

**TUC**

Changing the world  
of work for good

# **The rise of the far right**

**Building a trade  
union response**

TUC report, December 2020

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# Foreword

Resisting the far right is part of the trade union movement's DNA. From the Battle of Cable Street and the struggle against Nazism to the long fight to defeat apartheid, trade unions have a distinguished history of fighting the politics of hate. And with the far right growing in strength and influence globally, we must now write a new chapter in that story.

The far right has been quick to exploit neoliberalism's failures. More than a decade of crisis, austerity and insecurity have provided a fertile breeding ground for extreme right-wing ideology. The far right is in power in Hungary, Poland, Turkey, Brazil and Colombia - and influential elsewhere. And while Donald Trump was recently given his marching orders by Joe Biden, Trumpism lives on in the hearts and minds of more than 70 million American voters.

Alarming, far right ideas have now become part of the political mainstream. Narratives of division, exclusion and blame have driven the upsurge in racism, nativism and nationalism. This normalisation of extremism poses a huge challenge for everyone who believes in equality, justice and tolerance. The rise of the far right is a fundamentally a political question that demands a political answer.

As the voice of working people in all our wonderful diversity, trade unions have a special responsibility to detoxify the far right's poison. And this new TUC report produced by our friends at Trademark sets out how we should respond.

The report describes practical, effective strategies for tackling the far right in our workplaces and communities. It highlights how we should use our proud tradition of internationalism to out-organise the far right globally. And it underlines why we need a smart digital response to the far right's menacing online presence and adept use of new technologies. At every turn, we must ensure our response is rooted in evidence, mapping far right infiltration in our workplaces and unions, alongside the key influencers in far-right networks online.

As the report makes clear, we must also address the structural causes of right-wing extremism. Our current model of free-market capitalism has failed working people in the UK and elsewhere, driving down wages, enriching a tiny elite and unleashing unsustainable levels of inequality. That's why unions have led the campaign for a fairer, greener, more equal economic future. The case for our alternative is even more compelling amidst the ongoing turmoil of Covid: when this is over, there must be no return to business as usual.

Ultimately, the best way to defeat the far right is by delivering great jobs, wages, rights, services and homes for all. Fascism thrived amidst the despair of the 1930s depression - and after sacrificing so much to defeat it, working people won real economic change after the war. It was only when the postwar consensus broke down in the 1970s that far right ideology once again gained traction.

Despite the sobering advance of the far right today, this report contains encouraging news for trade unionists. Around the world, there are many great examples of unions leading successful, progressive coalitions against the far right. Some unions are also leveraging their industrial power, engaging employers in the struggle against extremism. And others are working closely with their counterparts abroad where firms have sites

in their respective countries. Everyone involved – including international and equality officers – deserves huge credit for this innovative work.

Above all, the report underlines the importance of building solidarity and workers' power. As well as raising awareness of the far-right threat, we must show that our fortunes as working people rise and fall as one. Black and white, women and men, young and old, workers are always stronger together. As the old adage rightly puts it: there is power in a union.

A must-read for trade unionists, anti-racism campaigners and antifascists, this report is a comprehensive resource in our fight against the far right. With a welcome focus on practical solutions, it shows how we can make a real difference in our workplaces, communities and online. By sticking to our values of unity, equality and solidarity, I'm convinced our movement can win this defining battle.

**Frances O'Grady, TUC general secretary**

## **Acknowledgements**

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# Executive summary

The far right is often treated as a fringe issue, dismissed as isolated groups lurking at the margins of politics and society. However, not only has the far right grown in strength but its ideas and influence have been mainstreamed and are now reflected in mainstream political discourse. Narratives of division, exclusion and blame have been normalised and appear all too frequently across society, in political debate, in the media and in our workplaces.

Throughout our history, trade unions have been at the forefront of the struggle against the far right and its attempts to divide working people. However, in order to effectively combat the far-right threat we find ourselves facing today, we need to understand it has mainstreamed its messages, worked across international boundaries and used online spaces to organise, recruit and promote its ideologies. A trade union analysis must also take into account the structural factors that have led to the growth of the far right.

We do not just have our rich history of fighting the far right to draw upon. There are examples of the union movement across the world leading progressive coalitions and effectively combatting the current threat that we face. We need to learn from and build on this work and vitally, just as the far right has gained strength from cooperating across national borders, our response must also be firmly rooted in internationalism and solidarity.

## Growth and mainstreaming

The 'far right' umbrella today encompasses a variety of parties, movements, networks and communities (online and offline), which have followed different historical trajectories and can differ in policy and agenda.

Although the biological racism of old is still very much with us, especially in the form of white supremacist organisations and networks, increasingly the far right has adopted what is known as 'nativism' or 'ethnic nationalism'. This ideology holds that non-native (or 'alien') forces - people, institutions or ideas - pose a fundamental threat to the native population or native culture.

The reasons for the far right's re-emergence are varied. However, one important factor has been the process of 'mainstreaming' that has legitimised and normalised far-right parties and ideas. This is not only a result of the far right rebranding itself for electoral purposes but also traditional centrist parties embracing radical right-wing rhetoric and policies for reasons of political expediency. It is through this process that far-right parties have become acceptable government coalition partners or been able to influence government policy on questions such as immigration.

## Structural factors driving the re-emergence of the far right

Structural factors are of particular relevance to a trade union understanding of the far right's re-emergence. Growing economic insecurity, increasing inequality and alienation from 'politics as usual' have fuelled widespread disaffection and anti-establishment sentiments. Attacks on trade unions and the absence of a perceived alternative to austerity or effective action to tackle inequality have helped the far right present its solutions as a more plausible-sounding alternative.

## **Role of media and online platforms**

Sections of the media at different times and to different extents have played an important role in the mainstreaming process by platforming key right-wing personalities, trivialising the threat of the far right, setting the agenda for example through elevating in the public imagination the perceived threat posed by immigration and adopting more reactionary positions on a range of social issues.

In parallel to this, there has been a rapid proliferation of online 'content creators', networks, groups and subcultures, which operate primarily through alternative websites and social media. These are proving to be increasingly sophisticated, disciplined and effective processes of radicalisation, cultivating a new generation of militants who are carrying far-right ideologies and narratives into the real world.

## **Internationalisation**

The past few decades have seen the growing internationalisation of the far right, in terms of mobilisation, shared narratives, targets, strategies, organisational networks and financing. Global networking supported by online organising has accelerated the far right's expansion across borders and generated opportunities and mechanisms for amplifying and growing far-right ideology.

Far-right parties have gained ground in parallel with the mobilisation of right-wing extremists on the streets. These parties, among them fascists, are the second- or third-strongest electoral forces in many European countries. Some are in government as minority coalition partners, and others are close to breaking through the attempts of some mainstream political parties to keep the far right out of government.

More significantly, the far right has also taken power at a national level in several countries. In the case studies explored in this report (Hungary, Poland, Turkey, Brazil and Colombia), we see a pattern of convergence between neoliberalism, far-right rhetoric and increasing authoritarianism. These examples can be understood as variants of a wider phenomenon that can be observed in different parts of the globe, western Europe included.

The far right may continue to grow and radicalise, especially given the opportunities presented by multiple economic and political crises. But its rise is not a foregone conclusion: trade unions in a number of countries have been instrumental in organising to push back the far right and work with progressive social forces around a transformative political vision; in the UK and around the world, workers are mobilising to counter the far right and build unity. In order to strengthen our efforts we have highlighted recommended areas for action that will build solidarity and workers' power, develop a clear counter narrative and raise awareness, build our evidence base and tackle the far right online.

# Recommended areas for action

## Building solidarity and workers' power

1. Throughout history trade unions have been at the forefront of the struggle against the far right and its attempts to divide working people using narratives of hate and blame. Drawing on our core values of unity, equality and solidarity, we will strengthen existing links and build new networks, rooted in workplaces. International solidarity between working people has led to concrete wins.

*It is crucial that as the economic crisis hits our members, we don't retreat to looking inward only within national borders and that we continue to build strong global relationships and build workers' power where unions face repression and authoritarian practices. This needs to be the foundation on which we build our work to jointly combat the far right.*

2. We must identify strategies to leverage our industrial power and engage employers in tackling the influence of the far right in the workplace:

*The TUC, Unite, the DGB and IG Metall are developing a programme for working with companies that have sites in the UK and Germany, aimed at developing a model for practical workplace-based action to counter the far right. We will ensure the learning from this pilot is shared widely.*

3. Unions recognise that, while the workplace is our starting point, we must connect our struggles to the wider community and build solidarity and develop a collective narrative to counter the far right:

*Unions need to explore a range of strategies including: supporting online community organising where ideas can be shared; developing industrial campaigns to overcome division and exploitation in workplaces; and producing and sharing content.*

4. Unions recognise that the far right targets its hate at specific groups including LGBT+, ethnic and religious minorities, migrants and refugees, women and trade unionists. In order to effectively combat this, we need to be clear as a movement that, in line with our core value of equality, we stand with all workers and oppose all forms of hate without exception:

*Trade union organisations should actively encourage members to stand in solidarity with all working people against the far right and ensure there are relevant rules on domestic and international affiliations that reject sympathising with far-right groups and any organisations that promote discriminatory narratives.*

5. The TUC has recognised that the rise of the far right is an international phenomenon and consequently the urgent need to further strengthen international links and the sharing of learning across international borders, and this should include building networks with the broader anti-racist and anti-fascist movement internationally.

## Building a narrative, raising awareness

6. Raising political awareness among workers and communities must be a priority for the union movement in building a compelling narrative to counter the far right. Sustained

political education among representatives, activists, members and communities should continue to:

- address the history of our movement and our fundamental values
- connect our daily struggles to the structural problems created by neoliberalism, which have systematically undermined institutions that support workers' rights
- challenge far-right narratives for example on migration, through constructive and challenging debate
- link history and theory to the practice of our concrete struggles in workplaces and communities in building a more equal and democratic society.

7. Combatting the far right is a political question that requires a political answer. Just as the far right has grown in the absence of a progressive alternative to neoliberalism, as the case studies show, it has been successfully pushed back where anti-racist and anti-fascist efforts have been closely linked to the struggle against neoliberalism and austerity. In practical terms this has involved building solidarity networks on the ground to connect the disparate social forces engaged in the struggle against racism, the far right and around various material concerns:

*We must continue to articulate a hopeful political narrative that shows how workers' lives can be improved in key aspects such as better jobs, pay, public services and housing. Given the pandemic and economic crisis that impact on members' jobs and lives, it is a key moment for the union movement to outline an inspiring vision for recovery.*

## **Building our evidence base for action**

8. There is limited information about the penetration of far-right organisations and narratives in UK workplaces and trade union membership. The programme of research currently being pursued by the DGB offers a methodological template and useful lessons for undertaking a similar exercise in the UK, which can subsequently inform trade union strategies.

9. It was beyond the scope of this report to undertake a comprehensive examination of trade union responses to the far right internationally. However, this is an important piece of work that would be useful in identifying the most effective strategies currently being employed and innovative responses to the constantly evolving threat of the far right.

10. It could be useful to undertake a wider analysis of the growth of the far right internationally and highlight other important case studies, for example in Asia, Africa and other regions.

## **Tackling the far right online**

11. The role of social media and 'big tech' companies in amplifying far-right narratives demands closer attention from trade unions, both to understand this phenomenon and to formulate an effective response including lobbying for stronger regulation.

12. We need to build upon work that is mapping the influence of far-right narratives and networks online. By analysing key influencers, recurring narratives, geographic and demographic data, we can identify strategies designed to pull people away from the influence of the right.

13. The UK lacks the type of progressive media that can match the capacity of the far right. Trade unions should consider their strategy to challenge far-right narratives and corporate power and promote a vision of a different world.



# 1. Background

The resurgence of far-right parties, movements and narratives is one of the stand-out features of the contemporary political landscape. Though it has roots in the 1980s, this new wave of right-wing radicalism has been galvanised by the powerful trends shaping the twenty-first century: economic turmoil and financial instability; widening global inequality; the crisis of liberal democracy; imperialism, conflict and international terrorism; mass migration; climate breakdown; rapid technological advancements; and the onset of a global pandemic. As these have deepened and spread, modern forms of right-wing radicalism have found fertile ground on which to operate, not just in Europe and the United States but in Turkey, Brazil, India, the Philippines, Israel and other parts of the globe.

## 1.1 Defining the 'far right'

How the far right is to be characterised is a matter of intense debate. This reflects the diversity of organisational forms, ideologies and historical trajectories that can be found within the contemporary right. Rather than thinking about discrete and separate groups, it is perhaps more helpful to think about a continuum. The modern-day far right includes everything from aspects of traditional conservative parties, parties that appear to have journeyed away from their fascist origins for electoral purposes (eg the French Front National, now Rassemblement National), newer parties of the far right (eg Alternative for Germany (AfD)), groups modelled on the ideologies and violent methods of 1930s fascism (eg Golden Dawn), and post-9/11 street-oriented movements (eg the English Defence League, Pegida). There is also a wide range of think tanks, civil society organisations, intellectual circles, online forums and networks that work to promote or influence the agendas of various right-wing actors. In addition there is a range of openly fascist and Nazi groupings, often advocating violence.

The far-right umbrella encompasses a range of parties and groups that differ in agenda and policy, as well as the extent to which they support or employ the use of violence. Even the general thrust of Euroscepticism that can be found among the European far right masks varying levels of support for multilateral cooperation and the institutional status quo within the EU.<sup>1</sup> But, for all its limitations, the term 'far right' is preferred here because it is the least problematic way of identifying individuals, organisations, political parties, movements and governments that have overarching similarities, as well as distinguishing between different variants.<sup>2</sup>

If there is one thing that defines the contemporary far right, it is the shared emphasis on racial or ethnic and cultural superiority, rooted in the myth of natural inequalities and nostalgia for an imagined past. Although the racism of old is still very much with us, especially among white supremacists, increasingly the far right has come to espouse what is known as 'nativism' or 'ethnic nationalism'. This holds that non-native (or 'alien') forces – people, institutions or ideas – pose a fundamental threat to the native population or native

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<sup>1</sup> Vasilopoulou S (2017). "European integration and the radical right: three patterns of opposition", in Cas Mudde (ed), *The Populist Radical Right: a reader*. Oxford & New York, pp 127-30.

<sup>2</sup> Halikiopoulou D (2018). "'Far right' groups may be diverse - but here's what they all have in common". *The Conversation*, 27 September 2018. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/far-right-groups-may-be-diverse-but-heres-what-they-all-have-in-common-101919>.

culture and to the harmony of the nation-state.<sup>3</sup> The goal of most far-right parties is an ethnocracy – ie a state governed by, and in the exclusive interests of, the majority ethnic group. In practice this results in programmes and narratives designed to strengthen the nation-state by making it more ethnically and culturally homogenous, whether through the assimilation or exclusion of the non-native groups. While the far right has a broad range of positions on socioeconomic issues, these are generally articulated through the same lens of ethnic nationalism.

This shift towards nativism or ethnic nationalism has occurred for two main reasons. The first is that the legacy of the Holocaust and intergenerational battles for civil rights and racial equality have made it toxic for some on the far right to (publicly) express their politics in racial terms. The second is that immigration patterns have at the same time presented right-wing radicals with opportunities to use the tactic of dressing their reactionary politics in primarily ethnic or cultural rhetoric. However, the more the memory of the atrocities of the Second World War fades, the more taboos that are shattered (eg Holocaust denial) and the more confidence the far right gains, the more explicitly and aggressively racist its politics could become.

## **1.2 The radical right, extreme right and fascism**

Within the far right, it is possible to distinguish between the 'radical right' and the 'extreme right'. The main difference between the two concerns their attitude to liberal democracy: the former is prepared to operate within democratic institutions, while opposing aspects of liberal democracy such as the promotion of equality; the latter is explicit about its commitment to the destruction of democracy.<sup>4</sup> Extreme-right parties and groups are generally more recognisable by their open support for the use of violence and emphasis on explicitly racist rhetoric.

The distinction is not so clear when it comes to far-right social movements, where there is a history and continuing trend of interaction between the radical right and extreme right, including fascists. This takes the form of 'multiple membership and affiliations, joint mobilizations, transnational networks, social media, voicing support for particular election candidates, personal friendships, and so on'.<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that the radical right has a more ambiguous relationship with democracy than the distinction implies, as can be seen from the visibly authoritarian and anti-democratic path taken by radical-right parties in government. This calls to mind 'a fundamental lesson from the history of fascism: that democracy can be destroyed from within'.<sup>6</sup>

What, then, do we mean by fascism? Answering this question is not just a matter of semantics, but is about understanding what is at stake in order to develop tactics and strategies for tackling the threat effectively. Fascism is best understood as an ideology and mass movement whose task is counter-revolution: a total reconstruction of the state that purges the nation of its enemies. In other words, fascist ideas might exist in society, within the political spectrum, but will remain marginal as long as they have not acquired mass support. It is once these ideas have gained popular support and are put into

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<sup>3</sup> Mudde C (2019). *The Far Right Today*. Cambridge, p 33.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p 19.

<sup>5</sup> Copsy N (2018). "The radical right and fascism", in Jens Rydgren (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*. Oxford, p 180.

<sup>6</sup> Traverso E (2019). *The New Faces of Fascism: populism and the far right*. London, p 5.

practice – not just by a coercive state, but with the quiet acceptance or active complicity of large sections of the population – that we can begin to speak of fascism.<sup>7</sup>

To summarise, it is most useful to conceive the radical and extreme right as partially overlapping categories on a sliding scale, with traditional conservatism (the so-called ‘mainstream’ right) at one end and fascism at the other.<sup>8</sup> These categories broadly capture the distinctive features of different forms of right-wing radicalism, while recognising their overlap and interplay. They also allow us to trace movement along the scale and understand how the fascist component of the far right can grow out of another less extreme form.

### 1.3 The ideology and politics of the far right

In western Europe, the ethnic nationalism of the far right has made a prime target of immigrants, especially those from predominantly Muslim countries in Africa and the Middle East. Islamophobia was already on the rise by the close of the twentieth century, but gained new momentum in the wake of 9/11 and the bomb attacks in London and Madrid. Parties of the far right “seized on the opportunities generated by an environment of heightened insecurity”, singling out Islam as a global existential threat.<sup>9</sup> In Britain, Islamophobia has grown alongside increasing antagonism towards eastern European migrants following EU enlargement, especially in the context of the 2008 financial crisis. These forms of racism and xenophobia are stacked upon pre-existing prejudices against other black and minority ethnic (BME) groups including Travellers, Roma and anyone deemed to be the ‘other’.

In more recent years, the movement of asylum seekers and refugees – characterised by the right as a ‘refugee crisis’ – has combined with a prolonged economic crisis to exacerbate these tensions, exposing Muslims to more blatant forms of discrimination and attack. In the United States, we have seen the incorporation of Islamophobia into a xenophobic politics “long defined by anti-Mexican racism”.<sup>10</sup> For Islamophobic nationalists, the collective ethnic threat to western civilisation is now represented by the Muslim population at large, including those who may not have a strong connection to religious practices.

Islamophobia’s roots in the history of colonialism help to explain its strength in Europe. This is particularly true in countries such as France, where the legacy of the Algerian War looms large and people with African or Arab names have long been second-class citizens.<sup>11</sup> Today, the idea of a civilisational clash with Islam has helped build the myths of European identity and European values. Even as Euroscepticism has spread, there has been an increased focus on European borders and traditions, with far-right parties emphasising the need to defend ‘native’ Europeans from the threats of globalisation,

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<sup>7</sup> Renton D (2020), “The lessons we need to learn from Europe’s struggle against fascism”, *Jacobin*, 29 September 2020. Available at: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/09/lessons-europe-fascism-marxism-history>; Renton D (2018). *The New Authoritarians: convergence on the right*. London, pp 13-14. See also Arthur Rosenberg’s classic essay “Fascism as a mass movement” (1934), *Historical Materialism*, vol 20, no 1 (2012), p 154.

<sup>8</sup> Renton D (2018), *op cit*, pp 64-5.

<sup>9</sup> Kallis A (2018). “The radical right and Islamophobia”, in Jens Rydgren (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, p 77.

<sup>10</sup> Denvir D (2020). *All-American Nativism: how the bipartisan war on immigrants explains politics as we know it*. London, p 166.

<sup>11</sup> Traverso, *op cit*, pp 75-6.

immigration and 'Islamisation'.<sup>12</sup> A number of parties, from the Rassemblement National (RN, France) to the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), to the Law and Justice Party (PiS, Poland) and Party for Freedom (PVV, Netherlands), have managed to couple the key demand for national sovereignty with another message: that European culture and values are under threat of extinction. These sentiments have found practical expression in the draconian border, migration and security policies of individual EU member states well as more widely in 'Fortress Europe', which continues in the face of an accelerating humanitarian disaster that has cost tens of thousands of lives.<sup>13</sup>

Whereas Islamophobia has become one of the defining features of the far right in western Europe, antisemitism has played a less open role than in the past. In some cases, parties of the non-fascist far right (or 'radical right') have even performed dramatic U-turns on past antisemitic positions to advocate strongly for the state of Israel. This shift has been described as "part of a much wider strategy employed by the new radical right to shake off the suspicion of ideological continuity with interwar fascism or postwar neo-fascism". This strategy of publicly distancing themselves from their fascist predecessors has allowed radical right parties to use more extreme Islamophobic rhetoric for electoral gain.<sup>14</sup>

However, persistent and growing antisemitism sits alongside growing Islamophobia as a pronounced feature of the far right in central and eastern Europe (CEE). While a minority of the population admits to having an unfavourable view of Jews in general,<sup>15</sup> consecutive studies have shown that the strongest agreement with prejudicial statements has often been found in Hungary and Poland. One CNN poll found that about four in ten people in both countries believe that Jews have too much influence in business and finance, while a quarter said that they have too much influence in the media.<sup>16</sup> Another study by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) suggests that antisemitic attitudes may be even more pervasive and on the rise across CEE countries, while remaining dangerously high in parts of southern Europe.<sup>17</sup> In Hungary and Poland, the governing regimes of both Fidesz and the PiS have been guilty of promoting antisemitic discourses and distorting the memory of the Holocaust and Soviet communism for radical nationalist ends.<sup>18</sup> Combined with the proliferation of antisemitic conspiracy theories, this has contributed to the "rampant"ise of antisemitism.<sup>19</sup>

Discrimination and violence against the LGBT+ and Roma communities is another prominent feature of far-right activity in southern and eastern Europe. While attitudes towards the Roma are believed to have improved marginally in recent years, especially in northern Europe, anti-Roma sentiments are particularly high in CEE countries, and

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<sup>12</sup> Zúquete JP (2017). "The European extreme-right and Islam: new directions?", in Cas Mudde (ed), *The Populist Radical Right: a reader*. Oxford & New York, p 110.

<sup>13</sup> Akkerman M (2018). *Expanding the Fortress: the policies, the profiteers and the people shaped by the EU's border programme*. Amsterdam.

<sup>14</sup> Kallis, *op cit*, p 77.

<sup>15</sup> Pew Research Center (2019). *European Public Opinion Three Decades After the Fall of Communism*. Washington, p 85.

<sup>16</sup> Greene RA (2018). "CNN poll reveals depth of anti-Semitism in Europe". CNN, November 2018. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2018/11/europe/antisemitism-poll-2018-intl/>.

<sup>17</sup> ADL Global 100: an index of anti-Semitism, <https://global100.adl.org/map>.

<sup>18</sup> Fekete L (2019). *Europe's Fault Lines: racism and the rise of the right*. London & New York, pp 100-1.

<sup>19</sup> Echikson W (2019). "Viktor Orbán's anti-Semitism problem". *Politico*, 15 May 2019. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-anti-semitism-prsobleml-hungary-jews/>; Inotai E and Ciobanu C (2020), "Antisemitism creeps back as Hungary and Poland fail to draw red lines". *Balkan Insight*, 11 September 2020. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/09/11/antisemitism-creeps-back-as-hungary-and-poland-fail-to-draw-red-lines/>.

Italy and France to a lesser extent.<sup>20</sup> In each of these countries, the Roma suffer from disproportionately high levels of poverty, are discriminated against in employment and education, have limited access to services, live in conditions of forced segregation, and have long been subjected to intimidation and violence. This is particularly true for Hungary's 700,000-strong Roma community, whose experience over the past decade has been one of increasing social and economic exclusion, despite the adoption of EU anti-discrimination laws. State officials and members of various parties – including Prime Minister Viktor Orbán – routinely incite hatred against the Roma, scapegoating them as criminals and welfare abusers.

In Latin America, the right-wing resurgence has parallels with dynamics playing out in other parts of the world. At the same time, many of its characteristics are specific to the region's postcolonial conditions. Above all, the rise of the far right in Latin America can be viewed as an aggressive backlash against the 'Pink Tide' effort to decolonise the continent and dismantle economic, racial and gender inequalities.<sup>21</sup> Hence the right-wing agendas that are being pursued in a number of Latin American countries tend to combine neoliberal economic policies with the "exaltation of Christianity, patriarchy, 'Hispanic' whiteness and authoritarianism".<sup>22</sup> This is most apparent in Brazil, where Jair Bolsonaro has openly espoused his support for military dictatorship, denial of racial inequalities and rejection of the rights of a range of groups including women, LGBT+, indigenous and Afro-Brazilian people.<sup>23</sup> A similar style of conservative response has been visible across Latin America, to a greater or lesser extent in different countries.

In general terms, the far right today is extremely male dominated and anti-feminist. It is true that women such as Marine Le Pen (Rassemblement National) and Alice Weidel (AfD) occupy prominent positions in parties that have broadened their appeal to women. There is also evidence of the gender gap in support for far-right parties closing, as female support for these parties grows, in countries such as Denmark and France.<sup>24</sup> In addition, there are a number of female 'alt-right' personalities who promote a particular form of anti-feminism linked to white and male supremacy. Overall, however, men continue to dominate the far right at both leadership and grassroots level. Most far-right parties and groups hold 'traditional' sexist views on the role of women in society and on gender issues more broadly. The far right engages in both 'benevolent' and 'hostile' sexism. 'Benevolent' sexism sees women as physically weak but morally pure and believes that mothers and what is described as 'the traditional family unit' of a married heterosexual couple with children are fundamental to the nation. 'Hostile' sexism views women as morally corrupt but politically powerful, and resents what they view as the threat posed by women's rights and agency. This type of sexism is mainly encountered online, where young men (some of whom describe themselves as 'incels' or 'involuntarily celibate') discuss their hatred of women and enact fantasies about inflicting violence on women.

Most far-right groups display a combination of benevolent and hostile sexism. The majority also view feminism negatively. Feminism, like LGBT+ rights, is portrayed as an

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<sup>20</sup> Pew Research Center, *op cit*, p 86.

<sup>21</sup> The Pink Tide refers to the radical wave that brought left-wing parties and social movements to power in several Latin American countries in the 1990s and early 2000s.

<sup>22</sup> Weld K (2020). "Holy War: Latin America's far right". *Dissent*, spring 2020). Available at: <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/holy-war-latin-americas-far-right>.

<sup>23</sup> Gomes D (2019). "Brazilian politics and the rise of the far-right". *Black Perspectives*, 7 January 2019. Available at: <https://www.aaihs.org/brazilian-politics-and-the-rise-of-the-far-right/#fn-49282-1>.

<sup>24</sup> Scrinzi F (2017). "A 'new' National Front? Gender, religion, secularism and the French populist radical right", in Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan and Andrea Petö (eds), *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*. Basingstoke, pp 127-40.

existential threat to the nation because it undermines the integrity of the 'traditional family unit' and the demographic majority of the 'native' in-group. It is also considered to be an agenda 'alien' to the national culture, imported by foreigners. Far-right groups in western Europe have at times opportunistically feigned concern for women's and LGBT+ rights in order to win support from those groups and provide cover for their Islamophobia. But outside of this context, anti-feminist and anti-LGBT+ sentiments continue to be widespread across the far right.<sup>25</sup>

## 1.4 Populism

It is common for journalists and public intellectuals not to talk about the far right, but instead about 'populism'. This might seem a useful term to use currently, given the obvious differences between contemporary far-right political parties and those of past eras. However, the term has been used so widely and indiscriminately that its usefulness as a description is open to question.

It is important to understand that "populism is above all a *style* of politics rather than an *ideology*":

*It is a rhetorical procedure that consists of exalting the people's 'natural' virtues and opposing them to the élite - and society itself to the political establishment - in order to mobilise the masses against 'the system'.*<sup>26</sup>

In recent years the charge of populism has been levied at political leaders such as Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France; Nigel Farage and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK; Matteo Salvini and Beppe Grillo in Italy; Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Pablo Iglesias in Spain; Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the US; and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Brazil and Rafael Correa in Ecuador. Given the huge differences among these figures and the movements they represent, the word 'populism' has become "an empty shell, which can be filled by the most disparate political contents". Used in this way, "[t]he concept of populism erases the distinction between left and right, thus blurring a useful compass to understand politics".<sup>27</sup>

However, there is little doubt that radical right parties and movements have made effective use of populist strategies to further their agenda. This relative success lies in their ability to combine anti-establishment rhetoric with a culturally homogenous conception of 'the people' that excludes marginal groups, especially immigrants but also indigenous populations, the LGBT+ community, women and so on.

The far right's populist message takes aim at an elite of establishment parties, media, intellectuals, corporate figures and supranational bodies (eg the EU), which are accused of failing to represent the true interests of the people. As well as controlling much of society's resources, this elite is viewed as having delivered globalisation and multiculturalism to the material and cultural detriment of the nation. Coupled with this is the notion that marginal groups outside of a victimised, 'hardworking' majority are favoured by the corrupt elite, be that in terms of welfare provision or the granting of social rights. Conspiracy theories, appeals to purer forms of democracy (eg referenda) and attacks on 'political correctness' have all found a place in these strategies in different places. But whatever the combination of tools, the core objective is the restoration of a majority ethnic nation-state.

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<sup>25</sup> Mudde, *op cit*, chapter 9.

<sup>26</sup> Traverso, *op cit*, pp 15-16.

<sup>27</sup> Traverso, *op cit*, p 17.

## 2. Explaining support for the far right

Accounting for the growth in right-wing radicalism over the past three decades, across different regions and continents, is no easy task. The reasons for the far right's re-emergence in Europe and elsewhere are varied, multifaceted and do not readily generalise. It is also the case that there are contradictory dynamics at work. While electoral support for far-right parties has trebled from about 5 per cent in the 1990s to more than 15 per cent today, this has often fluctuated in place and time. In recent years we have seen right-wing radicalisation coincide with major setbacks for the far right, the events of 2020 demonstrating how quickly things can move in either or both directions. Political parties have come and gone, while far-right social movements are an even more diverse and volatile phenomenon.

We need to be careful about overstating the causal relationships that have facilitated far-right politics, which can only really be understood in relation to their specific historical, social and material circumstances. In particular, it is important to avoid catch-all explanations such as that of a *cultural* backlash against globalisation, cosmopolitanism and immigration, which is popular among much of the commentariat. However, there are a few observations worth making that might support a trade union understanding of, and response to, the far right's re-emergence.

### 2.1 Mainstreaming and convergence

One thing that has happened in recent decades is that far-right parties have found ways of mobilising electoral support even as voter turnout has declined across Europe. This is partly down to the use of new political styles and methods of communication, the emergence of new anti-establishment formations and the relative success of established far-right parties in moderating their images.<sup>28</sup> The prime example of this is the strategy of *dédiabolisation* (or detoxification) adopted by the French Front National (FN) under Marine Le Pen. Since becoming leader in 2011, Le Pen has worked to broaden the FN's electoral base by distancing the party from its fascist origins, rebranding as Rassemblement National and overseeing the expulsion of her father Jean-Marie, the party's long-time leader. This has also involved a calculated shift from antisemitic rhetoric to a more pronounced anti-immigrant, Islamophobic position, together with a pro-industry and superficially pro-worker agenda.<sup>29</sup> Far-right parties in Italy, Norway, Sweden and Austria have undergone similar rebranding exercises in order to strengthen their electoral appeal.

The last 30 years has seen a convergence of the political centre in its support for a market-driven economic model, including the rightward drift of social democratic parties. Sociocultural issues such as crime, immigration and terrorism – the main focal points of the far right – have been a focus of mainstream politics over the last 20 years, helping to legitimise and normalise the far right. Terms such as 'the war on terror', a consistent focus on 'illegal' asylum seekers and the introduction of citizen tests in the 2000s a precursor to 'the hostile environment' this decade have changed both language and policies.

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<sup>28</sup> Rooduijn M (2020), "Immigration attitudes have barely changed – so why is far right on rise?". *Guardian*, 2 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/02/immigration-attitudes-have-barely-changed-why-far-right-on-rise>.

<sup>29</sup> Renton (2018), *op cit*, pp 142–53.

Where parties of the radical right have not managed to constitute governments themselves, they have been able to influence government formation and policy in a variety of ways. From its establishment in 1995, the Danish People's Party (DF) has contributed to a rightward shift in the immigration and asylum politics of Denmark, both through cooperation with governments (2001–11 and 2016–19) and by virtue of its influence on public discourse.<sup>30</sup> In other cases, the convergence between centre-right parties and the radical right has been formalised as a coalition government, as in the case of the Lega in Italy, FPÖ in Austria, Ataka in Bulgaria, the Swiss People's Party and the PVV in the Netherlands. In an increasing number of countries, new and established parties of the radical right have come to be regarded as acceptable coalition partners, a pattern encouraged by the fragmentation of political systems and voting patterns.<sup>31</sup> Incorporation into parliamentary politics and government formations has meant the normalisation of radical right-wing parties, providing even greater scope for breaking taboos and setting new precedents.

Yet this is not the whole story. There are a number of parties that have simultaneously gathered electoral support *and* radicalised, rather than moderating their politics for electoral gain. The AfD provides just one illustrative example, since it has evolved from a marginal right-wing Eurosceptic party into one with significant electoral support *and* a powerful neofascist wing.<sup>32</sup> In the case of Le Pen's party, we can see that it has undergone a partial, managed and largely cosmetic process of detoxification, maintaining close links with individuals and movements that have an affiliation with France's fascist past.<sup>33</sup> Still others have attempted to redefine themselves as mainstream conservative parties, but at the cost of internal tensions and splits. Jobbik in Hungary, for example, has spawned a breakaway party known as Our Homeland Movement (MHM), which retains all of Jobbik's original antisemitic, neofascist trappings and has wasted no time in establishing its own paramilitary unit.<sup>34</sup>

Even where parties of the far right make electoral inroads, they can find themselves locked out of government. In Belgium, Sweden, Spain and Germany, for instance, far-right parties have come up against a *cordón sanitaire* imposed by traditional parties at a national level: in other words, there is an official or verbal agreement not to include these parties in government formation talks. Similarly, for all of Le Pen's efforts to reimage her party, a decisive electoral breakthrough continues to elude the RN. This raises an important question: what happens when far-right parties fail to obtain political power, even when

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<sup>30</sup> Bosch R and Hansen C G (2019). "The ghost of the Danish People's Party". *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Brussels Office*, 16 December 2019. Available at: <https://www.rosalux.eu/en/article/1561.the-ghost-of-the-danish-people-s-party.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Chiamonte A and Emanuele V (2017). "Party system volatility, regeneration and de-institutionalization in Western Europe (1945-2015)". *Party Politics*, vol 23, no 3, pp 376–88.

<sup>32</sup> Ovenden K (2019). "The myth of a 'post-fascist' present: contradictory trends on the European far and Nazi right". *Kevin Ovenden's Blog*, 10 October 2019. Available at: [https://kevinovenden.wordpress.com/2019/10/10/the-myth-of-a-post-fascist-present-contradictory-trends-on-the-european-far-and-nazi-right/?fbclid=IwAR0ZJWc6lac8lp1NwKxCXuDXzSgCvS-tuwxyzpZQs8oq8YEB-po\\_XYKDDTw](https://kevinovenden.wordpress.com/2019/10/10/the-myth-of-a-post-fascist-present-contradictory-trends-on-the-european-far-and-nazi-right/?fbclid=IwAR0ZJWc6lac8lp1NwKxCXuDXzSgCvS-tuwxyzpZQs8oq8YEB-po_XYKDDTw).

<sup>33</sup> Renton (2018), *op cit*, p 145; Palheta U (2020). "Fascism by another name". *Jacobin*, 15 February 2020. Available at: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/02/france-national-front-marine-le-pen-fascism-antisemitism-xenophobia>; Wolfreys J (2020). "When 'anti-populism' makes the far right mainstream". *Jacobin*, 26 January 2020. Available at: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/01/marine-le-pen-france-far-right-populism-macron-islamophobia>.

<sup>34</sup> Haines JR (2018). "A new political movement emerges on Hungary's far right". *Foreign Policy Research Unit*, 10 July 2018. Available at: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/07/a-new-political-movement-emerges-on-hungarys-far-right/>; "New Hungarian far-right party forms paramilitary unit". *TRT World*, 21 May 2019. Available at: <https://www.trtworld.com/europe/new-hungarian-far-right-party-forms-paramilitary-unit-26831>.



they play by the rules of the system? The danger is that this could feed “a potent argument from those who wish to promote more ‘militant’, directly fascist strategies”.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.2 Role of the media

Any discussion of mainstreaming would not be complete without a look at the role of the media. It is commonly suggested that public opinion has shifted dramatically over the past number of decades, and that the mainstreaming of the far right simply reflects the popular demand for tougher positions on matters such as immigration. However, this overstates the degree to which people’s attitudes have hardened on these issues and understates the extent to which “anti-establishment sentiment” has been exploited.<sup>36</sup> It also suggests that ordinary people are solely responsible for driving the mainstreaming process, rather than this process being shaped by elites through the construction of political narratives and the ways in which they choose to manage crises.<sup>37</sup>

Media organisations have contributed to the mainstreaming of far-right ideas and parties in a number of ways. Most obviously, we have seen the growth of powerful corporate media outlets that sympathise with or openly promote radical right-wing agendas. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is Fox News, which has had a significant mobilising effect on Republican voters in the US.<sup>38</sup> But sections of the media have also inflated the significance and impact of the far right in less obvious ways. As part of the drive for ratings, mainstream media outlets have repeatedly platformed prominent far-right politicians such as Trump, Bolsonaro and Nigel Farage, even when these were known to have negligible levels of popular support. As Mudde explains:

*To justify the exposure, journalists will often be overly critical, and even combative, arguing that they ‘hold them to account.’ What happens, however, is not just that readers and viewers are exposed to their ideas, but that some will sympathize with the ‘underdog’ far-right politician who is ‘unfairly attacked’ by the ‘arrogant elite.’<sup>39</sup>*

An increasing number of studies support this view, noting how the media has contributed to the mainstreaming of the far right in three main ways. Not only have traditional media outlets amplified the far right by offering its proponents a disproportionate level of coverage, but they have helped to normalise their views through “euphemisation and trivialisation” and “agenda-setting”.<sup>40</sup> Euphemisation and trivialisation refers to the way the ‘populist’ label has been used so prolifically and indiscriminately that it has had a trivialising effect on public perceptions of the far right. Agenda-setting relates to the way in which

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<sup>35</sup> Ovenden (2019), *op cit*.

<sup>36</sup> Geary D, Schofield C and Sutton J (2020). “Toward a global history of white supremacy”. *Boston Review*, 16 October 2020. Available at: [http://bostonreview.net/race/daniel-geary-camilla-schofield-jennifer-sutton-toward-global-history-white-supremacy?fbclid=IwAR24uzUNOocWPZsOWpanKHAWt1FfqRbANOMUaGHsvlRa-x4dOgUAEiiu\\_J4](http://bostonreview.net/race/daniel-geary-camilla-schofield-jennifer-sutton-toward-global-history-white-supremacy?fbclid=IwAR24uzUNOocWPZsOWpanKHAWt1FfqRbANOMUaGHsvlRa-x4dOgUAEiiu_J4).

<sup>37</sup> Winter A and Mondonl A (2018). “Understanding the mainstreaming of the far right”. *openDemocracy*, 26 August 2018. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/understanding-mainstreaming-of-far-right/>.

<sup>38</sup> Fishman R and Prat A (2016), “Can Fox News get Trump elected?”. *Slate*, 17 June 2016. Available at: <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2016/06/fox-news-exerts-more-power-over-the-electorate-than-you-might-think.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, p 92.

<sup>40</sup> Brown K and Mondon A (2020). “Populism, the media, and the mainstreaming of the far right: *The Guardian’s* coverage of populism as a case study.” *Politics* (online), 30 September 2020. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0263395720955036>.

the media has elevated issues such as immigration, crime and benefit fraud in the public imagination, providing the ground on which the far right has been able to mobilise.<sup>41</sup>

There is also substantial evidence that sections of the media have not only conditioned the public to think of certain issues as important, but also influenced *what* they should think about them. This framing role can be seen most clearly in how the press has reported twenty-first century acts of terrorism, with Muslim perpetrators more likely to be portrayed as having links to Islamic terrorist networks and non-Muslim, white perpetrators more likely to be depicted as 'lone wolves' with a mental illness.<sup>42</sup> This pattern of connecting terrorism to Islam has helped to create a climate of fear, simultaneously aiding the objectives of Islamic extremists and pushing people towards radical ethnonational reactions. Research has also found that media coverage of the 'refugee crisis' is critical to understanding how policymakers and the public have made sense of these events from 2015 onwards. Specifically, large proportions of the European press have shifted from an empathetic position to one marked by suspicion and hostility, and this has had a hand in feeding negative attitudes towards migration.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, the latest wave of far-right activity cannot be explained without reference to the ascendance of alternative right-wing media outlets, social media and online forums, which play their biggest part in far-right subcultures but have a disproportionate influence on wider political developments. This forms one of the topics of discussion in section 3.

### 2.3 Structural and systemic factors

When it comes to formulating a trade union analysis and response to the far right, it is important to understand the structural conditions, systemic processes and changes in social relations that underlie its re-emergence. Across western Europe and North America, neoliberal globalisation has meant deindustrialisation, underemployment and precarious work, wage stagnation, rampant inequality and generalised conditions of insecurity for a large and growing section of the population.

Over the past 40 years, there has been an erosion of the key sources of social and economic security – welfare safety nets, public services, other public goods (eg public housing) and notably trade unions' ability to represent the interests of their members through means such as collective bargaining.

- Across the OECD, the proportion of workers covered by a collective bargaining agreement has declined from almost half (45 per cent) to less than a third (32.4 per cent) between 1985 and 2017.<sup>44</sup>
- This has had a significant impact on inequality: research by the OECD for the G20 in 2015 found that "widening income inequality as measured by the Gini index has risen significantly in most advanced G20" countries and "The bottom 40% has fallen significantly behind in many countries, particularly since the recent [2008] crisis. For

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<sup>41</sup> Gavin NT (2018). "Media definitely do matter: Brexit, immigration, climate change and beyond". *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, vol 20, no 4, pp 827-45.

<sup>42</sup> Powell KA (2018). "Framing Islam/creating fear: an analysis of US media coverage of terrorism from 2011-2016". *Religions*, vol 9.

<sup>43</sup> Georgiou M and Zaborowski R (2017). "Media coverage of the 'refugee crisis': a cross-European perspective". Council of Europe Report DG1 03. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680706b00>; Eberl J-M, Meltzer CE, Heidenreich T, Herrero B, Theorin N, Lind F, Berganza R, Boomgaarden HG, Schemer C and Strömbäck J (2018). "The European media discourse on immigration and its effects: a literature review". *Annals of the International Communication Association*, vol 42, no 3, pp 207- 33.

<sup>44</sup> OECD (2019). *Negotiating Our Way Up: collective bargaining in a changing world of work*. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/employment/negotiating-our-way-up-1fd2da34-en.htm>

instance, in the United States, between 1979 and 2007, almost one half of the total national income gains were captured by the top 1 per cent".<sup>45</sup>

This has led to the undermining of the "social solidarities that flourished on such stable foundations".<sup>46</sup> The destruction of working-class communities and institutions has undermined long-held notions of belonging and collectivism. Meanwhile, experiences of poverty and inequality, social isolation, alienation and the culture of intense competition have caused significant pressures on people's mental health, generating added resentment, mistrust and vulnerability.<sup>47</sup>

Economic insecurity and precariousness have also spread to once-comfortable middle-class households, which have seen their incomes stagnate, cost of living increase and employment prospects become increasingly uncertain. University graduates are more likely to be saddled with debt, overqualified for the jobs they are doing and unable to access the housing market, while their parents face greater financial risks - both as a result of borrowing to meet day-to-day costs and growing pressures on retirement income security.<sup>48</sup> The financial crisis of 2008 and onslaught of austerity served to exacerbate these trends, compounding the fear, anger and disaffection that had been building over decades.<sup>49</sup>

Neoliberalism has also been characterised by the increasing concentration of power and the 'hollowing out' of representative democracy.<sup>50</sup> Key decisions are now taken at a remove from the communities that stand to be most affected, by a class of politicians and technocrats drawn from an increasingly narrow layer of society. There has been a conscious political effort to insulate the market from democratic pressures, both within states and internationally.<sup>51</sup> Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and EU operate on the basis of rules and governance structures that can be resistant to democratic intervention. This loss of political as well as economic power has led to a collapse of public confidence in government, political institutions and traditional parties, giving rise to widespread 'anti-political' and anti-establishment sentiments.

In the absence of plausible alternatives to rising inequality, and the lack of a successful strategy to oppose to austerity, the far right has been able to advance its own critiques and solutions. Parties and governments of the far right have challenged neoliberalism only in very specific and limited ways, with few clearly departing from orthodoxy when it comes to ownership and control of the economy. But for some of the main losers of neoliberalism (the unemployed, former manual workers and communities in deindustrialised regions), and those desperate to hold onto what they have (small business owners, the lower middle-class, people in or near retirement), far-right attacks on elite parties and institutions can represent the closest thing to an anti-systemic critique.

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<sup>45</sup> OECD (2015). *Income Inequality and Labour Income Share in G20 Countries*. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/g20/topics/employment-and-social-policy/Income-inequality-labour-income-share.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Horsley M (2015). *The Dark Side of Prosperity: late capitalism's culture of indebtedness*. Aldershot, pp 87-90.

<sup>47</sup> Tweedy R (2017). "A mad world: capitalism and the rise of mental illness". *Red Pepper*, 9 August 2017. Available at: <https://www.redpepper.org.uk/a-mad-world-capitalism-and-the-rise-of-mental-illness/>.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, OECD (2019). *Under Pressure: the squeezed middle class*. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/OECD-middle-class-2019-main-findings.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> TUC (2018). *A Future that Works for Working People*. Available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/future-works-working-people?page=2>

<sup>50</sup> Mair P (2013). *Ruling the Void: the hollowing of western democracy*. London & New York.

<sup>51</sup> Slobodian Q (2018). *Globalists: the end of the empire and the birth of neoliberalism*. Cambridge.

In addition, the far right, working hand-in-hand with the centre right, has been successful in promoting the idea that greater social equality for immigrants and other marginalised groups is the cause of people's deprived economic conditions. Programmes advocating immigration restrictions, restricting welfare benefits to 'native' inhabitants and cultural conservatism hold particular appeal because they have the appearance of a collective response, articulated through the lens of the nation-state. In this way, the far right has sought to lay claim to notions of community while offering plausible-sounding solutions to economic and political challenges.

All of these factors - economic insecurity, a rejection of the political establishment, the scapegoating of immigrants and other marginalised groups, an emphasis on national sovereignty and control - were present in the Brexit debate and the 2016 US presidential campaign that brought Trump to power. Trump's pledge to make America great again "played on the chauvinism" of a core support base and enabled him to pose "as the defender of the popular classes hit hard by deindustrialisation and the economic crisis".<sup>52</sup> He exploited the opportunity for regular TV appearances to present himself as the insurgent outsider, taking aim at the establishment and making outlandish, often explicitly racist and sexist claims. But another factor was disenchantment with the pace of political change under a Democratic administration, particularly among black and Hispanic Americans who chose not to vote, that played a role in Trump's election success in 2016.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Traverso, *op cit*, p 21.

<sup>53</sup> Urie R (2020). "Who elected Donald Trump?". *CounterPunch*, 16 October 2020. Available at: [https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/10/16/who-elected-donald-trump/?fbclid=IwAR37v8wY-nTDIBwf\\_e2NSbiw-oj5hUdWpE5wdboUHXOfHsN791xzm3vQ3v4](https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/10/16/who-elected-donald-trump/?fbclid=IwAR37v8wY-nTDIBwf_e2NSbiw-oj5hUdWpE5wdboUHXOfHsN791xzm3vQ3v4).

## 3. Far-right media, online networks and subcultures

We have already explored, in section 1, the role of the established media and traditional parties in mainstreaming far-right narratives, movements and parties. Here we focus on two further aspects of the process of right-wing radicalisation. The first is that of radical right-wing media. The second focuses on the online communities that make up the audiences for these brands and carry the ideologies and narratives into the real world. It is by looking closely at these right-wing propaganda operations that the labour movement can understand how, in precise practical terms, to build equivalent operations that match and then surpass the far right's capacity to shape opinion.

### 3.1 Right-wing media organisations

Right-wing media organisations can be subdivided into two categories: large, established media institutions on the one hand and relatively smaller digital media organisations on the other. Until recently, right-wing media broadly supported the project of the traditional centre right, while the digital media pushed the agenda of a more radical right.

The story of right-wing media over the past decade or so has been how the radical right has seized the narrative from the centre right. This process is one in which powerful media organisations, chiefly Fox News in the US, have facilitated a radicalisation of the American right by acting as a conveyor belt for bringing ideas and political projects manufactured by radical right-wing digital media into the broader public sphere.

A study published in 2018 looked at approximately four million individual news stories and social media posts from across the US right-wing media universe. The conclusions came as a surprise to many, who would have assumed that the 'rise' of insurgent digital media would have meant the 'fall' of old media. Instead, old media has been ideologically transformed and given renewed significance by new media.<sup>54</sup> Established right-wing brands, in order to maintain relevance, have increasingly come under the influence of an insurgent digital media, and recognised the need to adopt (and thus massively amplify) more extreme right-wing views. Today, Fox News is more influential among right-wingers in America than ever. A new generation of Fox hosts led by Tucker Carlson promotes the most clearly fascistic stances in the network's history. This has created a self-reinforcing relationship between bigger and smaller media suppliers, a 'propaganda feedback loop', the consequences of which have been plain to see in American politics.<sup>55</sup>

The same kind of propaganda loop has been shown to be part of the radicalisation of right-wing politics in Europe, though we lack the comprehensive quantitative data that we have in the American context. In Austria, which has given Europe one of its most frightening instances of far-right success in recent years, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) provides the best example. An investigation by Vienna's *Der Standard* shows how successful the FPÖ's digital media operation has been at influencing Austrian public opinion: crucially, it does so in quiet partnership with established media like Austria's

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<sup>54</sup> Benkler Y, Faris R and Roberts H (2018). *Network Propaganda: manipulation, disinformation, and radicalization in American politics*. Oxford.

<sup>55</sup> Vox (2017). "Why white supremacists love Tucker Carlson". 21 July 2017. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkQKVMYyPoM&list=LLWhDi9pZrxoskd9GLqoNrQg&index=1753>.

biggest newspaper, *Kronen Zeitung*, making possible a “process for taking over national media”.<sup>56</sup>

In 2016, FPÖ and AfD propagandists compared notes at a ‘Defenders of Europe’ conference organised by the pan-European Identitarian Movement, led by Austrian Martin Sellner.<sup>57</sup> The German-speaking far-right, one of the most powerful in Europe, takes propaganda very seriously. It is how it has built a movement, became powerful enough to turn leading Austrian media into accomplices and gone on to underwrite an integrated right-wing media machine that crosses European borders. The Austrian far-right digital presence is huge, and has inspired similar ecosystems in France and Germany, with the FPÖ explicitly working to spread its model to sister parties in these countries.<sup>58</sup>

We can see that with support from old media, far-right groups and their digital media outlets have made a qualitative leap from the margins to the centre of politics in the US, Austria, Germany and beyond.<sup>59</sup> In the UK, right-wing ideologues like Dominic Cummings, Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s former chief adviser, have called for a British Fox News equivalent in order to help supercharge the propaganda feedback loop here.<sup>60</sup> They will soon have their equivalent in Andrew Neil’s GB News, a project that powerfully demonstrates the extent to which right-wing propagandists take cues from each other internationally.<sup>61</sup>

### 3.2 Independent content creators

Parallel to the right-wing media organisations are independent right-wing content creators. YouTube has been the main platform for the growth of these personal brands, with new ‘anti-censorship’ platforms like BitChute and Parler taking on an increasingly important role. The list of such independent creators is long, but at the top in terms of influence in the English-speaking world are commentators like Stephen Molyneux, Jordan Peterson, ‘Tommy Robinson’, Stephen Crowder and Paul Joseph Watson. Under these sits a deep layer of more niche influencers, some of whom are the leaders of active far-right organisations like Anne-Marie Waters of ‘For Britain’. Independent creators largely operate on social media platforms creating interactive, self-expanding right-wing digital communities, as opposed to creating content for passive consumer audiences.

These creators and the communities that grow up around them are genuine forces for the recruitment of individuals to the far right. YouTube’s recommendation algorithm really does create ‘radicalisation pathways’, also known as ‘rabbit holes’ down which individuals

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<sup>56</sup> Maan N and Schmid F (2016). “‘Zur Info’: Das Facebook-Universum des Heinz-Christian Strache”. *Der Standard*, 4 October 2016. Available at: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000044079645/zur-info-das-facebook-universum-des-hc-strache>; Horaczek N (2019). “Propaganda in Europe: the far right media”. *Falter* (Published by European Press Prize). Available at: <https://www.europeanpressprize.com/article/propaganda-war-europe-far-right-media/>

<sup>57</sup> Bartlau C (2016). “Austria’s FPÖ cozies up to extreme right”. *DW*, 28 October 2016. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/austrias-fp%C3%B6-cozies-up-to-extreme-right/a-36192613>.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Heft A, Mayerhöffer E, Reinhardt S and Knüpfer C (2019). “Beyond Breitbart: comparing right-wing digital news infrastructures in six western democracies”. *Policy & Internet*, vol 12, no 1, pp 20–45.

<sup>60</sup> Stubbley P (2020). “Dominic Cummings’ think tank called for ‘end of BBC in current form’ and creation of Fox News equivalent in UK”. *Independent*, 22 January 2020. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/dominic-cummings-bbc-fox-news-boris-johnson-think-tank-new-frontiers-blog-a9296411.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Wilson E (2020). “Andrew Neil’s GB News will test whether there is appetite for a Fox News-style news channel in the UK”. *City AM*, 2 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.cityam.com/andrew-neil-gb-news-fox-right-wing-media/>.

can and do fall.<sup>62</sup> Popular right-wing YouTubers like Stephen Molyneux create videos about depression and loneliness, for example, in order to be discoverable by people looking for help. People search YouTube for videos about these problems, which leads them to Molyneux, who then introduces progressively more extreme ideas as people spend more time with his channel, and also introduces viewers to more explicitly right-wing figures.

Whereas mass right-wing media can impact public discourse and broadly shift the idea of what is politically acceptable in the mainstream, the online pathways that individuals follow create active and dangerous far-right militants, from the Identitarians and the English Defence League to the neo-Nazi Atomwaffen Division and more. An army of dedicated content creators and their digital footsoldiers are building a movement that largely emerges from these niche online communities.

### 3.3 Online networks, subcultures and groups

At the most basic level, the community side of the far right online is structured as a network within social media space. While many of these groups have been named and their actions and words analysed, the actual communities that surround and sustain them in the UK and Europe have yet to be comprehensively explored with the same level of digital mapping as elsewhere.<sup>63</sup> Only by having a detailed understanding of how the far right organises online can we design and implement appropriate responses, because it is in these online networks that a militant far right is growing.<sup>64</sup>

Once we can see the networks, we can visualise how the groups and subcultures within them attempt to exert influence, both within their own communities and in the wider world, using online networks as an organising platform. The Identitarian movement provides the most striking European example of the ways in which far-right activists online have shifted political outcomes to the right, working in tandem with more 'public' right-wing media and political parties. Led by Austrian Martin Sellner, the Identitarian movement has influence that far exceeds its size. While it is estimated to have only 300 members in Austria, 600 in Germany and a similar number in France, the Identitarians' media and tech savvy make it one of the most significant far-right groups in Europe. In 2017, it was credited with helping tilt the German federal election in the AfD's favour, allowing that group to be the first far-right party to enter the German parliament since the Nazi era:

*...AfD's massive vote gains reflect the extreme right's ability to conquer online space and win the information war with sophisticated obfuscation and disruption tactics. By scheduling a time each evening and agreeing on hashtags, they forced the Twitter algorithms to prioritise their posts... In the two-week run-up to the election, not a single day passed when #AfD was not in the top two trending hashtags in Germany.*<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ribeiro MH, Ottoni R, West E, Almeida VAF and Meira W (2019). *Auditing Radicalization Pathways on YouTube*. Cornell University, 22 August 2019. Available at: <https://arxiv.org/abs/1908.08313>.

<sup>63</sup> Guhl J, Ebner J and Rau J (2020). *The Online Ecosystem of the German Far-Right*. London/ Washington/Beirut/Toronto. Available at: <https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/2020-02/ISD-The%20Online%20Ecosystem%20of%20the%20German%20Far-Right.pdf>.

<sup>64</sup> Hope not Hate (2020). *A Better Web: regulating to reduce far-right hate*. Available at: <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/A-Better-Web-Final-.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> Ebner J (2017). "How Germany's far right took over Twitter - and tilted the election". *Guardian*, 26 September 2017. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/26/germany-far-right-election-afd-trolls>.

The Identitarians achieved their success on the basis of close coordination between members of dedicated teams specialising *infokrieg* – information warfare. Infokrieg groups flourish within far-right communities using platforms like Discord and Telegram to plan and execute their campaigns. This tactic mirrors AfD Bavaria’s Facebook campaigns, which actively targeted people with messages specifically tailored to their grievances.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, American neo-Nazi propagandist Andrew Anglin maintains a ‘troll army’ led from the *Daily Stormer* community. The right takes information warfare seriously.<sup>67</sup>

They do this because evidence is growing that more people now get their news from social media than from traditional sources. Such actors know that these methods do not guarantee political success, but are a necessary step in laying the groundwork for future success. Governments and political groups across the world sponsor online information campaigns led both by bots such as those used by Breitbart to promote Donald Trump or by JJ Rendon’s hackers to boost right-wing parties in Latin America.<sup>68</sup> Research by the Knight Foundation has quantified the influence of human-assisted cyborgs and bots across a number of information campaigns, again mostly in the US context.<sup>69</sup> In Mexico, political bots are a major industry. In each case, the fact of whether accounts are run by bots or humans is less important than the coordinated way in which they spread information in specific directions, towards specific people targeted for influencing.

### 3.4 Methods of communication and organising

We also need to understand the methods of communication used within right-wing online communities and the channels through which ideas travel. On relatively ‘open’ platforms like Twitter, communications spread outward in all directions: hashtags artificially forced to the top of the trend list will be seen by everyone, making it essential for propagandists. Twitter is different to Facebook, where networks are more closed – we generally see only what our Facebook friends or fellow group members share.<sup>70</sup> This means that attempts to stimulate demand for right-wing ideas on Facebook tend to be led by major parties and political organisations with money to spend on Facebook’s ad platform.

The Boogaloo movement, America’s largest network of extreme right-wing militias, uses paid Facebook ads to recruit.<sup>71</sup> Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign manager Brad Parscale earned his status as global right-wing propagandist-in-chief on the basis of his incredibly effective targeted Facebook campaign. His methodologies have been adopted everywhere

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<sup>66</sup> Engert M (2017). “Fans von Merkel, FDP oder NachDenkSeiten – so sieht der Wahlkampf der AfD auf Facebook aus”. *BuzzFeed News*, 22 September 2017. Available at: <https://www.buzzfeed.com/de/marcusengert/afd-wahlkampf-auf-facebook-analyse>.

<sup>67</sup> O’Brien L (2017). “The making of an American Nazi”. *The Atlantic*, December 2017. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/12/the-making-of-an-american-nazi/544119/>.

<sup>68</sup> Bloomfield S (2019). “This Is not propaganda by Peter Pomerantsev review – quietly frightening”. *Guardian*, 10 August 2019. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/10/this-is-not-propaganda-peter-pomerantsev-review>; Worley W (2017). “FBI ‘investigating role of Breitbart and other right-wing websites in spreading fake news with bots’”. *Independent*, 21 March 2017. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/fbi-breitbart-investigate-alt-right-wing-websites-fake-news-bots-donald-trump-a7641826.html>; Robertson J, Riley M and Willis A (2016). “How to hack an election”. *Bloomberg*, 31 March 2016. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2016-how-to-hack-an-election/>.

<sup>69</sup> Hindman M and Barash V (2018). *Disinformation, ‘Fake News’ and Influence Campaigns on Twitter*. Miami. Available at: <https://www.mediebedriftene.no/siteassets/dokumenter/rappporter/kf-report-final2.pdf>.

<sup>70</sup> Especially since Facebook de-prioritised posts from pages in 2018.

<sup>71</sup> Beckett L (2020), “White supremacists or anti-police libertarians? What we know about the ‘boogaloo’”. *Guardian*, 8 July 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/08/boogaloo-boys-movement-who-are-they-what-do-they-believe>.



by the right, including by the team that ran the Conservative Party's 2019 election campaign.<sup>72</sup> These campaigns are effective because they also act as information-gathering systems: propagandists run many small campaigns at first, to gather feedback from target audiences about their preferences, and then pour money into the campaigns that work.

Elsewhere on Facebook, major right-wing media outlets like the *Daily Wire* have effectively gamed Facebook's system by using a networked approach to media distribution. They have done this by secretly operating a web of apparently unrelated pages that share stories from the central brand, tricking the algorithm into assigning the brand and its posts greater priority. More broadly, far-right propagandists use Facebook groups to organise and as an information battleground. Research into the role of online communities during the pandemic has found that far-right groups in the UK have been linking discussions of immigration, Islam, Judaism, LGBT+ and, in particular, 'the elite' to the COVID-19 outbreak, the resulting lockdown and speculation around the existence of a cure. Thousands of the links posted in these communities directed users to websites run by fringe political groups, 'medical' groups or groups representing a combination of both.<sup>73</sup>

Meanwhile, specialised platforms like Telegram and Discord as well as more explicitly right-wing social media sites like Parler, Gab and BitChute have also taken an increasingly large role in supporting far-right communities and media. Discord still hosts numerous 'nationalist' channels, despite press reports suggesting it has cleaned up its act.<sup>74</sup> 4chan remains an influential incubator for far-right ideas and conspiracy theories such as QAnon.<sup>75</sup> Niche forums like the now-defunct Iron March have given rise to some of the most violent far-right terror groups in existence, such as Atomwaffen Division.<sup>76</sup> Even video game networks have been targeted by far-right groups for recruitment.<sup>77</sup>

Understanding the forms of communication such as 'meme culture' is also useful as it helps explain how the far right overcomes some of the barriers to political persuasion faced by all propagandists: politics is serious and can be boring to many working people whose lives are serious enough already. Memes make politics (even right-wing politics) funny, and therefore fun.<sup>78</sup> Without memes, the rise of the contemporary far right would be inconceivable. Meme culture is the substance out of which subcultures are built and their significance in right-wing political communication can be found everywhere. They provide a way of creating in-group identity within distinct far-right subcultures as well as a method of influencing broad political outcomes.

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<sup>72</sup> Karp P (2019). "Isaac Levido: the Australian political strategist credited with Boris Johnson's victory". *Guardian*, 15 December 2019. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/dec/16/isaac-levido-the-australian-political-strategist-credited-with-boris-johnsons-victory>.

<sup>73</sup> Miller C (2020). "Coronavirus: far-right spreads Covid-19 'infodemic' on Facebook". *BBC News*, 4 May 2020. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-52490430>.

<sup>74</sup> Glaser A (2018). "White supremacists still have a safe space online". *Slate*, 9 October 2018. Available at: <https://slate.com/technology/2018/10/discord-safe-space-white-supremacists.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Tuters M (2020). "The birth of QAnon: on how 4chan invents a conspiracy theory". *OIL*, 7 September 2020. Available at: <https://oilab.eu/the-birth-of-qanon-on-how-4chan-invents-a-conspiracy-theory/>.

<sup>76</sup> Ross AR, Bevenssee E and ZC, "Transnational white terror: exposing Atomwaffen and the Iron March networks". *Bellingcat*, 19 December 2019. Available at: <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2019/12/19/transnational-white-terror-exposing-atomwaffen-and-the-iron-march-networks/>.

<sup>77</sup> Kamenetz A (2018). "Right-wing hate groups are recruiting video gamers". *NPR*, 5 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/05/660642531/right-wing-hate-groups-are-recruiting-video-gamers>.

<sup>78</sup> Hakoköngäs E, Halmesvaara O and Sakki I (2020). "Persuasion through bitter humor: multimodal discourse analysis of rhetoric in internet memes of two far-right groups in Finland". *Social Media & Society*, vol 6, no 2.

This is a disciplined process: digital activists are provided with sets of carefully crafted memes and told when and where to post them. Contrary to what we expect when we hear the word 'meme', they are tools in the hands of conscious political actors, not self-propelling units of culture that spread and multiply organically. This is something few outside the right have ever understood. In recent times, the New Zealand political consultants Topham Guerin made strategic use of a 'boomer meme industrial complex' in both the 2019 UK general election and the same year's Australian federal election.<sup>79</sup>

Meanwhile, research has shown that members of far-right audiences on YouTube relate to content and to content creators in unique ways, with few parallels on the left. The communication methods used by YouTube's most popular right-wing personalities have been compared to online courses, a learning experience that tells a story and brings people back to their channels over and over again.<sup>80</sup> Contrary to what one might expect, militants on the right are not just looking for short answers to a few simple questions: many see their ideology as comprehensive and coherent. Some of the largest right-wing channels, like that of Dr Jordan Peterson or the influential PraegerU implicitly trade on this theme, creating educational videos in series format or as one-offs.<sup>81</sup> An air of academic authority is meant to surround their ideas and give them legitimacy, which in turn influences mainstream discourse.

The far right today is adopting increasingly sophisticated, disciplined and effective methods of radicalisation, which are heavily concentrated online yet carry significant real-world implications, not least the incitement of violence and terrorism.<sup>82</sup> These methods are not yet fully understood, but what we do know about them offers lessons and warnings for the labour movement in the fight to organise workers and communities and combat radical right-wing narratives.

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<sup>79</sup> Fisher C (2019). *A Look Inside the Topham Guerin Boomer Meme-industrial Complex*. University of Canberra. Available at: <https://researchprofiles.canberra.edu.au/en/clippings/a-look-inside-the-topham-guerin-boomer-meme-industrial-complex>.

<sup>80</sup> Cea M (2017). "Where is the YouTube left? There, elsewhere and unfocused". *Salon*, 13 August 2017. Available at: <https://www.salon.com/2017/08/13/where-is-the-youtube-left-there-elsewhere-and-unfocused/>.

<sup>81</sup> Oppenheimer M (2018). "Inside the right-wing YouTube empire that's quietly turning millennials into conservatives". *Mother Jones*, March/April 2018. Available at: <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/03/inside-right-wing-youtube-turning-millennials-conservative-prageru-video-dennis-prager/>.

<sup>82</sup> Bjørgo T and Ravndal JA (2019). *Extreme-right Violence and Terrorism: concepts, patterns, and responses*. ICCT Policy Brief, September 2019. Available at: [https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CTED\\_Trends\\_Alert\\_Extreme\\_Right-Wing\\_Terrorism\\_JULY.pdf](https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CTED_Trends_Alert_Extreme_Right-Wing_Terrorism_JULY.pdf).

## 4. The internationalisation of the far right

That the far right poses a serious, growing threat is acknowledged by all genuine democrats. Whether the right will return to fascism is uncertain. The circumstances of today are very different to those of the interwar years, and the far right is a much more fluid and complex phenomenon. But there are also important parallels and similarities, not least the recurring themes of economic crisis, political instability and reaction. Just as it would be a mistake to regard all forms of right-wing radicalism as fascism, so it would be wrong to view fascism as remote, historically defeated or a constantly shrinking component of the far right. Instead, it is better to recognise that the “processes producing actual fascist, material mechanisms” are being generated now within the far-right family and society at large.<sup>83</sup> What follows is an attempt to identify some of these dynamics, assess the strength of the far right and provide an indication of the overall direction of travel.

### 4.1 The European parliamentary landscape

The 2019 European election results did not produce the far-right surge that many in the commentariat had feared. Instead they revealed a pattern of uneven growth for the far-right family (see Table 1 below). Among the big winners were Orbán’s Fidesz, which took more than half the vote, and Matteo Salvini, whose Lega party won more than a third of the vote and seats to cement its position as Italy’s biggest political force. Marine Le Pen’s Rassemblement National also narrowly topped the poll, laying down a marker for the 2022 French presidential election. In Poland, the governing PiS also won big, while there were gains for various new parties of the far right, among them the AfD, the People’s Party – Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) and the Vox party in Spain. The four big losers were the Danish People’s Party, Jobbik, the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn and Geert Wilders’ PVV, which saw its vote absorbed by the newly established Forum for Democracy (FvD).

The big story in the UK was, of course, the triumph of Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party, a single-issue vehicle with no political programme, democratic structure or membership.<sup>84</sup> As the name implies, the Brexit Party ran on the promise to deliver a clean and swift exit from the EU, and presented the election as a referendum on the issue. The results showed that the Brexit Party cannibalised and surpassed the 2014 vote of Farage’s former party, the Eurosceptic UK Independence Party (UKIP), winning 30.5 per cent of the vote share and 29 of the UK’s 73 seats. One major consequence of this election was to embolden the hard right within the Tories and pave the way for Boris Johnson’s ascent to the position of party leader, on the promise to leave the EU with or without a deal.

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<sup>83</sup> Ovenden (2019), *op cit.*

<sup>84</sup> Seymour R (2019). “In what sense is the Brexit Party a party?”. *Patreon*, 14 May 2019. Available at: [https://www.patreon.com/posts/in-what-sense-is-26849412?fbclid=IwAR3G\\_3fskA4FuZX5rmh88P5PHk8jvc\\_1PJ9G0BETVz9vx\\_5X30I-PWjDfY](https://www.patreon.com/posts/in-what-sense-is-26849412?fbclid=IwAR3G_3fskA4FuZX5rmh88P5PHk8jvc_1PJ9G0BETVz9vx_5X30I-PWjDfY).

**Table 1: Far-right vote share in European Parliament elections: selected countries**

Country	Party	2014 vote share	2019 vote share	Seats
Austria	Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)	19.7	17.2	3/18
Belgium	Vlaams Belang	4.3	11.5	3/21
Bulgaria	Ataka	3.0	1.1	0/17
Czech Republic	Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)	3.1	9.2	2/21
Denmark	Danish People's Party (DF)	26.6	10.8	1/13
Estonia	Conservative People's Party (EKKRE)	4.0	12.7	1/7
Finland	Finns Party (PS)	12.9	13.8	2/13
France	Rass (RN)	24.9	23.3	23/74
Germany	Alternative for Germany (AfD)	7.1	11.0	11/96
Greece	Golden Dawn	9.4	4.9	2/21
Hungary	Fidesz	51.4	52.6	12/21
	Jobbik	14.7	6.4	1/21
Italy	Brothers of Italy	3.7	6.5	5/73
	Lega	6.2	34.3	28/73
Netherlands	Party for Freedom (PVV)	13.3	3.5	0/26
	Forum for Democracy (FvD)	-	11.0	3/26
Poland	Law and Justice (PiS)	31.8	45.4	27/51
Slovakia	People's Party - Our Slovakia (LSNS)	1.7	12.1	2/14
Spain	Vox	1.6	6.2	3/54
Sweden	Sweden Democrats	9.7	15.4	3/20
UK	Brexit Party	27.0 (UKIP)	30.5	29/73

Altogether, the picture to emerge from the European elections was one of a more fragmented and delicately balanced parliamentary system, with the big traditional centre-left and centre-right blocs losing votes and seats in various directions. Parties of the far right are now spread across three different parliamentary groupings: the European People's Party; the Conservatives and Reformists (of which the Conservative Party remained a member up until Brexit); and the newly established Identity and Democracy grouping headed by Salvini and Le Pen, which has just 10 per cent of all MEPs. This

fragmentation means that the far right's direct influence over lawmaking will remain limited. More significant is the powerful rightward pull they are able to exert on centrist parties.

Yet the European elections represent only a partial indicator of the strength of the far right, in part because they are often the site of protest votes, and in part because voter turnout remains much lower than is normal in a national election, with the working class consistently abstaining in large numbers. At the national level, the far right has experienced mixed electoral fortunes in recent years. In Austria, support for the FPÖ dropped by a third in last September's parliamentary elections, which had been triggered by a corruption scandal. This resulted in the FPÖ's return to the opposition benches. The party also succumbed in subsequent state elections for Burgenland, before being routed in the elections for control of the capital Vienna, losing 26 of its 34 seats to become the smallest party in the legislature.

The Danish People's Party (DF) has experienced an equally dramatic decline since winning a fifth of the popular vote in 2015. As well as losing two-thirds of its votes and three MEPs in the European election, the party lost 21 of its 37 seats in last June's general election. A big part of the reason for this was that the Social Democrats absorbed much of the DF's anti-immigration policies and rhetoric to go along with its defence of the welfare state.<sup>85</sup>

One of the headliners of the European far right, the Rassemblement National, has also gone through a challenging period. While President Emmanuel Macron's La République En Marche lost heavily to the Greens in France's recent municipal elections, Le Pen's party did not fare much better. Having taken 1,438 council seats in 463 towns during the 2014 municipal elections, this time around RN came home with a much smaller haul of 840 seats in 258 towns. In mayoral races, Le Pen's party captured three towns and lost two, while failing to maintain control on a district town hall in Marseille. Polls indicate that Le Pen is on level terms with the faltering Macron, but a poor showing in next year's regional elections would leave her vulnerable to challenges from disaffected elements within the party.<sup>86</sup>

The once-ascendant AfD in Germany is another party to have suffered recent setbacks. Polling indicates that support for the AfD has fallen from 24 per cent to 18 per cent in eastern Germany in the past year, putting it behind Merkel's CDU and the radical left Die Linke. During this time the party's reputation has been marred by scandals and links to racist and antisemitic violence. The rift between its fascist wing and national conservative faction has been played out in public, with the former gaining ground. This exposure is alienating voters in nearly every state with the exception of Saxony, Germany's southernmost eastern state and AfD's stronghold, where it is still polling at 26 per cent.<sup>87</sup>

Salvini's Lega has faced new challenges, but remains in a comparatively strong position. Last year he brought down the ruling coalition in the hope of triggering new elections, but was forced into opposition through an unlikely alliance of the centre-left Democrat Party and the Five Star Movement. Although the right-wing coalition led by Salvini's party failed to make an expected breakthrough in regional elections earlier this year, it nevertheless consolidated large majorities in its strongholds while coming close in left-wing heartlands

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<sup>85</sup> Henley J (2019). "Denmark's centre-left set to win election with anti-immigration shift". *Guardian*, 4 June 2019. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/04/denmark-centre-left-predicted-win-election-social-democrats-anti-immigration-policies>.

<sup>86</sup> Lichfield J (2020). "The other loser in the French elections". *Politico*, 30 June 2020. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/30/france-marine-le-pen-macron-346480>.

<sup>87</sup> Brady K (2020). "What's behind Germany's far-right AfD party slump in polls?". *DW*, Kate Brady, 10 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/afd-germany-far-right/a-55164539>.

such as Tuscany, even overturning a large centre-left majority to win Marche for the far-right Brothers of Italy. The coalition, which also includes Berlusconi's Forza Italia, now controls 14 out of 20 regions, compared with just three in 2015.<sup>88</sup>

In other parts of Europe, the far right is consolidating or showing signs of growth. Last year saw the Vox party become the third biggest faction in the Spanish parliament, increasing its number of seats from 28 to 52. A recent national opinion poll has suggested that this could rise to 60 seats in the event of a general election.<sup>89</sup> The Sweden Democrats (SD) has quickly moved from the margins to cement its position as the country's third largest party, winning 17.5 per cent of the vote and 62 seats in the Rikstag. Were the SD to receive upwards of 20 per cent in a future general election, as polls consistently suggest it might do, it would heap the pressure on centrist parties to break the *cordon sanitaire* and involve it in negotiations. In Finland, meanwhile, the Finns Party (PS) emerged from the 2019 parliamentary elections with a 17.5 per cent share of the vote and 39 seats, making it the largest opposition force. The PS has hardened its position in recent times, and next year's municipal elections will provide another test of this strategy.<sup>90</sup>

Of the European far-right parties in power, Orbán's Fidesz and the PiS have enjoyed the greatest electoral success in recent years. As we have seen, Fidesz has managed to monopolise the right to win more than half the Hungarian vote in the European Parliament elections and secure a third consecutive supermajority at a national level. The PiS also matched its European election performance by winning a second term in government, followed by the re-election of its hardline president, Andrzej Duda, in July of this year. In the case of Hungary, however, the government's claim to legitimacy has been undermined by the steady drift towards authoritarianism, and there are signs of Poland following suit. These are but two (hardline) examples of a trend whereby authoritarian and anti-democratic governing practices have become more visible across the capitalist world.

## 4.2 Authoritarian neoliberalism and far-right regimes: case studies

Neoliberalism has always relied on authoritarian discourses and practices but the intensification of crises of different kinds and changing patterns of resistance have led to an increasingly authoritarian form of neoliberal governance, characterised by permanent austerity and increased state repression.<sup>91</sup> This authoritarian evolution of neoliberalism has coincided with re-emergence of the far right across the globe. Below we present case studies that explore the interaction between authoritarian neoliberalism and far-right ideologies in different contexts.

### 4.2.1 Hungary and Poland

Over the past decade the Orbán regime has followed a neoliberal path and an austerity programme that has involved regressive income reforms alongside legislation that curtails the rights of workers and trade unions. Collective bargaining provisions and the right to strike have been diminished, while in 2019 the Fidesz government introduced a 'slave

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<sup>88</sup> Gilbert R (2020). "Italy shows how easily Europe's leftwing strongholds can fall to the right". *Guardian*, 22 September 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/22/italy-europe-leftwing-right-tuscany-matteo-salvini-league>.

<sup>89</sup> "Opinion poll indicates gains for Spain's right", *Majorca Daily Bulletin*, 26 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.majorcadailybulletin.com/news/international/2020/10/26/73869/opinion-poll-indicates-gains-for-spain-right.html>.

<sup>90</sup> Dine C (2020). "The resistible rise of the Finns party". *Jacobin*, 13 February 2020. Available at: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/02/finland-election-finns-party-far-right>.

<sup>91</sup> Jessop B (2019). "Authoritarian neoliberalism: periodization and critique". *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol 118, no 2, pp 343–61.

law' that allows companies to demand 400 hours of overtime per year. The government has also instituted a punitive 'workfare state', where the unemployed – disproportionately comprised of Roma and Sinti – are forced to carry out hard labour, often under police supervision.

In Hungary and Poland anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric have been closely linked with a renewal of radical conservatism and an escalation in the culture wars. This has involved the insertion of religious rhetoric and practices into all aspects of public life and policy-making. In Hungary, the government has prohibited the teaching of gender and feminist studies in universities, and banned legal gender recognition for transgender and intersex people; in Poland, the state has promoted anti-LGBT rhetoric and introduced an effective ban on abortion. The authoritarian turn has been most apparent in Hungary; however, serious concerns have been expressed that Poland is now on a similar path. These are among the issues that have put the two states on a collision course with the European Union.

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### **4.2.2 Turkey**

Recep Erdoğan's Turkey has been described as "a capitalist nightmare: a triad of neoliberal economics, political despotism, and Islamist conservatism".<sup>92</sup> Erdoğan has presided over the liberalisation of Turkey's economy, based in part on labour flexibility and the erosion of trade union rights. Turkey has been identified as one of the 10 worst countries for workers.<sup>93</sup> Since the Gezi Park protests of 2013, and especially since the alleged coup attempt in 2016, the government has increasingly come to rely on authoritarian, repressive and violent modes of governance involving: the use of violent security policies against the political opposition and social movements, including trade unionists; mass detention, arrest and imprisonment under a prolonged state of emergency; media censorship; restrictions on the freedom of assembly; government dissolution of its 'resolution process' for a negotiated settlement to the Kurdish question; and the launch of a military offensive against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Kurdish region. Turkey has also witnessed increasing levels of violence against LGBT+ people, refugees, Kurds and the Armenian community. It has also brought the Justice and Development Party (AKP) into a formal alliance with the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), which is widely linked to the neo-fascist paramilitary group Grey Wolves. At the time of writing, Erdoğan's Turkey is on the way to becoming a radical right-wing dictatorship with clear fascistic tendencies.

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### **4.2.3 Brazil**

Bolsonaro campaigned on the promise of ultra-liberal economic policies, pledging to shrink the public sector, cut taxes, privatise state assets and make labour markets more flexible. Bolsonaro picked up where his predecessor Temer left off in attacking trade unions, disbanding the country's ministry of labour within days of taking office. In March 2019, his administration ended automatic deduction of union subs without warning,

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<sup>92</sup> Gündüz ZY (2015). "The 'New Turkey': fetishizing growth with fatal results". *Monthly Review*, 1 June 2015. Available at: <https://monthlyreview.org/2015/06/01/the-new-turkey-fetishizing-growth-with-fatal-results/>.

<sup>93</sup> ITUC (2020). *2020 ITUC Global Rights Index*. Available at: [https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc\\_globalrightsindex\\_2020\\_en.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc_globalrightsindex_2020_en.pdf)

compromising the financial independence of trade unions.<sup>94</sup> Brazil has been identified as one of the 10 worst countries for workers.<sup>95</sup> While Bolsonaro has introduced regressive pension reforms and attacked trade union rights, without an official political party and a constitution that gives considerable power to the legislature, states and municipalities he has faced resistance. Faced with these limitations, Bolsonaro has become increasingly reliant on a core group of military-linked advisers and ministers in his government. He has also played to the far-right gallery by attending anti-lockdown protests, speaking favourably about the military dictatorship and introducing relaxed gun laws that led to a doubling of gun ownership in one year.

Attacks and killings of indigenous leaders, trade unionists and Afro-Brazilians has also increased during his reign, fostered by a culture of impunity for police and the military. Brazilian lawyers and human rights collectives are requesting that the ICC open an investigation against Bolsonaro for inciting genocide against indigenous people. Racist police violence, meanwhile, endures in Bolsonaro's Brazil. The results of the November 2020 local elections, the first in his mandate, have severely damaged Bolsonaro's prospects going into 2021. In the context of a worsening economic and public health crisis, candidates backed by the Brazilian president suffered major losses in the states where he received the greatest support during the 2018 election. Overall, centre-right and right-wing parties made the most substantial gains.<sup>96</sup> At the time of writing, Bolsonaro looks vulnerable to political defeat sooner rather than later, particularly as he still has no official party to speak of. However, the harbingers of violent radicalisation and confrontation are also clear to see.

[Click through to read the case study in full](#)

#### 4.2.4 Colombia

The Colombian Peace Agreement (2016) has been celebrated for tackling the causes of the conflict. However, under President Ivan Duque of the Democratic Centre (CD) party, key parts of the Agreement have been actively undermined. Land reforms have been slow and directly contradicted by a doubling down on an extractive model of economic development. The government has turned away from the crop substitution programme designed to solve the problem of illicit drugs. Duque's government has made explicit its opposition to the transitional justice process established to provide truth and justice for the victims of conflict.

Then there is the persistence of violence against activists, ex-combatants and political representatives. Over 250 social leaders and human rights defenders were murdered in the first 11 months of 2020. Those targeted included environmentalists, farmers, lawyers, indigenous and Afro-Colombian activists, trade unionists, LGBT+ people, and civic and community leaders. As of November 2020, over 240 former FARC combatants have been killed since the signing of the Agreement. Fourteen trade unionists have been assassinated between 2019 and 2020. The ITUC's *Global Rights Index* identifies Colombia as one of the 10 worst countries for workers.<sup>97</sup> Human rights organisations such as Amnesty International have criticised the government for failing to use existing

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<sup>94</sup> Moss A (2020). "The edge of democracy". *TUC Blog*, 10 February 2020. Available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/edge-democracy>.

<sup>95</sup> ITUC, *op cit*, pp 20-1, 25. Available at: [https://www.itucsi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc\\_globalrightsindex\\_2020\\_en.pdf](https://www.itucsi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc_globalrightsindex_2020_en.pdf)

<sup>96</sup> Mier B (2020). "Brazilian elections: a day of shame for the far right". *Brasil Wire*, 16 November 2020. Available at: <https://www.brasilwire.com/brazilian-elections-day-of-shame-for-the-far-right/>.

<sup>97</sup> ITUC, *op cit*. Available at: [https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc\\_globalrightsindex\\_2020\\_en.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc_globalrightsindex_2020_en.pdf)



mechanisms to ensure the safety of social leaders.<sup>98</sup> There are signs of disparate social forces beginning to coalesce around the vision of a transformative peace that challenges Colombia's decades-long right-wing hegemony. However, they face the double threat of state violence and the 'outsourced' violence that continues to be prosecuted by paramilitaries, particularly in rural regions. This threat is made all the more potent by the authoritarian actions and right-wing rhetoric of Duque and his allies.

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#### 4.2.5 A wider phenomenon

It is clear that neoliberalism is not inherently opposed to authoritarian practices or far-right ideologies and these practices are not confined only to countries traditionally thought of as authoritarian. Since the onset of the so-called 'war on terror' in 2001, but especially since the 2008 financial crisis, these practices have been reinforced by the mainstreaming of far-right ideas by governments laying claim to the centre ground.<sup>99</sup>

In France, the state's brutal crackdown on protestors has come under criticism from the UN for "severe rights restrictions" and "excessive use of force", while Amnesty International has denounced the "unprecedented attacks" on the right to peaceful protest and assembly.<sup>100</sup> President Macron has also introduced policies by decree on 29 occasions, including far-reaching labour and pension reforms that faced widespread trade union opposition.<sup>101</sup> Macron has also continued to drift right on questions of immigration and France's relationship with its Muslim population. This has most recently been seen with the pledge to crack down on 'Islamic separatism' in the wake of two terror attacks as part of a strategy to legally embed authoritarian practices.<sup>102</sup>

Across the EU, there have also been signs of member states converging on more restrictive migration policies. One feature of this has been an acceleration of border externalisation measures, with the EU effectively outsourcing its border and migration policy to Turkey in 2016. Recent events in the Mediterranean and the deaths of hundreds of refugees at sea have drawn attention to the tragic consequences of these policies. The EU's hastily drafted Pact on Migration and Asylum seeks to resolve the problem of burden sharing for relocating refugees, but its emphasis is on deterrence and the strengthening of external border arrangements.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Amnesty International (2020). *Why Do They Want To Kill Us? Lack of safe space to defend human rights in Colombia*. London. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR2330092020ENGLISH.PDF>.

<sup>99</sup> Bruff I (2016). "Authoritarian neoliberalism and the myth of free markets". *Roar*, issue 4 (winter 2016). Available at: <https://roarmag.org/magazine/ian-bruff-authoritarian-neoliberalism/>.

<sup>100</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2019). "France: UN experts denounce severe rights restrictions on 'gilets jaunes' protesters". 18 February 2019. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24166&LangID=E>; Amnesty International (2020). "France: thousands of protesters wrongly punished under draconian laws in pre and post COVID-19 crackdown". 28 September 2020. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/09/france-thousands-of-protesters-wrongly-punished-under-draconian-laws-in-pre-and-post-covid19-crackdown/>.

<sup>101</sup> Salvi E (2020). "Emmanuel Macron has no mandate for his attack on pensions". *Jacobin*, 7 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/03/emmanuel-macron-article-49-3-pension-reforms-strikes-france>.

<sup>102</sup> Hanafi S (2020). "Macron steals right's thunder on fight against radical Islam". *Bloomberg*, 2 November 2020. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-11-02/macron-steals-right-s-thunder-on-fight-against-radical-islam>.

<sup>103</sup> Ní Bhriain N (2020). "Europe's new pact on migration and asylum: more deadly border politics". *In Historical Thunder and Lightning*, 1 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.brexitblog-rosalux.eu/2020/10/01/europes-new-pact-on-migration-and-asylum-more-deadly-border-politics/>.

In the US, the conservative think-tank Freedom House ranks the standard of political rights as 33<sup>rd</sup> in the world.<sup>104</sup> The past two decades in particular have been marked by the continued expansion of executive powers, mass surveillance, the arbitrary detention and torture of terror suspects and the abuse of state secrecy doctrines to shield torture and eavesdropping from judicial review.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, nearly 2.3 million people are incarcerated in the US, with black Americans and Latinos disproportionately more likely to be arrested, imprisoned or killed by police than whites.<sup>106</sup> The Black Lives Matter movement has once again brought to the fore the systemic racism that has long been an inbuilt feature of US society. Trump's term in office has been characterised by discriminatory domestic policies and at times extreme rhetoric with serious implications for human rights. Key rights and protections for asylum seekers, immigrants, Muslims, LGBT+ people and women have been rolled back, and Trump has stacked the Supreme Court with a conservative majority that could go on to overturn key decisions such as the legalisation of abortion. Growing denunciations of the anti-racist left, of 'Antifa' and the teaching of critical race theory, as well as his defence of police and Trump supporters using violence against Black Lives Matter protestors, has encouraged Trump's more reactionary support base.

However, November's presidential election saw women, young people, the working class, city dwellers and ethnic minorities turn out in large numbers to hand Joe Biden a victory over his Republican rival.<sup>107</sup> Trump has been defeated electorally, but he has also activated and transformed the scattered and fragmented American far right into something more coherent and dangerous. It does not appear that Trumpism will be going away in the near future, but whether it evolves into something with a clear strategy and direction remains to be seen.

In the UK, there are features of authoritarian neoliberalism with the extension of state powers, an increase in surveillance and the severity of police responses to protest and dissent, alongside the introduction of more exploitative working conditions, anti-union laws and an even-more punitive and discriminatory welfare system. All of this has taken place in a climate of Islamophobia and the persistence of long-standing structural racism. Racism has been found to be "endemic and pervasive" in the UK, manifesting itself at every level of policing.<sup>108</sup> By 2022, the Conservatives' "hostile environment" measures will have been in place for a full decade, despite the outrage provoked by the Windrush scandal, and there is every possibility of their extension.<sup>109</sup> Under emergency Covid-19 measures the government has given the police new and expansive powers, introduced 300 pieces of secondary legislation (laws created by ministers without parliamentary votes) and progressed legislation such as the Overseas Operations Bill. Plans to curtail

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<sup>104</sup> Freedom House (2020). Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>

<sup>105</sup> Greenwald G (2016). "Trump will have vast powers. He can thank Democrats for them". *Washington Post*, 11 November 2016. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/11/11/glenn-greenwald-trump-will-have-vast-powers-he-can-thank-democrats-for-them/>.

<sup>106</sup> Sawyer W and Wagner P (2020). *Mass Incarceration: the whole pie 2020*. Prison Policy Initiative report. Available at <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2020.html>.

<sup>107</sup> Roberts M (2020). "US election: women, the young, the working class, the cities and ethnic minorities get rid of Trump". *Michael Roberts Blog*, 8 November 2020. Available at: <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2020/11/08/us-election-women-the-young-the-working-class-the-cities-and-ethnic-minorities-get-rid-of-trump/>.

<sup>108</sup> Joseph-Salisbury R, Connelly L and Wangari-Jones P (2020). "'The UK is not innocent': Black Lives Matter, policing and abolition in the UK". *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* (online). Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/EDI-06-2020-0170/full/html>.

<sup>109</sup> Merrick R (2020). "Hostile environment to stay until at least 2022, Priti Patel's 'improvement plan' suggests". *Independent*, 30 September 2020. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/hostile-environment-priti-patel-windrush-scandal-review-b720205.html>.

the power of the judiciary have been revealed and there have been numerous reports of cronyism and corruption, disinformation campaigns and political appointments.<sup>110</sup>

There have also been times when Boris Johnson and his allies have emulated aspects of Trump's culture war: casting aspersions on the impartiality of the BBC; mounting staunch defences of Britain's imperial history; stigmatising Black Lives Matter protestors; attacking the 'liberal elite' and 'political correctness'; prohibiting the use of resources by anti-capitalist organisations in schools; and criticising the teaching of critical race theory in universities.<sup>111</sup>

The situation in the UK is obviously not directly comparable with that in Hungary or Poland, much less Turkey, Brazil, Colombia, the US, India, the Philippines or Israel for that matter. Each of these countries is characterised by varying degrees of authoritarianism and right-wing rhetoric. But they are all different variants of the same wider phenomenon. Viewed from the vantage point of the discussion above, we can see how a) right-wing authoritarian regimes can arrive by the back door, using legal and semi-legal means; b) these regimes are compatible with the central tenets of neoliberal economic thinking; and c) they can radicalise quickly in moments of crisis or when they find themselves running up against political limitations.

### 4.3 Assessing the global far right

The past few decades have seen the growing internationalisation of the far right, in terms of mobilisation, issues and narratives, targets, strategies, organisational networks and financing. This is not an entirely new phenomenon. Scholars have documented early attempts by fascist parties to establish trans-European institutions in the interwar period, for example the International Conference of Fascist Parties (1932) and the Fascist International Congress (1934).<sup>112</sup> Many trade union activists will be aware that fascist regimes, supporters and sympathisers rallied behind Franco during the Spanish Civil War. In the post-WWII period, several attempts were made to revive white supremacist, Nazi and neo-fascist ideas and forms of organisation, including a number of largely ineffective pan-European (Nouvel Ordre Européen, the European Social Movement, Circulo Español de Amigos de Europe) and global (World Union of National Socialists, League for Pan-Nordic Friendship) alliances.<sup>113</sup>

By the 1970s, a new generation of 'Eurofascist' formations had begun to emerge, most notably the Front National, which became the driving force behind the development of similar parties across Europe. This coincided and overlapped with the emergence of a racist skinhead subculture, which spread across Europe and into North America to become a social movement and ideology of global significance in the space of a decade.<sup>114</sup>

Globalisation processes have accelerated the far right's expansion across borders and generated the opportunities, as well as the mechanisms, for greater transnational

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<sup>110</sup> Casalicchio E (2020). "Boris Johnson goes presidential". *Politico*, 5 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/uk-prime-minister-boris-johnson-goes-presidential-cabinet-office-dominic-cummings/>.

<sup>111</sup> Mohdin A (2020). "Legal threat over anti-capitalist guidance for schools in England". *Guardian*, 1 October 2020. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/oct/01/legal-threat-governments-anti-capitalist-guidance-schools-political>

<sup>112</sup> Caiani M (2018). "Radical right cross-national links and international cooperation", in Rydgren (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, p 566.

<sup>113</sup> Griffin R (2017). "Interregnum or endgame? The radical right in the 'post-fascist' era", in Cas Mudde (ed), *The Populist Radical Right*, pp 17-18.

<sup>114</sup> See Pollard J (2016). "Skinhead culture: the ideologies, mythologies, religions and conspiracy theories of racist skinheads". *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol 50, no 4-5, pp 398-419.

cross-fertilisation. The process of European integration may challenge the core ideological principles of the far right, but has provided an important institutional arena for cooperation. Since the 1980s, radical and extreme-right parties in the European Parliament have made successive attempts to coordinate among themselves for elections and form an official parliamentary group. The 2014 elections marked a breakthrough for Eurosceptic far-right parties across the EU. Following this, there was an attempt to establish a parliamentary group in the form of the European Alliance for Freedom (EAF), which had existed as a pan-European alliance of parties since 2010. This collapsed due to national differences and internal splintering, but has since been resurrected as the Identity and Democracy group in the wake of the 2019 elections.

Outside of these institutionalised forms of cooperation, there is growing evidence of contact between parties and movements of the far right in Europe and beyond. One recent study of the most important far-right organisations in six European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Britain, Italy and Spain) found that most of the organisations surveyed (71 per cent) have frequent transnational contacts, either with right-wing groups in other countries or at the international level with umbrella federations.<sup>115</sup> These organisations are meeting online and in person at conferences and rallies, exchanging ideas, sharing resources and developing common platforms.

Closer and more regular contact has given rise to periodic and thus far largely unsuccessful attempts to establish a far-right international. For example, Trump's former chief strategist Steve Bannon has spent almost two years trying to organise Europe's far-right parties under the banner of The Movement, his Brussels-based think-tank. However, enthusiasm for the idea has waned among leaders of the bigger parties in his sights. Spain's Vox party is among those to have cooled its contacts with – and interest in – The Movement,<sup>116</sup> instead pursuing an initiative that is independent of Bannon and the likes of Salvini's Lega. In October of this year, Vox's leader, Santiago Abascal, launched the Madrid Charter, a declaration of personalities from 15 countries that aims to address "the concern about the advance of communism and the extreme left". This Madrid Charter marks the beginning of the Madrid Forum, an international initiative to counter the ideological and political threat of Cuba, the São Paulo Forum and the Puebla Group.<sup>117</sup>

One prominent example of the transnationalisation of non-party groups is the French-born Identitarian movement, which promotes the 'great replacement' theory that domestic elites are conspiring to replace the white European population with non-white immigrants. The Identitarian movement now has chapters in at least 14 countries and allies in many more, and the reach of Identitarian ideas extends far beyond the groups that share the brand name. Think-tanks, institutes, newspapers, far-right public intellectuals, clothing labels, bars and sports clubs have all drawn inspiration from Identitarianism. The great replacement myth has had a formative impact on American white supremacists

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<sup>115</sup> Caiani M, *op cit*, pp 567-70.

<sup>116</sup> Maestre A (2019). "The worrying rise of Spain's far right". *Jacobin*, 28 April 2019. Available at: <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/04/vox-party-far-right-spanish-election>.

<sup>117</sup> "Abascal prepara el Foro Madrid para hacer frente 'al avance del comunismo y la extrema izquierda". *vozpopuli*, 26 October 2020. Available at: [https://www.vozpopuli.com/espana/comunismo-izquierda-abascal-foro-madrid\\_0\\_1404460220.html](https://www.vozpopuli.com/espana/comunismo-izquierda-abascal-foro-madrid_0_1404460220.html). The São Paulo Forum is a collective of socialist political parties and other organisations from Latin America and the Caribbean, launched by the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT) in 1990. Established in 2019, the Puebla Group is a progressive alliance of over 40 leaders from Latin America and Spain, including former presidents, current and former government ministers and legislators.

and the perpetrators of no fewer than six mass terrorist attacks since 2018, including the Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant.<sup>118</sup>

Identitarianism has evolved alongside a kaleidoscope of transnational groups such as the Atomwaffen (AWD), an influential neo-Nazi terrorist network that promotes violence by affiliated groups, and 'lone wolves' across the globe.<sup>119</sup> Groups such as the AWD retain significant organisational power; however, there has been a rapid shift towards a fragmented, post-organisational and 'leaderless' paradigm whereby online networks and communities of more loosely affiliated groups and individuals are becoming increasingly important in shaping patterns of far-right activity and violence.<sup>120</sup>

The dynamics of financial globalisation have also facilitated increased flows of 'dark money' – that is, the use of non-profits and opaque company structures by rich donors to finance right-wing groups and push radical right-wing ideas into the mainstream. This is not a novel development, but it is one that is having a growing influence on the far right internationally. Researchers at *openDemocracy* have established that US Christian right groups, some of which are linked to personnel in Trump's administration, have spent at least \$280 million overseas since 2007. Much of this money has gone into campaigns against the rights of women and LGBT+ groups, but more recently they have been using Latin America as a testing ground for spreading misinformation about China's role in the spread of coronavirus and undermining the WHO. These and other funding networks provide an important forum for meetings and correspondence between far-right political parties and social movements.<sup>121</sup>

There are also more subtle processes of internationalisation taking place, which have contributed to collective experiences and the exchange of tactics and mobilisation patterns. What happens in one country's election can have ramifications for the political situation elsewhere, just as the outbreak of street protests in one city can inspire similar protests in another. This can overlap with the strategies of far-right organisations, which often send delegations to participate in party conferences and protests in different countries or, in the case of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion in eastern Ukraine, recruit volunteers from abroad to gain experience of armed conflict.<sup>122</sup> Finally, as we have seen in section 3, the media and internet has played an increasingly important role in facilitating the rapid diffusion of far-right ideas, frames and strategies across borders. It is largely

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<sup>118</sup> Beirich H (2020). *Generation Identity: international white nationalist movement spreading on Twitter and YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/GPAHE-July-2020-Report.pdf>; Anti-Defamation League (ADL) (n.d.) *Hate Beyond Borders: the internationalization of white supremacy*. Available at: <https://www.adl.org/resources/reports/hate-beyond-borders-the-internationalization-of-white-supremacy#introduction>.

<sup>119</sup> Soufan Center (2020). *Special Report: the Atomwaffen Division: the evolution of the white supremacy threat*. Available at: <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/The-Atomwaffen-Division-The-Evolution-of-the-White-Supremacy-Threat-August-2020-.pdf>.

<sup>120</sup> Comerford M (2020). "Confronting the challenge of 'post-organisational' extremism". *Observer Research Foundation*, 19 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/confronting-the-challenge-of-post-organisational-extremism/>.

<sup>121</sup> Ramsay A (2019). "Is your prosecco funding the far right?". *openDemocracy*, 22 May 2019. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/your-prosecco-funding-far-right/>; Brough M, Snip I, Provost C and Ferreira L (2020). "Interactive: explore US Christian right 'dark money' spending globally". *openDemocracy*, 28 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/interactive-explore-us-christian-right-dark-money-spending-globally/>; Cariboni D and Cotal (2020). "US groups linked to COVID conspiracies pour millions of 'dark money' into Latin America". *openDemocracy*, 29 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/us-groups-linked-to-covid-conspiracies-pour-millions-of-dark-money-into-latin-america/>.

<sup>122</sup> Purdue S (2020). "Foreign fighters and the global war for white supremacy". *Fair Observer*, 18 February 2020. Available at: [https://www.fairobserver.com/more/international\\_security/far-right-foreign-fighters-white-supremacy-history-azov-battalion-international-security-news-88711/](https://www.fairobserver.com/more/international_security/far-right-foreign-fighters-white-supremacy-history-azov-battalion-international-security-news-88711/).

through these technologies that the fringe ideas and practices of far-right groups and individuals in one small corner of the globe can gain international significance overnight, fuelling dangerous sentiments and real-life actions at a local level.

## 5. Trade union responses

How the far right will evolve in the coming months and years is an open question. Current conditions and the likelihood of recurring, deeper and more intense crises – economic, political and ecological – will continue to provide fertile ground for organising. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that an aggressive form of far-right authoritarianism could cohere in a dozen or more countries at once. Equally, there is every chance of a “new form of mass reactionary politics” taking root in the midst of these crises.<sup>123</sup> However, the inexorable rise of the far right is not a foregone conclusion. A lot depends on the response of trade unions, social movements and political parties. Here we present just some examples of responses to racism and the far right that have involved, or been led, by trade unions in different countries.

### 5.1 Continental Europe

As far Europe is concerned, Germany is the country where the trade union movement appears to “have developed the most comprehensive set of actions” to counteract the rise of far-right parties and sympathy among workers for far-right views.<sup>124</sup> These actions have involved:

- a) The adoption of a ‘defining limits and open door’ strategy, which means a no-tolerance approach to the expression of racist or far-right views, but at the same time an open door for steering the anger and frustration of discontented workers towards collective action.
- b) Unions such as the DGB and its members are setting standards and ideals on democracy and solidarity, for example by enshrining defence of democracy and anti-fascism as a fundamental pillar of the trade union’s activity. Some local union leaders have also begun to apply ‘incompatibility measures’ aimed at excluding members and supporters of far-right parties from membership of the trade union, though there are still discussions on whether or not to implement this policy across the board.
- c) DGB and its affiliates, as well as its research arms, have commissioned or undertaken several studies on the far-right attitudes of workers and trade union members in particular. These studies have been crucial in identifying the strength of far-right attitudes among workers as well as establishing the extent to which far-right organisations have a presence in workplaces and the democratic structures of trade unions. The DGB is currently leading a major research project in six European countries (Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Poland and Hungary) that aims to provide an updated analysis of far-right organising and narratives in the workplace.
- d) Awareness raising and political education interventions also form a key part of trade union strategies in Germany. A number of unions have developed brochures, produced guidebooks and launched education programmes that not only shine a light on the true nature of far-right parties such as the AfD, but are designed to prepare workers for debates on important social and economic issues.

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<sup>123</sup> Renton D (2020), *op cit*.

<sup>124</sup> European Economic and Social Committee (2019). *Trade Union Strategies in the EU to Address Trade Union Members’ and Workers’ Growing Propensity to Vote for Right Wing Populists and Nationalists*. Brussels, pp 47-53. Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/qe-03-19-589-en-n.pdf>.

e) German unions have begun implementing action at a company level, particularly in response to far-right movements' attempts to penetrate works councils by fielding candidates for elections, especially in the automobile sector. These are decentralised initiatives and have not yet been generalised into a fully fledged strategy. But this an exercise still in development, supported by the ongoing research of DGB and other organisations. Other workplace interventions include workplace-based training and education initiatives to strengthen the internal democratic culture of companies. These initiatives 'open the door' by promoting a culture of fraternal debate around sensitive issues.

German trade unions also have a long history of leading and taking part in anti-fascist movements. In recent years, trade unions have been centrally involved in local and national mobilisations against the AfD. Two years ago, a demonstration of nearly 250,000 people took place in Germany against the AfD, organised by a coalition that included trade unions, human rights organisations and migrant associations. There have been countless local mobilisations since then, which have connected with strikes and workplace struggles, in addition to campaigns over health and housing. While we need to be careful not to overestimate the impact of these events - the AfD's difficulties have also arisen from internal tensions - there is little doubt that this constant pressure played a significant role in exposing the fascist tendencies within the party.<sup>125</sup>

Recent events in Greece also show that the far right can be pushed back. At one point Golden Dawn had 18 MPs and was on course to become Greece's third-largest party. But in 2019 the party has lost all of its seats and virtually all of its electoral support, and its leadership has been found guilty of running a criminal organisation whose crimes included murder, assault and possession of offensive weapons. This setback for the far right was not inevitable: Golden Dawn's political and legal defeat would not have happened without broad-based anti-fascist action and strategy, solidarity actions and the mass mobilisation of Greece's main trade union federations over a sustained period.<sup>126</sup> Significantly, the unions were critical in ensuring that the fight against racism and fascism was closely linked to the struggle against austerity, by organising migrant workers industrially and engaging in community-based campaigns for an expansion of welfare, housing and healthcare for refugees.

The Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) is working closely with the DGB and other European trade union partners on a research project focused on far-right organising and narratives in the workplace. The CGIL is also engaged in campaigning activity geared towards counteracting Lega's efforts to establish a foothold in workplaces and trade unions, most notably through its formal relationship with the General Labour Union (UGL). CGIL is running a widespread campaign to highlight the unfair practices and negative implications of UGL's actions, for example the signing of a national collective agreement for delivery riders that undermines ongoing negotiations. CGIL also works closely with the National Association of Italian Partisans (ANPI), which has just signed a protocol with the Ministry of Education to promote the memory of anti-fascist movements in schools.

Trade unions in Hungary have experienced a dramatic decline in membership during the decade that Orbán has been in power. Orbán's regime has made clear its intention to destroy unions and destroy workers' rights. One report notes that "there are no

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<sup>125</sup> Ovenden K (2020). "From Golden Dawn to the AfD, the far right is being beaten back by a fighting left". *Counterfire*, 20 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.counterfire.org/articles/analysis/21736-from-golden-dawn-to-the-afd-the-far-right-is-being-beaten-back-by-a-fighting-left>.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*



direct strategies or actions carried out by trade unions” to counteract support for the far right.<sup>127</sup> But while unions are relatively weak in Hungary, Orbán’s ‘slave law’ created an unprecedented protest movement. At the beginning of 2019, trade unions came onto the streets in protest against the new labour code, demanding that it be withdrawn. They were joined by political parties and civil society organisations, which accused Orbán of eroding democracy and the rule of law. This ushered in ‘a year of resistance’ against the government, promoting closer cooperation between opposition parties that eventually resulted in electoral gains at a municipal level. However, the protests have since given way to an approach favouring dialogue with the government, particularly in the context of the pandemic. It is uncertain how this will play out and whether we will see a concerted challenge to Orbán’s radical nationalist, anti-worker and anti-immigrant agenda.<sup>128</sup>

In Poland, the trade union reaction to the constitutional ban on abortion has highlighted the importance of building solidarity networks and mobilising against regimes that are lurching to the right. The protests organised by Strajk Kobiet (Women’s Strike) have galvanised public support and gathered huge momentum, bringing tens of thousands of people onto the streets. The Polish trade union movement has a strong Catholic nationalist influence. But while some unions have been supportive of the government, the demonstrations have attracted support from a broad range of social forces including farmers, taxi drivers and sections of the trade union movement, including the miners’ union Sierpień ’80. With the political landscape polarised and evenly balanced, the outcome of the Strajk Kobiet protests will be hugely significant.<sup>129</sup>

## 5.2 The UK

Trade unions have been one of the mainstays of anti-racist and anti-fascist activity in Britain for decades, reaching all the way back to the battles against Mosley’s Blackshirts in the 1930s. More recently, trade unions led the mobilisation against the National Front in the 1970s and 1980s. This is part of the reason for the weak and fragmented nature of the neo-Nazi right in Britain today. But trade unions have once again been forced to mobilise against the far right as it has re-emerged in different incarnations. In an effort to deny the far right the space in which to organise and propagate its views, trade unions in the UK have initiated or supported a number of demonstrations and counter-demonstrations in recent years. This has included widespread support and solidarity activity among trade unions for the Black Lives Matter movement.

Recognising the urgent need to build on what has already been done, the TUC and its affiliates have been working to develop further strategies for countering racism and the far right. For instance, the TUC has been engaging with international partners on the question of how best to organise against far-right forces and narratives in the workplace, with a view to developing a joint programme of work on a cross-border basis. Furthermore, the TUC is in the process of developing new education courses, one of which – Winning Workplace Unity – has already been delivered in four regions.

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<sup>127</sup> European Economic and Social Committee, *op cit*, p 55.

<sup>128</sup> Szijarto I (2019). “Hungarians can’t be bought with potatoes”. *Jacobin*, 27 October 2019. Available at: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/10/hungary-viktor-orban-fidesz-budapest>.

<sup>129</sup> “Farmers, taxi drivers and miners show support for abortion protests in Poland”. *Notes from Poland*, 26 October 2020. Available at: <https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/10/26/farmers-taxi-drivers-and-miners-show-support-for-abortion-protests-in-poland/?fbclid=IwAR3ElconpyBWhGylAGMbwFzl8CPP8mg6VkJFdr-EU6qK78l66qOUFIK1uZc8>.

The Trade Union Co-ordinating Group (TUCG)<sup>130</sup> has recently published an edited collection that draws attention to various aspects of trade union activity geared towards combatting racism and the far right.<sup>131</sup> Among the initiatives highlighted is the FBU's solidarity and education trips to the refugee camps in Dunkirk and Calais, which have involved firefighter members travelling across to the camps with much-needed supplies and bringing back the stories of refugees to their workplaces. The FBU executive has decided to expand this project in order that its message of internationalism and solidarity can be spread more widely among its membership. Also highlighted is the campaigning efforts of the RMT in the struggle against institutional racism and the far right, and its commitment to formulating a trade union response including, in collaboration with the TUC and others, the development of anti-fascist training.

For its part, the NEU has been developing an anti-racist workplace charter that models good practices and behaviours for schools relating to the curriculum, pastoral systems and employment practices. The union has also posted member-created teaching resources about refugees and migrants on the NEU website. NEU activists have meanwhile been working on initiatives to 'decolonise' the education curriculum, which is an important development not only because of its longstanding pro-imperialist bias but particularly in the light of the Windrush scandal, Black Lives Matter and the Tories' attacks on academic freedoms in schools and universities. This decolonising agenda seeks to: connect contemporary racialised disadvantages with wider historical processes of colonialism; make what teachers teach and how they teach it more responsive to the problems of colonial and racialised privilege and discrimination; and overcome the limits and disadvantages embedded in curricula (content) and pedagogies (methods for teaching, assessment and academic support).

Unite has launched a 'Unity Over Division' campaign, run by its own staff to allow direct engagement with members. Unite's work includes a process of building the skills and confidence of activists to challenge far-right narratives in the workplace and community through engaging in difficult conversations – very much in line with the 'open door' strategy being pursued by some of the German unions. At the time of writing, Unite has held a series of large workshop-style events with workers across the UK, in addition to more localised one-day training events. The union has briefed all of its 100 tutors across the regions, developing new resources for core shop stewards' education programmes, and trained another 100 facilitators in Ireland to have difficult conversations in their communities in response to a rise in far-right activities. During the lockdown, Unite has engaged with private companies and local councils to deliver anti-racist education, securing the support of employers for the union's Unity Over Division charter.

It is important to add that successful political campaigning against racism and the far right has always been linked to industrial campaigns to build class solidarity. Over the past two years alone, there have been several large-scale disputes affecting sectors that are crucial to sustaining our communities *and* have a high proportion of BME and migrant workers. These are the kinds of action that serve to strengthen the links between the industrial, the political and the community. Furthermore, the pandemic has prompted a reassessment of what constitutes essential work and how it should be valued, financially and societally. The Conservative government's proposals for new restrictions on migration post-Brexit will leave many of these workers, already low paid and precarious, facing even greater

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<sup>130</sup> Comprising BFAWU, FBU, NAPO, NEU, NUJ, PCS, POA, RMT, UCU and URTU.

<sup>131</sup> Trade Union Co-ordinating Group (2020). *Trade Unions Fighting Racism and the Far-right: building solidarity in workplaces and communities*. Available at: <https://www.tucg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/TUCG-equality-booklet.pdf>.

exploitation and abuse.<sup>132</sup> This is why the emphasis placed on organising migrant workers by the TUC and affiliates is so important.

### 5.3 The US

The defeat of Donald Trump owed a great deal to the organising and mobilising efforts of trade unions and grassroots movements. Starting in 2018, the Trump administration was faced with an upsurge in major strikes, most notably by public schoolteachers and support workers of various kinds. Significantly, the teachers struck and won in 'red' (Republican) states with no collective bargaining provisions. The outbreak of the pandemic saw workers responding to the government's failure to guarantee adequate workplace health and safety protections and income support for frontline workers. Coming on top of the pandemic and subsequent economic impacts,<sup>133</sup> these actions and the conditions that gave rise to them had the cumulative effect of galvanising opposition to Trump. Union members not only voted for Biden but, crucially, mobilised in large numbers to help deliver gains for Biden in key swing states, with the AFL-CIO playing an important role. This mobilisation centred around public health (Medicare For All) and the economy. The multiple overlapping crises in the US present a serious threat to workers' lives and livelihoods, but have also opened up some possibilities for a political trade union response.

### 5.4 Latin America

Far-right neoliberal movements and governments in Latin America are among the greatest threats to democracy, human rights and a decent standard of living for the majority. This is why examples of successful resistance contain useful lessons for trade unions in other parts of the world. The huge victory of the MAS candidate Luis Arce in Bolivia's presidential elections not only heralds a brighter future for the Bolivian people but also demonstrates the possibility and necessity of building a resilient movement from the bottom up. Indigenous, Afro-Bolivians, peasants and large sections of the trade union movement have been actively resisting far-right attacks and state repression since the coup began last year. They were sustained by the fact that the MAS government emerged from the social movements, as opposed to a narrow focus on the rituals of voting every few years, and gave those movements a democratic stake in the project to overturn neoliberalism. Grassroots political education organised by workers' movements and campesino unions were another foundation stone of the movement that has been built there.

Chile is another example of trade unions placing themselves at the heart of a movement to push back the tide of right-wing reaction and chart a new path for the country. The referendum granted by the government to replace Pinochet's constitution came after years of campaigning and mass protest action involving trade unions, indigenous groups, the women's movement and students. Meanwhile, we have already noted that an emerging coalition of social forces, including trade unions, has mobilised in Colombia around a positive and increasingly coherent political vision that aligns peace and democracy with critiques of neoliberal capitalism, bringing issues of poverty, inequality

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<sup>132</sup> Morris M (2020). *Building a Post-Brexit Immigration System for the Economic Recovery*. IBPPR briefing, November 2020. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/files/2020-11/post-brexit-migrationnov20.pdf>.

<sup>133</sup> See Yates MD (2020). "COVID-19, economic depression, and the Black Lives Matter protests: will the triple crisis bring a working-class revolt in the United States?". *Monthly Review*, vol 72, no 4, pp. 14-33.

and racial injustice to the forefront. The Brazilian trade union movement, too, has been campaigning consistently against Bolsonaro's policies in the industrial and political sphere. A general strike against the government's pension reforms in the summer of 2019 has been followed by a pattern of industrial action against privatisation, public sector cuts, layoffs and Bolsonaro's response to the pandemic. A number of trade union leaders and activists were also elected during Brazil's municipal elections in November of this year.<sup>134</sup>

The histories and circumstances of these Latin American countries are very different to those faced by trade unions in the UK. But they highlight the necessity of industrial campaigning, extra-parliamentary organising and movement-building, linked to a hopeful political vision.

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<sup>134</sup> See <https://www.cut.org.br/noticias>.

## 6. Conclusion: A resistable threat

The threat of the far right today is potent, not least because of its electoral and extra-parliamentary strength. Far-right electoral parties have gained ground in parallel with the mobilisation of right-wing extremists on the streets. They are in parliament and have taken power, not just at a local or regional level but at a national level. We have seen how authoritarianism and far-right ideologies are not incompatible with neoliberalism; instead, these regimes sit at the extreme end of a continuum, a continuum that itself is moving in a more authoritarian and radical right-wing direction. The political mainstream has increasingly adopted far-right discourses and practices, while far-right parties, movements and regimes themselves have also shown radicalising tendencies under certain conditions. It is this spread of far-right ideas, discourses and practices that presents such a challenge. Today's far right is also transnational, which has a catalysing effect on its ability to grow and radicalise. The contemporary far right has also displayed tactical flexibility, ideological pragmatism and a degree of sophistication in its preferred methods of organising and communication. Added to this is the complex ecosystem of transnational far-right media outlets, networks and groups, which have drawn large numbers of people down dangerous 'rabbit holes' and inserted far-right narratives into the public discourse.

And yet, the far right does not have the answers to the multiple crises we face. Examples of successful resistance across the globe contain useful lessons for us all. Trade unions, the biggest social movement on the planet, are best placed to meet this challenge head on by articulating and organise around a hopeful vision of the future.

*If the left fails to provide rational, progressive solutions to the growing social and economic crises, the right will seize the occasion with irrational and reactionary 'solutions' to these crises. (Daniel Singer)*

# Appendix 1

## Central and eastern Europe

Countries of central and eastern Europe have experienced two phases of rapid and painful economic liberalisation. Among eastern European countries, Hungary had a head start in its transformation into a market economy as a result of reforms that began as early as the 1970s,<sup>135</sup> whereas Poland is widely regarded as the model example of economic 'shock therapy'.<sup>136</sup> But under the 'supervision' of the western powers, the IMF, World Bank and their advisers, the pace of liberalisation picked up across eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union following the latter's dissolution in 1991. This involved, among other things, the mass privatisation of state assets, the creation of stock exchanges and capital markets, swingeing budget cuts and the introduction of flexible labour markets. The immediate consequences were catastrophic: a massive drop in living standards, a huge spike in unemployment and an explosion of inequality. The mandatory privatisation of pension schemes drove many pensioners into extreme poverty, and the 'transition' caused the greatest fall in life expectancy and rise in mortality ever recorded in peacetime.<sup>137</sup>

These effects of the transition process lingered on into the mid-2000s, when a new round of neoliberal reforms was imposed on post-communist states to prepare them for accession into the EU.<sup>138</sup> It was not long after this that the financial crisis struck. Eastern Europe was first hit by the global credit crunch, then by a fall in capital inflows and a collapse in demand for exports. Each of these far-reaching impacts was compounded by the rapid restructuring of the region's economies and financial systems in the preceding decades.<sup>139</sup>

Hungary was the hardest hit of the central and eastern European EU members because a significant portion of its government debt was foreign-owned. Austerity, rising unemployment and record levels of household indebtedness, coupled with political corruption, all paved the way for Orbán's rise to power in 2010. With the promise of unorthodox economic policies such as withdrawing from the IMF/EU bailout programme, nationalising pension funds and utilities, and imposing new taxes on banks and multinationals, combined with attacks on refugees and the EU's border arrangements, he succeeded in radicalising politics "towards a new spirit of 'national cooperation'".<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Broder D (2019). "When socialist Hungary went neoliberal" (an interview with Adam Fabry). *Jacobin*, 28 September 2019. Available at: <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/09/hungary-neoliberalism-soviet-union>.

<sup>136</sup> Klein N (2007). *The Shock Doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism*. Toronto. Chapter 9.

<sup>137</sup> Fekete L (2017). *Europe's Fault Lines: racism and the rise of the right*, p 98; Popov, V (2018). "Mortality and life expectancy in post-communist countries". *DOC Research Institute*, 5 June 2018. Available at: <https://doc-research.org/2018/06/mortality-life-expectancy-post-communist/>.

<sup>138</sup> Fekete, *op cit*, p 97.

<sup>139</sup> Marer P (2010). "The global economic crises: impacts on Eastern Europe". *Acta Oeconomica*, vol 60, no 1, pp 3-33.

<sup>140</sup> Stubbs P and Lendvai-Bainton N (2019). "Authoritarian neoliberalism, radical conservatism and social policy within the European Union: Croatia, Hungary and Poland". *Development and Change*, vol 51, no 2, pp 547-8; Broder, *op cit*.

Orbán's Fidesz government was elected for a second term in 2014, and for a third in 2018, achieving a supermajority on both occasions. In 2015, meanwhile, PiS won power in Poland having fought the election on a hybrid programme of anti-EU and anti-refugee sentiment, economic protectionism and the promise of family-focused welfare spending.<sup>141</sup> In 2016, the neo-fascist People's Party – Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) won 14 of 150 seats in the Slovakian parliament. These breakthroughs for parties of the radical and extreme right not only represented a (partial) rejection of austerity, but also formed part of a "broader rebellion against the outcomes of the 'transition process' that was implemented after the collapse of Communist Party rule".<sup>142</sup>

## Latin America

The transitions experienced in different parts of Latin America over the past few decades have been of a different kind, but are not without parallels. In an unprecedented wave of strikes, single-issue campaigns and mass mobilisations, extending from the 1990s into the mid-2000s, popular movements of various Latin American countries either overturned or dealt a heavy blow to the neoliberal agenda that had been imposed by regimes linked to Washington, the IMF and the World Bank. These popular movements, some of which created their own political parties, started winning elections and entering government in more and more of the region's countries. Some of these governments sought to reform the system with an emphasis on redistributive social policies (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay); others looked to make a clean break with neoliberalism using popular mobilisations (Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela). Other countries, chiefly Colombia, remained under the control of US-backed neoliberal administrations, but were the subject of an ongoing struggle between the state and popular movements.<sup>143</sup>

In 2002 Luiz Ignácio Lula da Silva of the Workers' Party (PT) won the presidential elections in Brazil, a country deeply scarred by two decades of dictatorship and a further decade of neoliberal restructuring, and one dominated by big capital and centre-right political forces. Pursuing a policy of broad alliances, Lula's government promoted the production of commodities for export and an expansion of the country's internal market, which encouraged a period of significant economic growth and the creation of twenty million new jobs during his two terms in office. Brazil's biggest departure from neoliberalism during his tenure came in the form of an expansive welfare programme which, along with minimum wage increases, helped to lift nearly 40 million people out of poverty.<sup>144</sup>

Dilma Rousseff, Lula's successor, sought to maintain the same economic principles during her two terms in office (2011–16). However, the objective conditions for maintaining this agenda began to deteriorate in 2012 as the global economic crisis reached Brazilian shores via the collapse in international commodity prices. A deep recession began in

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<sup>141</sup> Smith AD (2015). "Poland lurches to right with election of Law and Justice party". *Guardian*, 26 October 2015. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/25/poland-lurches-to-right-with-election-of-law-and-justice-party>.

<sup>142</sup> The Ervina Szabová Collective, cited in Fekete, *op cit*, p 98.

<sup>143</sup> Harnecker M (2015). *A World to Build: new paths toward twenty-first century socialism*. New York. Chapter 3.

<sup>144</sup> Atunes R (2019). "The preemptive counterrevolution and the rise of the far right in Brazil". *Monthly Review*, 1 July 2019. Available at: <https://monthlyreview.org/2019/07/01/the-preemptive-counterrevolution-and-the-rise-of-the-far-right-in-brazil/>; Tepperman J (2016). "Brazil's anti-poverty breakthrough: the surprising success of Bolsa Familia". *Foreign Affairs*, vol 95, no 1 (January/February 2016), pp 34–44.

2013, eroding confidence in Brazil's fragile coalition government. It was in then that the right's systematic attack on Rousseff began. In June of that year, thousands of young people took to the streets to protest an increase in bus fares in São Paulo, whose state government was led by the right-wing Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB). The authorities sent the police to beat down the protests. Demonstrations increased, with millions of young people taking to the streets across the country with demands such as better public services and an end to corruption. Having first condemned the demonstrations, the media and political opposition saw an opportunity to undermine Rousseff's legitimacy and that of her PT-led government. The media was decisive in encouraging greater numbers onto the streets, including growing sections of the traditional middle classes and large sections of the bourgeoisie. Increasingly the protests began to acquire right-wing slogans, including calls for a return to military dictatorship. This period was marked by the "rapid politicization and ideologization of the right and, in particular, of the far right".<sup>145</sup>

Despite these mounting attacks, Rousseff narrowly won a second term in late 2014, sustained by working-class votes. However, the election left Brazil with the most fragmented Congress in history, and Rousseff needing to form a 10-party coalition to achieve a majority. In the midst of a deepening economic crisis, this left the president exposed to attacks by the opposition and coalition partners alike. It was then that the right intensified its process of destabilisation, putting obstacles in the way to prevent the government functioning and using allegations of corruption to push for a parliamentary and judicial coup. Outside of parliament, large media-backed right-wing demonstrations were taking place on a weekly basis, calling for Rousseff's head:

*While the image of the 2013 protests is of young people resisting repression, that of the pro-impeachment demonstrations of 2015-16 is of well-off families taking selfies with police officers - a new populism of the right emerging in Brazil.*<sup>146</sup>

The right's campaign against Rousseff reached its climax in 2016 when the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PDMB), the PT's biggest coalition partner, withdrew from government and gave its support to the president's political deposition and impeachment on charges of corruption. The right used Michel Temer's two-year interregnum to dramatically shift the political landscape in Brazil, through a combination of austerity, privatisations and the destruction of social programmes and of workers' rights, as well attacks on the social rights of LGBT+ people, Afro-Brazilians and women. It was in this climate, and that of increasing authoritarianism, that Marielle Franco, a black bisexual feminist, human rights activist and city councillor for the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), was murdered in March 2018.<sup>147</sup>

It is doubtful whether Bolsonaro would have won Brazil's 2018 presidential election had the ever-popular Lula not been imprisoned on spurious corruption charges. Nor could it be said that Bolsonaro was part of the centre-right's plan, which was focused on identifying a viable candidate from within its own ranks. But he was favoured by the economic crisis, the unpopularity of Temer's government and the rising systemic mood, using Trump-inspired propaganda and rhetoric to pose as the anti-establishment outsider.

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<sup>145</sup> Tricontinental (2018). "Dossier no. 5: Lula and the battle for democracy in Brazil". Available at: [https://www.thetricontinental.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Dossier5\\_LulaAndTheBattleForDemocracyInBrazil.pdf](https://www.thetricontinental.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Dossier5_LulaAndTheBattleForDemocracyInBrazil.pdf); Atunes, *op cit*.

<sup>146</sup> Neuenschwander J and Giraldes M (2018). "Marielle Franco: 1979-2018". *New Left Review*, no 110 (Mar-Apr 2018), pp 131-4.

<sup>147</sup> See Neuenschwander and Giraldes, *op cit*.



As in other cases where the far right has been successful, Bolsonaro managed to appeal to sections of the working class and lower-middle class – economically insecure, disaffected and looking for someone to blame. He won a core constituency of white, upper-class voters who sought a reversal of Lula’s remaining achievements, along with a restoration of law and order and traditional values. The evangelical churches also played a major role, rallying behind Bolsonaro once the momentum behind his campaign looked unstoppable. Even the country’s economic and political elites eventually assented to his candidacy, after he pledged to implement the ultraliberal programme of Paulo Guedes, an investment banker with a PhD from the notorious economics department in Chicago.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Grigera J and Webber JR (eds) (n.d.) “The long Brazilian crisis: a forum”. *Historical Materialism*. Available at: <http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/articles/long-brazilian-crisis-forum>; Gallego ES (2018). “How Bolsonaro came to pass”. *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung New York Office*, November 2018. Available at: <http://www.rosalux-nyc.org/how-bolsonaro-came-to-pass/>.

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