

Rethinking United Fronts and the Far Right in the Contemporary World: The Crisis of Bourgeois Rule and the Weakness of Anti-Capitalist Politics

The ascendance of the Far Right across the world – from the US to India – is prompting, among other things: a) a concern that fascism, in one form or another, is returning to political life; and b) inclinations among those in countries facing such developments to confront, as in the past, the transformations with united or popular fronts, linking various progressive movements, parties, and Left political orientations.

Debate has already begun as to the benefits and drawbacks of this approach, based mostly on history. This day-long workshop, **Rethinking United Fronts and the Far Right in the Contemporary World**, seeks to explore both the class character of Far Right movements (both in terms of the structural conditions of its existence and the class position of its foot soldiers) as well as the class nature of the political opposition that is required to confront it. In particular, it will examine whether and how the factors and the conditions in the *contemporary* world bearing on evaluations of united fronts – and the very possibility and potential nature of such fronts today – are similar to and are different from those in the past. The workshop will also ask on what basis might such fronts extend their reach beyond the struggle against the Far Right and nascent fascism to broad progressive social and political transformation.

To be held at York University, Toronto, **July 20-21, 2018**, the workshop (as part of the Augmenting the Left series) will draw together a cohort of scholars and activists, based in North America, who will speak to these complex issues that are in urgent need of elaboration. It is organized by the York research collective, 'Critical Scholarship and Social Transformation' (<http://criticaltransformation.blog.yorku.ca/>).

BACKGROUND

We start from the assumption that the Far Right's ascendance and opening toward fascism represents a crisis of world capitalism: the crisis of democratic-secular politics, and the hegemonic project of the bourgeoisie as well as the crisis of the bourgeois economic system, dominated by financial capital. Other attributes include the failure of social-democratic or other forms of bourgeois-reformist politics, and the weakness of Left movements, including those on the communist-revolutionary Left: indeed, the power of Far Right movements is inversely proportional to the power of the working masses.

As originally conceived by some on the Left earlier in the Twentieth Century a popular front strategy involved communist organizations combining their forces with other progressive organizations, including bourgeois organizations. The united front was a strategy where workers, belonging to the communist Left, keeping their

organizational identity intact, were meant to combine with social democratic workers to strike against fascism in a united fashion; this process was seen as an inevitable part of the fight to establish socialism and would expose the bourgeois character of social-democratic reformist leadership. The united front was to be a springboard; a defensive strategy, which was meant to be ultimately transformed into an offensive strategy against bourgeois class rule itself.

Revolutionary practice requires revolutionary ideas. The united front is arguably also an intellectual project - and not just a political one - that might transform through history. United fronts do not just come about on their own. They require prior intellectual imagination demanding answers to serious questions. Seeking unity across various anti-Rightist forces makes sense to many observers today, but one must ask: on what terms? One must also ask: with or without the context of an "exceptional historical conjuncture," how should various progressive forces today relate to one another? There is also the question about what happens after the defeat of the far Right? This implies that Marxist-oriented thought ought to keep selectively returning to the critical engagement with non-Marxist thought, something that Marx himself was committed to as seen in his close study of bourgeois economists like Ricardo. In his *On the Significance of Militant Materialism*, Lenin also gave a call for such an engagement, arguing that revolutions are not made by communist revolutionaries only.

Rather than see this engagement as a diversion from any orthodox or true Left paths, we can see it as a potential opening towards a politics of anti-capitalism, where non-socialist orientations are not dismissed but, where possible, pressed beyond their limited political and intellectual scope into a struggle over the question of how far - and where - to go in relation to capitalism and political life; and to foster a widening and deepening scope of contention (from housing, food, health care, education, to nature and the material alteration of our world). This politics of anti-capitalist contention, in the contemporary world where anti-capitalist forces are frustratingly fragmented, can extend to protest and reform movements that are Left-oriented but not anti-capitalist; or to socialist-labelled political parties that maintain their long tradition of reformism but which might veer toward policies beyond reform. What is needed is a commitment from anti-capitalists to debate and struggle not over the limited nature of reform or the struggle against the far Right per se but over the substantial and difficult questions that are located in that in-between space of transition from reform to anti-capitalism.

As an initial attempt to promote a critical discussion on the Far Right and the nature of Left politics that will be necessary to fight it, we would like to invite a selected number of scholars and activists to the workshop. If you are interested in sharing your ideas, please respond to the organizers within two weeks of receiving the invitation.

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