

# UC Santa Barbara

## Other Recent Work

### Title

Global capitalism and twenty-first century fascism: a UC case study

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7153p2v0>

### Journal

Race & Class, 53(3)

### Authors

Robinson, William I  
Barrera, Mario

### Publication Date

2012-03-02

# Global capitalism and twenty-first century fascism: a US case study

WILLIAM I. ROBINSON and MARIO BARRERA

*Abstract:* This seminal article analyses the current structural crisis and instability in an ever more polarised world in relation to earlier systemic crises that were resolved through fascism or through Fordist-Keynesian 'class compromise' (the 1930s) and the emergence of capitalist globalisation (the 1970s). The authors identify three basic responses to the crisis: popular insurgency from below; reformist stabilisation from above; and, a twenty-first century neo-fascism. Looking specifically at the US, they analyse political and economic developments that demonstrate fascistic characteristics. While no simple replication of the past, the emergence of a Christian Right since the mid-1980s, the growth of certain currents within the Tea Party movement, the sharp increase in violent hate groups, the spread of a vicious anti-immigrant movement, the psychopathology of white decline, sharp militarisation and pervasive policing give some indications of the rise of fascist tendencies. But what is crucial today is the sophistication of such a project, made possible by the ideological domination of media together with new surveillance and social control technologies that allow it to rely more on selective than generalised repression. In calling for a co-ordinated fightback, both in the US and beyond, the authors see the only viable solution to the crisis of global capitalism as a massive redistribution of wealth and power downward towards

---

*William I. Robinson* is Professor of Sociology, Global Studies and Latin America Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara. His latest book is *Latin America and Global Capitalism* (2008).

*Mario Barrera* is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Comparative Ethnic Studies at the University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of the classic award-winning study, *Race and Class in the Southwest* (1979).

*Race & Class*

Copyright © 2012 Institute of Race Relations, Vol. 53(3) 4-29  
10.1177/0306396811425983 <http://rac.sagepub.com>

the poor majority of humanity, along the lines of a twenty-first century democratic socialism.

*Keywords:* anti-immigrant movement; capitalist crisis; Christian Right; globalisation; militarisation; neo-fascism; Oath Keepers; Patriot movement; SB1070; Tea Party; transnational capital

## **A crisis of humanity**

The crisis of global capitalism is unprecedented, given its magnitude, its global reach, the extent of ecological degradation and social deterioration, and the scale of the means of violence. We truly face a crisis of humanity. The stakes have never been higher; our very survival is at risk. We have entered a period of great upheaval, of momentous changes and uncertainties, fraught with dangers, if also opportunities.

Facing this crisis calls for an analysis of the capitalist system, which has undergone restructuring and transformation in recent decades. The current moment involves a qualitatively new transnational or global phase of world capitalism that can be traced back to the 1970s and is characterised by the rise of truly transnational capital and a transnational capitalist class (TCC). Transnational capital has been able to break free of the nation state constraints to accumulation of the previous epoch and, with it, to shift the correlation of class and social forces worldwide sharply in its favour and to undercut the strength of popular and working classes around the world in the wake of the global rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

Emergent transnational capital underwent a major expansion in the 1980s and 1990s, involving over-accumulation through new technologies, such as computers and informatics, through neoliberal policies and through new modalities of mobilising and exploiting the global labour force – including a massive new round of primitive accumulation, uprooting and displacing hundreds of millions of people, especially in the Third World countryside, who have become internal and transnational migrants.

We face a system that is now much more integrated and dominant groups that have accumulated an extraordinary amount of transnational power and control over global resources and institutions. But, by the late 1990s, stagnation had set in and the system faced renewed crisis. Sharp global social polarisation and escalating inequalities fuelled the chronic problem of over-accumulation. The concentration of the planet's wealth in the hands of the few and the accelerated impoverishment and dispossession of the majority have been so extreme under capitalist globalisation that they even forced participants at the 2011 World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos to acknowledge that the gap between the rich and the poor worldwide is 'the most serious challenge in the world' and is 'raising the specter of worldwide instability and civil wars'<sup>2</sup> Global inequalities and the impoverishment of broad majorities mean that

transnational capital cannot find productive outlets to unload the enormous amounts of surplus it has accumulated. By the twenty-first century, the TCC turned to several mechanisms to sustain global accumulation in the face of over-accumulation.

One is militarised accumulation; making wars and interventions that unleash cycles of destruction and reconstruction and generate enormous profits for an ever-expanding military-prison-industrial-security-financial complex. We are now living in a global war economy that goes well beyond such 'hot wars' as those in Iraq or Afghanistan. A second mechanism is the raiding and sacking of public budgets. Transnational capital uses its financial power to take control of state finances and to impose further austerity on the working majority, resulting in ever greater social inequality and hardship. The TCC has used its structural power to accelerate the dismantling of what remains of the social wage and welfare states. And a third mechanism is frenzied worldwide financial speculation, turning the global economy into a giant casino. The TCC has unloaded billions of dollars into speculation in the housing market, the food, energy and other global commodities markets, in bond markets worldwide (that is, public budgets and state finances) and into every imaginable 'derivative', ranging from hedge funds to swaps, futures markets, collateralised debt obligations, asset pyramiding and Ponzi schemes.

The 2008 collapse of the global financial system (which some have called the 'great recession') was merely the straw that broke the camel's back. This is not a cyclical, but a structural crisis – a restructuring crisis, such as we had in the 1970s and, before that, in the 1930s – that has the potential to become a systemic crisis, depending on how social agents respond to the crisis and on the element of contingency that is unpredictable and always plays some role in historical outcomes. A restructuring crisis means that the only way out of crisis is to restructure the system, whereas a systemic crisis is one in which only a change in the system itself will resolve the crisis. Times of crisis are times of rapid social change, when collective agency and contingency come into play more than in times of equilibrium in a system.<sup>3</sup>

This crisis shares a number of aspects with the earlier structural crises of the 1970s and the 1930s, but there are also several features unique to the present. One is that the system is fast reaching the ecological limits of its reproduction. We may have already reached a point of no return. Another feature is the magnitude of the means of violence and social control. Computerised wars, drones, bunker-buster bombs, star wars and so forth have changed the face of warfare. Warfare has become normalised and sanitised for those not directly at the receiving end of armed aggression. At the same time, we have arrived at the panoptical surveillance society. A third is the limits to the extensive expansion of capitalism, in the sense that there are no longer any new territories of significance that can be integrated into world capitalism, de-ruralisation is now well advanced, and the commodification of the countryside and of pre- and

non-capitalist spaces has intensified; that is, converted in hot-house fashion into spaces of capital, so that intensive expansion is reaching depths never before seen. A fourth is the rise of a vast surplus population inhabiting a 'planet of slums',<sup>4</sup> alienated from the productive economy, thrown into the margins and subject to sophisticated systems of social control and to destruction – to a mortal cycle of dispossession-exploitation-exclusion. A fifth is a disjuncture between a globalising economy and a nation state-based system of political authority. Transnational state apparatuses are incipient and have not been able to play the role of what social scientists refer to as a 'hegemon' or a leading nation state that has enough power and authority to organise and stabilise the system.

### **Fascism as a response to capitalist crisis**

The structural crisis of the 1930s was resolved through the creation of a new model of Fordist-Keynesian or redistributive capitalism, while that of the 1970s was resolved, at least momentarily, through capitalist globalisation. 'Resolved' does not mean that things got better for the mass of humanity but, rather, that restructuring allowed for the resumption of sustained accumulation. But crises open up a possibility for change that can go in many different directions. The current crisis is resulting in a rapid political polarisation in many parts of the world and in the global system as a whole. Both right- and leftwing forces are insurgent. There appear, in the current conjuncture, to be three identifiable responses to the crisis that are in dispute.

One is a reformism from above that is aimed at stabilising the system – in saving the system from itself and from more radical response from below. Transnational elites have proposed regulating global financial markets, state stimulus programmes, fomenting a shift from speculative to productive accumulation and limited redistributive measures. Reform-oriented elites, such as George Soros, Joseph Stiglitz, Jeffrey Sachs and representatives of a number of European and Third World governments, are guided less by neoclassical than by institutional economics and pursue what some have called a global neo-Keynesianism. Nonetheless, in the years following the collapse of the financial system in 2008, it would seem that these reformers have been unable to prevail over the power of transnational finance capital.

A second response to the crisis is popular and leftist resistance from below. Although often in fits and starts, this resistance appears to be insurgent in the wake of 2008, yet spread very unevenly across countries and regions. The mass uprisings in EU countries in the wake of sovereign debt crises in 2010–2011 and the imposition of draconian new austerity programmes are a reflection of this insurgency, as are the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, the turn to the Left in a number of Latin American countries and the revival of labour militancy in the US in early 2011 in the face of relentless anti-union and austerity campaigns by Republican and other rightwing forces.

However, crises of state legitimacy and vacuums in institutional power open up space not just for popular forces from below, but also for the far-right forces that compete with reformist and radical responses to crisis. Hence, the third response is what we term twenty-first century fascism. The ultra Right is an insurgent force in many countries – in Latin America, for instance, in Colombia, Mexico, Honduras and elsewhere, and in a number of EU countries and, what concerns us most here, in the US. It is our fear that, if reformism from above fails and if the Left is not able to seize the initiative, the road will be open for twenty-first century fascism, at least in some countries and regions around the world. This proto-fascist Right seeks to fuse reactionary political power with transnational capital and to organise a mass base among historically privileged sectors of the global working class, such as white workers in the North and middle layers in the South that are now experiencing heightened insecurity and the spectre of downward mobility. The proto-fascist response to the crisis involves militarism, extreme masculinisation, racism, the search for scapegoats (such as immigrant workers and Muslims in the US and Europe) and mystifying ideologies.

We should recall that fascism is a particular *response to capitalist crisis* that seeks to contain any challenge to crisis that may come from subordinate groups. In this regard, central to the story of global capitalism and global crisis, as well as to the spectre of neo-fascism, is a mass of humanity involving hundreds of millions, if not billions, of people who have been expropriated from the means of survival, yet also expelled from capitalist production as global supernumeraries or surplus labour, relegated to scraping by in a ‘planet of slums’ and subject to all-pervasive and ever more sophisticated and repressive social control systems, as we discuss in more detail below. From the vantage point of dominant groups, the challenge is how to contain the mass of supernumeraries and the marginalised and the resistance of downwardly mobile majorities. We have seen transitions from social welfare to social control states. The need for dominant groups around the world to ensure widespread, organised, mass social control of the world’s surplus population and of rebellious forces from below gives a powerful impulse to the project of twenty-first century global fascism.

Images of what such a political project would involve spanned from the late 2008/early 2009 Israeli invasion of Gaza and ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the Palestinians, to the scapegoating and criminalisation of immigrant workers in the US, genocide in the Congo, the spread of neo-Nazis and skinheads in Europe, the US/UN occupation of Haiti, intensified Indian repression in occupied Kashmir and the incipient breakdown of constitutional order under the George W. Bush administration. In this essay, we explore the spectre of twenty-first century fascism in the US in the context of capitalist globalisation and crisis. We draw on interpretations of ‘classical’ fascism, but we also develop the concept of twenty-first century fascism as a response to crisis that shares some facets of classical fascism, yet is distinct in several significant ways.

As a caveat, we stress that we cannot possibly do justice here to the full extent and complexity of the matter at hand, given space constraints. Our aspiration is to introduce an initial and exploratory statement on the spectre of twenty-first century fascism for debate, ongoing investigation and, of course, as a warning and cry to action.

### **Crisis of the capitalist nation state and the impulse towards neo-fascism**

The logic of accumulation burst forth in past centuries as the negation of a social logic. But fierce social and class struggles worldwide were able, in the twentieth century, to impose a measure of social control over capital, what Karl Polanyi referred to as the 'double movement' (the first movement being the rise of the capitalist market).<sup>5</sup> Popular classes, to varying degrees, were able to force the system to link social reproduction to capital accumulation. What has taken place through globalisation is the severing of the logic of accumulation from that of social reproduction, resulting in an unprecedented growth of social inequality and intensified crises of survival for billions of people around the world. As a result, the accumulation and legitimation functions of the capitalist state – always in tension with one another – cannot both be met. Economic crisis intensifies the problem of legitimation for the dominant groups, so that accumulation crises appear as spiralling political crises.

The state, as Offe<sup>6</sup> (among others) has noted, must compensate for market failures without infringing on the primacy of private accumulation, yet it cannot undertake this compensation without undermining the dominance of the capital-labour relation through the extension of non-commodity forms. These contradictions were managed for a time in the post-second world war period through Fordist-Keynesian modes of accumulation, but globalisation undermined these arrangements and unleashed the neoliberal 'counter-revolution' that has progressively reduced these non-commodified spaces. The invasion and commodification of such spaces have ranged from outsourcing more and more public activities to private companies (including war itself), the privatisation of health and education, and so forth. This juggernaut of the commodification of everything has aggravated crises of social reproduction, undermined the social bases for more stable forms of consensual domination and provided further impetus for more coercive forms of social control.

In essence, the state's ability to function as a 'factor of cohesion' within the social order breaks down to the extent that capital has globalised and the logic of accumulation or commodification penetrated every aspect of social life – the 'life world' itself – so that 'cohesion' requires more and more social control in the face of the collapse of the social fabric. There is a shift from social welfare to social control or police states. This is less a question of public policy, in the first instance, than class relations; the liberation of emergent transnational capital from the nation state has undermined the material basis of the capitalist redistributive state; that is, the particular correlation of forces between popular classes and



capital that constituted the class basis of the social states of Fordist-Keynesian capitalism.<sup>7</sup>

In response, the state abandons efforts to secure legitimacy among broad swathes of the population that have been relegated to surplus labour. The system does not even attempt to incorporate this surplus population, but rather tries to isolate and neutralise its real or potential rebellion, criminalising the poor and the dispossessed, with tendencies towards genocide in some cases, whether as intentional policy or objective outcome, such as in the Congo, Somalia, Gaza or in the case of Amazonian indigenous nationalities. States resort to a host of mechanisms of coercive exclusion: mass incarceration and prison-industrial complexes, pervasive policing, repressive anti-immigrant legislation, manipulation of space in new ways so that both gated communities and ghettos are controlled by armies of private security guards and technologically advanced surveillance systems, and ideological campaigns aimed at seduction and passivity through petty consumption and fantasy. All this provides fertile bases for projects of twenty-first century fascism.

Poulantzas makes a distinction between the 'normal' and 'exceptional' forms of the state: the former corresponds to conjunctures in which bourgeois hegemony is stable; and the latter to crises of hegemony.<sup>8</sup> To what extent are countries around the world moving into exceptional states? And how would such exceptional forms appear? The outlines of a twenty-first century neo-fascism seemed to be congealing in the years of the Bush presidency in the US and, more generally, as an ascendant tendency in global society. A descent into barbarism, driven by military spending, multiple forms of repression and wars to contain the down-trodden, to seize new territories, resources and labour pools and maintain social control, has already begun. Could a neo-fascist project that moves in this direction organise enough support to put in place a hegemonic bloc? Some of the tell-tale signs of such a neo-fascist project are the fusion of transnational capital with reactionary political power; escalating militarisation and extreme masculinisation; a mass base among economically insecure and socially disaffected sectors, animated by a fanatical ideology; race/culture supremacy and xenophobia embracing an idealised and mythical past; economic destabilisation and concomitant social anxiety among privileged strata of the working and middle classes; a racist mobilisation against scapegoats that serves to displace and redirect social tensions and contradictions; and, finally, charismatic leadership.

### **Twentieth and twenty-first century fascism**

Not all 'exceptional states', however, can be considered fascist. Are we justified in attaching the term fascism to such trends? In order to address this question, it is necessary to specify our understanding of fascism and to explore what form a US neo-fascism might take in this century. We do so with the understanding that fascism is not a simple, clearly demarcated phenomenon and also that a twenty-first century fascism, for reasons we will delve into below, need not and would not



resemble twentieth-century 'classical' fascism in many respects, despite certain parallels.

In his detailed comparative analysis of the two historical cases (Italian fascism and German National Socialism or Nazism), Robert Paxton summarises much of the earlier literature on fascism and describes classical fascism as a distinctively twentieth-century phenomenon based on the mobilisation of a mass electorate that had emerged in nineteenth-century Europe.<sup>9</sup> Among the factors that contributed to the success of both were the economic dislocations produced in Europe by an increasingly internationalised economy, the social and economic disruptions that attended the first world war and the fears of traditional elites of strong socialist movements among the working class. Paxton identifies certain themes that are typical of classic fascist movements and regimes:

- a strong emphasis on nationalism and integration into a community, with a consequent de-emphasis on the individual;
- mass political mobilisation on the basis of strong emotional appeals;
- militarism and expansionist goals;
- imperialism;
- demonisation of imputed enemies, often ethnic in character;
- a sense of victimisation;
- authoritarianism;
- a hierarchical order with a supreme charismatic leader;
- a desire for purification of society, with a glorification of violent means; and,
- a rejection of ineffectual or faltering democratic institutions.

It is important to see the 'themes' of fascist movements identified by Paxton in the context of the crucial link between capitalist crisis and fascist movements, and the fusion of capitalist interests with reactionary political power, discussed below, and as highlighted by classical Marxist and also some liberal treatises on fascism.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the scaffolding of classical, as well as twenty-first century, fascism involves a major social psychological and cultural component. In his classic 1941 text on European fascism, *Escape from Freedom*,<sup>11</sup> Erich Fromm argued that with the breakup of the medieval world, Europeans lost a settled social structure and a religious worldview that had provided them, despite its drawbacks, with a sense of place in society and in the universe, resulting in widespread anxiety and a loss of meaning. In many cases, this led to the creation of hierarchical and authoritarian solutions that represented an 'escape from freedom'.

These psychological stresses, according to Fromm, resulted in the creation of an authoritarian character, or personality, in those social sectors most affected. Fromm goes on to link these psychosocial dimensions of classical fascism to the early twentieth-century crisis of capitalism, especially in Nazi Germany, and to the class bases of Nazism in the lower strata of the middle classes, composed of small shopkeepers, artisans and white-collar workers threatened by capitalist displacement. '[The]

psychological conditions were not the “cause” of Nazism’, says Fromm, in observing the confluence of rational, as well as non-rational, factors in explaining the triumph of the Nazi regime. The psychological conditions ‘constituted the human basis without which it could not have developed, but any analysis of the whole phenomenon of the rise and victory of Nazism must deal with the strictly economic and political, as well as with the psychological conditions’.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, many, but not all, of these dimensions of classic fascism are present or emergent in the US. The emergence of a Christian Right since the mid-1980s, the explosion of the Tea Party movement, the sharp increase in violent hate groups, the spread of a vicious anti-immigrant movement and the psychopathology of white decline are some of the indications of the rise of fascist tendencies within US civil society and polity. Below, we will discuss some of these developments. We conceive of a twenty-first century fascism as an exceptional form of capitalist state and society that is not limited to movements in civil society and the polity such as these, insofar as it also involves tendencies within the state, the cultural industries, the political economy and capital accumulation, among others. We also reiterate, in following the classical Marxist studies on twentieth-century fascism, that, whether in its classical form or in possible variants of neo-fascism in the twenty-first century, fascism is a *particular* response to capitalist crisis.

At the same time – *and this is crucial* – a twenty-first century fascism would not be a repetition of its twentieth-century predecessor. The role of political and ideological domination, through control over media and the flow of images and symbols, would make any such project more sophisticated and, together with new panoptical surveillance and social control technologies, probably allow it to rely more on selective than generalised repression. These and other new forms of social control and modalities of ideological domination blur boundaries, so that there may be a constitutional and normalised neo-fascism (with formal representative institutions, a constitution, political parties and elections), all while the political system is tightly controlled by transnational capital and its representatives.

We agree, in this regard, with Bertram Gross who, in his 1980 modern classic *Friendly Fascism: the new face of power in America*,<sup>13</sup> addressed some of these distinctions between classical and neo-fascism. The element that Gross saw as central to all types of fascism is a strong interpenetration of large capitalist corporations with a repressive centralised government that serves corporate interests. He argues that such a state of affairs can develop gradually and incrementally, without a dramatic takeover of power by an overtly authoritarian party, and that control can be exercised through more subtle and sophisticated means than in the classic cases. Indeed, he believed that the evolution of such a system of friendly fascism in the US was fully compatible with retaining a two-party and ostensibly democratic system. His statement in this regard bears great relevance to the current conjuncture:

How would the elites respond if the masses began to ask the elites to give much more and gain much less – particularly when, under conditions of

capitalist stagflation and shrinking world power, the elites have less to give. Some radical commentators claim that the powers that be would use their power to follow the example of the classic fascists and destroy the democratic machinery ... I see it ... as highly unlikely. No First World Establishment is going to shatter machinery that, with a certain amount of tinkering and a little bit of luck, can be profitably converted into a sophisticated instrument of repression.<sup>14</sup>

In Gross's view, the biggest success of incipient neo-fascist movements in US society and polity in the 1970s was that:

many of [their] positions which first sounded outrageous when voiced during the Goldwater campaign of 1964 are now regarded as part of the mainstream. This is not the result of Radical Right shifts toward the center. On the contrary, it is the result of a decisive movement toward the right by the Ultra-Rich and the Corporate Overseers.<sup>15</sup>

Needless to say, the ever-rightward drift of the 'center' in the US has continued unabated since Gross's time and has accelerated since the crisis exploded in 2008, pushed on by an array of far-right forces, which we discuss below.

We do not assert that fascism has arrived in the US or even that it is likely. We suggest that fascist forces are insurgent in US society and polity and that a twenty-first century fascism is only one possible outcome to the crisis. Drawing in part on the classical and more contemporary studies on fascism, as discussed briefly above, and in even greater part on our own propositions on the nature of a twenty-first century fascism, we turn now to the twenty-first century fascist impulse in the US.

### **The dictatorship of transnational capital and Obama's Weimar republic**

Fascism in the twentieth century involved the fusion of reactionary political power with *national* capital; indeed, it was, in part, the inability of German and Italian national capital to out-compete the national capitals of other European powers in the imperialist conquests at the turn of the nineteenth century and following the German defeat in the first world war that led to a fascist response once the 1930s crisis hit with full force. The major concentrations of what were national capitals have transnationalised under globalisation. We do not see twenty-first century fascism in the US as a mechanism of competition with other national capitals, but as an expression of the dictatorship of transnational capital. The fusion of reactionary political power at the highest levels of the US state with transnational capital had been developing during the Bush years and would likely have deepened under a McCain-Palin White House.

While Obama's election may have averted such a fusion, it has also generated another set of conditions propitious for the development of neo-fascist forces in

the US. The Obama project was, from the start, an effort by dominant groups to re-establish hegemony in the wake of its deterioration during the Bush years (which also involved the rise of a mass immigrant rights movement<sup>16</sup>). Obama's election was a challenge to the system at the cultural and ideological level and has shaken up the racial/ethnic foundations upon which the US republic has always rested. However, the Obama project was never intended to challenge the socio-economic order; on the contrary, it sought to preserve and strengthen that order by reconstituting hegemony and conducting a passive revolution against mass discontent and the deepening popular resistance that began to percolate in the final years of the Bush presidency.

The Italian socialist Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of passive revolution to refer to efforts by dominant groups to bring about mild change from above in order to undercut mobilisation from below for more far-reaching transformation. Integral to passive revolution is the co-optation of leadership from below; the integration of that leadership into the dominant project. Currently, dominant forces in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere in the Middle East and North America are attempting to carry out such a passive revolution in the face of the expanding tide of popular rebellion and demands from below for more fundamental change in the political and socioeconomic order. Obama's 2008 election campaign tapped into and helped expand mass mobilisation and popular aspirations for change not seen for many years in the US. The Obama project co-opted that brewing storm from below, channelled it into the electoral campaign and then betrayed those aspirations, as the Democratic party effectively demobilised the insurgency from below with more passive revolution.

In this sense, the Obama project weakened the popular and Left response from below to the crisis, which opened a space for the rightwing response to the crisis – for a project of twenty-first century fascism – to become insurgent. Obama's administration appears in this way as a Weimar republic. Although the Social Democrats were in power during the Weimar Republic of Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s, they did not pursue a leftist response to the crisis, but, rather, sidelined the militant trade unions, communists and socialists and progressively pandered to capital and the Right before turning power over to the Nazis in 1933.

On the other hand, such far-right movements as the Tea Party, as well as racist legislation such as Arizona's anti-immigrant law SB1070, have been broadly financed by transnational corporate capital. The rightwing billionaire brothers, David and Charles Koch, whose combined fortune of some \$40 billion is exceeded only by those of Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, are the prime bankrollers of the Tea Party and also of a host of foundations and front organisations, such as Americans for Prosperity, the Cato Institute and the Mercatus Center, which have pushed an extreme version of the neoliberal corporate agenda, including the reduction and elimination of corporate taxes, cutbacks in social services, the gutting of public education and the total liberation of capital from any state regulation. Less well known is that the Koch brothers, who originally made their fortunes in the oil industry, have raised funds for the Tea Party and other organisations from

dozens of the largest transnational corporations operative on the US political scene.<sup>17</sup> The actual programmatic content of the Koch brothers and the organisations and movements they finance and help lead is a deepening many times over of the neoliberal 'counter-revolution' of radical free-market global capitalism and converges perfectly with the interests of transnational capital, notwithstanding that elements of the politicised leadership of the TCC may put forward political programmes and policy proposals quite distinct from the US far Right.

Transnational capital and its political agents are attempting to resolve the crisis by launching war on the global working class; in effect, an effort to deepen many times over and to consummate the 'neoliberal counter-revolution' that began in the 1980s.<sup>18</sup> Europe and the US now face the same neoliberal policies that have been imposed on the global South since the 1980s. It is also worth noting that three sectors of transnational capital in particular stand out as the most aggressive in pursuing this agenda and as prone to seek neo-fascist political arrangements to facilitate accumulation: speculative financial capital; the military-industrial-security complex; and, the extractive and energy (particularly petroleum) sector. Capital accumulation in the military-industrial-security complex, for instance, depends on endless conflicts and war, including the so-called wars on terrorism and on drugs, as well as on the militarisation of social control against, for example, immigrants and oppressed groups such as African Americans and Palestinians (more on this below).

While transnational capital's offensive against the global working class dates back to the crisis of the 1970s and has grown in intensity ever since, the 'great recession' of 2008 was in several respects a major turning point. In particular, as the crisis spread, it generated the conditions for new rounds of massive austerity worldwide, greater flexibilisation of labour, steeply rising under- and unemployment, and so on. The crisis allowed transnational capital to squeeze more value out of labour, directly through more intensified exploitation and indirectly through state finances. Social and political conflict escalated around the world in the wake of 2008, including repeated rounds of national strikes and mass mobilisation in the EU, uprisings in North Africa, and so on. While transnational state apparatuses failed to intervene to impose regulations on global finance capital, they *did* intervene to impose the costs of devalorisation on labour.

We should recall that a key component of classical fascism was the smashing of trade unions (along with socialist and communist parties). In the US, as elsewhere, the assault on the unions has been going on for several decades. Gross observed in his study on *Friendly Fascism* that corporate capital was financing strenuous efforts to contain labour unions in sectors already unionised and to keep other sectors and regions, such as the US South, union free through such tactics as decertification and 'right to work' campaigns. He pointed out that, by 1980, union membership had declined to 22 per cent of the American labour force, down 3 per cent in the 1970s alone, with the effect of reducing the militancy of the labour movement and helping to move the Democratic party in a



more conservative direction.<sup>19</sup> Just one year later, the Reagan government launched an all-out siege on unions, with the notorious dismissal of striking air traffic controllers.

Deunionisation is also the effect of deindustrialisation, the flexibilisation of work, heightened competition among workers, as unemployment and underemployment increase and in the face of the threat of capital flight, and through corporate anti-union campaigns made notorious by the vicious tactics employed by Walmart.<sup>20</sup> Public sector unions, perhaps the last bastion of major union strength in the US, have come under full-scale assault following the 'battle of Wisconsin'. There, the Koch brother-financed Republican governor Scott Walker pushed a bill through the state legislature that undermined labour's right to collective bargaining, severely curtailed public sector worker benefits and paved the way for broader anti-worker restructuring of the state's finances, including draconian cuts in social services, together with corporate tax breaks. Even as workers and students fiercely resisted the assault, Walker ominously threatened to deploy the National Guard, and other states around the country introduced similar legislation.

In 2010, the US Supreme Court ruled in the notorious Citizens United case that corporations could not be restricted in their financial contributions to electoral campaigns and political parties. Citizens United sets a bone-chilling legal precedent insofar as it lifts any restrictions on transnational capital's ability to impose its overwhelming financial power on the political process in order to secure political outcomes without having to support extra-legal *coup d'états* or breaks with electoral processes and constitutional orders.

### **Surplus labour, scapegoats and the new concentration camps: the social bases of twenty-first century fascism**

One new structural dimension of twenty-first century global capitalism, as mentioned above, is the dramatic expansion of the global superfluous population: that portion marginalised and locked out of productive participation in the capitalist economy and constituting some one-third of humanity. Writing in the *Grundrisse*, Marx argued that, at a certain point in the development of production, science and technology become qualitative forces of production that can increasingly generate value removed (in terms of immediacy) from 'living' human labour (for example, through automation).<sup>21</sup> The ongoing rise in the organic composition of capital through investment in constant capital intended to increase the rate of exploitation and/or to undercut worker resistance eventually results in a qualitatively new situation in which value-generating technology makes the labour power of large swathes of the working class superfluous. Moreover, crises provide capital with the opportunity to accelerate the process of forcing greater productivity out of fewer workers. In the current crisis, for instance, the largest employers in the US 'have emerged from the economy's harrowing downturn



loaded with cash thanks to deep cost-cutting that helped drive unemployment into double digits ... and [resulted in] huge gains in worker productivity', observed one report.<sup>22</sup>

This process has accelerated under globalisation. New-found mobility and new forms of spatial organisation allowed emergent transnational capital to break free from earlier nation state constraints to accumulation; that is, to the power and ability of working classes to impose those constraints within the bounds of the nation state. Spatial reorganisation has helped transnational capital to break the power of territorial-bound organised labour and to impose new capital-labour relations based on the fragmentation, flexibilisation and cheapening of labour. These developments, combined with a massive new round of primitive accumulation and displacement, have given rise to a new global army of superfluous labour, to the marginalisation of one-third of the world,<sup>23</sup> dispossessed from the means of production, locked out of productive participation in the global economy and subject to new forms of social control and repression.

This mass of 'supernumeraries' is of no *direct* use to capital. However, in the larger picture, such surplus labour is crucial to global capitalism insofar as it places downward pressure on wages everywhere (especially to the extent that global labour markets can be tapped and labour can be mobilised throughout the global economy) and allows transnational capital to impose discipline over those who remain active in the labour market. On the other hand, unrest, spontaneous rebellion and organised political mobilisation among the structurally unemployed and marginalised pose a potential threat to the system and must be controlled and contained. Criminalisation of the structurally marginalised and the militarisation of their control are major mechanisms of pre-emptive containment, especially in instances where marginalisation is highly racialised or ethnicised, such as in the US.

The drive to contain the real or potential rebellion from the mass of the dispossessed and disenfranchised in twenty-first century fascism replaces, in some respects, the drive to crush socialism from an organised working class that helped drive twentieth-century fascism. The state responds to those expelled from the labour market and locked out of productive labour not with expanded social welfare and protection, but with abandonment and with repressive social control and containment strategies, including racialised criminalisation and the mobilisation of the 'culture industries' to dehumanise the victims of global capitalism as dangerous, depraved and culturally degenerate Others - as criminal elements posing a threat to society.

In the US, dominant groups have waged such systemic cultural and ideological 'law and order' campaigns for several decades to legitimate the shift from social welfare to social control states and the rise of a prison-industrial complex. In analytical abstraction, these processes can be seen as taking the place of concentration camps, insofar as they conjoin with legal changes, such as anti-drug consumption and 'three strikes' laws, that criminalise the marginalised, especially youth of

colour. They subject a surplus and potentially rebellious population of millions of people to concentration, caging and state violence. Among many studies of the rise of the prison-industrial complex in the US, Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag* shows how California has led the way in 'the biggest prison building project in the history of the world'. The number of people in US prisons increased by 450 per cent from 1980 to the early twenty-first century, despite a steady fall in crime rates. The defeat of radical struggles, alongside the accumulation of surplus capital, led to a strategy of caging surplus labour, made up of young people of colour in vast disproportion to the population at large.<sup>24</sup>

More generally, a twenty-first century fascism in the US would have historical roots in the country's particular history of racialised class relations and in the religious evangelism that have both been central to the development of capitalism in the country. Historic blocs based on hegemonic domination, in order to achieve any stability, must involve material incentives and concessions for those from the subordinate classes brought into the bloc. White labour in the US, which historically enjoyed caste privilege within racially and ethnically segmented labour markets, has experienced, under capitalist globalisation, downward mobility, flexibilisation and heightened insecurity. This loss of caste privilege is problematic for political elites and state managers, since legitimation and domination have historically been constructed through a white racial hegemonic bloc.

The state, elites and the anti-immigrant forces they back have attempted to reconstruct such a bloc through, among other processes, a scapegoating of immigrant communities, along with Muslims and other oppressed racial and ethnic groups, by trying to draw in white workers with appeals to racial solidarity and to xenophobia.<sup>25</sup> Manipulation of the economic crisis helps channel mass frustrations and insecurity into the anti-immigrant sentiment that deflects attention from the real causes of the crisis. As the level of anger and fear among the traditional, largely white working class and middle strata reaches unprecedented levels, what Hage calls a 'psychopathology of white decline'<sup>26</sup> obscures the class dimensions of the crisis and lends itself to this scapegoating.

More broadly, and alongside new modalities of social control, the culture of global capitalism attempts to seduce the excluded and abandoned into petty consumption and fantasy as an alternative to placing social or political demands on the system through mobilisation. These ideological campaigns deflect attention from the sources of social deprivation and channel the insecurities associated with capitalist globalisation onto the marginalised groups. Within the nation state, the marginalised and/or super-exploited become scapegoats, which helps the political representatives of the ruling groups to organise electoral coalitions and construct consensus around the new order (e.g. anti-immigrant and get-tough-on-crime campaigns). Internationally, Third World victims of abandonment (such as Somalia, Haiti, the Congo) are portrayed, at best, as passive and incompetent victims eliciting paternalist sympathy, if not as inferiors to be dismissed and relegated to death and oblivion.

The state's war on immigrants in the US, including an escalation of workplace and community raids, detentions and deportations, racial profiling, police abuse, and so forth, feeds hate crimes against immigrants and generates increasing hostility towards Latino/a communities. In these ways, the state's repressive activities combine with corporate strategy, as we discuss further below, to generate the spread of neo-fascist forces in civil society. One recent report by the Southern Poverty Law Center observed:

There's no doubt that the tone of the raging national debate over immigration is growing uglier by the day. Once limited to hard-core white supremacists and a handful of border-state extremists, vicious public denunciations of undocumented brown-skinned immigrants are increasingly common among supposedly mainstream anti-immigration activists, radio hosts and politicians. While their dehumanising rhetoric typically stops short of openly sanctioning bloodshed, much of it implicitly encourages or even endorses violence by characterising immigrants from Mexico and Central America as 'invaders,' 'criminal aliens' and 'cockroaches.' The results are no less tragic for being predictable: hate crime statistics ... strongly suggest a marked upswing in racially motivated violence against all Latinos, regardless of immigration status.<sup>27</sup>

The Center also recently reported that 'three strands of the radical right' – hate groups, nativist extremist groups and patriot organisations – increased from 1,753 groups in 2009 to 2,145 in 2010, a 22 per cent rise (and which followed a 2008–2009 increase of 40 per cent), and that these groups have expanded, in part, through anti-immigrant activity.<sup>28</sup> A 2010 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) report observed that: 'rightwing extremists may be gaining new recruits by playing on the fears about several emergency issues. The economic downturn and the election of the first African American president present unique drivers for rightwing radicalisation and recruitment.' The DHS report concluded that: 'over the past five years, various rightwing extremists, including militias and white supremacists, have adopted the immigration issue as a call to action, rallying point, and recruitment tool'.<sup>29</sup>

### **Militarisation as social control *and* as accumulation**

If the imperative of social control gives a powerful impetus to the militarisation of global capitalism, militarisation has another key function as well, that of sustaining global accumulation in the face of stagnation. Militarisation as a response to the crisis of global capitalism achieves the simultaneous objectives of social control and repression and of coercively opening up opportunities for capital accumulation worldwide, either on the heels of military force or through the state's contracting of corporate capital for the production and execution of social control and war. While we cannot satisfactorily address this topic here, Robinson has shown how the US invasion of Iraq integrated that country into global

capitalism and opened up vast new accumulation opportunities for transnational capital, while others have shown how war itself is increasingly privatised, so that the state organises and directs warfare from above, yet doles out the distinct activities associated with warfare to transnational corporations.

Militarised accumulation now is not the same as the previous 'military Keynesianism', since much of warfare itself and the related processes of social control and repression have been privatised and semi-privatised. Well beyond the older linkage between state warfare and corporate capital – that is, the procurement of weaponry, equipment and military technology – militarised accumulation now ranges from the replacement of state soldiers by mercenary armies ('private security firms') to the subcontracting of reconstruction projects, military engineering, the construction of military and conflict-related installations, the supply of food, consumer items and services to occupation armies, the construction of private prisons and 'security walls', and even the subcontracting of torture and interrogation.<sup>30</sup>

Hence, the generation of conflicts and the repression of social movements and vulnerable populations around the world form accumulation strategies independent of any political objectives. By way of example, immigrant labour is extremely profitable for the corporate economy in a double sense. First, it is labour that is highly vulnerable, forced to exist semi-underground and be *deportable* and, therefore, super-exploitable. Second, the criminalisation of undocumented immigrants and the militarisation of their control not only reproduce these conditions of vulnerability, but also in themselves generate vast new opportunities for accumulation. The private immigrant prison-industrial complex is a boom industry. Undocumented immigrants constitute the fastest growing sector of the US prison population and are detained in private detention centres and deported by private companies contracted out by the US state. As of 2010, there were 270 immigration detention centres that, on any given day, caged over 30,000 immigrants. Under Obama, more immigrants have been detained and deported than at any time in the past half a century. Since detention facilities and deportation logistics are subcontracted to private companies, capital has a vested interest in the criminalisation of immigrants and in the militarisation of control over immigrants – and more broadly, therefore, a vested interest in contributing to the neo-fascist anti-immigrant movement.

By way of example, it is no surprise that William Andrews, the CEO of the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the largest private US contractor for immigrant detention centres, declared in 2008 that, 'the demand for our facilities and services could be adversely affected by the relaxation of enforcement efforts ... or through decriminalisation [of immigrants]'. Nor is it any surprise that the CCA and other corporations, such as the GEO Group, both of which are listed on global stock exchanges, have financed and participated directly in the drafting of the spate of repressive anti-immigrant legislation in

Arizona and other US states, while state officials pushing this legislation are themselves tied to the private immigrant prison-industrial complex. These include Arizona governor Jan Brewer and Arizona state senator Russell Pearce, who actually introduced the notorious anti-immigrant law SB1070. While Arizona is ground zero for the war on immigrants, neighbouring New Mexico is the operations centre for CSI Aviation, the largest contractor for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) flights that deport the undocumented. Headed by retired Marine colonel Allen Weh, CSI has also financed and sponsored SB1070 and similar legislation in New Mexico.<sup>31</sup>

In sum, fascism in both its twentieth- and twenty-first century variants is not just a political response to capitalist crisis, but also in and of itself a project in the function of accumulation and profit-making that brings the state together with capital. While transnational capital has not at this time fused with reactionary political power at the highest level of the US federal government, militarised accumulation, as well as such instances as the Koch brothers' sponsorship of Wisconsin governor Walker's far-right programme and the broad corporate sponsorship of anti-immigrant legislation, underscore a broader feature of both classical and twenty-first century fascism: reactionary political forces in the state open up accumulation opportunities for capital in crisis, and capital, in turn, develops an interest in a system of violence and coercive control.

The deep historical roots of US militarisation and neo-fascism go back to the genocide and slavery that laid the very foundation of a racial republic, followed by territorial expansion, imperialist conquests and interventions throughout the country's history and the terror campaigns of the Klan and the Texas Rangers, among others. It was the September 11 attack on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon that gave the greatest impulse to militarisation in relation to the current crisis. The cutting edge of accumulation in the 'real economy' worldwide shifted in the wake of that attack to a military-security-industrial-construction-engineering-petroleum complex that accrued enormous influence in the halls of power in Washington. The top military brass have become increasingly politicised and involved in policy-making.<sup>32</sup> Military spending skyrocketed into trillions of dollars through the 'war on terrorism' and the invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, acting to throw fresh fuel on the smouldering embers of the global economy.

The Pentagon budget increased by 91 per cent in real terms between 1998 and 2011, and, even apart from special war appropriations, increased by nearly 50 per cent in real terms during this period.<sup>33</sup> This spending has stabilised at levels significantly above cold war peaks (adjusted for inflation) and far above the cold war average in real terms.<sup>34</sup> The US state has mobilised vast resources and political pressures, taking advantage of the dollar's role as the global currency (and, therefore, of the extraordinary power of the US Treasury) to absorb surpluses and sustain global accumulation by militarising that accumulation and creating a global war economy under the pretext of wars on 'terror' and 'drugs'. (Note also that wars accelerate the turnover time of the circuit of militarised accumulation.)



Pentagon planners now talk of a 'long war' that projects an 'arc of instability' caused by insurgent groups from Europe to South Asia that will last between fifty and eighty years.<sup>35</sup> This type of permanent global warfare involves both low- and high-intensity wars, 'humanitarian' missions, 'drug interdiction operations', and so on; it appears to be the twenty-first century fascist variant of what were the external military conquests and formal territorial expansionism of twentieth-century fascism.

The masculinist and militaristic culture that accompanies militarised accumulation has reached unprecedented heights. The fusion of militarisation and extreme masculinisation – masculine fear of female power, misogyny and homophobia, what Goff calls 'martial masculinity' – has invaded the sphere of mass culture.<sup>36</sup> An increasingly fascistic pop culture combines this celebration of militarisation and masculinity with fantasy, mysticism and irrationality, as epitomised in the mass appeal of extremely violent computer games, the proliferation of reality TV shows and the glorification of military aggression, social violence and domination in mainstream Hollywood cinema. The latter draws in enormous audiences, achieves record profits and wins Oscars with such 'true grit' films as *The Hurt Locker* that depoliticise and normalise, even glamorise, warfare, even if they fall short of formal endorsement. Video gaming of war and of state and interpersonal violence for pure entertainment, such as the widely popular HAWX video game, normalise and aestheticise the militarisation of culture and everyday life as never before.

The immense structural inequalities of the global political economy cannot easily be contained through consensual mechanisms of social control; that is, through consensual or hegemonic domination. Nonetheless, we reiterate that a twenty-first century fascism would not look like twentieth-century fascism. Among other things, the ability of dominant groups to control and manipulate space and to exercise an unprecedented control over the mass media, the means of communication and the production of symbols, images and messages means, as previously noted, that repression can be more selective (as we see, for example, in Mexico or Colombia) and also organised juridically so that mass 'legal' incarceration takes the place of concentration camps. Also, the vast new powers of cultural hegemony open up new possibilities for atomising and channelling grievances and frustrated aspirations into escapism and consumerist fantasies. The fashion and entertainment industries market anything that can be converted into a commodity. With this comes depoliticisation, at best, if not the ability to channel fear into flight rather than fightback. The ideology of twenty-first century fascism often rests on irrationality – a promise to deliver security and restore stability is emotive, not rational. Twenty-first century fascism is a project that does not, and need not, distinguish between the truth and the lie.

### **Neo-fascist currents in US civil society and polity**

The great recession of 2008 seems to have been the trigger for an outbreak of one of the most significant rightwing populist rebellions in US history. The neo-fascist



insurgency can be traced back several decades, to the far-right mobilisation that began in the wake of the crisis of hegemony brought about by the mass struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, especially the black and Chicano liberation struggles and other militant movements by Third World peoples; counter-cultural currents; and militant working-class struggles. Neo-fascist currents can be seen from the fundamentalist Christian Right and the Tea Party to the Oath Keepers, the Patriot movement, Militia movement, Minutemen, White Power movement, various neo-Nazi and Klan organisations, white nationalists, and so on. There is a growing cross-pollination between different sectors of the radical Right not seen in years. Space constraints allow no more than a cursory review here.

There is no single neo-fascist organisation or movement in the US and the distinct strands of what we consider to be the stirrings of neo-fascism in US civil and political society are quite disparate. Moreover, mass charismatic leaders of a twenty-first century fascist project have so far been largely missing in the US, although figures such as Sarah Palin and Glen Beck certainly appear as rightwing leaders who have garnered the support of neo-fascist currents within the Tea Party and the Christian fundamentalist movement. Some have seen the Tea Party as a movement that could galvanise distinct sectors, in particular a possible tripartite convergence of the Tea Party movement with the Christian Right and the political far Right housed in the Republican Party, although we believe it is premature to make such a prediction. It is significant that both the Christian Right and the Tea Party have wide-ranging and close connections with the Republican party (there is also broad overlapping membership, and many Christian Right and Tea Party leaders are also Republican party leaders and officials). In order to gain headway, any neo-fascist current would have to become grounded in the parties and the political system.

The Patriot movement and the militias that serve as its armed wing see the federal government as a plot to take away 'liberties' and support a 'one-world government'. It first came to prominence in the 1990s among people formerly associated with racially-based hate groups. In recent years, the Patriot movement has experienced a dramatic resurgence, led by the fastest growing Patriot group, the Oath Keepers. Founded in 2009 by Stewart Rhodes, a former aide to Republican congressman Ron Paul, who is considered one of the intellectual fathers of the Tea Party movement, the militarised Oath Keepers movement has a core membership of men and women in uniform, including soldiers, police officers and veterans. At regular ceremonies in every state, members reaffirm their official oaths of service, pledge to protect the Constitution and vow to disobey, by arms if necessary, 'unconstitutional' orders from what they view as an increasingly tyrannical government that threatens the US Constitution. By 2010, the Oath Keepers had at least one chapter in every state and were adding dozens of members daily, also recruiting from serving police officers and members of the military.

The formation of a clear Christian Right movement and its increasing identification with the Republican party developed during the 1960s and 1970s around the

1964 anti-civil rights candidacy of Barry Goldwater, seen as a landmark in the rise of a new far Right in US politics, and around President Richard Nixon's 1972 'law and order' campaign discourse, which took the place of overt racial appeals. The Christian Right also galvanised around opposition to the feminist movement, to gay rights, to abortion rights, to prohibition of school prayers and in favour of the traditional patriarchal family. These 'social issues' became the cutting edge of the so-called 'culture wars' as a counterpart to the rising neoliberal corporate agenda.

The most significant event in the consolidation of a politicised Christian Right was the creation of the Moral Majority in 1979, which disseminated the Christian Right's messages nationwide through Jerry Falwell's television network and began campaigns to register religious voters and encourage them to vote against liberal candidates.<sup>37</sup> The most important aspect of the Moral Majority was its role in the fusion of the Christian Right with an emerging political far Right, housed largely in the right wing of the Republican party. Ronald Reagan's elections resulted in the consolidation of the Christian Right's role in the Republican party, with a correspondingly decisive influence on future Republican platforms.

But the identification of a rightwing Christian fundamentalism with a political neo-fascist Right lodged in the Republican party – and in state institutions – reached a crescendo during the years of the presidency of George W. Bush, himself a declared 'born-again Christian'. A glimpse of the true nature of this fundamentalist movement became notorious in the chilling 2006 documentary by filmmakers Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady, *Jesus Camp*, which depicted evangelical Christian kids being trained as young soldiers in 'God's army' at a summer camp in North Dakota and being taught that they can 'take back America for Christ'. (In one scene, a cardboard cut-out of George W. Bush is presented to the children, who react by laying their hands on the figure and prostrating themselves as though in a religious procession.)

The long-term politicisation of US Christian conservatives, and their increasingly entrenched influence in the Republican party, have led some observers to see the Christian Right as the centrepiece of a potential US neo-fascism. Chris Hedges describes a fast-spreading network of influence in grassroots civil society through a rapidly rising and highly influential current known as 'dominionism', which, at the level of doctrine, takes its name from Genesis 1:26–31, in which God gives human beings 'dominion' over all creation, and, at the level of politics, calls for the radical Right church to take political power and to replace secular law with biblical law. According to Hedges:

Dominionism, born out of a theology known as Christian reconstructionism, seeks to politicise faith. It has, like all fascist movements, a belief in magic along with leadership adoration and a strident call for moral and physical supremacy of a master race, in this case American Christians ... It teaches that American Christians have been mandated by God to make America a Christian State ... America becomes, in this militant Biblicism, an agent of God, and all political

and intellectual opponents of America's Christian leaders are viewed ... as agents of Satan ... Labor unions, civil-rights laws and public schools will be abolished.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, the Tea Party movement exploded onto the US political scene in early 2009 in the wake of the Obama election and there is significant overlap with the Christian Right and other neo-fascist currents, especially the anti-immigrant movement.<sup>39</sup> The Tea Party is not just one organisation; in fact, there are six major groupings. One is Tea Party Express, which has supported Sarah Palin, has funded far-right Republican candidates for office, engages in anti-Islamic activism and promotes the 'birthers' - the movement claiming that Obama was born abroad and is therefore legally prohibited from being president. A second is Freedom Works, which is heavily funded by corporate donors and provides support to its preferred rightwing candidates and to anti-immigrant activists. A third is Tea Party Patriots, a grassroots group claiming over 2,000 local chapters. The Patriots calls for a repeal of the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution (which established income tax), espouses a vitriolic anti-immigrant position and is close to rightwing militia groups and such racist organisations as the Ku Klux Klan. Fourth is the Tea Party Nation, which organised a conference in 2010 featuring Sarah Palin, has strong ties to the Christian Right, the 'birthers' and the anti-immigrant movement. Fifth is Resistnet Tea Party, which focuses on internet and social network organising to push anti-abortion, pro-traditional marriage, anti-immigrant, anti-Islamic and anti-multicultural agendas. It also has overlapping membership with the Minutemen, the virulently anti-immigrant paramilitary hate group. Finally comes the 1776 Tea Party, which also overlaps with the Minutemen and the Christian Right.

Heavily funded by the Koch brothers, who in turn raise funds from a broad array of corporate donors, the Tea Party combines a programme tailor-made for the transnational corporate agenda with an utterly irrational, fanatically anti-Obama and often bizarre discourse about a secret 'socialist plot' to take over the US and about the need to restore a mythical past - cloaked in codes - of patriarchy, white supremacy and the restoration of middle-class stability and conservative community. The Tea Party's programmatic themes include: tax cuts for the rich and for corporations; lifting environmental and other government regulations on business; cutting and privatising social services, including social security; anti-unionism and especially attacks on public employee unions; anti-immigrant attacks and, beyond them, a broader anti-Latino, anti-black and anti-gay discourse, although often coded.

An overwhelmingly white movement, the Tea Party is the voice of the vulnerable Christian white lower and middle classes, whose world is in crisis and collapsing around them. Their race-/ethnic-based social privileges no longer provide protection against the ravages of global capitalism and, in response, they are attempting to retreat into a soothing fortress of rage and alignment

with the Christian Right, with other neo- or proto-fascist organisations and with an ideological fanaticism and moral absolutism promoted by their corporate sponsors. When decoded, Tea Party calls to 'take back the country' should be read as taking back the caste privileges that Partiers feel they have lost as a result of the breakdown of the traditional white race/culture supremacy that has underpinned those privileges. Tea Party rallies and Christian Right events exude mass popular enthusiasm as well as the anger characteristic of a neo-fascist current that cannot be reduced to the manipulation by capital and the reactionary Right.

### **Conclusion: uncertain futures**

All of the conditions and processes are present and percolating through for a twenty-first century fascism to take shape, and the social and political forces behind such a project are mobilising rapidly. Nonetheless, the US cannot be characterised at this time as fascist.

What is to be done? We do not have that answer, nor is an attempt to provide that answer within the scope of this essay. As we stated at the outset, our aspiration here includes a warning and a cry to action. We reiterate by way of conclusion that times of crisis open up space for collective agency and for contingency to influence the course of history in ways not possible in times of stability, so that short-term predictions are of little value. Under these circumstances, how masses of people understand the nature of the global crisis becomes itself a critical battleground in the struggle for alternative futures. Hence, crucial to any struggle in the US and in global society against neo-fascism, and crucial to the war that has been unleashed against the global working class, is to counter rightwing and neo-fascist discourse with a coherent explanation of the crisis and of possible solutions from a working-class, Leftist and democratic socialist-oriented perspective.

In the US, the challenge for anti-neo-fascist forces is how to build an anti-fascist front that could bring together a grassroots fightback with some of the reformist forces from above, yet in which *hegemony over such a fightback is exercised by popular forces from below and not by elite reformers*. Beyond the US, the counterweight to a twenty-first century fascism must be a co-ordinated fightback by the global working class that involves rebuilding working-class organisations, including independent trade unions and socialist movements, and extending cultures of social solidarity and transnational resistance. The only viable solution to the crisis of global capitalism is a massive redistribution of wealth and power downwards towards the poor majority of humanity along the lines of a twenty-first century democratic socialism, in which humanity is no longer at war with itself and with nature. And the only way such redistribution can come about is through mass transnational struggle from below. Otherwise, humanity may be headed for what Chew, among others, has termed a new Dark Ages.<sup>40</sup>

## References

- 1 For our view on the nature of the new global capitalism and its crisis, see, *inter alia*, William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: production, class, and state in a transnational world* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Robinson, *Latin America and Global Capitalism* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Robinson, 'The crisis of global capitalism: cyclical? structural? systemic?', in Martijn Konings (ed.), *Beyond the Subprime Headlines: critical perspectives on the financial crisis* (London, Verso, 2010). Robinson has emphasised four interrelated and mutually constitutive dimensions to what we term the crisis of global capitalism. The first is a crisis of social polarisation worldwide, of social reproduction. The second is a crisis of over-accumulation. The third is a crisis of state legitimacy and political authority (or domination). And the fourth is a crisis of sustainability or an ecological crisis.
- 2 See Philip Aldrick, 'Davos WEF 2011: wealth inequality is the "Most serious challenge for the world"', *The Telegraph*, 26 January, electronic edition, downloaded on 2/1/2011 from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financetopics/davos/8283310/Davos-WEF-2011-Wealth-inequality-is-the-most-serious-challenge-for-the-world.html>.
- 3 On the structural and potentially systemic nature of the current crisis, see, in particular, Robinson, 'The crisis of global capitalism', *op. cit.*
- 4 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London, Verso, 2007).
- 5 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, second edition (Boston, Beacon, 2001).
- 6 Claus Offe, 'Structural problems of the capitalist state,' in K. Von Beyme (ed.), *German Political Studies*, Vol. 1, (London, Sage, 1974), pp. 31-57.
- 7 Redistribution is still possible at the nation-state level when distinct class and social forces (such as in Venezuela) take control of, and transform, the neoliberal national state. Even then, however, the larger global system and the structural power that transnational capital is able to exercise over the direct power of national states severely constrains redistributive projects, unless, in our view, such projects: 1) are transnational, as, in Robinson's words, 'neither Keynesianism nor socialism are any longer possible in one country' (Robinson, *A Theory...*, *op. cit.*); 2) move beyond redistribution to effect a more fundamental transformation in class/property relations.
- 8 Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, (London, Verso, 1973).
- 9 Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York, Vintage, 2005), esp. pp. 78-80.
- 10 Two classical Marxist texts on twentieth-century fascism are Franz Newmann, *Behemoth: the structure and practice of National Socialism, 1933-1934* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1942, republished by Ivan R. Dee Publishers, Chicago, 2009, with an introduction by Peter Hayes), and R. Palme Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution* (1934, reprinted by Rockville, MD, Wildside Press, 2009).
- 11 Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York, Henry Holt, 1941, 1969). Fromm is not alone in emphasising the socio-psychological dimensions of fascism. Hannah Arendt and Wilhelm Reich, among others, have done so as well. See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, Benediction Books, 2009 [1951]); Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (London, Souvenir Press Ltd, 1997 [1933]).
- 12 Fromm, *ibid.*, p. 216.
- 13 Bertram Gross, *Friendly Fascism: the new face of power in America* (Boston, South End Press, 1980).
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 230.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 198.
- 16 On this point see Alfonso Gonzales, 'The 2006 Mega Marchas in greater Los Angeles: counter-hegemonic moment and the future of El Migrante Struggle', *Latino Studies* (Vol. 7, no. 1), pp. 30-39.
- 17 See, *inter alia*, Jane Mayer, 'Covert operations: the billionaire brothers who are waging a war against Obama', *New Yorker* (30 August 2010); and the documentary *Billionaire Tea Party*,



directed and produced by Taki Oldham and released by Larrikin Films, 2010; see website at <http://www.billionairesteaparty.com/>.

- 18 On these details, see Robinson, 'The crisis of global capitalism', op. cit., and also William I. Robinson, 'Global capital leviathan,' *Radical Philosophy*, (No. 165, January–February 2011), pp. 2-6.
- 19 For these details, see Gross, op. cit., pp. 244–245.
- 20 See, e.g., Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Retail Revolution: how Walmart created a brave new world of business* (New York, Metropolitan Books, 2009), see esp. chapter 5, 'Unions keep out'.
- 21 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: foundations of the critique of political economy* (New York, Penguin, 1993 [1858/1939]).
- 22 Tom Petruno, 'Corporate giants awash in cash as economy picks up', *Los Angeles Times* (24 March 2010), pp. A1, A8.
- 23 The ILO reported that in the late twentieth century, some one-third of the global labour force was unemployed. International Labor Organization (ILO), *World Employment Report 1996–97*, (Geneva, ILO/United Nations, 1997).
- 24 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007). See also, *inter alia*, Tara Herivel and Paul Wright (eds), *Prison Nation: the warehousing of America's poor* (New York, Routledge, 2003); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: mass incarceration in the age of color blindness* (New York, New Press, 2010).
- 25 See, generally on this topic, William I. Robinson, 'Aquí estamos y no nos vamos: global capital and immigrant rights', *Race & Class* (Vol. 48, no. 2, 2006), pp. 77–91.
- 26 Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society* (New York, Routledge, 2000), p. 9.
- 27 Southern Poverty Law Center, 'Immigrant backlash: hate crimes against Latinos flourish', *Intelligence Report* (No. 128, winter 2007), p. 1.
- 28 Southern Poverty Law Center, *Intelligence Report* (No. 141, spring 2011).
- 29 Department of Homeland Security, US Government, *Rightwing Extremism: current economic and political climate fueling resurgence in radicalization and recruitment* (7 April 2009).
- 30 On the US state integrating Iraq into global capitalism, and on militarised accumulation more generally, see, *inter alia*, William I. Robinson, 'Beyond the theory of imperialism: global capitalism and the transnational state', *Societies without Borders* (No. 2, 2007), pp. 5–26; Robinson, 'The crisis of global capitalism', op. cit. On the privatisation of warfare, see, *inter alia*, Jeremy Scahill's noted work, *Blackwater: the rise of the world's most powerful mercenary army* (New York, Nation Books, 2008), as well as Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism* (New York, Picador, 2008).
- 31 On the CCA-SB1070 link and related details, see the journalistic exposé by Laura Sullivan, 'Prison economics help drive Arizona immigration law,' *National Public Radio*, 28 October 2010, print version downloaded on 11/16/2010 from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130833741>, and also Catalina Nieto, 'The for-profit con to criminalize immigrants', 4 January 2011, *Commondreams*, <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2011/01/04-12>, and accessed on 5 February 2011. For the Andrews citation, see Tom Barry, 'The national imperative to imprison immigrants for profit', Center for International Policy, Americas Program, posted at CIP Americas Program webpage on 3/10/2009 and accessed on 16/11/2010 at <http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/1662>. For general analysis, see *inter alia*, Tanya Golash-Boza, 'The immigrant industrial complex: why we enforce immigration policies destined to fail', *Sociology Compass* (Vol. 3, 2009), pp. 1–15.
- 32 See, e.g. Bruce Ackerman, 'A less political military,' *Los Angeles Times* (21 June 2010), p. A9.
- 33 Project on Defense Alternatives, 'The Pentagon and deficit reduction', PDA Briefing Memo #47, Washington, DC, Commonwealth Institute, 1 March 2011, p. 1.



- 34 Project on Defense Alternatives, 'An undisciplined defense: understanding the \$2 trillion surge in US defense spending', Washington, DC, Commonwealth Institute, 18 January 2010.
- 35 See Tom Hayden, 'War never-ending', *Los Angeles Times* (28 March 2010), p. A31.
- 36 Stan Goff, 'Sowing the seeds of fascism in America,' *Truthdig* (internet magazine), posted on October 3, 2006, and accessed on 7/21/07 from [http://www.truthdig.com/dig/item/200601003\\_white\\_supremacism\\_sexism\\_militarism/](http://www.truthdig.com/dig/item/200601003_white_supremacism_sexism_militarism/).
- 37 Donald K. Williams, *God's Own Party* (New York, Oxford, 2010), pp. 177ff.
- 38 Chris Hedges, *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the war on America* (New York, Free Press, 2006), pp. 10-12.
- 39 Peter Montgomery, 'The Tea Party and Religious Right movements: frenemies with benefits'. Paper presented at the Conference on the Tea Party Movement, University of California at Berkeley, 22 October 2010, pp. 9-10. Polling data presented by Montgomery show that '47 per cent of those who consider themselves part of the Tea Party movement, and 57 per cent of Tea Partiers who identify as Christians, say they are also part of the Christian conservative or Religious Right movement'.
- 40 Sing C. Chew, *The Recurring Dark Ages: ecological stress, climate changes, and system transformation* (Lanham, MD, AltaMira Press, 2007).