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## Corporate Neoliberalism vs Authoritarian Right Politics: Is South Africa Next?

**Radhika Desai, 18 September 2024, Cape Town**

I am honoured and delighted to appear before you to deliver the annual Saloojee Memorial Lecture. Thanks to the Saloojee Trust, in particular the members I've been most in touch with – Martin Jansen, Peter Jacobs and Kelly Gillespie, for the invitation and the excellent hospitality. I have been at once thrilled to be in your beautiful city and humbled at the scale of the challenges you face, in this city and in the country.

Set up in the memory of Abdulhay and Edna Saloojee and their struggles against apartheid and for democracy, the task of the Saloojee lecture task is to offer reflections on democracy, particular as it be being pounded by neoliberalism.

I hope I will fulfill this task to your satisfaction today and look forward to

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2024  
Memorial  
Lecture

**The Rise of the  
Authoritarian  
Right in the  
World & South  
Africa:**

implications for the  
working class and  
movement building?

**RADHIKA DESAI**  
Canadian geopolitical economy scholar activist, author of  
After US Hegemony, Globalization and Empire building

📅 Wednesday 18 September 2024  
🕒 18:00 for 18:30  
📍 On-line or @ Neville Alexander Auditorium, UCT  
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our discussion later. My lecture today derives from my work on parties and politics in both the imperialist countries and in the semi-colonial or Third World, in the context of the political economy of neoliberalism, and its geopolitical economy. This work has taken a broadly historical materialist or Marxist direction, though it has also distanced itself from key Western Marxist positions and considers Marxism to be compatible and continuous with more non-Marxist currents of thought in the imperialist world and in the Third World, than most allow.

With that, let me start.

President Ramaphosa's Government of National Unity may be settling down to its business of ruling, its public statements about inclusive growth and Black Economic Empowerment stressing continuity with the past. Most South Africans, however, remain unsettled by the many questions raised by the elections. What does the ANC's loss of majority signify? Given that South Africans signalled their desire for a change of direction from the path on which the ANC has travelled over the past three decades, can continuity last? If it does not, what will replace it? Will the political forces that caused the ANC's loss replace the historic party and its coalition partners? With what consequences? To what extent do they resemble the new forces that ruling establishments in major capitalist democracies accuse of endangering democracy - Trump, the Afd, the *Rassemblement national*, Reform UK, the *Fratelli d'Italia* - to name only the most prominent? Will South Africa be next? Is it already? Are these forces the causes or symptoms of the decline of democracy?

To answer some of these questions, I propose to dive into the foundational historical relationship between capitalism and democracy. Then I will go on to discuss the circumstances in which it once briefly thrived so that its decline under the neoliberalism of the past four decades and more is thrown into relief. This will enable us to understand the current situation in which neoliberal democracies were already far advanced in anti-democratic directions before they came to be assailed by the new forces against which their ruling establishments, self-proclaimed stalwarts of democracy such as Joe Biden, claim to be defending democracy. I will close by drawing out the broad implications of this analysis for South Africa.

### **Capitalism and Democracy**

The mainstream assumption that capitalism and democracy go together is premised on a fundamental terminological confusion: liberalism is confused

with democracy. This confusion is shrilly employed in US and Western foreign policy discourses about promoting democracy when, in fact, they are advancing liberal and neoliberal laws and economic policies to favour capital and particularly foreign capital, preferably but not necessarily accompanied by sham electoral rituals that are supposed to signify democracy.

However, liberalism and democracy are not just distinct. If we understand that liberalism means, most fundamentally, the freedom of *private* property, they are antithetical. For private property designates property in the means of production – factories, farms, mines etc – whose private ownership by some deprives most others from owning them and reduces them to the status of workers who must work for the owners of those privately owned means of production. Private property must not be confused with personal property, property in the means of consumption, no matter that for some it includes a dwelling or a even a generous pension pot.

Liberal, or capitalist, society, based on private property, is structurally unequal while democracy proposes at least formal equality. Since the people can, indeed must, use this formal equality to advance substantial equality, if brought together, the two principles were bound to be on a collision course.

Small wonder then that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before mass working class organization and agitation made the pretence of supporting democracy *de riguer* among capitalist elites, most of them, including most intellectuals, liberal as well as conservative, opposed democracy in the sense of universal adult franchise. Their arguments were liberally laced with a fear of the masses and its loyal companions, misogyny and racism, both at home and, of course, in their already extensive colonies. They were convinced that democracy would destroy capitalism.

So were Marx and Engels. As is well known, they believed that the capitalist state was little more than a ‘executive committee of the bourgeoisie’. Perhaps less well known are the hopes Engels expressed that advancing enfranchisement of the working class would spell the end of capitalism. As he put it in some 1895 reflections on the path revolution would take and whether it would involve street fighting, at least in Germany where the SPD was advancing electorally,

We, the “revolutionaries”, the “overthrowers” — we are thriving far better on legal methods than on illegal methods and overthrow. The parties of order, as they call themselves, are perishing under the legal

conditions created by themselves. They cry despairingly with Odilon Barrot: *la légalité nous tue*, legality is the death of us; whereas we, under this legality, get firm muscles and rosy cheeks and look like life eternal. And if we are not so crazy as to let ourselves be driven to street fighting in order to please them, then in the end there is nothing left for them to do but *themselves break through this dire legality*.

Engels was being remarkably prescient: not the working class seeking the destruction of capitalism but capitalist elites seeking its preservation would have to break the law. This is, of course, what happened some decades later with the rise of fascism.

Capitalism did not need democracy but *representative* institutions of rule with the representatives elected by a highly restricted electorate of the propertied. Such representation was structurally necessary: the capitalist ruling class is not united by kinship as the feudal class is. Their competing interests need to be brokered by their representatives in parliament – literally a talking shop. It is the introduction of electoral processes to choose them that is routinely exploited to say that the imperialist countries were ‘democratic’ already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier though their franchise remained far from universal.

These liberal representative capitalist political orders were forced to become more democratic thanks to the struggle of working people to extend the franchise to themselves. However, as the Canadian Marxist philosopher, Crawford B MacPherson put it, in this process of democratising liberal society, democracy itself was liberalised, that is to say, it was made compatible with the persistence of capitalism, and all its inequality, through a range of measures, both carrots and sticks, to ensure that working class political activity remained this side of overthrowing capitalism.

While carrots chiefly took the form of welfare measures, the sticks – ranging from the various ideologies – racism, misogyny, religion – dividing people to constitutional limitations on infringement of the right of property to outright repression of working class political activity – were also essential.

Just how recently liberal capitalism was democratised is noteworthy. As the Swedish sociologist Göran Therborn has shown, the advent of universal adult franchise in these countries was largely a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon. Worse, many countries experienced reversals in the first half of the century, with fascist and other dictatorships.

So, we might say that, in fact, First World or imperial countries as a whole, became democratic in the meaningful sense of introducing universal adult franchise lastingly, only after the Second World War. Indeed, the United States, which deploys the rhetoric of democracy promotion so aggressively abroad, 'first attained democracy' only circa 1970 when, thanks to the Civil Rights Movement, the Jim Crow laws that restricted the franchise of African Americans in the southern states were repealed. Looked at this way, South Africa's 30 years of democracy does not seem to be diminished by the US's 60 years, and is diminished by India's 70 years, not to mention the empowerment of the Russian masses more than a century ago or the Chinese 75 years ago this year.

The reversals of the interwar period, part of what Hobsbawm called a wider resurgence of the right in Europe, are generally analysed in the framework of fascism. What is not often noted is that the fascisms and the wider resurgence of the right of this time were a reaction of capitalist elites to the advent of mass politics thanks to working class organization. Dealing with the threat mass working class politics posed to capitalism had to involve sponsoring right wing and fascist *mass movements* which, moreover, stole many clothes from socialism.

The most sustained and meaningful period of the coexistence of democracy and capitalism only followed the military defeat of fascist regimes, a defeat in which socialist forces, the Soviet Union and the Chinese - socialist and nationalist - forces played a key role.

So, only after liberal capitalism was saved from fascist capitalism by communist forces was the relation of democracy and capitalism briefly stabilised in the imperial countries. And that required the massive reform of capitalism. As Eric Hobsbawm put it, after the Second World War, in the circumstances of the time, after capitalism had inflicted two World Wars and a Great Depression on the World, faced organised working classes as well as national liberation movements,

... a return to laissez-faire and the unreconstructed free market were out of the question. Certain policy objectives - full employment, the containment of communism, the modernization of lagging or declining or ruined economies - had absolute priority and justified the strongest government presence. Even regimes dedicated to economic and political liberalism now could, and had to, run their economies in ways which would once have been rejected as 'socialist'. After all, that is

how Britain and even the USA had run their war-economies. The future lay with the 'mixed economy'. (Hobsbawm 1994: 272-3)

Several parameters bounded the practically unique experience of the next several decades when, ever so briefly, capitalism and democracy appeared compatible.

- A high degree of working class organization topped by mobilization for war, in the words of the Italian Communist, Antonio Gramsci, a 'major political undertaking for which the ruling class has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses' for which the masses will demand reciprocity. In Britain, the classic instance, war-time planning and equality of access to the means of life, which contrasted so sharply with the misery and inequality of the Great Depression that was still fresh in popular memory, created a broad agreement that governments could and should cure a vast array of social ills and ensure that war's end did not put society back in depression conditions. This consensus had long been in the making. Welfarist and social imperialist ideologies (ideologies in which working people won material concessions in return for supporting imperialist policies abroad, a 'Guns and Butter' compromise) were already contesting the verities of the reigning liberalism in the decades before the First World War thanks to the rise of working-class organization. After the First World War and amid the Great Depression, a decidedly left-of-centre 'middle opinion' also arose, bringing into the anti-capitalist fold not only Liberal intellectuals like Keynes, whose critiques of capitalism was not far from Marx's in its radicalism, but also many Conservative politicians (Marwick 1964). These tendencies were strengthened by the Second World War, with its national government, planning, rationing, 'fair shares' and 'equal sacrifices'. They contributed to the near universal feeling that there could be 'No excuse anymore for unemployment, slums and underfeeding' (quoted in Addison 1977,19).
- The centrality, indeed indispensability, of communist forces - Soviet and Chinese - in the defeat of fascism, a fact that was nearly universally recognised at the time, with Uncle Joe being far more popular and enjoying greater prestige when the war ended than Uncle Sam.
- The demonstration effect of the spectacular industrialization of the USSR in the interwar period without which it could not have won the Second World War for the allies.

- The existence and stabilization of socialist orders in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China and Korea, with the later addition of Vietnam, which forced progressive policies on their flanks – the welfare state in Western Europe and points west which created the demand conditions for the spectacular growth of the next 3 decades and land reform in East Asia, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, which formed the indispensable foundation of their comparatively egalitarian prosperity in the decades to follow.
- A significant one-time shift of markets from the colonies and the world market to the domestic markets in the imperialist countries such that working class consumption registered a one-time and substantial increase and became a systemically important factor in the investment decisions of their capitalists.
- The adoption of the Keynesian Welfare State policies – macro economic policy for full employment, considerable state ownership, acceptance of strong trade unions, progressive taxation, publicly provided health care and education, child benefits, unemployment benefits, illness and disability benefits and pension benefits, and above all, capital controls, which prevented the free movement of capital.
- This was made all the more possible because, notwithstanding considerable success in the development of the newly independent countries of the Third World in this period, most of these countries failed to industrialise substantially and remained exporters of primary commodities, ironically even producing and exporting more of them so that they could earn the scarce foreign exchange they needed to jump-start their industrialization. This meant that the dual structure of the world economy inherited from colonialism – with the imperialist countries producing high value goods with skilled labour and the rest producing low value goods – persisted. The material benefits to the imperialist countries permitted substantial concessions to working classes which would be far more difficult elsewhere.
- Structures of international economic governance, particularly capital controls, that, unlike the pre-1914 era, permitted national governments to run their economies for growth and development.
- And, if all the above were not enough, Western, particularly US, agencies were hyperactive in ensuring the repression of left-wing forces – from McCarthyism at home to the programs like Operation Gladio in Europe. The co-existence of capitalism and democracy even in its heyday required more repression than is generally recognised.

Postwar 'socialist' measures may have reformed capitalism in its imperial homelands. However, they did not abolish it. The underlying system remained capitalist and soon, as is capitalism's wont, it ran into crisis, a complex crisis of high inflation, high unemployment, plunging investment and low growth.

The onset of the slump in the First World made the 1970s a decade of crisis, a Gramscian 'organic crisis' in which economic crisis reverberated through society, politics and culture and consisted 'precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born', an 'interregnum' in which 'a great variety of morbid symptoms appear' ( Gramsci 1971, 276).

As growth and investment slowed and inflation and unemployment rose together, giving rise to the then new portmanteau, 'stagflation', political contestation over capitalism erupted in the major capitalist economies. Strikes, mass movements of every sort - of women, racial, ethnic and religious minorities and even the earliest forms of environmentalism - protests and even terrorism entered the political battlefield, shaking the hold of capitalist ruling classes so hard as to prompt their intellectual representatives to complain openly of an 'excess of democracy' (Crozier et al. 1975). Political alignments shifted as new left and right movements appeared.

The major capitalist countries faced a stark choice: deepen socialistic reform, public ownership and initiative, and invest in the still-growing Third World to expand demand so as to keep growth going or, as the neoliberals in their think tanks bankrolled by capital and some politicians already converted to the new creed recommended (Desai 1994; Slobodian 2018; Cockett 1995 ), lift postwar restrictions on capital, now blamed for the growth slowdown, at home and campaign to lift them abroad. The former favoured working people the world over while the latter favoured capital and its comprador allies in the Third World. Capital won.

Though union density and the political strength of the historic parties of labour and the left were at historic highs, thanks to their long-standing 'Guns and Butter' compromises, which has also left them with an analysis of capitalism that owed less to Marx and more to neoclassical economics. It considered capitalism superior to socialism where production was concerned, suffering only from inequality of distribution, failing to understand that the prosperity of the West and of large parts of Western working classes rested not just on their superior productivity but also on imperialism.



Thus, the left was intellectually too weak to present viable alternatives. Over the post-war decades, non-Communist working-class parties and organisations in the major capitalist countries 'had no economic policy of their own' and had focused only on 'improving the conditions of their working-class constituencies' through reliance 'on a strong wealth-creating *capitalist* economy to finance their aims' (Hobsbawm 1994, 272. Emphasis added).

### **Democracy under Neoliberalism**

Once this fateful choice was made, the rug was pulled from under the complex post-war compromise that, for a brief three decades, made it seem as if democracy and capitalism could not only co-exist but were natural partners.

The marriage of liberal democracy and capitalism was never celebrated in its heyday. Now, however, two opposed sets of narratives emerged. One was critical, lamenting the erosion of democracy as neoliberalism increased repression and, by blocking any means through which working class material concerns could be addressed through democratic avenues, turned them into shams. This critical discourse spoke of 'low intensity democracy' (Gills et al 1993) and 'democracy lite' (Chomsky 1997). For a long time, however, this discourse could barely be heard above another, far louder, more voluble and far better funded.

This discourse insisted on the compatibility of capitalism and democracy. Emboldened by the implosion of the USSR and East European communisms, even as popular indifference towards political processes grew in the Western world, voter participation declined and public hostility towards elected leaders grew (a high point was the public celebration of the death of Margaret Thatcher in the UK in 2013), US and Western intellectuals sang melodies about the natural partnership of capitalism and democracy and Francis Fukuyama proclaimed his 'end of history' thesis that some combination of liberal democracy and capitalism constituted the pinnacle of human social organization, beyond which humanity could not, and need not, progress.

By the next decade, however, signs of the 'the Hollowing out of Western Democracy' were multiplying. According to Peter Mair, one of its chief chroniclers, they included voters becoming increasingly apathetic and their party alignments becoming increasingly volatile. Parties themselves once the indispensable transmitters of the popular will to governments, were

atrophying. Politicians were disavowing politics, portraying it as a dirty business which they stood above, depoliticising their roles and privileging 'governance' over politics. Governments were handing over important aspects of policy making to 'independent' experts - the most important being 'independent central banks'. And, last but not least, there was a vast increase in the scholarly literature on democracy, with major intellectuals producing new works on the subject and new journals, institutes and thinktanks being set up to study democracy.

How could popular indifference to and disaffection from democratic processes be squared with this proliferation of scholarly interest in them, Mair asked? Dismissing the possibility that the latter sought to compensate for the former and encourage greater interest in democracy, he argued, instead, that

... far from seeking to encourage greater participation, or trying to make democracy more meaningful for the ordinary citizen, many of the contributions on institutional reforms or democratic theory seem to concur in favouring options that actually discourage mass engagement.

And that

the renewal of intellectual and institutional interest in democracy is not intended to open up or reinvigorate the practice as such, but rather to redefine democracy in such a way that does not require any substantial emphasis on popular sovereignty, so that it can cope more easily with the decline of popular involvement.

He might have added, benefit from it too.

Inevitably, this led to the privileging of political forms that limited popular participation constitutionally over forms, particularly associated with the Third World, in which participation was privileged over limitations on it. Such definitions were, of course, routinely deployed both against Third World political processes and against any mass forces at home.

So, we had the transition from a relatively meaningful liberal democracy of the first few post-war decades in the west in which capitalism was made acceptable to the populace through socialistic reforms to neoliberal democracy in which these reforms are rolled back. What is the result? The answer lies in a brief listing of the parameters that define neoliberal

democracy, reducing it to barely credible electoral exercises that make a mockery of the idea of democracy:

- An attack on unions resulting in weakening of working class organization
- Cuts in social spending
- Privatization and contracting out
- outsourcing
- The end of Soviet and Eastern European communism and an assumption that China is going the same way, reducing pressure on the west to emulate them, however minimally
- Stagnant wages resulting constrained demand
- Privileging big corporations over even smaller capital let alone working people
- Lifting of capital controls and the financialization of economies
- The shift of the historic parties of the working class to neoliberalism
- Attacks on civil liberties
- Increasing censorship
- Restrictions on exercise of franchise.
- Money and media focussed electoral strategies
- Discourses limiting democracy.

This outcome is not accidental but the result of a deeper trend, identified by Marx but today ignored by most who call themselves Marxist.

Marx had foreseen clearly that, once capitalism entered its monopoly phase, it would be ripe for transition to socialism. It would have performed what historically progressive function it ever performed – socialising production and labour, albeit brutally and chaotically. Working people would recognise that monopolies provided unearned rentier income to their owners and there was no reason to leave them in private ownership and socialise them. They would, indeed, bring about socialism. Early twentieth century intellectuals and leaders like Hilferding and Lenin also realised this. That is why Lenin claimed that capitalism had already reached its highest stage back then.

However, the expected socialist revolution did not occur in the imperialist homelands of capitalism. Despite great working class upheaval after the First World War, stretching across the world, from Warsaw to Winnipeg and from London to Lima, despite the German Revolution, the Italian Biennio

Rosso and Red Vienna, only the Russian Revolution lasted from this revolutionary period.

However, worse was to follow and, at the end of the Second World War, after the Great Depression, Fascism and another World War has exposed the ills of capitalism more starkly than ever before, most intellectuals expected – the likes of Keynes and Hayek hoped and the likes of Hayek feared – that the world would turn left after the war.

And it did: notwithstanding the claims of so many, including so many Marxists, that capitalism was restored after the Second World War and went on to experience a ‘Long Boom’ or ‘Golden Age’, proving Lenin wrong and showing that capitalism had a great deal of puff left, indeed will go on forever, capitalism was not restored but reformed, as we have seen, through socialistic measures.

Moreover, what is clear, after over four decades of neoliberalism have progressively freed capitalism from the constraints and obligations of these socialistic reforms, is that capitalism, left to its own devices, has no puff left at all. It is capable of delivering only anemic growth, if any, powered only by state subsidies, has been financialized and productively weakened, imposes ever greater inequality and precarity and, last but not least, requires wars as its performance pales in comparison with that of socialist China and, on occasion, even some developing countries that have retained some of the apparatus of their developmental states after subjection to neoliberalism in general and Structural Adjustment in particular.

One clear implication of this is that the growth of the golden age or the Long Boom was not due to any recovery of mojo by capitalism but due to the socialistic reforms which, inter alia, created better demand conditions, provided state support and kept investment productive (as opposed to financial), in the imperialist countries while the Second World produced impressive growth in the communist economies and even the Third World achieved considerable if not sufficient development through projects of national autonomous development.

A second equally important implication is that neoliberalism is the only form of capitalism we can now have. The alternative can only set societies on the path to socialism. This has long been true of the world outside the imperialist west: given capitalism’s reliance on imperialism, it could never bring development of any meaningful sort to the rest of the world. Indeed, it relies on denying development to it. Only Marxist thinkers who imagined

lionised capitalism considered revolutions outside its imperial homelands 'premature'. They were, in fact, on time and are by now long overdue. Socialist revolutions outside the homelands of capitalism are just the only way for them to achieve development given that capitalism seemed to have already arrived at its maturity and lost any dynamism within the imperialist homelands, necessarily so.

So what does this mean for democracy?

Universal adult franchise was achieved only at a point when capitalism in the imperialist countries had already entered its monopoly phase and early on, democracy was widely reversed by fascism, whose link with monopoly capitalism was widely understood. So, democracy even of the liberal sort, could only really co-exist with a substantially, if not radically, reformed capitalism. With the rollback of those reforms and the restoration of freedom to capital, specifically, giant monopoly capitalism (neoliberalism has used the rhetoric of free markets and competition to advance the interests of monopoly capital and giant monopoly corporations), this relationship had to deteriorate.

However, the exact shape of that deterioration needs some attention. The onset of neoliberalism should have been the moment of the left's resurgence. After all, neoliberalism has many, largely working class, discontents. Mobilizing them against neoliberal capitalism should have created powerful left parties ready to reform and transform capitalism. However, though briefly strong new left currents appeared in many countries in the 1970s and even 1980s, thanks to deep-seated 'Guns and Butter' compromises the historic parties of the working class had long made with their ruling classes, they failed to harness these currents to transformative economic programmes and, by the 1990s, these parties had accepted neoliberalism, waging unrelenting war against popular left forces in their own ranks, as the war against the Bennite left in the British Labour party of the 1970s and the more recent war against Corbyn both show.

In this context, with the left persecuted, marginalised and discredited, the discontents of neoliberalism have become prey to authoritarian demagogues like Trump and Johnson, like the AfD and RN. Where genuine left mobilization does occur, it is discredited as 'populism'. This is the function of the emergence of so much scholarship and discourse around the term. It sees the likes of Trump or Johnson as right populism while tarring Corbyn or Sanders with the brush of 'left populism'.

Populism is generally understood as a broad, largely unstructured, mobilization of 'the people' against the elites, or the establishment with no clear political orientation. However, it must be seen as leaning right, if for no other reason than not clearly doing so in the context of capitalism is implicitly at least endorsing the capitalist status quo. So, what the neoliberal establishment in the West would see as right and left populist currents are, in fact, an insurgent and necessarily right wing force, whose policy differences with the neoliberal establishment are hard to discern - consider the extent to which Biden left Trump's policies in place and pursued his initiatives with even greater zeal and how much of Trump's platform is being absorbed by Harris - and genuine left impulses still awaiting appropriate leadership.

So, today, however, the term populism is being applied to the *wrong pair of the triad of forces in contention* by the neoliberal establishment.

The politics of Trump or Brexit are certainly populist, seeking to exploit the discontents of neoliberalism to get to power by promising to alleviate their economic misery but doing little or nothing after arriving there.

The politics of a Corbyn or a Sanders, while certainly suffering from the disorganization of the historic institutions of the working class over the past decades, or even century, and thus less structured than they might be, does not seek to exploit the discontents of neoliberalism but to address them. They also seek to organise working people and their communities and organizations. Last but not least, they are the ones that are truly anathema to the establishment: While a Trump or a Johnson can be allowed to take office, a Sanders or a Corbyn must be prevented by the most vicious means possible. These are not the 'left populists' but the first attempts at the sort of genuine mobilization of working people that is so sorely needed and whose birth is bound to be difficult.

The other populist force is the cross-party neoliberal establishment. Its politics is structurally populist, even if it consciously excludes the element of popular *mobilization*, indeed considers it anathema. As Peter Mair described it, this 'simple populist strategy' employs 'the rhetoric of 'the people' in order to suggest that there had been a radical break with past styles of government' which were clearly based on class.

We may label it 'left' populism if we must, giving an ironic nod to its own pretensions, and recalling how fascism itself used 'socialist' words and slogans to get working class support while also demobilising it.

So, in the imperial core of capitalism, neoliberal financialized capitalisms are plagued with the senility of capitalism and the decay of their democracy. On its political battlefield, on one side stands a self-styled 'left' structurally populist establishment that is primarily responsible for presiding over a decaying capitalism and committed to keeping it alive no matter how many deformations it must introduce in democracy to do so. On the other are ranged the forces it labels 'right populist' and hypocritically labels a threat to democracy when, in fact, they are just the symptoms of the damage it has already done to liberal democracy.

The only hope for humanity, in the imperialist countries and, thanks to their still great destructive power capable of extending the already widespread murderous wars farther, outside them, lies in widespread discontents of neoliberalism that still yearn for a suitable expression and vehicle, of which the likes of Corbyn or Sanders and today, those of Melanchon or Wagenknecht, are the first shoots emerging from a soil that is capable of pushing up far more socialist forces. These forces must not just be socialist but also anti imperialist, opposing the West's wars, symptoms of a declining and desperate imperialism.

### **Post-ANC South Africa**

What does all this imply for South Africa? As is well known, the transition from Apartheid to liberal democracy took place under the aegis of neoliberalism. That was the price South Africans were made to pay for removing apartheid. They won formal equality in liberal democracy but their ability to translate it into a meaningful transformation of their lives and their economy was severely restricted, constitutionally and by other means, including, critically, free capital flows. They were not permitted to extend the elaborate welfare state for whites under Apartheid to the non-white population, only to dismantle it.

Unable to deliver meaningful change, the ANC, notwithstanding its left traditions and the great hopes the end of Apartheid aroused, has deteriorated into a vast machine for patronage, clientelism and corruption aimed at keeping a narrow corporate elite, now joined by an unproductive, parasitical black elite. Inevitably, South Africans have become disaffected from politics and have begun to drift away from it. Lacking any viable political force that can genuinely represent their interests, they fall prey to the populism of a Zuma while whatever genuine left impulses the EFF of Malema may represented remain blunted thanks to the intellectual and political poverty of left forces more generally.

The key to this intellectual poverty, which the South Africa left shares with those in most other capitalist countries of the First and Third Worlds, is the abandonment of Marx's analysis of capitalism as contradictory value production under the influence of neoclassical economics and more broadly, in the West at least, thanks to a relatively successful reformism. Today, however, even in the west, the guns and butter compromises has been replaced by guns without butter.

It is now high time to see clearly that capitalism has already exhausted its what historically progressive character it ever possessed long ago when it entered its monopoly phase. That democracy is not compatible capitalism, having been briefly made so only by a major socialistic reform. So the tasks ahead involve not any redistribution of the gains of a still vigorous capitalism but include the need to plan production through at least a modicum of centralised planning controlling the enterprises that must be large and monopolistic for efficiency or natural reasons while also pragmatically leaving room for duly regulated and controlled small and even medium capital and an array of worker, community, municipally or cooperatively owned enterprises.

This has implications for how we understand democracy. If our interpretation of neoliberal capitalism is at all credible, it implies that capitalism is no longer, if it ever was, compatible with democracy. The achievement of democracy requires striking out on the road to socialism, and that will involve not just redistribution but the organization of production itself, something that requires a relatively well-organised party to accomplish through planning. Democracy will be about ensuring that these are done democratically.

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