracy) as a way of capturing power and/or shaping political outcomes, including violence.

These characteristics of the far right have, however, changed in response to the passing of time and, with it, the consequent consolidation and deepening of the institutions, ideas and norms associated with liberal-capitalist modernity – in spite of the opposition of conservative and far-right forces. The consequences of fascist movements coming to power after World War One, their role in instigating World War Two and their subsequent defeat have had a particularly strong influence in shaping the nature of the contemporary far-right. The far-right, then, has had to come to terms as a form of opposition politics to a political and social terrain defined by an entrenched anti-fascism.[31] This combines with the stability and widespread legitimacy of the institutions and practices of liberal democracy within most European states such that, today, far-right parties tend to share a formal commitment to the workings of parliamentary democracy. Consequently, this apparent normalcy and with more and more of the contemporary far-right rejecting any adherence to the legacy of fascism the boundaries separating the far-right from the conservative right have become much less clear and the political, organizational, social and ideological continuities with the historical far-right more tenuous.[32]

However, the contemporary far-right's rejection of fascism and its commitment to liberal democracy should not be accepted at face value.[33] Most, if not all contemporary far-right parties in Europe tend to oppose the way in which the operation of liberal democracy – via the rule of law and constitutional guarantees – limits the power of the executive and majority rule, which they regard as limiting the potential for radical action and solutions to society's ills – be it crime, immigration, human rights or job security – due to the power of 'minority interests'. Although ostensibly committed to the democratic process, then, the politics of the contemporary far right rests on a populist narrative about the will of an amorphous 'people' and how this is frustrated by the operations of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law. Thus, within the far-right's narrative is a call for greater use of referenda and increasing executive power at the expense of parliamentary procedures and constitutional guarantees, particularly through sanctioning the power of an individual leader, as the embodiment of the will of the people. One does not have to necessarily agree with liberal scaremongering to recognise the historical parallels with the rise of fascism in this narrative and the potential consequences on the body politic if such changes were to be realised. The contemporary far right's commitment to liberal democracy, then, should be properly assessed with regard to the contradictions between the political and institutional consequences of their policy proposals and the functioning of a liberal democracy. In a word, the former would, in all likelihood, necessitate a fundamental attack on the normal processes of liberal democracy.

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[31] Though as Robert Paxton, 2004: 172-5 warns us though the historical circumstances are very different today it is not beyond the realms of possibility for a far-right authoritarian state to emerge within the context of a contemporary 'emergency politics'.

[32] Carter, 2005: 19.

[33] This refers particularly to those scholars who tend to focus more on the ideas and official pronouncements of contemporary far-right parties and leaders (and this applies equally to those who do the same with regard to fascism whilst ignoring the evolution of fascism as movements and regimes in power). The point here is that the contemporary far-right *has* to distance itself in its official pronouncements from the fascist past as part of its electoral strategy but this official posture does not mean that these parties – and their members/supporters – are, necessarily, fundamentally different in their outlook from their fascist predecessors.

To sum up the preceding discussion; the far-right shares an ideological and historical connection with traditionalism or conservatism but is a distinct political-ideological current through its commitment to a much more radical set of political objectives combined with the methods it is willing to employ to realise these goals, particularly through its suspicion towards and, to some extent, rejection of the foundational rules of liberal democracy. Historically, the far-right has obviously undergone a number of changes – in its political, ideological organizational and socio-economic character – since the late nineteenth century which questions the extent we can use a single term to describe a range of parties and movements operating in very different political and economic, domestic and international contexts.

However, such changes notwithstanding there are enough commonalities between late nineteenth century, fascist and contemporary far-right movements to permit a single label to be deployed. Though there are some distinctions to be made the contemporary far-right continues to be characterised by its ideological defence of social, ethnic and cultural hierarchies, xenophobia and racial exclusivism if not racism, as well as a hostility towards cosmopolitan doctrines of rights and egalitarianism.

Secondly, the far-right is defined by an ambivalent attitude towards capitalism whilst being consistently hostile to globalizing tendencies within it and foreign and finance capital in particular. However, in light of the general tuning away from social democratic statist forms of political economy over the last twenty years or so and the ascendancy of neoliberal ideological 'common sense' it is possible to identify two distinct contemporary far-right currents. Whilst both are committed to a 'producerism' – a focus on production rather than the service or financial sectors, one, more traditionally oriented strand, tends towards a statist-protectionist authoritarian model of political economy that more closely resembles fascism; whilst the other more 'libertarian'/post-industrial strand tends to be committed to the promotion of free-market proposals based on entrepreneurship, individualism and a smaller scaled back economic role for the state.[34]

Finally, in spite of its rhetoric it continues to see liberal democratic structures of governance as illegitimate, ineffective and corrupt, particularly through identifying the way in which international or cosmopolitan/global governance structures impinge on national polities. Thy thus demand a transformed polity associated with authoritarian structures of governance and de-coupled from regional and global structures, institutions and rules. I now intend to focus on the core of the argument through turning to the way in which the international has conditioned and shaped the political evolution of the far-right over three different historical conjunctures.

Materialist Explanations of the Far-Right

As indicated in my introductory remarks, there is a significant strand of work that has focused on the relationship between capitalist development and the evolution and political orientation of the far-right. However, most of this work is fragmented through tending to focus on specific historical and national episodes of far-right activity with particular concentrations on the causal relationship between capitalist development and crisis and inter-war fascism, and neoliberalism and the contemporary far-right. In short, there is no comparative historical-spatial analysis which properly locates the material bases of far-right mobilizations *beyond* the national capitalist economies of particular locales of fascist activity in the evolving and unevenly developing global capitalist economy. The analytical issues that tend to be overlooked in this division of the literature are: (1) an assessment of the role played by the *global* character of capitalist development and the place of particular national economies within it on the evolution of the far-right; and (2) a comparison of the

[34] Betz & Immerfall, 1998:5; Kitschelt, 1995.

changing historical character of capitalist development in shaping the far-right within these different states. It this gap which this article aims to address.

The most significant literature on capitalism and the far-right is obviously the tradition of Marxist writing that emerged within the Communist International in response to the rise of fascism.[35] Too many mainstream scholars of the far-right have either ignored or ridiculed much of this work.[36] Whilst significant elements of this material consists of a politically-charged justification for the *volte faces* of Comintern policy towards fascism[37] and, in consequence, provides little analytical purchase in assessing fascism or the far-right more generally, some of the contributions to the inter-war Marxist debates on the conceptualisation of, and explanation for the rise of fascism are marked by high levels of sophistication and complexity that give lie to the anti-Marxist dogma that these debates are either irrelevant, economically determinist or better understood as class-based anti-fascist political positions.[38] Because this tradition of thinking offers the most developed account of a materialist theory of the far-right anchored in the 'laws of motion' of capitalist development, much of this section will be focused on discussing these Marxist arguments.

However, it is also worth recognising the way in which material factors have also played centre-stage in other historical and contemporary accounts of the far-right if less associated with a general materialist theoretical approach. In the former, a number of scholars have emphasized the role played by the so-called *Sonderweg* or the distinctly German path of capitalist-industrial development during the late nineteenth century, in determining the establishment of far-right, proto-fascist forms of political movement in the decades leading up to the First World War, which laid the foundations for the subsequent emergence and success of Nazism.[39] Simply put, according to this argument the origins of Nazism lay in the failed 1848 bourgeois revolution in Germany and the continuation of the German *ancien régime*, which came to increasingly rely on the cultivation of reactionary, xenophobic, anti-Semitic and protectionist policies – through mobilizing far-right populist movements from above. In explaining German state formation and foreign policy up to the First World War as a consequence of the continued dominance of the traditional agrarian – Junker – land-owning class, Wehler and other members[40] of the Bielefeld school have been critiqued by a number of Marxist-informed scholars[41] who have tended to give greater emphasis to the combined impacts of capitalist development and crises in accounting for the emergence and success of the far-right in pre-1914 Germany and Nazism thereafter. In a word this tradition tends to take the issue of 'national exceptionalism' to extremes through not only offering a determinist – explaining historical trends through reading back from the end point of the historical process (the Nazi dictatorship) – but also ignoring the wider appearance in other most other European states of the same political phenomenon. This is something that I will come back to in the historical survey that follows.

With regard to accounts of the contemporary far-right, a few scholars have centred in on the evolving globalized and neoliberal character of European economies – and the economic instabilities

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[35] Derek Beetham's (1983) collection and commentary remains the best resource in surveying these debates.

[36] See Eatwell, 2003 Griffin, 1993 and Turner. 1969, 1975. As Beetham, 1983: 2-3, 50 notes inter-war Marxist commentary on fascism is not reducible to official Comintern doctrinal pronouncements, and neither can much of this work be written off as a form of economism based on deducing fascism from the convulsions of the economic system.

[37] See Beetham, 1983: 149-67.

[38] However, as Dave Renton (1999:1-5) stresses considering the content of fascist ideology and the consequences of fascist policy attempts at 'academic objectivity' and impartiality amongst some scholars of fascism and the far-right can be highly problematic when there is a contemporary social and political imperative in highlighting the awfulness of fascist regimes and the continuing resonances of fascist ideas and attitudes in contemporary society.

[39] The key statement in this regard was Hans-Ulrich Wehler's *Das Kaiserreich* (1973) which established the so-called Bielefeld school of German historiography.

[40] Kocka, 1980; Puhle, 1975.

[41] See Blackbourn and Eley, 1984 in particular.

and social and cultural insecurities associated with such developments – in explaining the revival of far-right fortunes over the last couple of decades.[42] However, in much of this writing there appears to be a historical amnesia as to the way in which earlier episodes of globalized capitalist development conditioned the origins and evolution of the far-right. Further, these analyses suggest that the far-right mobilizations are much less associated with the properties of capitalism and end up disaggregating questions of immigration, cultural insecurity and disillusionment with mainstream political parties from capitalist development. As I will demonstrate, below, in the following sections, whilst capitalist development has evolved it continues to provide the principal structural source for far-right mobilizations. Further, I will argue that what explains the differential impact of capitalism on the far-right across different historical moments is the way in which capitalism is organized and managed at the international level and the way in which crises are managed and have been de-coupled from geopolitical rivalry and conflict. Thus, whilst there is an *organic* relationship between capitalist development and the far-right, what explains the varied fortunes and relative weakness of the contemporary far-right is, paradoxically, due to greater internationalisation of capitalism and the political and ideological architecture that has accompanied these developments since 1945.

Marxist writing on fascism provides the most theoretically developed materialist account of the far-right. However, through its focus on the inter-war era it is not clear the degree to which this work is relevant to explaining the re-emergence and development of the far-right since the end of the Cold War. Two more recent attempts by Chris Bamberry[43] and Dave Renton[44] to apply some of the conceptual arguments of the inter-war Marxist debate on fascism to the contemporary far-right tend to downplay the *evolving* dimension of the structural character of global capitalist development, especially with regard to political-economic relations between the major capitalist economies and the reduced geopolitical (and military) consequences of continuing uneven development in the world economy. Further, they continue to apply the term 'fascist' to contemporary far-right parties. A case of *plus ça change*, these renderings of Marxist theory suggest a transhistorical approach to fascism: as long as there is capitalism (and its tendencies towards periodic bouts of crisis) there will always be fascism. Such accounts are weakened by a rather static view of capitalist development that over look transformations within it since 1945 especially at the global-imperial level and, consequently, the character (and limitations) of contemporary far-right movements. I will come back to this in the following section.

There are two key elements of inter-war Marxist approaches to fascism that continue to be relevant to a general conceptualisation of capitalism and the far-right: (1) a theory of capitalist crisis from which fascism emerged, grew and realized its ultimate success; and (2) the relationship between fascist mass movements and the capitalist ruling class and state elites.[45] The problem of official Comintern policy was that it tended to conflate these two issues. Fascism was seen as a product of a crisis of capitalist development (economic stagnation, labour militancy and falls in profitability) and

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[42] See Betz, 1994; Kitschelt, 1995; Betz and Immerfall, 1998.

[43] Bamberry, 1993.

[44] Renton, 1999.

[45] Dave Renton, 1999: 1-5; 54-62 provides a useful overview of inter-war Marxist theories of fascism which he categories into three strands: (1) a 'left-wing' theory which tends to concentrate on the context for its emergence during moments of economic crisis and its counter-revolutionary activities in support of the capitalist class; (2) a 'right-wing approach which tends to focus on fascism as an ideology and mass movement and its radical characteristics; and (3) what he labels as a 'dialectical theory' of fascism which treats fascism as a mass movement with a reactionary ideology that emerges and grows in context of capitalist crisis. Thus, whereas the first approach tends to reduce fascism to an instrument of the ruling class – most closely approximating the caricature of Comintern theses on fascism, the second approach ends up detaching the movement from the wider structural socio-economic context and, in doing so downplays the specific class interests it upheld. Consequently, I will focus on the final approach which provides the most sophisticated Marxist theoretical framework for understanding fascism.

rose with the support of the capitalist class, particularly the heavy industrial and militarized fractions of capital. Once in power it acted on behalf of these reactionary-imperialist aspects of capital.[46] In a word there was no sense that fascism was a mass movement that – in spite of its contradictory dynamics – acted with varying degrees of autonomy from dominant classes and state elites. As I will now show, other inter-war Marxist thinkers theorising fascism had a more sophisticated understanding of these two issues and, in consequence, manage to recognize the *political* dimensions of fascist success and the more qualified relationship between capital and fascism. I will begin by looking at Marxist explanations of the origins of fascism in capitalist development and crises.

Whilst the official Comintern position tended to treat different capitalist economies after the First World War as following a very similar developmental logic embraced in the idea of 'monopoly capitalism,'[47]suggesting a universal impulse and tendency towards crisis and fascism, the writings of Gramsci, Togliatti and Silone argued that through the operations of uneven and combined development fascism was a more/less likely outcome in circumstances of economic crisis in different countries. Thus, in the case of Italy, her late and highly uneven socio-economic development and entrance into the imperial system in the final years of the nineteenth century imposed intense pressures on the Italian state and dominant classes that became ultimately unmanageable immediately after World War One in a context of an outbreak of working class militancy and peasant rural insurrection.[48]The key point here was the combination of the longer-term trajectory of Italian capitalist development – dating back to the Risorgimento of the mid-late nineteenth century and the only partially nationally configured political and economic system – with the immediate political crisis engendered by Italian participation in the war.[49]

Such a position was also recognised by Poulantzas. He argued that one could only explain fascist successes in Italy and Germany through the way in which competitive struggles within the capitalist-imperialist system filtered into the politics of each national formation. Again, drawing on the concept of uneven and combined development, Poulantzas saw the ultimate determination of fascism as deriving from the historical position of each state within the overall imperial system.[50] The tendencies towards fascism were laid, then, in the manner in which countries like Italy and Germany were integrated into an existing imperial system of capitalism led by the established and, ultimately, socially stronger and politically more stable countries of Britain and France (and the US).[51]

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[46] Such a position came to define official Comintern policy at its fifth congress in 1924.

[47] 'Monopoly capitalism' is associated with the writings of Lenin and Bukharin on imperialism and refers to a number of tendencies regarded as characterizing earlier twentieth century capitalist development: a tendency towards the increasing concentration of production into ever larger industrial combines or cartels/trusts; the merging of finance with industrial capital leading to the ascendancy of finance capital; the development of a 'state-monopoly trust' unifying capitalist and state interests; and a transformation and intensification of international completion in capitalism between rival national blocs increasingly played out at the geopolitical level. See Lacher, 2006: 50-1; 135-7.

[48] See Beetham, 1983: 82-7; 121-7; 127-48; 236-44.

[49] The international context and inter-imperial competitive dynamics, in particular, were important in the sense that the Italian ruling class expected economic and territorial rewards for its role in the war on the victorious Allied side. However, Italian expectations were to be disappointed by the Versailles settlement the consequence of which was an that domestic economic pressures intensified highlighted by the shortage of coal and other raw materials and demands for the end of wartime restrictions.

[50] Poulantzas, 1974: 17-24.

[51] Geoff Eley, 1983: 68-9 nicely captures the uneven (and contradictory) character of socio-economic development in Italy and Germany in the early part of the twentieth century, 'Both Germany and Italy were societies experiencing accelerated capitalist transformation through which entire regions were being visibly converted from predominantly rural into predominantly urban-industrial environments. In both cases the process was extremely uneven (in vital ways, functionally so), with equally large regions trapped into social and economic backwardness (the south in Italy, the East Elbian parts of Prussia and the Catholic periphery of the south, south-west, and extreme west of Germany)… This

For these Marxist thinkers, capitalist development was characterised by its uneven socio-economic character rather than tendencies towards uniformity, which, in turn, helped effect contrasting political fortunes that became particularly stark in moments of economic crisis such as that in the immediate period after World War One and after 1929. Thus, whilst Britain, France and the United States[52] avoided fascism, in part, because their respective political structures were able to respond to each crises in *politically effective* ways, the political systems of Italy and Germany were not.[53] This was in large part due to the acute contradictions within them derived from the disarticulation of each state's socio-economic structure from its political system. Whilst in Italy this occurred in the immediate aftermath of world war, the combination of longer-term/structural socio-economic developments and immediate/short-term crisis in Germany occurred later.

In Italy the defining factor was the revolutionary upsurge involving the newly baptised industrial working class in the urban north combined with peasant insurrection in the countryside.[54] Thus, whilst driven by an economic imperative derived from the relationship between capital and labour and consequential upon the capitalist development that had altered the socio-economic fabric of Italy over the last two-to-three decades, the trigger for fascist advance was less an economic collapse comparable to Germany after 1929, than an inability of the ruling class and fledgling liberal-democratic political system to resolve the crisis.[55]

In the German case, the crisis that produced fascist dictatorship was not a consequence of Germany's economic backwardness – indeed German industry was defined by its highly developed character – but rather the combination of the interconnections between the post-war domestic and international settlements and how they shaped capitalist development after the abortive revolution of 1918. Thus, in the former the post-war revolutionary crisis was 'settled' with the establishment of the Weimar Republic which saw state institutions embedded directly into the capital-labour relationship. In the latter, Germany's reintegration into the world economy via the punitive reparations regime of the Versailles settlement intensified the problems of capitalist restoration through a direct and, in some respects, coercive international-imperial intrusion into its domestic political economy. However, whilst this cocktail provided a favourable context for the rise of fascism (and the broader authoritarian far-right in Germany) it was the immediacy of the post-1929 economic crisis and collapse in profits and mass unemployment that paved the way for fascist dictatorship.[56] Further, this crisis was heavily infused with a globalized capitalist logic as 'hot' American money was rapidly repatriated from the German financial system and export markets shrunk.[57] Thus, the combined organic tendencies of German capitalism – a heavy dependence on

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situation produced complex political effects. [W]e might say that the pace of social change outstripped the adaptive capabilities of existing political institutions. This was particularly so when the political institutions had to respond to new social forces: agricultural populations concerned for their future in an economy increasingly structured by industrial priorities; urban populations demanding a more rational ordering of hastily improvised city environment; a potential chaos of private economic interests; the mass organizations of the industrial working class; and the more diffuse aspirations of the new professional, administrative, and managerial strata of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.'

[52] Interestingly, whilst the economic impact of the Great Depression on the United States was especially severe with the failures of scores of banks and mass unemployment a far-right authoritarian political movement did not emerge to take advantage of this in spite of Father Coughlin's hopes.

[53] Silone in Beetham, 1983: 236-44.

[54] Charles Maier (1988:47-9) has suggested that the scale and intensity of peasant insurrection in Italy immediately after the war was unique compared to the rest of Western Europe and it was here where fascist intervention against the red agrarian leagues was most decisive and where the class dispensation of Italian fascism was most evident.

[55] Bambery, 1993: 8-13; Renton, 1999: 30-34.

[56] Renton, 1999: 34-9.

[57] Guerin, 1973: 37-8.

exports as a source of growth and capital accumulation – and the particularities of the post-war settlement were brutally exposed resulting in the severest depression in Europe.

The key elements of these Marxist contributions to the emergence of fascism relevant to a more general political economy of the far-right are the following. First, the recognition that though fascism was a universal possibility *and* current in capitalist states enveloped in serious bouts of socio-economic crisis, its relative political significance was a consequence of the specific historical positioning of particular states within the global capitalist economy. Consequently, in accounting for the wider historical experience of the far-right – before and after the fascist episode – attention needs to be focused on the character of uneven capitalist development and the specificity of the *political* character of periodic moments of transformation and crisis. In short, the historical observations of Gramsci, Silone and Togliatti – writing in the in the 1920s – that fascism was more or less likely within certain types of 'peripheral state' implies that we must be careful about determining the universal and singularly economic causes of the contemporary far-right.

Secondly, the causal relationship between economic crisis and fascist ascendancy and political success; the nuances in some inter-war Marxist accounts are that fascism is most likely to succeed, politically, in a combined context of severe *international* economic crisis and political obstacles to their resolution *within* the existing capitalist socio-economic order. Economic crisis, alone, then, did not produce a serious fascist threat and this obviously has a significant bearing on the wider theorisation of the far-right. What were determining, however, were the way in which institutional frameworks and the balance of political forces determined the political response to the economic crisis. Further, whilst the spectre of revolution was an important factor influencing the behaviour of dominant social classes and their political representatives, particularly in Italy, it is difficult to accept the claim by some Marxists that fascism saved the bourgeois order from socialist revolution.[58] A more accurate argument would be that fascism thrived in a context of economic crisis, institutional political paralysis and when attempts at socialist revolution had either ended in failure (as in Italy) or were unlikely (as in Germany).[59] In many respects, as Michael Mann has recognised, because dominant social classes and political elites were *instrumental* in securing fascist success, their actions tended to rest on a perception of revolutionary threat than was actually the case.[60]Furthermore, Mann's important qualification to the relationship between the spectre of revolution and economic crisis in the victories of fascism in Italy and Germany point to the actions of ruling classes as determining. Thus, it was the particular dispositions of the Italian and German ruling classes that, ultimately, decided the fate of fascism. As demonstrated elsewhere other European ruling classes did not opt for far-right authoritarian solutions. Mann seems to suggest that

[58]As Michael Mann (2004: 59-62) notes whilst the fascist response was most marked in those locales where the organization and potential of the revolutionary left was strongest, the high-point of revolutionary insurgency in Italy and Germany had been reached some time before the defining conjuncture that ushered fascism into state power. Whilst in Italy the high-point had been reached in 1920 a year before the fascist ascendancy in Germany it had occurred much earlier – in the immediate years after the war – through the split in the left and the combined bureaucratic inertia of the SPD and the strategic failings of the KPD. Indeed, one might argue that in both cases fascism only succeeded *because* of the failings in left strategy through taking advantage of a revolutionary crisis without a fully developed revolutionary subject and leadership. As Poulantzas, 1974: 36-52 in his critique of Comintern and KPD doctrine in the late 1920s stresses, the rise of fascism in Germany tended to dovetail with the political 'demobilization of the working class' highlighted in the decline in strike activity and the increasingly defensive posture towards employers who were increasingly using the tactic of lockouts and a general turn away from political activity through only focusing on economic struggles at the workplace.

[59] In this respect Klara Zetkin's (in Beetham 1983: 102-13) claim that ruling classes endorsed fascism rather than suppress it out of fear that this might have facilitated a proletarian revival seems a little problematic.

[60] Mann, 2004: 24-5; 60-1; 356-7.

the Italian and German ruling classes could have opted for a rational – non-fascist – alternative[61] but this begs the question. While hindsight proves his point, analytically, in stressing this he obscures the *particular* character of capitalist development and history of class conflict within these two countries that meant that the actions of the Italian and German ruling classes were – in the long-term irrational based on the ways in which fascist states developed – whilst being highly plausible and rational in the short-term.

Finally, the conflictual class relations and break-down of established social and political institutions within Italy and Germany that preceded the establishment of fascist dictatorship implicates an aspect of Gramcsi's writing – on the concept of hegemony – that the Marxist (and non-Marxist) discussion of fascism has tended to neglect.[62] What fascism demonstrates was the break down of bourgeois hegemony, as the reproduction of capitalist social property relations was no longer possible through the consensual incorporation of subaltern layers into a historical bloc that realized capitalist dominance, but also managed to effect some material gains for these subaltern layers. This point has a wider conceptual relevance in that instances of such breakdown provide determining contexts for the far-right, particularly through the way in which they are likely to implicate ruling classes in moving towards an 'emergency politics' to restore or maintain the prevailing socio-economic order and, in doing so, requiring mass mobilizations from below.

What is also important regarding hegemony was that in the inter-war case this was not just a domestic issue within Italy and Germany, but was also fundamentally grounded in the post-1918 international political-economic architecture established after the war and the failure to integrate German and Italian ruling classes and, more importantly, wider social layers into the institutions of that order. This obviously implicates the ruling classes of the other major capitalist powers in failing to provide a basis for international co-operation and institutions that rested on a reasonable degree of political legitimacy. Thus, following Gramsci's most sophisticated contemporary political interlocutor, Robert Cox,[63] we can see fascism as a consequence of the contradictions within and the ultimate failure to realise a hegemonic international order in a way comparable to that which was established under US leadership after 1945. Fascism (and revolution) is a consequence, then, of the breakdown of hegemonic orders at the domestic and international levels. And it has been the successful establishment and development of bourgeois hegemony under US leadership after 1945 that provides a crucial explanatory variable in explaining the relative weakness of the far-right after 1945. So, in spite of the return of serious economic crises to the capitalist world as in the early-mid 1970s and more recently with the current global economic crisis – that witnessed, over 2008-9, the worst decline in global output since the Great Depression – the far-right has not been able to take advantage in any way comparable to the inter-war era. This is something that I will come back to in the final section.

Now let me turn to the related issue of the political agency of fascist movements and regimes. A number of issues derived from Marxist analyses of fascism are pertinent to a general theoretical explanation of the far-right; in particular the social basis of fascism, the distinction between fascist movements and regimes and the relationship between fascism and the capitalist class. Marxists, as one would expect, have sought to identify the class identity of fascist movements and the degree to which they can be associated with the mobilisation and representation of particular social interests. Fascism has been defined as a particular kind of petty-bourgeois[64] reactionary mass

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[61] Mann, 2004: 25.

[62] Renton, 1999: 69 makes brief reference to Gramsci's theory of hegemony but doesn't really develop the point.

[63] Cox, 1987.

[64] The identity of petty-bourgeois social layers is based on their material position with the capitalist economy situated between and, periodically, merging into the ranks of the proletariat or bourgeoisie, and their subjective ideological outlook based on status, independence and self-sufficiency. Marxists have tended to identify the petty-bourgeoisie as

movement.[65] The rise and success of fascism is then, regarded as resting on the alienation of the petty-bourgeoisie from the prevailing social and political order due to their economic vulnerabilities to proletarianization resultant from economic crises and their concerns as to the threats to private property from the revolutionary left.[66] This claim has been subject to ongoing critical scrutiny from non-Marxist scholars with some claiming that fascism actually tended to draw on greater working class support[67] and others emphasizing the trans-class identity of fascist movements.[68]

I do not have the time and space to engage with the empirical minutiae of these complex debates over the social composition of fascist movements but I will make some brief comments. The first thing to note is that fascist movements were quite dynamic in their membership and support, particularly in the case of the NSDAP which competed for support in a plural – if increasingly authoritarian – civil society and competitive elections for over ten years in contrast to the Italian case where the period from the formation of the fascist movement and the entrance into government and the establishment of dictatorship was much shorter. Marxist thinkers have been correct, then, in questioning the analytical usefulness of concentrating on the ideology of fascism as the principal theoretical prism through which to understand and explain the character of fascism. Instead, a focus on fascist ideas and rhetoric needs to be combined with the evolving character of the fascist movement in a context of rapidly shifting crisis.

In recognizing the contrasting characters and complexities the Italian and German cases we are, however, able determine that fascism had disproportionate levels of support from different social constituencies and that this support was linked to the dynamics of capitalist development. Specifically, in both the Italian and German cases fascism was disproportionately *under*-represented amongst the organized working classes, particularly those located in major cities. This is significant because fascist rhetoric and propaganda attempted to be all encompassing in its appeals to as wide a constituency as possible and did make appeals to workers. Thus, whilst some workers did join the ranks of fascism (especially the German SA) these tended to be young, unemployed, found in small towns and with no experience of socialization into the labour movement. Further, whilst fascist movements offered what Michael Mann has called a transcendental vision[69] to overcome the combined political and economic crisis that they confronted, they also particularly appealed to small-scale property owners, the self-employed and those concerned with status, through their actions – in physically intimidating and attacking trade unionists and socialists – which suggested the reality of a more specific and class-based appeal than their rhetoric would suggest, and which, inevitably, made them more attractive to some social groups over others.[70]

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consisting of: (i) small-property owners, shopkeepers, artisans and small-scale farmers (i.e. those particularly dependent on secure and stable lines of credit and vulnerable to the combined threats of state regulation and taxation and competition from big capital); and (ii) the so-called 'new middle-class white-collar salatariat' whose petty-bourgeois sensibility derives from their perceived superior social status as functionaries of the modern industrial state. They tend to value the institution of private property, national pride and also tended to be concerned with working class militancy and internationalism.

[65] See Bambery, 1993: 62; Guerin, 1973: 41-62; Renton, 1999: 35-6, 102-4; Poulantzas, 1973: 237-46; Togliatti in Beetham, 1983: 136-48.

[66] Beetham, 1983: 7.

[67] Payne, 1995; Eatwell, 2003: xxvi

[68] Mann, 2004: 20-8.

[69] Mann, 2004: 14-16.

[70] Something that Marxist analyses have tended to overlook is the impact of the experience of mass-industrialised warfare amongst sections of the population and the wider appeal of what Michael Mann (2004: 16-17; 26-7) terms a 'cleansing and transcendental violence' on the support for fascist movements. This was particularly pronounced in Italy where a high proportion of the fascist *squadristi* were war veterans and where the ascendancy of fascism was much more related to violence than was the case in Germany.

However, as suggested in the previous discussion concerning the role of economic crisis in providing the context for fascist success so we should recognize that fascist support and mobilizations fluctuated and they were only able to become mass movements in contexts of acute crisis. Thus, in a context of falling prices, profits and demand and a political system apparently unable to implement effective policy responses – as typified Germany after 1929 – the structural organization of the capitalist economy proved telling in that unemployed and non-unionised workers and small-businessmen and small-scale farmers in particular – without the structural protections of organized labour or big capital – found themselves particularly attracted to the fascist call. In Italy, whilst fascist 'foot soldiers' on the ground were drawn from the ranks of demobilized soldiers, highly educated young men and some workers,[71] their actions in breaking up socialist co-operatives in the countryside and smashing-up socialist and trade union offices made them indirect allies of landlords and big capital who provided funds to the fascist movement.[72]

The significance of Marxist analyses on the class basis of fascist movements will be further discussed below, but with regard to the analytical relevance to a wider conceptualisation of the far right the claim that fascist movements particularly drew on and appealed to petty bourgeois social layers suggests that there is a direct causal link between the susceptibility of particular social layers to fascist appeals in contexts of crisis. Drawing on this in a non-dogmatic fashion and recognizing the dynamic and uneven character of capitalist development (i.e. that the classic or old petty bourgeoisie has shrunk in size as a portion of contemporary capitalist society compared to the inter-war era whilst much of the public-sector white-collar salatariat is now much more integrated into the fabric of organized labour) this suggests that particular social layers – not just the petty bourgeoisie – located within vulnerable locations of the economy will continue to be predisposed to far-right appeals in contexts of contemporary crisis whilst organized labour will continue to be a barren land for far-right mobilizations. This is something that I will come back to in the comparative historical survey that follows.

Now let me turn to the how Marxists have addressed the relationship between fascist movements and the capitalist class; a theme that has been a source of much controversy in the literature on fascism. We can quickly dispense with the simplistic and instrumentalist argument of the official Comintern position that saw fascism as the armed and terrorist wing of capital as well as Daniel Guerin's argument that tends to regard fascism as the political arm of the 'magnates of heavy-industrial capital.'[73]The key problem with much of the Marxist analysis of the rise of fascism is the failure to properly distinguish the relationship between fascist movements and capital and fascist states and capital. I will discuss the latter in a moment where Marxist analysis tends to be empirically and theoretically stronger. In the former case the support and role played by capitalist interests in the rise and ultimate success of the Italian and German movements in coming to power was much more ambivalent than much Marxist writing on fascism has tended to recognize. However, this is not to say that it was irrelevant but rather to recognize the particularities of each national context where fascist movements were active. In the Italian case, Marxist arguments are on stronger ground as capitalist interests and landlords, in particular, played important roles – financial and political – in assisting Italian fascism between the crucial years of 1920 and 1925.[74]

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[71] Stanley Payne (1995) suggests that over 40 per cent of fascists were workers. However, Mann, 2004: 107-11 suggests that this may be an over-estimation and – in paralleling the social profile of the NSDAP – worker involvement with Italian fascism tended to occur in less urban areas where there was lower organized working class penetration whilst in urban areas fascism was much more of a middle-class phenomenon.

[72] Bambery, 1993: 11-13; Guerin, 1973: 21-40.

[73] On the Comintern position see Beetham, 1983:149-67; on Guerin see, 1973: 10, 24.

[74] Guerin, 1973: 33-4; Beetham, 1983: 8. See also the non-Marxist work of Mann, 2004: 118-20; Paxton, 2004: 60-1 and Adler, 1995.

What explains this is that industrial capital and capitalist landlords had a genuine fear of socialist revolution after the *bienno rosso* of 1919-20 that saw socialist trade unions engage in strikes and factory occupations and, in the countryside – through socialist control of local governments – appropriate property and establish co-operatives as militant peasant leagues seized property. Whilst this revolutionary wave soon exhausted itself through splits within the left, these developments – so soon after the Bolshevik Revolution and in the midst of a wider revolutionary atmosphere in many other parts of Europe – were enough to panic ruling classes, particularly as the post-war Italian liberal governments were not willing to use force to quash the left and secure property rights. Landlord and industrial capital's support for fascism, then, can be explained by the failure of the existing liberal-parliamentary system to resolve the intense class conflict after the war and because the actions of the fascist *squadristi* – in attacking socialists in the city and countryside – appeared to be the only alternative.[75] In consequence, fascism was not a direct instrument or agent of capital, but its actions had favourable consequences for capital nonetheless.

The situation in Germany was rather different. As Henry Turner's exhaustive survey of business archives has demonstrated,[76] German capital did not provide financial or other significant support for the NSDAP until the very final stages of the Weimar Republic[77] and when the economic crisis of the Great Depression had very much set in and, moreover, when alternative authoritarian far-right solutions appeared to have failed to move Germany out of the depression. Indeed, German capital not only tended to fund other parties of the right and far-right against the left,[78] it was also concerned about the 'socialist' dimensions of the left-wing of the NSDAP associated with Gregor Strasser[79]and articulated in the NSDAP's 1920 programme of aims. The relationship between capital and fascist movements was, then, more contingent than some strands of Marxist thinking acknowledged. In both cases capitalists and landlords preferred other right-wing and anti-socialist options in part because of the way in which the political and economic crises within both countries

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[75] The German dissident communist theorist August Thalheimer noted, however, that 'The last thing the Italian bourgeoisie wanted when it encouraged the terrorist campaign against the workers by the fascist bands was the rule of Mussolini and his fascists .... The end result was never originally intended originally by the Italian bourgeoisie, but it was the inevitable consequence of its actions.' Thalehimer, 'The Development of Fascism in Germany' (1930) in Beetham, 1983: 197-202. Adler, (1995: 171; 437-53) is more cautious on the support given by Italian industrial capital to fascism though he tends to accept the greater involvement of landlords.

[76] Turner, 1969; 1985.

[77] The relationship changed through 1932: at the start of the year Hitler spoke at the Dusseldorf Industrial Club encouraged by the steel magnate Fritz Thyssen, whilst in the spring sections of heavy industrial capital began to move closer to the NSDAP. By November 38 industrial leaders wrote to President Hindenburg recommending Hitler as Chancellor (Remmling, 1989: 218-9).

[78] This is an important point that qualifies any critique of Marxist explanations for the rise of fascism. Whilst ambivalent about its support for fascism, the German ruling class – industrial and agrarian – consistently supported the wider and established far-right political milieu in support of an authoritarian solution – resting on the destruction of Weimar social democracy. It was the inability of these parties to build a mass-base in contrast to the Nazis combined with their failure to do 'what was required' that, in the final analysis, made German capital embrace Hitler. The key point here, well-made by Marxists at the time and in contemporary analysis, is that there *was* a non-fascist option but this would have required an acceptance of the legitimate social and political interests of the German working class represented by social democracy. The political representatives of German capital were not willing to make such a compromise and, instead invited into power the NSDAP and welcomed the brutal dismantling of Weimar democracy.

[79] According to Strasser, 'German industry and economy are in the hands of international finance capital means the end of all possibility of social liberation; it means the end of all dreams of a socialist Germany… We young Germans of the war generation, we National Socialist revolutionaries, we ardent socialists, are waging a fight against capitalism and imperialism incarnated in the Versailles treaty … German socialism will be possible and lasting only when Germany is freed.' Cited in Guerin, 1973: 79; see also 77-101.

developed after the war and because they had reservations as to the degree to which fascists were sympathetic to a social order based on private property.[80]

Marxist analyses of fascist movements in Italy and Germany in particular demonstrate a good deal of sophistication regarding the mass and contradictory character of these movements and the relationship between them and ruling classes. What some critics seem to have missed in dismissing Marxist analyses is that the writings of Thalheimer, Trotsky and others explain that the bourgeois 'embrace' of fascism was due to the depth of the crisis that the bourgeoisie confronted and the failure of bourgeois-engineered resolutions to it. Whilst proletarian revolution was not imminent in either case, in failing to gamble on a fascist solution the bourgeoisie recognized that they risked something much worse; be it continued economic stagnation or increasing social instability and political radicalisation with the prospect of civil war. What the connection between fascist mass movements and the bourgeoisie suggests instead – and which will be demonstrated in a moment, below – is a defining contradiction in the character of fascism as a form of politics. Simply put, whilst fascism mobilized and articulated the grievances of a range of subaltern layers it did not tend to govern in their interests.

Any concerns that capitalists and landlords had over fascists' attitudes towards the rights of private property were quickly assuaged after fascists started to govern. It is this point – the transformation of the *social* character of fascism when in power that brings out in bold relief the distinct class basis of fascism that was partially obscured in the movement phase of fascism. And it is in the conceptualisation of fascist regimes through a revised working of Marx's concept of 'bonapartism'[81] that Marxist analyses of fascism in power offers major analytical insights. The record of fascists in power, then, suggests a clearer class disposition to fascism than was evident in the 'movement phase'. Further, in working through state institutions and in accepting the continuation of a social order based on private property, fascist governments – *contra* some of the arguments of a number of non-Marxist scholars[82] – demonstrated their relatively limited revolutionary character.[83] Indeed, in destroying the social and political institutions of the left – reformist and revolutionary alike – fascist governments laid the foundations for an authoritarian and militarised mode of capitalist development.

As a number of non-Marxist scholars have recognized, in power, fascism's anti-capitalism was highly selective. Whilst some private property rights were compromised this was focused on regime opponents (foreign capital in general and the property of Jews in particular in Germany) and whilst the state became much more involved in the management and direction of economic activity this tended to be welcomed by most sections of capital in the context of spectacular collapses in production, investment, trade and demand. Further such involvement concerned – as it was – with the political and cultural regeneration of the nation/*völk* rather than economic transformation, did

[80] Indeed as Trotsky noted 'the representatives of big business preferred a quiet and more stable solution to the crisis: "they want no convulsions no long and severe civil war. If they chose Hitler, it was only because of the depth of the crisis made a stable bourgeois democracy unsustainable."' Trotsky, cited in Renton, 1999: 71.

[81] Marx's theory of bonapartism was outlined in the *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* written in 1852 in response to the establishment of an a right-wing authoritarian dictatorship in France after the 1848 revolution. See Marx, 1954.

[82] As Dave Renton (1999: 18-29) and Robert Paxton (2004: 206-20) accurately note a number of scholars (see Eatwell, 1996; Griffin, 1993; Payne, 1995; Sternhall, 1986; Thurlow, 1998) of the far-right end-up obscuring the political and ideological character of fascist regimes by failing to recognise the class-character of fascist states through exaggerating the revolutionary dimensions of fascism suggesting that fascism can be considered as either a 'third way' between right and left or even a form of leftist revolution.

[83] In Togilatti's words once in power '[t]he inexorable consequences of capitalist stabilisation impose themselves' (Beetham, 1983: 9).

not tend to encroach on the rights of capital in the wage-labour relationship.[84] In consequence, whilst political order was transformed through a new model of hierarchy the social order more or less remained intact.

The key theorists applying Marx's concept of Bonapartism to fascism are the dissident German Communist leader August Thalheimer and Leon Trotsky. Bonapartism refers to a particular authoritarian form of state power or dictatorship through which bourgeois social rule is effected in spite of the dissolution of bourgeois (parliamentary) representative institutions after a period of intense class conflict.[85] For Thalheimer and Trotsky this was the case in both Italy and Germany at different moments after 1918. What characterised the context within each was a combined scenario of a defeated and demoralised proletariat after a revolutionary upsurge and an exhausted bourgeoisie unable to impose itself upon wider society, which provided an opportunity for a dictatorship to resolve the social crisis through imposing an authoritarian political solution from above.[86] Thalheimer's analysis is particularly pertinent to the emergence of fascism in Germany. Here, while moves towards authoritarianism could be and were realized within a parliamentary framework, a resolution of the crisis which preserved the social order required the abolition of the parliamentary system and the elimination of all classes' – not just the working classes – political rights.[87]

In contrast to Thalheimer, Trotsky's work insisted that fascism – characterised by a mass terrorist movement from below – was distinct from Bonapartism and that it was the pre-Nazi regimes in Germany under Bruning, Schleicher and Papen that were properly 'bonapartist' through standing above and holding the balance between the mass movements of the left and right[88] before the bourgeoisie finally decided to give up its political rights to resolve the crisis permitting the crushing of the left. Trotsky also took seriously the class composition of fascism, particularly its petty-bourgeois dimensions. In consequence he saw this as a problem as much as an opportunity for the bourgeoisie in overcoming the crisis through the destruction of the left. He suggested that this was a major source of reluctance on the part of the bourgeoisie in turning to fascism rather than alternative authoritarian solutions as they were concerned that the petty bourgeoisie's hatred and envy of big capital – as articulated in much of the 'revolutionary rhetoric' of some fascist leaders – might be turned against them should fascist movements gain access to state power.[89]

This raises the issue of the deep social contradictions and splits within the fascist movement particularly evident within the NSDAP in spite of fascist claims to national unity and social-political transcendence.[90] Thus, once in power and once the working class had been tamed the militancy of

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[84] Paxton, 2004: 10-11. Adler, 1995 and Sarti, 1971 demonstrate that the Italian industrial bourgeoisie managed to maintain a good deal of autonomy under fascism in spite of Mussolini's attempts to create a corporatist state. In repressing organized labour fascist governments fundamentally altered the capital-labour relationship in favour of the former.

[85] Poulantzas, 1973: 11 defines fascism as an 'exceptional form of capitalist state' similar to the concept of bonapartism.

[86] Thalheimer in Beetham, 1983: 28.

[87] Thalheimer, 'The Development of Fascism in Germany,' (1930) in Beetham, 1983:197-201.

[88] Trotsky 'Bonapartism and Fascism' (1934) in Beetham, 1983: 217-21.

[89] Trotsky 'Bonapartism and Fascism' (1934) in Beetham, 1983: 217-21.

[90]Michael Mann's recent work (2004) outlines a sophisticated argument that defines fascism as a reactionary movement committed to social and political transcendence, which was its primary ideological source of social mobilization. However, in doing so he tends to overlook the deeper set of contradictions within fascism that were played out in the history of fascist regimes. In a word, to properly understand the character of fascism and explain its experience of power one must examine the *concrete* consequences of what these regimes did. Mann's empirical survey errs towards a recognition of this contradiction between an ideology of transcendence and a practice of regimes characterised by social contradictions and the continuation of class rule but his theoretical frame of transcendence means that he ends up accepting too much of the ideological pronouncements of fascism.

the fascist mass movement was seen as a threat to the social stabilisation of the capitalist order.[91] This was resolved in a more gradual fashion in Italy through the integration and socialisation of fascists into the state apparatus after 1922 and 1925,[92] whilst in Germany it was dealt with much sooner in the 'night of the long knives' in June 1934 where the left-wing of the NSDAP – the representatives of the more radical elements of Nazism and the petty-bourgeois mass movement – were physically eliminated to reassure dominant social interest and traditional political elites.

The problem with this analysis, as recognised by Beetham, is that it implies that with the elimination of the more radical currents within Nazism, German fascism had little or no popular social base and ended up as the instrument of the capitalist class, which appears to be very close to the (flawed) orthodox Comintern position. I will come back to the contradictions within the fascist state and the hierarchy of socio-economic interests it served in a moment, but to suggest that Nazism was devoid of a popular social base after 1934 overlooks the wide social support that Hitler's regime secured through economic stabilization, cutting unemployment and overturning the – widely regarded – humiliations of the Versailles settlement.[93] Beetham's revised formulation that 'fascism was a creature of capitalism's crisis rather than of the capitalists themselves,' is a better way of describing the dynamic of class relations and state power.[94]

However, in recognizing that fascist regimes could not be reduced to an instrument of monopoly capital, Marxist (and a number of more recent non-Marxist) inter-war analyses correctly argued that once in power the socio-economic interests of the petty-bourgeoisie (and especially workers) were subordinated to the (continuing) social power of capital. This was reflected in the purging of radical strands within the movement and the commitment to a political-economic model of development that privileged the socio-economic position of capital.[95]Alan Milward notes that between 1933 and 1938 whilst overall German national income increased the increase of real income amongst the working class did not correspondingly improve and any increases were mitigated by rising food prices. Further, with regard to petty-bourgeois social layers, the number of small businesses declined and there was little evidence that these social groups benefited, materially, in any significant manner under the Nazis. In many respects, then, popular mobilization and support was realized through social and psychological means through the access to positions of political privilege through Nazi party membership and in a wider sense through cultivating ethnic pride and national revanchism.[96]

In politicizing economic relationships and the social order to an altogether new and higher level, fascism ended up, according to Marxist analysis, being a highly contradictory mode of capitalist development. Thus, whilst the failure and breakdown of the (bourgeois) political system explained the coming to power of fascist movements, once in power they had to act to rescue and stabilize the capitalist economy – like all other capitalist states in the context of the global economic crisis of the Great Depression. The conceptual issue here is teasing out the precise contradictions of the fascist state in relation to both its mass base and the capitalist class.

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[91] 'Having arrived in power, the fascist chiefs are forced to muzzle the masses who follow them by means of the state apparatus … But while losing its social mass base, by resting on the bureaucratic apparatus and oscillating between the classes, fascism is regenerated into Bonapartism' Trotsky, 'Bonapartism and Fascism,' (1934) in Beetham, 1983: 219.
[92] Mann, 2004: 105.
[93] Beetham, 1983: 36-7. See also Mann, 2004: 20-3, 26-7; Paxton, 2004: 55-86.
[94] Beetham, 1983: 51.
[95] Jane Caplan (1977: 89) in her review of Poulantzas's *Fascism and Dictatorship*, suggests that the purge of the Nazi left in June 1934 should be considered as a response by the Nazi leadership to pressure from traditional state elites and big capital and the threat of a conservative coup against Hitler. She further argues that it was not until 1938 that the Nazis finally imposed their stamp on the German state highlighting the continuation of significant bourgeois-conservative power bases in the regime for a number of years after the Nazis came to power.
[96] Milward, 1980: 57-8.

Richard Löwenthal's writing is most pertinent here in stressing the contradictions within fascist state capitalism. Thus, because of the depth of the economic crisis – mass unemployment, falling profits and stagnant production – the state was forced to intervene to stimulate and guide economic activity. Yet, in intervening to support the sluggish/depressed parts of the economy pushing the economy towards autarchy, the regime was also subject to pressures from other, less dependent areas of the economy revealing the distinct and competing interests of different fractions of capital.[97]Whilst capital retained significant dimensions of autonomy, particularly over the control of the production process within the firm, as the mobilization for autarchic economic policies and war gathered pace, so did the impact of the political-ideological directives of the Nazi regime. Thus, whilst National Socialism was not concerned with transforming capitalist social property relations its political agenda did, obviously, have significant consequences for the autonomy of German capital and the complexion and balance of socio-economic power within the German capitalist class. This equally applied to Italy where, as Adler has demonstrated the political economy of the Italian fascist state was shaped by the political directives of the state and the liberal-technocratic impulses of Italian industrial capital which persisted throughout the Fascist episode.[98]

Further, as Otto Bauer noted, fascist success in Germany in developing the productive forces within the context of the suppression of wage labour exposed a contradiction in ensuring the longer-term stability of the economy. For Bauer, the contradiction of developing the forces of production without an equivalent development of wage labour as a source of consumption, was to be resolved at the international level and here the wider context of uneven and combined development and the legacy of European imperialism was to prove determining.[99]To a significant degree then, fascist political economy could be seen as the expression of a *generalized* capitalist tendency of imperialism through the development of closer organizational and strategic connections between state-managers and fractions of the capitalist class – the idea of Monopoly capital – which took on a much more pronounced militarist form than other capitalist states because of the *combined* domestic social *and* international geopolitical weaknesses of fascist states. In this sense, then, the political economy of fascist states was geared to geopolitical conquest through war as a way of resolving these twin contradictions. The 'resolution' of the crisis that confronted these states and which salvaged capitalism came, then, at a huge social and political cost.

What can we take from these historically-grounded Marxist theoretical analyses of fascism in developing a wider general theory of capitalist development and the far-right? As Renton notes, what characterizes the work of the thinkers/arguments surveyed here is a dialectical understanding of fascism meaning that to properly understand its character, evolution and impact we need to focus on the contradictions within and relationship between: (i) fascist ideology and the fascist movement; (ii) the mass character of the fascist movement and dominant social forces; and (iii) the movement and regime phases of fascism. Whilst recognizing the unique ideological features and historical circumstances that helped produce fascism we are able to apply some of the Marxist analyses of fascism to the far-right more generally. In particular the ideology of the far-right, as I will demonstrate in the following section continues to be grounded in a contradiction as to its rhetorical commitment to realise national unity through abolishing class (and other) divisions with a highly ambivalent position on capitalism. This is an important theoretical and methodological point about the general assessment of the far-right. As the dialectical inter-war Marxist analyses demonstrate an assessment of the substance of fascism – and thus the far-right in general – requires situating and

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[97] Löwenthal, 'The Origins of Fascism,' (1935) and 'The Fascist State Monopoly,' (1935) in Beetham, 1983: 301-8; 325-40.

[98] Adler, 1995.

[99] Bauer in Beetham, 1983: 56.

embedding the ideological character of the far-right with the actions of the movements themselves within an evolving and dynamic context. Further, although the relationship between dominant socio-economic interests and political elites and far-right movements have been very different in the contemporary record of the far-right this does not mean that the wider social, political and international context is irrelevant in explaining the profile of the contemporary far-right.

Whilst some Marxists have not managed to distinguish the level of change on the character and political fortunes of the contemporary far-right,[100] this does not mean that a different, arguably, more dialectical approach, will repeat the same errors. The contemporary far-right is obviously a different political beast than fascism and an explanation for its differences and contrasting fortunes (as well as that of the pre-fascist far-right) could usefully draw on some of the key conceptual positions of the inter-war Marxist debate that have done much to illuminate the socio-economic, ideological and political character of fascism. As a preview of what is to follow we can say that the key issues or differences in explaining the contemporary far-right from fascism are: the very different character and consequences of moments of capitalist crises; the transformation of the relationship between domestic/national economies and the global economy in capitalist development; the transformation and differentiation in the class structure of advanced capitalist states; and the relationship between dominant socio-economic interests and militant, reactionary movements from below.

Capitalism, Crisis and the Historical Evolution of the Far-Right

In this final part of the paper before I conclude I want to apply some of the conceptual arguments discussed in the previous section to the key moments in the political evolution of the far-right: the founding era of the far-right in the period stretching from the late nineteenth century up until the early years of the twentieth century; and the post-Cold War contemporary era. To some extent it is possible to describe the evolution of the European far-right as one of rise, 'triumph' and fall and that this political trajectory has been intimately connected to the changing character of capitalist development and the corresponding political and geopolitical expressions of capitalist crises. Let me begin with through examining the origins of the far-right as a distinct political current in late nineteenth century Europe.

The distinct and novel – with regard to the conservatism of the *ancien régime* – current of a far-right politics emerged in European states in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Whilst a conservative-*ancien régime* politics had characterized the politics of much of the nineteenth century in response to the revolutionary waves unleashed by 1789, and which saw nationalist and reactionary mobilizations of subaltern layers – and peasants in particular – against the social forces of the liberal republican left, by the late nineteenth century the combined developments of the spread and intensification of capitalist social property relations and the emergence of an organized and increasingly socialist-oriented working class within European states saw the emergence of an autonomous and mass-based far-right politics from below no longer subservient and dominated by the social and political interests of the *ancien régime*.

This was revealed in the emergence of a range of social and political movements drawing on similar class constituencies and articulating a range of social, economic and political programmes of a far-right persuasion through the 1880s and beyond. Whilst most pronounced within Germany in the form of the Pan-German League, the Colonial Society, the Imperial League Against Social Democracy and an assortment of trade-based movements mobilizing small and large-scale farmers, artisans and shopkeepers, such movements also appeared in France in the form of the Republican-militarism of Boulangism and, later, *Action Française* and the *Syndicats Jaunes* and in Britain with the

[100] See Bambery, 1993; Renton, 1999.

Tariff Reform League and later, the British Brothers and National Service Leagues. These movements shared a number of common far-right attributes: they were aggressively anti-socialist and their emergence was in correspondence to the growing strength of the organized working class;[101]they supported a nationalist-imperialist foreign policy based on geopolitical rivalry seeing neighbouring powers as sources of military threat; they opposed free trade, calling for trade protectionism and the formation of imperial trading blocs; they defended private property rights and the social rule of capital but insisted on an economics of producerism and the removal of foreign and globalizing forms of capital within the national economy.

Arguably, then, it was capitalist development – penetrating, transforming and destabilizing the domestic interiors of states – combined with the problems associated with the geopolitical management of an emerging international capitalist economy that provided the trigger for the formation of the far-right. Although it is important to recognize the ideological, organizational and political autonomy of many of the far-right groups and movements that emerged at this time in Germany, France and Britain in particular, it is also clear that traditional ruling classes – especially agrarian land owners – and elements within the state actively sought to manipulate and channel far-right mobilizations from below, as a way of providing a mass basis of legitimacy for the existing social and political order and weakening the growing appeal of the left. The significance of this not only highlights the importance of recognizing and focusing, analytically, on the relationship between ruling classes and state elites with far-right mobilizations from below in explaining the politics of the far-right, but also the way in which this connection acted as a filter for the channelling of international and geopolitical tensions and rivalry into domestic politics.

Thus, capitalist development was intimately connected – in spite of claims of a liberal *pax Britannica* hegemony – to a hierarchical and militarised geopolitical order evidenced in the wars associated with the formation of the German state and the simmering rivalries for access to and control of imperial markets and territories. The connections between economics and geopolitics became even more pronounced during the era of the so-called 'great depression' (in prices and profitability) which ran from 1873 to 1896.[102] With transportation and other technological advances the global market entered a phase dominated by over-production in cereals and other agricultural produce and in an increasing number of industrial goods. Facing pressure from mobilized domestic producer interests – bourgeois, agrarian and petty-bourgeois – national governments, to varying degrees, responded through moving towards escalating bouts of trade protectionism. Whilst one would want to avoid making a mechanical and functional connection between the depression, the moves towards protectionism and the 'new imperialism' evidenced in the 'carve-up of Africa' after the 1884-5 Congress of Berlin both the protection of domestic markets from foreign competition and the expansion of new markets through colonial acquisitions were obviously seen by large sections of the industrial and agrarian business classes and state elites as a means to address the crisis whilst preserving the core social pillars of the existing order.

Economic development and competition, then, became increasingly fused with geopolitical manoeuvrings and this filtered into the domestic politics of European states. These connections between geopolitics and capitalist development, then, became embedded into the domestic political development of European states: industrial capitalist development undermined traditional urban (petty-bourgeois) craft, artisanal and retail trades and traditional farmers – large and small – as

[101] Whilst fearful of the Communist 'spectre of revolution' haunting bourgeois Europe these movements were also hostile to the reformist social democratic demands of labour, which they saw as requiring a counter-mobilization and the articulation of an alternative mass-popular political-ideological vision in ways that foreshadowed the rhetoric and techniques of fascism. See Gourevitch, 1977.

[102] For discussions of the economic and political impact of the 'Great Depression' see Clavin, 2000; Gourevitch, 1977; Halperin, 2004; Hobsbawm, 1987: 34-55; Saul, 1985.

foreign goods, firms and production techniques began to penetrate local economies; industrial development saw the rapid creation of an urban proletariat that increasingly began to flex their social and political muscle in demanding social, economic and political reform; the social 'casualties' of industrial capitalist advance sought local and international scapegoats and governing elites and ruling classes were happy to encourage and cultivate a xenophobic nationalism as a way of managing the challenges to domestic social order and in developing an international politics whereby new European powers could press for external concessions to balance and accommodate the impact of domestic capitalist transformation.

Focus on pre-fascists and post-CW eras; see above for structure of argument (less of an empirical survey; but draw on similar points of Marxism and fascism debate), less on inter-war era as this has been discussed already – focus on uneven and combined development; connection between external cap development and domestic politics – management of crisis; role of hegemony at domestic and international levels; pre-fascist importance of ruling classes and geopolitical order; post-CW hegemony and character of cap development.

Conclusions