

If it's not fascism ... what is it?

Unless the economic roots of this phenomenon are understood and its political and social significance is appreciated, not a step can be taken towards the solution of the practical problems of the communist movement and of the impending social revolution.

Lenin, 1920 Preface, *Imperialism*.

Shouting 'fascist!' at the screen whenever Dutton appears might make you feel good. But it ain't proletarian science. Materialist dialectics is to penetrate appearances in search of inner dynamics before refocusing on the surface. There, we test our initial analysis against the flow of events before turning back in search of their drivers. Science is a spiral that burrows deeper. Only then can we secure the foundations for our engaging with the passing parade. These pages offer a contribution towards those political tasks.

'Fascism!' has become one more synapse-clogging cliché. Its repetition leaves the labour movement stuck on the superficial. Worst of all, such windy rhetoric prevents us from knowing more of what our enemy is up to.

In 1970, Nicos Poulantzas began *Fascism and Dictatorship* by quoting Max Horkheimer: 'Anyone who does not wish to discuss capitalism should also stay silent on the subject of fascism.' Poulantzas follows up that clue: 'Strictly speaking, this is incorrect: it is he who does not wish to discuss imperialism who should stay silent on the subject of fascism. Fascism in effect belongs to the imperialist *stage* of capitalism.' Agreed.

Those who go around shouting Fascist! take care not to mention the overt/covert dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Similarly, they never say 'capitalist' but rabbit on about neo-liberalism as if it were not the latest period of social reproduction of capital in its monopolising stage.

The thread between screeching 'Fascism!' and blaming all our woes on neoliberalism is avoidance of the c-word: capitalism. They also abuse the 'One Percent' – not the class of capital's personifications and their agents in corporates and in the state.

Some of the following thoughts are from a talk I gave ages ago to a politics in the pub, posing the question: 'If it's not fascism, what is it?'; the 'appendix' is from a chapter I have been working on about robots; for several weeks early this year I tried to put onto paper what I had said at the commemoration for the Australians who volunteered for the Spanish Republic.

That speech even drew me further into monopolising capitals - Lenin's 'Imperialism', but more into Bukharin. I also returned to the Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1934) where the opening chapter remains essential in showing how a preparedness among wage-slaves to embrace dictatorship is connected to the impress of family structure and the workplace discipline. I also renewed my acquaintance with the debates among Japanese Marxists in the 1920s over where that latecomer fitted in to the world of monopolising capitals. (Germaine A. Hoston, *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan*, 1986).

How to begin?

Our starting point is that all class societies are dictatorships. Most have been overtly so and were so until quite recently - the 1980s. From around 1800, they were often military dictatorships: The Men on Horseback. Bonaparte is as likely a candidate for getting that underway as anyone - but the rise of the generals can't be severed from the bourgeois revolutions that sidelined, without removing, the landed aristocracies. For millennia, monarchs had been generals, and vice versa.

Here in another working principle: new things happen. Often as not, they do so in old garb; sometimes old things repeat in new clothes. The historical is the transitory. Fascism came. It conquered. The needs of capital shifted. There is no eternal, natural or universal.

No doubt fascism was a class dictatorship, though taking several manifestations, each very much the expression of its place. The first point to make is that fascism was a new expression of overt dictatorship. From that indisputable fact, let me at once leap to my conclusion about today. Fascism started - no dispute there. And it ended - I'd say in the early 1950s. One fault in the claim that the threats we face now is still 'fascism' is a loss of historical sense.

Holding that point in abeyance for the moment, let's go back to the fact that fascism did not always exist. So when did it appear - and more

importantly 'how exactly?' did it win in some nation-market-states but not in others?

To answer those questions we have to take a step back to see how capitalism changed. From 1900, says Lenin, it moved into its monopolising stage, Imperialism. That restructuring of capital came with war-making but also with an upsurge in proletarian and peasant movements. They start with the Boxers, onto Russia in 1905, Mexico, the IWW, the electoral successes of the SDP, and parallel challenges everywhere whether Japan or the UK.

So, 'fascism' is the form of overt dictatorship which appears in the era of monopolising capitals to repress revolutionary challenges. That is what makes Salazar, Franco, Musso, Hitler, Tojo and Generalissimo Cash-my-Cheque all fascists. There is very little common cultural or ideological identity – apart from 'anti-Bolshevism'. The latter need lasts across Europe till around 1950 – you could pick the Greek conflict as the death agonies on both sides. Write *finis* to the fascist moment.

But overt dictatorships continued to thrive – South Korea, Taiwan, much of the Middle East. The Men on Horseback again rode to the fore, this time on tanks.

Monopolising capitals were stronger than ever and the economic order is stable during the long trough in unemployment till the mid-1970s. The late sixties see the first signs of a new wave of open dictatorships, most obviously in Latin America, and in the independent i.e. neo-colonial states of Africa. Some new dictatorships prove as vile or worse than in the fascist moment. The post-war wave of revolutions had to be contained and it was but not by reverting to fascism. Rockefeller's Trilateral Commission does not back mass movements of the Right to contain the participatory democracy of the Left. New things happen.

To repeat another point from the start: one size of overt dictatorship does not fit all. And part of the success or capital out of the fascist moment has been to permit the spread of covert dictatorships post-1945 – eventually even to Spain and Portugal. There too, the covert dictatorships have had to keep up with the times.

So that there can be no doubt about what I am saying about Australia or the US, let me underline that today's bourgeois democracies are covert dictatorships of the monopolising capitalist class, backed by the corporate warfare state: the academic-congressional-military-industrial complex.

One danger from going on about 'fascism' is that its promoters assume that we used to have 'democracy', or that 'democracy' is now under threat. An historical materialist's starting point has to be the persistence of class dictatorship, overt or covert. From there, we have to ask about our current bourgeois dictatorship/democracy: what kind of covert dictatorship is it? How does it differ from those before 2000? and in what ways? To limit the teleology of 'why?', we should adopt Lenin's regular demand about every issue: 'exactly how?'

Here are three of the starting points for that investigation:

- since the late 1700s, divisions, and then morcellisations of labour have imposed mass atomization;
- for more than 100 years we have been subject to mass marketing which, by the 1970s, had installed a totalitarianism in the sense that there is 'no outside the market' in how we are supposed to understand our needs or desires;
- one instance is 'the News', leaving our understanding of events within the context of no context. In brief, 'the News' is by definition, fake, and has been since its invention in the 1900s.

Together, these components of daily life in Australia, and similar nation-market-states, have sapped class politics for working people – though not for our exploiters and their agents in workplaces and state apparatuses.

That was where the local nation-market-state as covert dictatorship had got to by 1990. Then came the anti-social media, automatic surveillance, and genomics. Investigating how they are being applied and developed US Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency etc confronts us with a puzzle: are the covert dictatorships poised to achieve the total control of an overt dictatorship without its authoritarianism?

Following are some roughs from a chapter on robots and the future of labour-time. They give some detail on what the state apparatuses are up to. They can't tell us what will happen next. Rather, they pose several of the questions that we shall have to investigate if we are to get close to an answer before its actualisation leaves us in no doubt about possible connections between any future overt dictatorship and the covert dictatorship under which we now live.

Their state rarely calls in sick

No survey of the revolutionisings of the production and realisation of values can escape their linkages to developments for repression and warfare. By recognising the law as an instrument for class violence raised to an obligatory norm, Marx and Engels - unlike capitalism's liberal apologists¹ - never shrink from plunging into the cross-currents between production and destruction. (785, 794, chapters 27 and 28)² In becoming Communists and establishing historical materialism from the mid-1840s, they could see why 'that in the same relation in which there is a development of the forces of production, there is also the development of a repressive force ...' (799, n.23)³

To overlook the coercive element in labour relations is *de rigueur* among 'the Pharisees of Political Economy.' Countering their attachment to 'Sweetness and Light' is one more reason for the emphasis on state power throughout this essay. We should, however, acknowledge the 'scientific impartiality' of Max Weber, who, while recognising that the subordination of 'free' labour draws on ethics, is not embarrassed to emphasise 'the empty pocketbook' as a most persuasive 'idea', before spotlighting the state as legitimised class violence:

The industrialist takes into account the fact that people exist who are hungry, and that those other people in the spiked helmets will prevent their using physical force simply to take the means where they find them which could serve to allay their hunger ...⁴

Free labourers are conscripted into wage-slavery by officers of the state to be drilled at the workplace by NCOs known as managers. (549) Only then will we wage-slaves deliver the portion of labour-time for free that provides the

¹ John U. Nef, *War and Human Progress, An Essay on the Rise of Industrial Civilisation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950); and T.S. Aston, *An Economic History of England, The 18th Century* (London: Methuen, 1972), 126-7. For a contrary perspective, Sandra Halperin, *War and Social Change in Modern Europe, The Great Transformation Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

² Frederick Engels, "The Role of Force in History," *M-ECW*, vol. 26, 453-510; their *New American Encyclopedia* entries, *M-ECW*, vol. 18 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1982); Engels, "On Rifled Cannon," *M-ECW*, vol. 17 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1981), 354-66; Marx wrote to Engels about the Roman armies, September 25, 1857, *M-ECW*, vol. 40 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), 186-7.

³ Marx is quoting himself from *The Poverty of Philosophy*, (1847), *M-ECW*, vol. 6, 176.

⁴ Max Weber, *Critique of Stammler* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 102; Martin Albrow (ed.), "Max Weber, R. Stammler's 'Surmounting' of the Materialist Conception of History," Part 2," *British Journal of Law and Society*, 3, no. 1 (1971): 18-19.

surplus-value to be realised into profit for the reproduction of capital on an expanding scale. The agents of capital apply 'fuzzy logic' (identified in 1965) to assembly-lines for lines of robots as well human operatives increase productivity by optimizing the sequence of operations.⁵

Despite those necessary factors for the survival of capitalism, today's making and selling of commodities would be unrecognisable to the handful who read *Capital* in 1867, even though the appearance of airfreight, genetically modified canola, Nano-particles and nuclear power more than justify the attention that Marx and Engels pay to a 'constant revolutionising' of the conditions of production.⁶ By contrast, the imbalance of class forces is again close to where it was before 1917, with the seventy years up to 1990 confirming the Hungarian joke that real existing socialisms are the shortest road to capitalism. Shadowing that reverse, 200 years of interrupted expansions of capital-within-capitalism have called for relentless renovations of its state apparatuses, repressive and ideological.⁷ The result is a tighter than ever monopoly over the means of violence, cloaked in ADMASS, and legitimised by the internalising of 'wars on terror' among Netizens being mass atomised on anti-social media.⁸

Brainjacking

A reality check is to return to the Special Issues of the *Scientific American* in which preeminent researchers chart the frontiers of their disciplines. The 1985 survey of molecular researchers highlighted cloning and but did not postulate the Human Genome Project which got underway three years later, announcing its completion in 2003.

⁵ M.E. Salveson in 1955 identified "The Assembly Line Balancing Problem," *Journal of Industrial Engineering*, 6: 18-25.

⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," *M-ECW*, vol. 6, 487.

⁷ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: NLB, 1971), 121-73.

⁸ Fred Turner, "Machine Politics, The rise of the internet and a new age of authoritarianism," *Harper's Magazine*, January 2019: 25-33; Joe Trippi, *The Revolution will not be Televised; Democracy, the Internet and the Overthrow of Everything* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

Systems Theory came out of weapons research in the 1940s, Peter Galison,^[17]The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision," *Critical Inquiry*, 21, no. 1 (1994): 228-266. For some military highways and byways from Weiner to Facebook via amphetamines and then LSD, see A. David Napier, "How to escape feedback," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 2018: 8-9.

Far beyond the proto-cyborgs staffing the ‘hellscape’ of Amazon’s warehouses, the organic and the inorganic are being blended in Genetically Engineered Machines and Brain-Computer-Interface for an era of Bio-botics.⁹ The U.S. Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) developed the Internet through which the National Security Agency spies on domestic dissenters and foreign allies; DARPA is funding BrainComputerInterFace (BCIF).¹⁰ Having put up seed funding for what became GoogleEarth, the CIA is looking forward to hacking into our brains – literally – courtesy of project BRAIN (Brain Research through Advanced Innovative Neurotechnologies).¹¹ Miniscule cerebral organoids able to generate brain waves and pre-term neural networks are being cultivated from brain stem cells.¹² Other laboratories can convert neural signals into speech and transmit telepathically.¹³

From the mid-1980s, the Co-founder of the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at MIT, Marvin Minsky, hoped to ‘connect computers to our brains, perhaps through millions of microscopic electrodes inserted into the great nerve bundle called the corpus callosum, the largest data base in the brain.’ Eventually, using nanotechnology, we will entirely replace our brains ... Such a future cannot be realised through biology ... Once delivered from the limitations of biology’, Robots ‘will be our children ... Hence, we could design our “mind-children” to think a million times faster than we do.’¹⁴

Minsky underestimated the possibility another kind of ‘child’ from genetic manipulation, a narrowness he reiterated late in 1994; unable to get beyond this mechanistic mentality, he also failed to perceive how the

⁹ *NYT*, February 1, 2017, B3; *The Economist*, April 13, 2019: 52-3; *NYT*, July 7, 2019, B1 and 6.

¹⁰ Richard Anderson, “The Intention Machine,” *Scientific American*, 320, no. 4 (April 2019): 26-31.

¹¹ Tim Requarth, “Mind Field,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 214 (2015): 53-59; Diana Kwon, “Self-Taught Robots,” *Scientific American*, 318, no. 3 (2018): 30. For “Slaughterbots,” *The Economist*, December 16, 2017: 68-9; Raffi Khatchadourian surveys the ethical debates, “The Doomsday Invention,” *The New Yorker*, November 23, 2015: 64-79.

In a harbinger of the military’s role in developing cyborgs, Rodney Hall’s 2018 novel, *Stolen season* (Sydney: Picador) imagines a mangled vet – named ‘Adam’ – having his mobility restored by a eco-skeleton.

¹² *Science Daily*, August 29, 2019 reporting *Cell Stem Cell*, 2019; DOI: 10.1016/j.stem.2019.08.002. NASA’s participation in the experiments should be no surprise.

¹³ Rowan Hooper, “‘I want to make a chemical brain,’” *New Scientist*, September 15, 2018: 38-40.

¹⁴ Marvin Minsky, “Will Robots Inherit the Earth?” *Scientific American*, 271, no. 4 (1994): 86-91. Marvin Minsky, *The Society of Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

biological and the mechanical might be made to expand the other's capacities, and even more significantly, blend their workings. In a back-to-the future moment, Elon Musk has picked up Minsky's call to replace every part of the body and brain, and thus repair all the defects and injuries that make our lives so brief.' To this end, he has launched a corporate offshoot branded Neuralink to merge AI systems with brains lasered with a lace of ultra-thin electrodes.¹⁵

Out of *in vitro* fertilization (IVF), children become one more commodity, with surrogacy a human right for those with money to pay; meanwhile, pets have become 'furry children', to be cloned after death, along with the Woolly Mammoth in South Korea. The Human Genome Organisation (HUGO) from 1988 to its proclaiming in 2003 of a complete map but since has had explain junk DNA and more recently Epigenetics, the latter having surmounted accusations of Lamarckianism.¹⁶

Far from the End of Biology proclaimed by Minsky, genetic engineers are still at the beginning of their hope 'to perfect God', as the head of the Beijing Genomics Institute puts it, an ambition only partly restrained by ethics committees and the courts. Computer engineers are also just leaving the starting blocks in their quest for quantum supremacy. Later rather than sooner, some combination of life sciences and new materials, if not their integration by grafting circuits onto cells, will rival the transistor's replacement of valves in the late 1940s. At CalTech, in 2013, Brain Machine Interface implanted electrodes that control the signals that trigger motor movement' in order to manipulate robotic limbs.¹⁷

SUB HEADING

The means for enforcing class power alter with battlefronts and with workplace technologies.¹⁸ Since all human practices are transitory, how

¹⁵ *The Economist*, July 20, 2019: 63.

¹⁶ Nessa Carey, *The Epigenetics Revolution* (London: Icon, 2012) .

¹⁷ ??? Anderson, *Scientific American*, 320, no. 4 (2019): 26-31.

¹⁸ Ronald W. Batchelder and Herman Freudenberger, "On the Rational Origins of the Modern Centralised State," *Explorations in Economic History*, 20, no. 1 (1983): 1-13; John S. Pettengill, "The Impact of Military Technology on European Income Distribution," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 9, no. 2 (1979): 201-25.

State violence as a guarantee of inequality is lost on bourgeois liberals such as Thomas Piketty, though not Adam Smith who told his students that 'Laws and government may be considered in this and in every case as a combination of the rich to oppress the poor,

exactly the agents of competing capitals strive to contain antagonistic class relationships will remain subject to 'constant revolutionising.'¹⁹ Those agents must, on occasion, calibrate the disadvantages to their class from replacing one of the covert dictatorships, which characterise bourgeois democracy, with one of the more overt kind, which, statistically, remains the norm.²⁰ Fascism became the form of open dictatorship needed to beat down revolutionary challenges from the 1900s into the early 1950s. The moment of fascism is 'exceptional'²¹ only in its being one expression of overt dictatorship, the one hammered out to secure the power of capital during five decades of tumult and, even then, only for certain nation-market-states.²²

In the late 1940s, one assault on proletarian power was the de-labourisation of construction, mining and freight-handling, sectors where militancy had put unions on the front-line of another battering from the introduction of machinery as a weapon in the class struggle. Builders, miners and stevedores had some success with holding actions around pre-fabrication, open-cut and bulk-handling. Nonetheless, in 1960, the Prague-based *World Marxist Review* initiated a discussion among Communist Parties about 'What are the Changes in the Structure of the Working-Class?'²³ In brief, was mechanisation depriving the manual proletariat of its vanguard role along with its declining share of the workforce? Strike-waves either side of 1970 seemed to reassert its primacy, despite the media circus around student rebels.

Since the 1980s, spurts in the 500-year globalisation of labour-times²⁴ have shattered union coverage so that labour faces accelerated rates of both absolute and relative exploitation from/on a position of proletarian weaknesses not seen since the depths of the Great Depression around 1932-3.

and preserve to themselves the inequality of the goods ...' *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1978), 208.

¹⁹ David Rockefeller charged his Trilateral Commission with promoting representative democracy to counter participatory democracy, Alan Wolfe, "Capitalism Shows its Face: Giving up on Democracy," Holly Sklar (ed.), *Trilateralism* (Boston: South End Press, 1980), 295-323.

²⁰ S.E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback, The Role of the Military in Politics* (London: Pall Mall, 1962); Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'Etat, A Practical Handbook* (London: Allen Lane, 1968).

²¹ Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship* (London: New Left Books, 1974), Part Seven.

²² J. Barrington Moore, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

²³ *World Marxist Review* (1960), 3, no. 5: 36-58; no. 9: 69-80, and no. 12: 67-77.

²⁴ See my "What Happened in Globalisation?," *JAPE*, ??? (2003): ????

The relative strength of contending classes requires political expression. The disappearance of large-scale Communist Parties across Europe, and the small but strategically placed ones in Australia and South Africa. Even the defensive tactics of labourism and parliamentary socialism are no more. The labour lieutenants of capital diluted social democracy into social liberalism, starting in Australasia, in tandem with Thatcher and Reagan, a decade before New Labour in Britain,²⁵ to be enshrined in the European Union and Trade 'Partnership' Agreements. The continent which saw the world's first labour government in 1899 has not had a Labor Party since the early 1990s, with the abbreviation 'ALP' now standing for Anti-labour Party.

That the rule of capital is not under threat is a tribute to the success of its agents at disorganising labour, often as not by organising us into the right channels. Nonetheless, those agents face breakouts from the two-party regime by workers seeking retribution for job losses and redress for their degradation in the 'iron cage' at work.²⁶ To excite oneself that bourgeois democracies are preparing to resurrect the fascism of the 1930s would be, as Marx wrote in another context, 'a very rewarding method – for stilted, mock-scientific, highfaluting ignorance and intellectual laziness.'²⁷ Such a delusion disables our fight against the novel forms of covert dictatorships to which we are being subjected. Our ability to resist is constrained by commercial and security surveillance²⁸ backed by swat teams and S.A.S. units in support of the civil power far more than it by street gangs challenging law-and-order and 'civility' from the right.

The need to stand up to thugs blocking the building of mosques and harassing of Muslim women is beyond question. But how many of those activists ever think that, by being grafted onto their devices, they are

²⁵ Boris Frankel, "Beyond Labourism and Socialism, How the Australian Labor Party Developed the Model of 'New Labour'," *New Left Review*, no. 221 (1997): 3-33; Brian Easton, *The Making of Rogernomics* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989).

²⁶ "Editorial", *The Economist*, February 20, 2016: 7; Wolfgang Streeck, "You need a gun," *London Review of Books*, December 14, 2017: 25-6; Mike Carter, *All Together Now? One man's walk in search of his father and a lost England* (London: Guardian Faber, 2019).

²⁷ Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, 27 June 1870, *M-ECW*, vol. 43 (Moscow: Progress Publisher s, 1988), 527.

²⁸ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: the Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019) understands neither the origins of capitalism nor its needs, and has even less any apprehension of how far its agents will go to secure them.

informants for the security police? Which is the greater threat: street gangs or the National Security Agency?