

Why The Future Belongs To The Left



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As long as the barbarism of neoliberal capitalism defines the present, the future can only belong to the left.

Over the course of the past few decades, the political pendulum has shifted dramatically to the right virtually throughout the entire world.

Indeed, since the onset of neoliberal era, virtually all political parties in representative democracies moved to the right: conservative parties embraced free-market capitalist policies in spite of their disintegrating impact on social order and traditional values, social democratic parties abandoned any pretense of commitment to the class struggle and came to depend totally on capitalism, and communist parties became historically obsolete.

Worse still, political parties and movements of the far-right gained ground in most countries around the world, and populist authoritarianism has emerged as a serious contender for the mess—poverty, declining wages, huge economic inequalities, massive unemployment, and social decomposition—created by the policies of neoliberal capitalism. In this context, extreme nationalist rhetoric and xenophobic sentiments, which apparently never go out of fashion, but do thrive under deteriorating economic and social conditions, have also emerged as key elements in today's political universe.

In the light of the above realities, one may be tempted to conclude that the Right has won in the historic clash of ideologies. But this would be a mistake, an overestimation on the one hand of the ability of the system in place to overcome its inherent contradictions and underestimation of the other of the role of the historical forces of change.

If anything, the future actually belongs to the Left.

Firstly, all of the above-mentioned conditions that are prevalent in today's capitalist societies are nothing sort of social diseases which, if left untreated, will dehumanize the body politic and ultimately destroy civil society. Poverty, insecurity, systemic racism, massive economic inequalities, and social decomposition are not natural phenomena. They are the consequences of particular policies dictated by the needs and whims of a privileged few who have hijacked the state and use it as a vehicle to maintain the status quo and reproduce conditions favoring overwhelmingly capital over labor and nature.

But they are not permanent conditions, nor should one should believe for a moment that they point to the direction of the movement of history. Humanity has always rejected economic exploitation and social injustice, and the conditions today are in fact quite ripe for a massive rejection of neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism has proven to be a total disaster and is actually being challenged on several fronts. Only lack of unity among progressive forces on the future order and the weakening of subjective agencies of action on the national and international level, both the result of the economic and political counterrevolutions that took place in the 1980s, stand on the way from dealing a final blow to its rotten socio-economic order.

Secondly, capitalism itself is not a permanent state of affairs. It is a system that arose from specific historical circumstances, with only five hundred years of history so far, and has already undergone spectacular transformations—from merchant capitalism to industrial capitalism, and in our own time to hyper-capitalism. It will eventually be replaced by a different method of production and social organization.

Thirdly, while humans are social animals, capitalism itself is an anti-social system, pitting one individual against another, and the environment against the economy. Capitalism regards wealth and profit-making as the very meaning of life and sees competition as the very essence of human relations. In so doing, it turns a blind eye to human capacity for cooperation, solidarity, altruism, commitment to a vision of a social order based on equality, justice, and peace, and even self-sacrifice.

Fourthly, the very history of capitalism is indeed replete with widespread opposition to its ideology, values, and practices, and the system has been forced on numerous occasions in the course of its history to abandon and/or reform some

of its most brutal manners and make concessions to working people.

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Finally, we should not overlook the fact that the rise of authoritarian populism in many parts of the world has its roots in the economic policies of neoliberalism, which are completely insensitive to the social complexities governing human societies. People left behind the capitalist rat race, or feeling economically insecure and witnessing a steep drop in their standard of living while the rich get richer, have turned out of fear or desperation to allegedly anti-establishment and far-right politicians who run campaigns based on the politics of fear and hate and make promises of return to a golden era. But such trends are quite transient, as history has shown, and while they are utterly disturbing and unquestionably menacing, they should cause no despair. The political pendulum can easily swing in the opposite direction.

History is on the side of the Left. Capitalism, especially in its neoliberal variant, is capable of only heightening the contradictions that it generates. The progressive forces are anything but defeated. In fact, the politics of progressive social change are spreading rapidly in many parts of the world in the age of the pandemic. In the US, Joe Biden has adopted a far more progressive economic and social policy agenda than anyone had anticipated, thanks to pressure from activists. The winds of change are also blowing in Germany as the Greens are on a sure path to government, and bent on bringing about major economic changes.

Of course, the direction of history is not a given. The realization of the end of neoliberal capitalism requires concrete public awareness of its deadly contradictions, massive political participation through transformative agencies of social change, and a vision of the future political, economic, and social order.

In the past, the Left was able to realize all of the above conditions and not only fight against capitalist onslaught but score some impressive victories. Sometimes through revolution, more often through reform.

It can do so again. The future has yet to be written; but, as long as the barbarism of neoliberal capitalism defines the present, the future can only belong to the Left.

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