

America's Turn Towards Fascism and Its Contradictions

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The fact that fascist elements in the U.S. have started raising their sinister head and that Donald Trump has started showing his open sympathy for such elements is borne out by several recent incidents. On Saturday August 12, at a white supremacist and neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, peaceful anti-fascist protesters were attacked by the fascists; a man drove a truck into them killing civil rights activist Heather Heyer and injuring at least 19 others; and an African-American teacher DeAndre Harris was beaten mercilessly with a metal rod just a few yards from the Charlottesville police headquarters. Trump's initial response to the incident was to condemn violence "on many sides" but to avoid criticizing white supremacists specifically. Two days later, owing to a public outcry over his ambivalence, he relented somewhat and criticized the white supremacists specifically; but again on Tuesday he backtracked and insisted that "there was blame on both sides". These last remarks, not surprisingly, were welcomed by former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke who thanked Trump for his "honesty". And now the white supremacists are planning rallies in several towns across the U.S.

Less than a fortnight later, on August 25, Trump granted a Presidential pardon to former Arizona sheriff Joseph Arpaio, who had been convicted for criminal contempt of court for persisting with "racial profiling" of Latino immigrants despite a court order against it. Trump even called him an "American patriot". This "patriot" apparently ran his personal "concentration camp", an outdoor jail in Phoenix, where he detained Latinos in inhuman conditions, conditions where the temperatures in the complex even reached 145 degrees F. A Presidential pardon for this notorious racist is a clear signal being given to the white supremacists and neo-Nazis that Trump is with them.

America is clearly turning towards fascism, a fact that is not surprising in itself. Globalization has brought great hardship to the white working class; and this has been compounded by the capitalist crisis. While economist Joseph Stiglitz has shown that the real wage rate of an average male American worker in 2011 was even lower than in 1968, economist Angus Deaton has shown that the current mortality rate among white male workers was comparable to that in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which itself had been a modern record for peacetime. While liberal bourgeois politicians like Hillary Clinton barely acknowledged such facts, Trump, in the absence of any progressive opponent (since Bernie Sanders had withdrawn from the contest), obtained a certain sympathy even from the working people by at least recognizing their plight; and their support helped to put him into the White House. But the culprit he presented to them as being responsible for their plight was not the system of neo-liberal capitalism, but the "other", namely, the immigrants, the Muslims, the Blacks, and the "foreigners".

Not surprisingly, he was soon "adopted" by U.S. finance capital which saw in him a bulwark against possible "disorder", and an ally who, while being acceptable to the people, would carry forward the agenda of finance capital. Trump, in turn, reciprocated the support from big business by packing his economic advisory positions with a host of top business executives, by promising a hefty reduction in the

corporate tax rate, from 35 to 15 percent, and by choosing as the Chairman of his Economic Advisory Council not an academic economist, as had generally been the case earlier, but a Goldman Sachs executive named Gary Cohn.

What is interesting however is that several of these executives have now resigned from Trump's economic advisory council in protest against his not coming out against white supremacy in a more forthright manner. Many observers in India in fact, impressed by this spate of resignations, have contrasted business opposition to Trump's softness towards white supremacy with business silence in India over Modi's softness towards gaurakshaks and other vigilante groups.

The reason that is typically advanced for these resignations in the U.S. is that the executives' conscience would not allow them to be part of an administration which is molly-cuddling those who are bent upon dividing that country. And this, let us concede, could well be true of many of the executives who have resigned, and even of all of them to an extent. But there is an additional factor of importance which must be noted here.

The various white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups have little legislative clout as yet in the U.S. If pro-corporate legislation is to be passed, if a budget proposing lower corporate taxes is to be adopted, then Trump has to rely on the support of law-makers in the Congress and the Senate. And not everybody even in his Republican Party, despite its strong Rightward shift in recent years, is willing to support the white supremacists and the neo-Nazis. So, if pro-corporate steps have to be taken by him, then Trump has to woo the legislators in both houses, for which he has to keep a certain distance from his fascist supporters. The fate of his recent attempt to do away with Obamacare (the healthcare measures put in place by Barak Obama) owing to the opposition inter alia of Republican leader John McCain, is a pointer in this context. McCain along with several other leading Republicans has also been critical of Trump's softness towards the fascists; and they could easily resist Trump's attempts to woo them. The corporate world therefore would like Trump to distance himself somewhat from the more extreme far-Right groups in order to push through his pro-corporate agenda.

There is in other words a contradiction underlying Trump's position. Though he has a fascist outlook and an affinity with fascist elements, he has been elected as the candidate not of a fascist party but of the Republican Party, which despite being Right-wing and having perhaps several fascists within its ranks, is not a fascist Party per se. The implementation of his pro-corporate agenda therefore requires a degree of distancing from his fascist base. The resignation of several executives from his advisory council is a means through which pressure is applied on him for creating such a distance.

It is interesting that his corporate backers are adopting a dual approach towards Trump. While some of them have resigned from their advisory positions, others have stayed on, even with the tacit support of those who have resigned. Thus Gary Cohn, who has publicly stated that he too was contemplating resignation, has not done so, in order to be able to "serve the country"; and he has also stated that his decision not to resign was supported by many who had chosen to distance themselves from the Trump administration because of its softness towards fascist groups. In other words, while some executives have resigned as a means of putting pressure on Trump to

adopt positions that would make the implementation of a pro-corporate agenda possible, others have stayed on in his administration in order to work out for him such a pro-corporate agenda in the first place.

What we are witnessing in short is a complex process of negotiations between Trump and big business. According to Michal Kalecki, the renowned Polish Marxist economist, fascism was characterized by the fact that “the State machinery is under the direct control of a partnership of big business with fascist upstarts”. Kalecki’s remark however refers to a situation where a fascist State has come into being. But in countries like the U.S. which are turning towards fascism, the coming into being of a fascist State, if at all it occurs, is still a long way ahead. The partnership between fascist upstarts and big business is still in the process of being formed; the capturing of exclusive State power by this partnership is nowhere yet in sight. This partnership in short is being formed within the framework of a not-yet fascist bourgeois State, which makes negotiations over the formation of this “partnership” that much more complicated and tricky. The diversity of responses of corporate executives to the positions of the Trump administration is a reflection of the complicated nature of such negotiations.

While the turn of the U.S. towards fascism is unmistakable, the contradictions associated with this turn, and the complexity of the process of formation of the partnership between big business and fascist upstarts within the framework of a non-fascist bourgeois State to start with, are also clearly visible.