

Debate

“Functional Substitutes for Fascism” in the Era of Globalization

This journal published in 1998 (Vol. XVIII, No. 2) an article by David Pizzo, “The Museumization of Fascism: ‘Functional Substitutes for Fascism’ in the Era of Globalization,” that debated an important intervention by Achin Vanaik in the continuing discussions on Indian “fascism.” Vanaik originally presented his thesis in an article entitled “Situating the Threat of Hindu Communalism: Problems with the Fascist Paradigm,” which appeared in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXIX, No. 28, 1994, and was subsequently republished as a chapter in his book, The Furies of Indian Communalism, London: Verso, 1997. We are pleased to publish Vanaik’s response to Pizzo, followed by some further thoughts on fascism by David Pizzo and Vasant Kaiwar.

Reply to Pizzo

Achin Vanaik

In welcoming David Pizzo’s critique of my views on fascism I am not simply engaging in a formal courtesy.¹ For I discern in that critique a motive and purpose that I respect and appreciate and which stands in striking contrast to the way in which most Indian Marxists have dealt with the issue of fascism here. The latter have treated the issue of fascism in third world countries in an utterly unproblematic manner.

The history of actually existing fascisms in inter-war Europe has been “raided” at various levels — cultural, political, economic (sometimes with considerable sophistication affording illuminating but partial insights) — to justify fascist characterizations in India. The number of Indian Marxist intellectuals who have been troubled by the idea that this might constitute a serious theoretical departure from classical understand-

ings of Marxism can barely be counted on the fingers of one hand.

But then, the starting point for their own Marxist theorizations is not the classical tradition represented by the likes of Trotsky, Bauer, Thalheimer but the understandings of fascism propagated by the Stalinist Comintern from 1924 onwards, with the 1928 thesis plus amendments in the 1935 Congress, constituting their basic pole of reference. Gramsci has been appropriated by Indian sympathizers, supporters and apologists of Stalinism and Maoism for his specific insights into the character of Italian fascism and his general insights into the cultural-ideological dimension of fascism but without using him to directly challenge that Comintern theoretical tradition. Though Trotsky is the single most important reference point in the classical Marxist tradition for an understanding of fascism, he is effectively ignored (when not excoriated) by most such Indian Marxists. Such Marxists, unconcerned as they are by the need for reassessing or revisiting that classical tradition, when talking about Indian fascism do not for the most part qualify their characterization by talking of "neo-fascism" or "semi-fascism" or of "functional substitutes for fascism." With great confidence and self-assurance they talk simply of fascism and the "fascist threat" in India.

In refreshing contrast, Pizzo is much more circumspect and perfectly willing to emphasize the significance of the differences between such "third world fascism" and "classical fascism" rooted in the study of metropolitan fascism by using such qualified nomenclatural forms even as he insists that commonalities justify their emplacement within a wider, more universal and general theory of fascism. Moreover, fully conscious of the need to *develop* Marxist theorizations of fascism to suit our times, Pizzo self-consciously tries to do just that. He recognizes that there is a theoretical problem and seeks to address it. This is something that I can only endorse and welcome and wish

others, especially Indian Marxists, would emulate.

I have many points of both agreement and disagreement with Pizzo but I will not try to explore all or even most of these. Instead, I will isolate what I believe to be the most fundamental points of difference so that contrasting perspectives in theorizing fascism, even among Marxists, can be clearly posed. It is not quite accurate to claim as Pizzo does, that I have relegated the "fascist situation" to the museum of history, or that I believe fascism is a phenomenon "that only applies to a narrow set of events in one place during one brief period." Even for classical Marxism, fascism was seen as a recurring possibility, i.e. capable of temporal extension. Both in chapter five of my book and in the introductory chapter one, I acknowledge this point and pronounce myself agnostic but skeptical about the possibility of such temporal extension. But I am not categorical in ruling out the possibility of such fascist recurrence in the capitalism of our times precisely because I have great respect for the power of that classical tradition of Marxism which believed in this recurrent possibility.

Pizzo is certainly correct in stating that my central point of reference in discussing the contemporary relevance of fascism is that tradition. But also because of my respect for the explanatory power of that tradition I do categorically rule out any spatial extension of the applicability of the fascist paradigm outside the metropolitan heartlands (its advanced and core regions of North America, Europe and Japan) to third world dependent capitalist countries. This still does not mean that I cannot in any circumstances be persuaded that I am wrong or that there can be no revision of, or departure from, that tradition's understanding of fascism to suit our times. But any effort to do so should respect and recognize the great strengths of that explanatory framework, be explicit in confronting its core theses and persuasive in justifying a departure from them.

A universal theory of fascism is what the classical understanding aimed to provide. But it was adamant that this should never be confused with, or interpreted to mean, universalizing the possibility of fascism to any or every capitalist state. It is the Stalinist Comintern which in 1928 as part of its "third period" thesis made two basic theoretical claims, not held then or subsequently by the main legatees of the classical Marxist approach to the study of fascism — the trio of Trotsky, Bauer and Thalheimer (along with the contributions of Gramsci).

The first and completely new claim was that fascism was a general phenomenon common to all capitalist countries; the second, was a heteronomous and highly instrumentalist understanding of fascism as the "open dictatorship" of monopoly capital. The theoretical consequences of these two quite unwarranted claims have carried on to this day.

Pizzo says, "It is my belief that fascism is a radical form of 'emergency surgery' to save the most fundamental structures of global capitalist accumulation during periods of acute crisis." I have no quarrel with such a view. And yet the direction Pizzo subsequently takes from here is not mine. To put it another way, fascism is a last resort attempt to resolve the most acute crisis of *capitalism as a world system*, not of capitalism in one country! This is a crisis so acute that the fundamental structures of world capitalism are gravely threatened. There can *only* be so acute a crisis of world capitalism (given its combined and uneven character) if there is such a crisis in one or more of its core metropolitan regions. The basic methodological point of departure for any assessment of an epoch or era or situation of fascist crisis must itself be the international arena. But the political expression of that crisis is revealed at the level of the nation-state in the deep dilemma of a frightening fragmentation of a dominant national bourgeois bloc which therefore faces the possibility of revolutionary usurpation by a

combative working class, which, if it took place, would mark a dramatic shift in the relationship of class forces *worldwide* against capital.

That is to say, fascism is not just the most extreme form of national political and class reaction but *simultaneously and inescapably* the most extreme form of *international* reaction. This distinctive form of the fascist dialectic of the international-national is possible only because the national terrain over which the politics of fascism is played out is one or more of the imperialist heartlands itself. In short, imperialist competition of a most acute kind is also a feature of the fascist crisis. This was a crucial feature of historical fascism which gave it such gravity as a world-impacting phenomenon. The penumbra of fascism, it may be argued, should be seen as capable of extending to other developed capitalist countries which are not serious players in the game of imperialist competition. Some may even wish to argue that this penumbra of the fascist threat be seen as capable of extension to dependent capitalist countries. But even here some way of registering the qualitative differences between metropolitan fascisms and "peripheral fascisms" would have to be made.

No wonder, in the post-war era those outstanding Marxist theorists who saw themselves as belonging to traditions which were the legatees of classical Marxist theorizing of fascism at its best, insisted that fascism proper was a feature of imperialist countries only.² Using notions of semi-fascism, neo-fascism, peripheral-fascism to describe brutal authoritarian-nationalist states in the third world should not become an attempt to imply the existence of some "process" of "creeping fascism" from the geographical periphery to the center, or even as a symptom of the shape of things to come in this era of the Long Downturn (post-1973) or what Eric Hobsbawm calls the Third Age of the "Landslide."³ That this period of the Long Downturn provides the objective foundation for the emergence of a new

politics of barbarism-reaction worldwide is an unobjectionable inference. That such forms of barbarism as may emerge bear significant resemblances to the barbarisms of the past, namely fascism, is also unobjectionable. I have made both these points in my introductory chapter. But the *methodological* starting point for even understanding the validity and strength of the fascist threat today *has* to be the investigation of the metropolis *not* the periphery.

I will come back to this point again, but let me take up now the second claim of the Stalinist Comintern — the effective denial of the very considerable *autonomy* of fascist state power from class power. Now there is nothing in Pizzo's critique that suggests any sympathy with this Comintern approach. But nor is there anything which suggests that he is explicitly rejecting such a heteronomous claim. That is to say, nowhere does Pizzo face up directly to another central proposition of the classical Marxist understanding of fascism, even if it is for the purpose of rejecting its validity for the building of a more contemporary theory of universal fascism. The emergence of fascist rule represented the *political expropriation* of the bourgeoisie and therefore, the *most autonomous* form that the capitalist state can take. This is the extreme end of the spectrum represented by the Marxist commitment to the theory that in capitalism the state has only "relative autonomy" from class rule. It is precisely this understanding that inspired Trotsky, Bauer, Thalheimer (even Gramsci — "Caesarism") to try and understand and explain this autonomy better through their respective attempts to develop Marx's views on Bonapartism into a fuller theory of the fascist state. What a contrast this was to the thinking of the Comintern!

The fascist option had to be endorsed, indeed it became incumbent to do so because the political unity and coherence of the dominant class bloc was imperiled as never before because of its acute fragmentation and danger of decomposition in an ongoing class

struggle with a powerful and organized working class. The counterrevolution begins before the seizure of state power and is completed after it. Crucial to the process is the nature of fascism as a *mass movement* of the petty bourgeoisie. When Barrington Moore cites pre-war Japan as an example of Asian fascism or when Pizzo cites Indonesia (1965) and Chile (1973) as candidates for the status of third world fascisms, this is effectively an endorsement of the possibility of "fascism from above."

However, historical fascism was always a counter-revolution from below. It is not enough to cite middle-class support for the Chilean coup (or even the truckers' strike) or for the Indonesian military coup. There has to be a petty bourgeois *mass movement* and an *open, mobilizational politics of some duration* (which at least characterized what was happening in India from the late 1980s to the early 1990s and remains a repeatable feature of the contemporary political scene) in which the key vehicle for that mobilization — the fascist party — grows. In the fascism from above perspective, one can dispense with the necessity of there being a fascist party or movement or both. The military, with or without a suborned party, can apparently do the job.

I will not totally dismiss such revisionist attempts to construct a new theory of fascism. But the last-ditch character of fascism because of this fact of "political expropriation" applies not just to any or every national bourgeois bloc but only to the bourgeois bloc of *dominant* classes in dominant, i.e., imperialist countries, not to dominated classes or dominated class blocs in dominated, i.e., third world dependent countries. The meaning of fascism as the emergence of a world crisis requires nothing less. Pizzo agrees with me that even the necessity for third world fascist resolutions resides ultimately in what first world bourgeoisies, not third world ones, believe is in their interests. The latter, after all, are dependent bourgeoisies located in de-

pendent class blocs where the "hegemonic" component is "externally" powered.

But unlike me, Pizzo believes the fascist option is not simply the last-ditch resort of a terribly beleaguered national-metropolitan bourgeois bloc whose deep predicament comes from a *direct* class confrontation with its workforce threatening its survival and hegemony. It can also come from the much milder challenge simply to its imperialist interests in the third world. Corresponding to this much more diluted conception of challenge comes a much more diluted conception of the "fascist option" as a kind of "foreign policy option" which can be "consciously exported... to the third world."

How much dilution a theory can suffer in the process of revision and yet remain sufficiently true to the essentials of that theory so as to constitute a development and advance and not an "un-Marxist" departure is a serious question. What are the "essentials" of a Marxist understanding of fascism which have to be preserved? If indeed, classical Marxist understandings and the actual experiences of the European fascisms of the inter-war period is both our methodological and historical-empirical foundation then what degree of "Marxist departure" can be accepted? The difficulty in answering this definitively suggests that there is not going to be any definitive theoretical resolution of the differences that exist between Pizzo and myself. But before leaving it at that let me take up some other points.

At one point in his article, Pizzo argues (by way of making analogous references) for incorporating greater flexibility. He says, if capitalism, colonialism and imperialism have changed over time, why not fascism? But again, the crucial question is how much allowance for variation in fascism is to be made? Indeed, in this casual comparison between the phenomena of imperialism/capitalism and fascism it is easy to forget that there is a crucial distinction. Impe-

rialism and capitalism are *continuous processes* while fascism is not! Fascism is not because acute capitalist/imperialist crisis is not a continuous process but an occasional or periodic or recurring feature. That is why it is legitimate to talk of the possible "evolution" of capitalism/imperialism, of its changing or new "phase(s)" or "stage(s)."

Of course, during the inter-war period, all Marxists subscribed to the view that the imperialism of their period was the "highest stage," i.e. in some sense the peak or last stage in the history of capitalism's productive dynamism. Fascism was the expression of a capitalism forced to try and resolve its acute crisis in this moribund stage and if successful through fascist victories then able to buy time and a new lease of life for itself before the contradictions of the longer-enduring epoch of its moribund stage of existence brought matters to a revolutionary or near-revolutionary head once again. Hence the recurring temptation of fascism. The problem that has faced post-war Marxists is that they have had to retain this conclusion about fascism's recurring possibilities under very different assumptions, not shared with inter-war Marxists in their times, about the character of capitalism/imperialism.

The point I am trying to make here, is that one cannot talk of new phases or stages or of the "evolution" of fascism in the way that one can for capitalism or imperialism. In the dialectic of continuity and change that can be claimed to characterize all three phenomena, the dimension of change that can be allowed for in developing a more adequate and contemporary theory of capitalism and imperialism will be greater than that which can be allowed for in a theory of fascism, precisely because of the more continuous and therefore "evolving" character of the first two. This point can perhaps again be highlighted by noting the difference between colonialism and neo-colonialism, itself corresponding to the evolution or change in capitalism/imperialism.

Post-war imperialism is not the era of colonialism but of neo-colonialism. The shift in nomenclature is crucial because for all the continuities between the two, the change (political independence) is of such great import that one has to alter the term of description. It cannot be claimed that neo-colonialism is a concept that can be subsumed under a wider theory of colonialism. Both colonialism and neo-colonialism have to be subsumed under a newer, historically broader and more developed theory of imperialism. Moreover, imperialism-colonialism or imperialism-neo-colonialism are not connected as in some dialectical relationship where the explanation of the sources of one is inseparable from the explanation of the sources of the other. It is the first term "imperialism" that provides the explanatory key to the relationship and the second term in the duality is essentially derivative from the first.

The admittedly analogical comparison that Pizzo is making between the changing character (and theories) of colonialism-neo-colonialism and fascism-neo-fascism would be more precise if he did not insist that theories of post-war "neo-fascism" in the third world are to be subsumed under a wider theory of fascism. Rather, the second (neo-fascism) should be contrasted with the first (fascism) in acknowledgement of how basic changes on the ground (a new phase) in capitalism/imperialism have created the necessity for change in terminological description regarding colonialism-neo-colonialism. And just as in the imperialism-neo-colonialism duality, the second derives from the first, might not the relationship between metropolitan fascism-peripheral fascism be similarly linked rather than the latter presumed to be capable of separate and independent existence from the former? But these contemplations of mine are also by way of manipulating analogies and I do not want to claim more for them other than their ability to provide suggestive illuminations, not clinching arguments.

Perhaps I can sum up my central claim in this way. The world arena and therefore the metropolitan heartlands must be the methodological starting point for any investigation of the nature of the economic, and its corresponding socio-political, crisis of the contemporary capitalist system. Robert Brenner in a recent text, "The Economics of Global Turbulence" has sought to provide nothing less than a new, overarching theory of contemporary capitalism/imperialism.⁴ For all its remarkable strengths this text has also been severely criticized for its "unMarxist" identification of the "horizontal" competition between capitals rather than the "vertical" conflict between capital and labor as the central systemic contradiction. [One can easily infer the negative effects that accepting Brenner's framework would have on the claim that the fascist paradigm retains as crucial a relevance today as in the past]. Of course, one does not have to accept Brenner's framework. But there is one enormous and incontestable methodological virtue in his attempt to forge a new and better understanding of world capitalism — his insistence on locating his core analyses in the USA, Germany and Japan and their respective radial zones.

This is as it has to be. The corollary to such an economic analysis would have to be the socio-political analysis of the national-bourgeois blocs corresponding to this economic architectural layout. The key questions then would be whether there is (are) intertwining socio-economic-political crisis(es)? When might it (they) emerge? What forms would it (they) take? And so on.

In the introductory chapter of my book I stress that in this period of the Long Downturn there has to be a politics of international as well as national reaction. A contemporary theory of fascism can claim to be precisely this — an explanation of the politics (its sources, effects, possibilities and prospects) of international reaction. This, in effect, is what Pizzo aims to

do and feels justified in calling this an effort to construct a more universal theory of fascism in which the classical Marxist theories of fascism can be subsumed. I have already said enough about my doubts in this regard and whether this is the right thing to do. But in constructing such a wider theory of international reaction in the form of a universal theory of fascism the dialectic of the international-national has to be both maintained and respected. To do this, it is an inversion of priorities, almost a waste of time, to look at what is happening in the third world. You have to look first and foremost at Europe, Japan, North America. It is from the concrete analyses of the concrete situations there that the crucial building blocks for constructing a more universal and contemporary theory of fascism (if it is possible) will emerge.

But precisely because the third world is where the more radical forms of rightwing political authoritarian-nationalisms are to be sighted, their experiences have been given a theoretical and methodological weight in the effort to understand the political trajectory of world capitalism today that they can never deserve.

Finally, regarding India and "Indian fascism" I wish to make only one point. The central instrumentality of fascism is the state. The central instrumentalities of the so-called fascist forces of India — the Sangh Combine — is not just or primarily the state, important though it is, and determined though the Sangh is to capture and suborn it. It is also the RSS itself. It is the RSS that is meant to be the skeletal structure on which the anatomy of the "new India" is to be constructed. Since for fascism the central instrument is the state, everything has to be invested in its seizure and use. The very purpose of fascist activity in civil society — the fascist movement — is to help achieve this paramount aim. So important is this — state occupation as the culmination of fascist efforts and the state as its chief "transformative" instrument — that once fascist forces achieve state power they will not

relinquish it before completing their project.

In the Sangh, because the RSS is considered at least as important as the state, there has also been a noticeable (and enduring) tension and uncertainty regarding: (a) RSS attitudes towards the state and the "corrupting" ideological impact on the RSS of involvement in conventional political activity; (b) a clear determination that the political party vehicle, whether Jan Sangh or the BJP, be subordinate to the greater authority of the RSS; (c) a longer term and more flexible attitude to the question of state power ("we can wait and try again even if we lose elections"); (d) a sustained effort to use state resources to strengthen the various organizations of the Sangh Combine, most importantly the RSS. (Of course, the RSS should infiltrate the state apparatuses but never be subsumed or subordinated by it, even by "their own" state); (e) activity in the terrain of civil society is not the mere preparation for ascension to state power but the crucial terrain itself, indeed more important than the state.

In my chapter on fascism, I sought to drive home certain crucial distinctions between the danger of fascism and the danger represented by the Sangh. I want to end by re-quoting that stress. The danger represented by the RSS-led Sangh is, in fact, "more deep-rooted than fascism, more enduring and more difficult to completely or comprehensively destroy." Thus the "ultimate decay or defeat of the Hindu state would not have the same decisively damaging effect on Hindu communalism as the ultimate decay or defeat of the fascist state has on the forces of fascism."

Notes

¹ David Pizzo, "The Museumization of Fascism: 'Functional Substitutes for Fascism' in the Era of Globalization," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, XVIII,2, (1998) pp.96-107.

² If it is not already clear from my book then let me make it explicitly so: I see the Trotskyist theoretical tradition as embodied in its outstanding post-war thinkers such as Isaac Deutscher and Ernest

Mandel as providing the best point of reference in the post-war period for trying to understand the politics of our times. Mandel has also provided a more concentrated, systematic and concise presentation of Trotsky's basic propositions regarding fascism — an invaluable contribution. I also fully share Perry Anderson's typically perspicacious judgment: "Trotsky's writings on fascism represent the only direct and developed analysis of a modern capitalist state in the whole of classical Marxism." See, P. Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* London: Verso, 1984, p.119.

³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, London: Michael Joseph, 1994.

⁴ Robert Brenner, "The Economics of Global Turbulence," *New Left Review*, 229, May-June 1998.

A Continuing Discussion on Fascism, Globaliza- tion, and the "Third World"

David Pizzo

And the May 1968 events in France were only a prelude. Only if this wave should recede into failure, and if the disappointment of the younger generation should coincide with an upset in the economy, would fascism, in turn, have some chance of success.

Ernest Mandel, 1969¹

I want to begin my answer to "Reply to Pizzo" by thanking Achin Vanaik again for taking seriously this ongoing dialogue on the issues of fascism and "globalization." While it is clear that we differ on many issues, our exchange has been enormously fruitful for me in thinking about a problem that has far more significance than mere academic banter. Far too often, I feel that the debates about "globalization" both in the media and in the academy itself have been completely de-historicized and, indeed, almost entirely divorced from the realities of "The New Barbarism" that has come to characterize our world.² Drawing on his own work and on the most useful elements of Trotsky's Marxian theories of fascism, Vanaik has presented us with conceptual models and points of departure that avoid both of these intellectual pitfalls.

I feel I have a vast amount of intellectual terrain that I must cover in response to Vanaik's detailed comments, so I will therefore apologize in advance for keeping my points and the amount of empirical support I provide very brief. But as I said, I view this as an ongoing conversation that would profit enormously from the input of other scholars, and as such my claims are merely intended to stimulate further discussion among those willing to approach a topical issue that itself has been relegated to the "museum of history."

In my "The Museumization of Fascism"³ I attempted to highlight and explicate what I view as a "functional substitute for fascism" in the post-1945 era. I contend that the "recurring temptation of fascism" noted by Trotsky and Mandel must not only be examined in relation to events in the so-called Third World after de-colonization, but that this "recurrent fascism" must also be situated and understood in terms of the very real qualitative and quantitative changes that have occurred in the global economic, social, and political order since that time. It is certainly true that the

"fascist situation" of the inter-war period was characterized by structural and conjunctural features dramatically different from the situation faced both locally and globally by post-war authoritarian movements and regimes and their professed targets. Fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s must be viewed spatially, structurally, and conceptually as products of their time and place. I would, however, argue that certain crucial features of the European fascist constellation remain viable and discernable in contexts other than inter-war Europe. The perceived need to liquidate organized opposition to the state and capital (at the time it was labor and the "red menace") violently and completely during a time of profound structural crisis has indeed arisen in other contexts, including in the "semicolonial countries."⁴ Regimes such as Chile under Pinochet and Indonesia under Suharto deployed massive amounts of repressive police and military force against all visible manifestations of the "communist threat," practically annihilating organized labor and other grassroots organizations within their borders. These civil wars and the radical "emergency surgery" that ended them were the result of deep contradictions and tensions in the global economy and more particularly inside the countries in question. Such internal "counterrevolutions from above"⁵ not only made use of the methods of the European fascist regimes and at times explicitly acknowledged their affinity and debt to them, they also aimed to save the crucial sinews and structures of accumulation in an even more naked way than their fascist predecessors. Furthermore, this radical surgery to save elite structures of political and economic power enjoyed even more material and ideological support from the "Western Democracies" than Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany had in the early years of their respective regimes.⁶

While I agree with Vanaik that while it is difficult to situate "Third World fascism" (if there is such a thing)

and classical fascism within the same paradigm, enough features of the latter were incorporated in the former, often by design, to demand the conceptualization of some sort of "functional substitute for fascism" applicable globally. What one wishes to call this, be it "neo-fascism" or something similar, is less important than recognizing that some of the most crucial tenets of Trotsky's and Vanaik's fascism have indeed been retained and are observable in the "semicolonial countries," particularly once one notes the dramatic changes that have occurred since Trotsky (and Mandel) created their intellectual frameworks. Vanaik is correct in claiming that I did not explicitly confront Trotsky's understanding of fascism, and I believe that I must briefly explain how I interpret the model with which he and his later advocates have provided us. I believe that many of elements of his theory are as viable and insightful now as they were in the 1930s; other aspects need drastic revision due less to hindsight than to the profoundly different global context in which all of us must operate.

What is clear is that Trotsky himself ruled out "normal" military dictatorships as fascist formations. It is worth quoting at length the contrast he drew between the two:

We must not identify war dictatorship—the dictatorship of the military machine, of the staff, of finance capital—with a fascist dictatorship. For the latter, there is first necessary a feeling of desperation of large masses of people. When the revolutionary parties betray them, when the vanguard of the workers shows its incapacity to lead the people to victory—then the farmers, the small business men, the unemployed, the soldiers, etc., become capable of supporting a fascist movement, but only then.

He went on further to state that "A military dictatorship is a purely bureaucratic institution, reinforced by the military machine and based upon the disorientation of the people and their submission to it. After some time their feelings can change and they can become rebel-

lions against the dictatorship.⁷ In this formulation, one crucial difference of course is the nature of the mass movement that helps bring the fascist party to power. But the second crucial distinction is that military dictatorships as they existed in Trotsky's time were unable to achieve the complete destruction, or at least the submission of the fascist state's selected targets. The *form* of the dictatorship matters less than the *function*. Elsewhere he spelled this out explicitly:

When a state turns fascist, it does not mean only that the forms and methods of government are changed in accordance with the pattern set by Mussolini—the changes in this sphere ultimately play a minor role—but it means first of all for the most part that the workers organizations are annihilated; that the proletariat is reduced to an amorphous state; and that a system of administration is created which penetrates deeply into the masses and which serves to frustrate the independent crystallization of the proletariat. Therein is the gist of fascism...⁸

The central element that distinguishes fascism from "mere dictatorships" is its ability almost totally to exterminate all opposition and thereby save the crucial elements of the socio-economic system (even if doing this requires the fascist state to appropriate or even destroy many elements of the system itself). This line of reasoning was echoed by Mandel:

Fascism is not simply a new stage in the process by which the executive of the bourgeois state becomes stronger and more independent. It is not simply "the open dictatorship of capital." It is a *special* form of the "strong executive" and of the "open dictatorship," which is characterized by the complete destruction of *all* workers organizations—even the most moderate ones... it is the attempt to violently prevent *any* form of organized workers' self-defense, by completely atomizing the workers.⁹

The key to understanding fascism for Mandel and Trotsky was a) the development of the "fascist situation," which resulted from major social and economic upheaval, itself the result of long-term structural prob-

lems, and b) the ability of the fascist state to carry out a sweeping program of eradication in order to resolve, at least temporarily, the crisis. The form of this program matters less than the function and the end result (*complete destruction*).

Mandel and Trotsky claimed that the "strong states" of Europe and the "semicolonial world" must be distinguished from the fascist states in that they do not have the technological or organizational means to carry out such program:

Neither a military dictatorship nor a pure police state—not to speak of an absolute monarchy—has sufficient capabilities to atomize and demoralize for very long a conscious social class with millions of members and thereby to prevent the reappearance of even the elementary class struggles that are periodically produced by the simple play of market laws. To accomplish these ends, the big bourgeoisie needs a movement that can set the masses in motion on its side, that can wear down and demoralize the more conscious parts of the proletariat by systemic mass terror and street warfare, and that, after the seizure of power, can totally destroy the proletarian mass organizations and thereby leave the conscious elements not only atomized not also demoralized and resigned.¹⁰

The fact of the matter is that the amount of force and surveillance deployable by "strong states" has grown exponentially since the 1930s, or even since Mandel was writing in the 1970s. The sophistication and destructive capacity of new technology, methodology, and mechanisms of social control and "counter-insurgency" have reached unprecedented heights not only in the First World. By way of "military aid" and other transfers they have become decisive tools in the repertoires of "semicolonial" states attempting to achieve the same "successes" recorded by the fascist regimes of the inter-war period.¹¹ Indeed, the global revolutionary upheaval of Mandel's time was followed not only by "The Long Downturn," but also and not coincidentally by a series of catastrophes for the

forces of 1968. The annihilation of the Socialist Party in Chile was only the most extreme example of this.¹² All throughout Latin America and other parts of the so-called Third World, extremist regimes with the massive financial and technological backing of the "core powers" went to war with not only labor, but with civilian organizations of all kinds. In El Salvador the situation was so chaotic and violent that even the activists operating within the highest levels of the Church were eliminated with the coldest brutality. This global, elite assault in both the First and the Third Worlds on "blockages" to accumulation was even graced with such euphemisms as "counter-insurgency warfare" and the even more deceptive term "low intensity conflict." While such civil wars and assaults on anti-systemic forces may have been "low intensity" for the policy makers in Washington, they were apocalyptic for the literally millions of men and women who became their targets.

I would argue that Mandel fundamentally misunderstood what was occurring before his very eyes; he did not have the benefit of hindsight and worse was yet to come.¹³ His view of the "strong states" of the semicolonial world presents Third World dictatorships as merely attempts by local bourgeois elements to win a larger share of the "imperial pie."¹⁴ The profound and pervasive intermingling of First World imperial elites with their local allies ("*compradors*") renders such dismissive judgments, in my opinion, inaccurate and unhelpful. Nor can one argue that the process "on the ground" occurred simply at the behest of bureaucrats in Washington or London. Local elements of multinational corporations, local political and military elites, and "semicolonial" states collaborated and competed in complicated ways with their First World allies, and the result of this negotiated process often had decisive effects on the First World itself (more on this theme shortly).

Thirty years after the analyses of Mandel and over

60 years after the works of Trotsky, a global crisis of the sort that both authors felt was the necessary precursor to any recourse to "the fascist option" may well be upon us.¹⁵ Mandel's claim in 1969 that deep structural crises of the kind that brought the world classical fascism are "unlikely"¹⁶ to ever occur again seem not only overly optimistic; there is an ever growing amount of data to point out that we are living that nightmare now. Although the Euro-American societies have remained relatively insulated from the creeping effects of the Long Downturn, many analyses departing from a Eurocentric framework have shown that the world is currently suffering a crisis as bad or worse than that which followed in the wake of the 1929 economic collapse.¹⁷ Some also claim that the Asian Crisis, the ongoing Third World debt crisis, and the latest oil crisis are only the initial warning signs of a major collapse to come. When one rejects viewing the world through sterile economic models and examines what is actually occurring—collapsing living standards, the often total destruction of even basic systems of social welfare, the collapse of entire states—it is difficult to blithely speak of a "new golden age" in the terms so often fed to us by the media in the United States.

Moving away from Trotsky and Mandel, I want to make some final general points for further discussion. Perhaps it is because I am prejudiced by the fact that I study the complicated history of European-African relations a hundred years ago ("globalization before globalization"), but I feel that it is imperative to break away from what I view as Eurocentric analyses such of those provided by Mandel. His and Trotsky's vision of fascism *inside* what would be labeled the First World remain useful and brilliant, but they tell us little about the rest of the planet, much less how the various intimately interrelated components of the world system interact to create structures such as "strong states." I fundamentally disagree with Vanaik's claim that "it is an inversion of priorities, almost a waste of

time, to look at what is happening in the third world."¹⁸ The world in 1933 was not one of a European metropole from which *all* economic and political changes emanated, nor was Europe unaffected by the developments and changes that occurred in its imperial holdings and in the world at large. Such an assertion is even less tenable today.

Regarding the fascist situation of the inter-war period, I believe that two often-neglected points must be asserted. First of all, while fascism was certainly a pan-European movement faced by every state of the "industrial heartlands," it successfully seized (or was rather granted) state power only in areas that could be considered peripheral to that same European universe. Fascism arose in Italy and, arguably, in Spain, hardly the economic cores that they may appear to be today when one compares them to their neighbors to the north. Likewise, Nazism formed and took root in the primarily agricultural regions of southern Germany and in Austria, *not* in the Rhineland, Northeastern Prussia, or other industrial centers such as Hamburg or Dresden. France, Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United States—the heartlands—no doubt had fascist or fascist-like movements of their own and were faced with the same deep structural crisis that befell Germany and Italy. But the former had sufficient political and financial resources and enough institutional legitimacy and stability to attack both the crisis itself and organized labor *without* recourse to the "fascist solution." It was in countries where economic and political mechanisms of control were at their weakest, and regionally in areas of "uneven development" that political and economic systems collapsed and were replaced by radical states bent on annihilating the "Bolshevik Menace."¹⁹ It was precisely in these "semi-peripheral" areas that governmental and economic elites decided to turn to the fascists and in essence resorted to legalized barbarism. In the German case, large industrialists and the

conservatives that controlled the state apparatus brought the Nazis to power to affect the complete eradication of the KPD specifically and organized labor more generally, and they supplied the Nazis with their resources accordingly. The Nazis in January of 1933 gained control of the police, the judiciary, and the army in an approved assault on the common enemy.

In what ways do the semi-peripheries of the First World today resemble the European semi-peripheries of the inter-war period? Decades after the Nazi seizure of power, imperiled elites in Chile, El Salvador, or elsewhere could similarly call on not only their own militaries and certain "mass movements" (however small), they could count on the approval and backing of their First World counterparts. This admittedly rough analogue between classical fascism's fusion of traditional European elites (and regions) of the Old Right with the fascists and the "strong states" ties with their patrons and allies in the core countries is something that merits further examination. More important, however, is the fact that countries like Brazil, India, Indonesia, or Chile share with inter-war Italy and Germany a similar, traumatic "modernity" of the sort that gave rise to fascism. They uneasily straddle two worlds—a dynamic industrial one and an older, agrarian *ancien regime*—with effects that are often catastrophic for those forced to move from one realm to another.²⁰ It was precisely this "crisis of modernization," that is to say the violent dislocation and impoverishment suffered by the lower middle classes of Germany and Italy, that created the popular base that both the older agrarian right and the newer, radical right sought to cultivate as a counterweight to the forces of the left generally and communism more specifically. The lower middle and working classes in the industrializing semi-peripheries of the Third World are already facing a dire situation indeed—one need only examine the conditions in the swelling, large cities of

the "developing world"—a situation that continued globalization can only exacerbate. In the event of a major crisis, it is precisely this social milieu, practically abandoned by the Left, which will prove fertile soil for a new fascist drive.

A second often overlooked fact is that fascism owed a large debt to ideologies, techniques, and technology formulated and developed in the colonized countries. The empires and the societies in them were not a *tabula rasa* that the core countries could mold at will in ways of their choosing. The problems and often open resistance the colonizers faced led directly to the development of all sorts of features that later observers would view as quintessentially "fascist." The history of biological racism and various exterminationist ideologies is profoundly marked by the colonial experience.²¹ The historical development of the machine gun, aerial bombardment, doctrines for eradicating indigenous resistance, methods of population control and surveillance, and bureaucratic structures must be sought not only in Paris or Berlin, but also on the thousands of battlefields in the colonies and in the countless daily contests between ruler and ruled. Many of the racial "experts" who drafted the Nazis' Nuremberg Laws of 1935 had developed their expertise in German Southwest Africa.²² Even the concentration camp, perhaps the quintessential symbol of fascist rule, originated in Spanish Cuba, whence it made its way to the American Philippines and then the Boer War. In 1904 the German military and civil administration in German Southwest Africa explicitly copied this model in their attempt to liquidate Nama and Herero resistance; it was at this moment that the word *Konzentrationslager* (KZ) entered the German language. These and countless other examples serve to show that Hannah Arendt's and Frantz Fanon's claims that fascism was in part the horrors of empire come home to roost was true on more than just a moralistic level. As regards fascist ideology, some

scholars have even conceptualized Nazism as primarily an *imperial ideology* that attempted to replicate colonial structures and methods of control *inside* Europe.²³

Our present world can be characterized by "one way diffusion" no more credibly than the world of Hitler; indeed the complicated interrelationship between societies, classes, and states has become even more pronounced since 1945. The "supernationalist state" or global "imperialist empire" envisioned by Trotsky is in part already a daily reality.²⁴ The great powers in conjunction with international institutions, multinational corporate structures, and local Third World elites manage on a daily basis to expand and protect the dominant economic, political, and social forms without needing to engage in a Hitlerian war of conquest of all that surrounds them.²⁵ The fact that this transnational empire was achieved with methods other than outright territorial conquest is itself a crucial point that must be understood. Military, economic, and political power is more diffuse now than at any point in recent history in so far as there exists a complicated web tying global elites together in a vast, if still certainly imperfect, network.²⁶ This interlocking network is the direct result of the massive diffusion of capital and production out of the First World and into the Third;²⁷ Kenyan or Brazilian labor is even more tied into the global system now than they were during their respective colonial periods. Although power clearly remains in the hands of the so-called core countries and many Third World nations are completely helpless in the face of their demands, a growing number of states and elites in the Third World possess considerable autonomy as long as they obey the overall logic of the capitalist system and respect certain norms. Furthermore, when they feel threatened and wish to preserve the crucial structures of this system, they can count on resources—both local and those provided by the First World—of which their predecessors in the Third World of Trot-

sky's or Mandel's time could not even conceive. Often the level of social control and destruction they can achieve surpasses even what Hitler could imagine, at least within Germany itself. This support is readily available for those "semicolonial" strong states or "democracies" willing to wage class war and enforce labor discipline on their respective populations in the name of the system.

But this system of control is hardly perfect. As production systems continue to "globalize" (or "re-globalize" if one views the current period as one of renewed colonial conquest), the inevitable resistance of Third World populations to a level of immiseration and exploitation far surpassing anything seen in the West in some time becomes a global problem for the guarantors of the system. Noam Chomsky's prediction that the Chiapas Revolt was only the beginning of a far larger groundswell of resistance against globalization points to a renewed era of deep structural crisis, and like Samir Amin I fear that the system may respond initially by again turning to the fascist solution. Radical surgery—the attempted annihilation of all elements threatening accumulation and the state that guarantees it—of the most brutal kind may be viewed as the only option to deal with the new "red menace." The entire system will have to respond; the forced dichotomy of "First World-Third World" will help us understand neither the new forces of resistance nor the systemic response to it. No doubt, it would most likely be the "new democracies" of the Third World, so celebrated in Western media, that would crack under the pressure first in a manner reminiscent of the implosion of the fragile Weimar and Italian democracies.

As for India, while it can certainly be argued that the BJP/Sangh combine is *not* a unified fascist organization, engaging in a violent reconfiguration of the socio-economic structures of Indian society, it is clear, that they and other far-right organizations already have a mass base. They already possess a sophisti-

cated vocabulary that both rejects and embraces modernity (somehow reconciling nuclear weapons with a supposedly ancient, Hindu utopia) in ways entirely compatible with a "fascist option." In this respect they resemble the "New Right" that spawned the Nazis far more than they resemble the Old Right conservatives (of either India or inter-war Europe). For all intents and purposes, the Old Right as represented by the "princely" and other agrarian elites were co-opted or destroyed in the early 1970s by Indira Gandhi (when their local autonomy was nullified and they were put "on salary" by the government). Appropriately enough and perhaps not coincidentally, this was precisely the time when the agrarian elite-dominated Jana Sangh was superseded by the far more modern BJP. Vanaik is quite correct in claiming that the RSS, the "coordinator" of the Sangh Combine, has to date remained aloof and suspicious of directly seizing state power. This attitude, which on the surface indeed distinguishes the RSS from the inter-war NSDAP in Germany, seems to me to be a shrewd tactical move in a volatile political situation that, in all likelihood, would have led to their inevitable failure once "in power" and would have therefore undermined their long-term success.

I feel that Vanaik underestimates the Sangh Combine's ability and willingness to reconfigure itself in the face of shifting circumstances. A stable, potentially lethal enemy image is already present in India in the form of the "Muslim Peril," which at times has been in various ways combined with the "red peril" to devastating effect (an image in many respects constructed, ironically enough, by the Congress Party itself over the last few decades). RSS propagandists can and have claimed that India's numerous Muslims present a far more "credible" threat to the mythic Hindu nation than did Germany's Jews, who represented a mere one-half of one percent of Germany's overall population.²⁸ Furthermore, fascism in Europe was more than

merely a political movement; it was also a profoundly nihilistic cultural movement that drew on supposedly "ancient symbols" to construct a "new national community" of blood and culture in response to a "soulless" and traumatic modernity. Movements of exactly this description have emerged at a furious rate in India within the last 30 years (with roots going back decades further). At the forefront of this cultural movement have been the diverse formations of the Sangh Combine, who have, to a degree perhaps unmatched anywhere since inter-war Germany, been engaged since the mid-1970s in a truly massive project to construct a "viable alternative" to the current socio-economic order. Their drive has been an attempt to construct a "Third Way" precisely as the fascists of the pre-war and inter-war period understood it.²⁹ Were the "fascist situation" to present itself in India in the form of a deep crisis brought about by the traumas of uneven modernization and brutal globalization, it is very likely that the Sangh would become the pre-eminent force of counter-revolution from above and from below. What is lacking in India is not a popular base for such a drive or an ideology; what is lacking is a total crisis. To claim, as Vanaik does, that the Sangh Combine is currently a "far right" rather than a fascist movement says little about what it might become in a catastrophic political and economic situation. Such distinctions, while important in the present context, are of little comfort when one contemplates the truly nightmarish possibilities for the globe and India specifically in the years ahead.

There exists compelling evidence that such a crisis will and already is unfolding at the local level across the globe, manifesting itself most intensely in those partially modernized "break points" of the semi-periphery. One will therefore also have to avoid "hyperglobality" in analysis, that is to say, we must understand how structures and events evolve and interact on the local level rather than viewing every

development in sweeping, generalized, and ultimately unhelpful terms. Work of this kind is already being done. Gerard Heuzé's article in this issue of the journal on the history of the Shiv Sena in Bombay and Maharashtra shows in concrete and frightening detail how local populations' responses to the New Barbarism can take forms that do not bode well for Mandel's rosy prediction that the "fascist situation" would no longer be a temptation for those being ground down under the wheels of capitalism. Indeed, he warned that if the forces of the Left failed to offer alternatives to the present order, the windfall would inevitably go the fascists and indirectly to the powers that call upon them. With Marxism and its offshoots supposedly relegated to the "dustbin of history" and the brutalization of humanity everywhere continuing apace, I fear that the recurrent temptation may become instead an all too current reality.

Notes

¹ Ernest Mandel's Introduction to Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971, p.38.

² Many authors have used this or similar frameworks to describe the social realities of "The Long Downturn" and of so-called globalization. Among them are Samir Amin, Kevin Bales, Michel Chossudovsky, and Gerard Heuzé.

³ David Pizzo, "The Museumization of Fascism: 'Functional Substitutes for Fascism' in the Era of Globalization," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* XVIII, 2 (1998), pp.96-107.

⁴ This is Mandel's term for the new "Third World" of his time. Mandel, p.35.

⁵ As I noted, both these and other dictatorships did make use of some degree of popular support, i.e. the "mass base" so crucial to the evolution of classical fascism.

⁶ As noted time and time again, the American business and political community was initially quite enamored by both regimes; GM went as far as to call Hitler "the miracle of the twentieth century." See Michael Zezima, *Saving Private Profit*, New York: Soft Skull Press, 2000. Great Britain's political and economic elite, more directly threatened by the growing power of the Third Reich, nonetheless engaged in what some authors have begun to term "collaboration" with the Nazis, at least until after the Munich Conference. See

Clement Leibowitz and Alvin Finkel, *In Our Time: The Chamberlain Hitler Collusion*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997. The massive support granted by the USA, the UK, and other "First World" powers to Suharto, Pinochet, Montt is so well known and documented that it hardly needs to be recapitulated here.

⁷ Leon Trotsky, *Fascism: What it is and How to Fight It*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1996, p.40.

⁸ Trotsky, p.7.

⁹ Mandel, p.25. On page 27 Mandel further echoes Trotsky in emphasizing that the state's growing independence from its class "allies" is itself primarily a function of its drive to eliminate all impediments to its rule during a time of deep structural crisis.

¹⁰ Mandel, p.18. He repeats this formulation later (p.36). The strong states of his era supposedly could not suppress a rising mass movement with the tools available.

¹¹ Mandel himself warns how horrifying the result would be if a modern fascist state were to have at its disposal current methods of population control, and he stated this over 30 years ago. Mandel, p.37.

¹² Pinochet's project was so successful that even when the regime inevitably had to turn over the reigns of power to more "democratic" institutions, the country was so firmly locked into the Pinochet-US constructed system that it had to essentially follow the same rules as its predecessor as regards financial and labor policy. This is a success that no classical fascist regime could claim.

¹³ With the notable exceptions of Indonesia and Brazil. But the destruction of popular organizations only intensified in the former after 1969, and the latter soon embarked on a campaign of near genocidal proportions against the "subversive elements" of East Timor.

¹⁴ Mandel, pp.34-5.

¹⁵ Mandel, pp.22, 28.

¹⁶ Mandel, p.37.

¹⁷ See Samir Amin, *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization*, London: Zed Books, 1997; Michel Chossudovsky, *The Globalisation of Poverty*, Penang: Third World Network, 1997; and Walden Bello, *Dark Victory: The United States and Global Poverty*, London: Pluto Press, 1999.

¹⁸ Vanaik, "Reply to Pizzo," p.5.

¹⁹ One could almost view this as a capitalist corollary to Lenin's "weakest link in the chain" analysis for why this movement triumphed in Russia and not in Germany or Britain. The most unstable, politically (and in some ways economically) "backward" regions of Europe fell before the fascist onslaught.

²⁰ This definition of "modernity"—existing precariously on the cusp of the industrial modern and the agrarian "traditional"—is precisely that used by scholars such as Fredric Jameson and Perry Anderson.

²¹ See Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate all the Brutes*, New York: The

New Press, 1997.

²² See Jon Swan, "The Final Solution in South West Africa," *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History* 3,4 (1991): 36-55 and An-negret Ehmann, "From Colonial Racism to Nazi Population Policy," *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.

²³ See Woodruff Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

²⁴ Trotsky, p.41.

²⁵ Indeed, the militaries and quasi-military police formations of "strong states" have been turned *inward* on these states' own populations.

²⁶ See William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

²⁷ This outward movement of First World capital and productive forces is not universal, however. Africa remains a net *exporter* of capital to the First World, even taking into account all forms of "aid" offered by these same First World countries.

²⁸ Suharto and other far-right formations in Indonesia used the tactic of "othering" to devastating effect against the Chinese mercantile minority, one of the tactics used (with limited success) in an attempt to create a viable popular majority for the regime.

²⁹ See Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Comments on Fascism and "Functional Substitutes" for Fascism

Vasant Kaiwar

Achin Vanaik's theory of fascism, ably articulated in his "Situating the Threat of Hindu Communalism: Problems with the Fascist Paradigm,"¹ and in his "Reply to Pizzo," [above] includes *structural* conditions, i.e. a profound crisis of capitalism — in the classical case, the one that decimated inter-war Europe — on the one hand, and on the other, all manner of *conjunctural* conditions associated with a particular period of history not easily replicable in others.

The conjunctural conditions in which fascism arose in inter-war Europe include a strong working class movement, inter-imperialist rivalries for geopolitical hegemony of the world (in which conditions it is hard to see why emergency surgery to save global capitalism would emerge from any particular national bloc; why wouldn't they destroy each other, even at the expense of further accumulation?), not to mention strong petit-bourgeois mass movements. They also include, perhaps not explicitly, particular socio-cultural tectonics which were surely unique to Germany or Italy (taking only the obvious examples) and produced within a broad type of reaction very specific forms, all of which are now thrown together under the category of fas-

cism. If all of the above are required, then one is not sure how much purchase a theory of fascism has.

That is, the theory assumes: (i) a structural condition of crisis in capitalism that repeats itself from time to time; (ii) class contradictions that flow from the structural condition; and (iii) their resolution via class struggles and the victory of the personifications of capital and the more or less decisive defeat of the working class, the structural antagonists of capital. But, if Vanaik's description of the conditions — structural and conjunctural — in which fascism arose is right, then it is better seen as a moment in world-historical time, coincident with what Perry Anderson calls "modernity,"² in which political conflict is shaped not merely by the crisis of accumulation (though that is almost certainly the most important element) but also by the confrontation of elements — ideological and socio-economic — uneasily poised between the remnants of the *ancien régime* and the new order of capital. If this is indeed the case, the historical circumstances that produced fascism are surely unrepeatable and in a later epoch other socio-political denouements can be imagined to "resolve" a capitalist crisis and restore the conditions for capital accumulation. That is, a Marxist "theory" of fascism that takes world-historical time seriously must conclude that fascism is a limited historical phenomenon.

Vanaik rightly disputes that fascism is repeatable under a wider range of historical circumstances, especially within the primarily "domestic" circumstances of the peripheral countries of the world system, leaving at least a theoretical possibility that global circumstances could see a resurgence of it within the core countries of capital. He might further argue that emergency surgery to save national capital does not qualify as fascism. Arguably, even on this ground, there could be serious problems of squaring the historical record. In Europe itself there was more than one kind of fascism: taking only the most obvious examples, a semi-

peripheral kind as in Italy, in which what was being saved was a fairly ramshackle kind of capitalism with considerable survivals of the *ancien régime* as spelled out by Arno Mayer;³ a second kind as in Germany, corresponding to a more purely industrial economy, though here again it might be noted, as Pizzo does above, that the Nazi movement originated in the more agrarian south.

In the climate of the time, one might reasonably argue that both kinds of fascism arose as a result of a domestic impasse, fueled by local class contradictions, and arose to save accumulation in the national economy. Even if there were significant spillover effects across the European national divides, that might be regarded as an unintended consequence. And one might maintain, further, that there is no reason to presume that fascist attempts to restart the engines of capital accumulation were bound to succeed. Contra Trotsky, Bauer, and Thalheimer, there should be no presumption that an attempt, however radical, to resolve a very specific socio-economic impasse requires that the attempt be successful; that emergency surgery will cure the patient rather than end in the death of the patient and presumably the surgeons, too; or most importantly, as noted, that the intervention was designed to save accumulation for global capital, rather than its national variations with perverse consequences for imperialist rivals.

That is, there is no need to presume that the "local" variations of fascism exercise their surgical skills on behalf of the capitalisms of the core countries of global capitalism; this kind of ultra-structural thinking may have been characteristic of an earlier generation of Marxists but has little resonance nowadays.

However, *Vanaik could be wrong in a more profoundly historical sense*; that is, fascism is unrepeatable because it is a moment of modernity, and inconceivable under postmodernity, employing the term as Anderson and Fredric Jameson have developed it.⁴ If

one thinks of postmodernity in historical terms, that is, as a historical epoch in which modernization has overtaken all survivals of pre-modernity of the inter-war variety — "the saturation of every pore of the world in the serum of capital"⁵ — in other words, a new phase in the unfolding of capitalism, then one would expect both conflicts and their resolution themselves to reflect this new order, and fascism as such, or even "functional substitutes" thereof, not to be on the cards.

Anderson argues in *The Origins of Postmodernity* that classes in the classical sense — for example, the bourgeoisie and proletariat — cannot now, except in the most formal sense, be considered as agents of history;⁶ not because their confrontation has produced a resolution of a contradiction within capitalism, but because their political perspectives have collapsed in a world in which "the possibility of other social orders is no longer an essential horizon."⁷ Far from being effective agents of history in the present, either via their historical class-conscious confrontation, or their specific culture (e.g. bourgeois or proletarian culture), they are now accounting categories at best. Where does this leave us? For a start, conditions no longer exist for a replay of modernist contradictions and the resolution of present-day blockages to accumulation are conceivable without recourse to the ceding of power by the managers and "personifications" of capital, including the multi-national corporations, to a petit-bourgeois mass movement. The post-modern polities and economies seem to conduct a lot of their business underground, out of sight and mostly unaccountable to anyone.

But, more so, as noted, one has to conclude that none of the agencies, including the structural antagonists of capital whose activities play a major part in producing the system, is able to visualize an alternative to it; as Jameson puts it, we can conceive the death of nature but not the breakdown, much less the overthrow, of the system.⁸

The intensity of fascist-era confrontations, and the sheer scale of its brutality, might lie not merely in some determined bid by its main protagonists to rid society of its class contradictions. What fueled fascism, and what seems decisively to be missing at present is the sheer vividness with which its rival combatants — call them the most militant representatives of the proletariat and the petite-bourgeoisie respectively — visualized their socialist and corporatist alternatives to their respective forms of alienation under modernity. That perhaps is the starting point of thinking about the repeatability of fascism: the initial moment of provocation, so to speak, in working-class movements; the confrontation of those movements via a mobilization of petit-bourgeois rage and nostalgia (for a lost, or rapidly disappearing, non-industrial order); and the acceptance of a degree of political expropriation by the bourgeoisie if only to recuperate the economic order profoundly threatened by a massive crisis and radical proletarian uprisings. Whatever the structural underpinnings of classical fascism, the crucial elements of the resolution of crisis that we call fascism are inconceivable without the class agencies mentioned above acting in fairly autonomous imaginative, political, and existential domains. If none of these class categories operate any longer as they did in the high noon of European modernity, and arguably world-historical time is important to thinking about fascism, then we can say, *pace* Vanaik, that the structural moment of present-day capitalism, the post-modern moment as it were, cannot generate the contradictions of the moment of modernity that produced fascism.

Today's contradictions may generate something else: something essentially vapid or endlessly repetitive, communal riots blankly following one another; the tortuous elaboration of cultural symbols to obscure the impoverishment of the political imagination; the administrativization of repression on a hitherto unimag-

inable scale via the new technologies of control and surveillance, and so on. To expect the current crisis to generate fascism anywhere — even in the core countries of world capitalism — assumes that politics rather than culture defines the terrain of contestation, and that the restoration of the dynamics of accumulation is decided on the streets rather than in the impersonal machinations of the US Federal Reserve, the Treasury Department, and multilateral agencies.

At the core of global capitalism, the more or less complete demise of socialist militancy among the proletariat; petit-bourgeois rage diffused into an anodyne nostalgia for a past-future of innocent consumption; and profound bourgeois insecurity dissolved into the daily agonies of day trading and endless speculation; the development of a vast panoply of state, bilateral, and multilateral instruments to prolong and externalize a crisis without plunging the world economy into a depression — all ensure that the crisis, if it plays out the way it has so far, will not lead to sustained oppositional politics and, therefore, to fascism, much less to socialism. If anything, the peripheries are more peripheral than ever before in the history of capitalism; their activities and activism more irrelevant to accumulation on a global scale than in the late nineteenth century or the post-World War II boom; their opposition to the global system unable to go much beyond a mostly anti-Marxist environmentalism or reactionary Utopias based on the more nugatory aspects of rationalism old and new.

There are a few progressive voices, not least Vanaik's that resist those facile temptations, but these have to endure the repressions and the amnesia generated by the relentless forward march of global capitalism and its social and cultural radiations. The hope is that post-modernity is not the end of the process, and that we, as collective humanity, will reach a new promontory in the future from which to survey the wreckage of the present age and begin to address

seriously and systematically the unfinished agenda of Marxism, namely the construction of a classless society based on the collective control of production, consumption, and the massive task of reversing what capitalism has wrought: the destruction of the vital powers of humans and nature. Then perhaps we can truly tackle barbarisms of all kinds thrown at us by those who are threatened by the slightest intimation of emancipation.

In the meantime, I concur with Vanaik that it might be more realistic to analyze what lies in front of us rather than fight over labels generated at another historical moment, however important that may have been and whatever superficial resonances it may have for politics in our own time.

Notes

¹ Originally published in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXIX, 28 (1994) and republished in Achin Vanaik, *The Furies of Indian Communalism*, London: Verso, 1997.

² Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, London: Verso, 1998.

³ Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime*, New York: Pantheon, 1981.

⁴ Anderson, esp. pp.85-92; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991, p. ix.

⁵ Anderson, pp. 55-6.

⁶ Anderson, pp.114-37.

⁷ Anderson, p. 92. See also, Fredric Jameson, "The Antinomies of Postmodernity," in *The Seeds of Time*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, pp.1-71.

⁸ "It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps this is due to some weakness in our imagination" (Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, p. xii). Jameson might have added that perhaps our imagination itself is limited by the nature of late capitalism.