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Fascism: The False Revolution
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I want to look at some of the neglected attributes of fascism and its relevance for what's happening today. Before World War I Benito Mussolini was a socialist. But many of his socialist comrades thought he was less interested in advancing the cause of socialism than in advancing himself. Sure enough, the minute that the wealthy classes in Italy offered him financial support and the promise of power, he didn't hesitate to switch sides. We know about people who switch sides, don't we? And with the huge sums he got from wealthy interests, Mussolini was able to project himself onto the national scene as the acknowledged leader of I Fasci di Combatimento, a movement composed of ex-army officers and various other toughs who were used as a kind of anti-labor militia. They specialized in attacking unions, peasant farm cooperatives, socialists, communists and anarchists.

After World War I Italy's parliamentary government faced a postwar recession. To maintain profit levels, the large industrialists and big landowners would have to slash wages and raise prices. The state in turn would have to provide the big owners with massive subsidies and tax exemptions. To finance this corporate welfarism, the populace would have to be taxed more heavily and social welfare expenditures would have to be drastically cut. Does all of this sound familiar? [laughter]

But the government wasn't completely free to apply these harsh measures because many Italian workers and peasants had their own unions and fairly strong political organizations, with demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, factory takeovers, the forcible occupation of farmlands they won substantial concessions in wages, in work conditions and in the right to organize. So the workers and peasants were able to mount a defense of their standard of living. To roll back that standard of living and to get the economic changes that the plutocrats and tycoons wanted, the ruling interests had to abolish the democratic rights that helped peasants and workers defend that standard. So the solution was to smash their organizations and their political liberties.

In 1922, the Federazione Industriale, the leaders of industry, along with top bankers and agribusiness associations, met with Mussolini to plan the March on Rome, contributing 20 million lira to the so-called "fascist revolution." Within two years after seizing state power, Mussolini had shut down all opposition newspapers and crushed the socialist, liberal, Catholic, democratic and republican parties, which together had commanded about 80% of the vote. The fascists were never a majority in Italy. Opposition leaders, union leaders and others were beaten, exiled or murdered. The Italian Communist Party endured the severest repression of all.

In Germany there was a very similar pattern of complicity between fascists and capitalists. German workers and farm laborers had won the eight-hour day, unemployment insurance, the right to unionize. They had built very strong political

organizations also. But heavy industry and big finance were in a state of nearly total collapse. Business wanted to cut wages. Business wanted tax cuts and massive state subsidies to revive profit levels. During the 1920s the Nazi storm troopers were subsidized by business and were used to terrorize workers and farm laborers. But by 1930 a decision was made by the German tycoons: The Weimar Republic no longer served their needs and was too accommodating to the working class and to the Social Democrats. They greatly increased their subsidies to Hitler, propelling the Nazi Party onto the national stage. In fact, Hitler himself boasted of it, the immense amount of campaign material we got, a thousand automobiles with loudspeakers. Each of them could make 100,000 appearances, saturating every town and village in the cities of Germany, getting out this propaganda. Money to build their party organization, their youth groups and their paramilitary forces.

You can read book after book about fascism and Nazism and find almost nothing said about the economic policies of these regimes, of the things I just told you about now. They're just not in the books. There's also a vast literature on who supported the Nazis. Who supported them? There were some rich tycoons, but some of them were against him. Some workers voted for him, some were against him. It's hard to say. Blah, blah, blah. Very little is ever written about who the Nazis supported when they came in, who the fascists supported when they came in. Because that would be much more revealing, you see. And this is in keeping with the tendency of mainstream scholarship to avoid the entire subject of capitalism whenever something unfavorable might be said about it.

Who did Mussolini and Hitler support once they seized state power? In both countries a strikingly similar agenda was pursued: labor unions and strikes were outlawed. Union property and publications were confiscated. Farm cooperatives were handed over to rich private owners. Big agribusiness farming was heavily subsidized. In Italy, child labor was reintroduced. In both Germany and Italy the already modest wages of the workers were cut drastically, in Germany from 25-40% cuts, in Italy 50%. These were already rather modest wages as it was. In both countries minimum wage laws, overtime pay and factory safety regulations were abolished or turned into dead letters. Taxes were increased for the general populace but lowered or eliminated for the rich and big business. Inheritance taxes for the wealthy were greatly reduced or abolished. Both Mussolini and Hitler showed their gratitude to their business patrons by handing over to them publicly owned and perfectly solvent steel mills, power plants, banks, steamship companies. Privatization, it's called. Both regimes dipped heavily into the public treasury to refloat or subsidize heavy industry. Corporate welfarism, we would call it today. Both states guaranteed a return on the capital invested by giant corporations and assumed

most of the risks and losses on investments. Sounds like Savings & Loan, if you ask me.

As in all reactionary regimes, public capital was raided by private capital. The result of all of this? In Italy during the 1930s the economy was gripped by recession. A staggering public debt. Widespread corruption. But industrial profits rose. The armaments factories busily rolled out the weapons. In Germany unemployment was eased somewhat because there was a massive depression when they came in. It was eased because of the massive arms program. But generally poverty increased. If you cut wages 25-40% poverty is increased, no matter how many jobs you might create. But from 1935-1943 the net income of German corporate leaders rose 46%. In both countries the conditions of labor deteriorated greatly. Speedups, dismissals, imprisonment of workers who complained about unsafe or inhumane work conditions, longer hours for less wages.

Looking at this years ago, I used to say that fascism never really succeeded in solving the irrational contradictions of capitalism. Today I believe it was never intended to solve the irrational contradictions of capitalism. At least not for the populace and for the people. Now I'm of the opinion that it actually in a way did succeed. It succeeded in solving the problems of capitalism, but only for the capitalists. Fascism offers a reactionary solution, not a social solution, for the contradictions of capitalism. It forces all the burdens and losses onto the working public. And in those days, by the way, there was any number of U.S. bankers and industrialists, including the likes of Henry Ford, who appreciated the way fascism was serving the monied class. They were avid admirers. They gave political and even financial support to Mussolini and Hitler. The U.S. press was also filled with admiration. *Fortune*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the free and independent press that speaks for all of us, they hailed Il Duce as the man who rescued Italy from radicalism and brought perfect harmony to the country. The image of an Italy in a state of perfect harmony is one that challenges the imagination, in any case. [laughter]

In regard to Hitler, the U.S. press in the 1930s had a rather substantial contingent of a "Give Adolf a chance" group. He means well. Oh, he may be a little rough here and there. Some of that sympathy was greased directly by Nazi money. Hearst entered a deal with the Nazis with his wire service. The Nazis paid him something like ten times a normal subscription. In response, Hearst fired any reporters who filed negative stories and admonished the others to treat Nazi Germany in a nice light. Grey Bletcher told me that he found back issues of Hearst newspapers that contained guest columns by Nazi leaders like Alfred Rosenberg and Hermann Goering. So we're talking thick here. They were thick.

As the war clouds gathered, as Italy, Germany and Japan, who were the latecomers in the industrial world, began to challenge the interests of the more established Western capitalist nations, then press coverage begins to get a little more critical. Some mainstream writers, academics and scholars will not only deny fascism's close collaboration with big business, they even argue that business was one of the victims of fascism. Angelo Codevila, a Hoover Institute right-wing flak, blithely announcing in *Commentary* magazine, August 1994, "If fascism

means anything, it means government ownership and control of business." He goes on to say, So business doesn't like fascism. They often try to misrepresent fascism as a mutant form of socialism. In fact, if fascism means anything, it means government support and subsidy for business, mass privatization and intensified exploitation and repression of labor, in a word.

Fascists and Nazi leaders did not merely serve the capitalists. They also served themselves. They were unprincipled people. Mussolini lived like a king. Hitler is portrayed to us as an ascetic fanatic, a devoted ideologue who wasn't concerned with material things. Yeah, sure. In fact, Hitler accumulated an immense fortune, much of it in very shady ways. During his entire tenure in office, he avoided paying any income taxes or property taxes and got special rulings from the German Tax Office. The letters are very amusing. Yes, we see no reason ... heavy state expenditures ... no taxes for you, mein Führer. He expropriated art works from the public domain. He stole enormous sums from Nazi Party coffers, including the endowments and donations, small ones, big ones, he took a lot of it for himself. He invented a new concept called the "personality right" and charged a minute fraction of a fee for every postage stamp that was sold that had his picture on it. He made hundreds of millions of marks.

The greatest source of Hitler's wealth was from a secret slush fund to which German industrialists regularly donated. Wolf Schwarzweiler, in a book about Hitler's private fortune: "Hitler knew that as long as German industry was making money, his private money sources would be inexhaustible. Thus he would see to it that German industry was never better off than under his rule by launching, for one thing, gigantic armaments projects," or what we would call today "defense contracts." Hitler lived self-indulgently. He had a motor pool of limousines, private apartments, country homes, a vast staff of servants, a majestic estate in the Alps. He was a snob. His happiest times were when he was entertaining European royalty, including the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, who themselves were delighted to be his guests. There are photos of them shaking hands and looking adoringly at each other. Well, come on, Parenti, is that all fascism is, a conspiracy to save capitalism? That might not be *all* that it is, but that's quite an important part of it, so could we talk about that once in a while? It's the part that Hitler himself kept referring to when he talked about saving the industrialists and bankers from Bolshevism. Mussolini also designated himself Italy's savior from the red tide. What was exactly so terrible about communism was not that it threatened democracy. The Italian fascists and German Nazis both openly detested democracy, and they destroyed it when they came to power, in any case. The industrialists don't worry about democracy when they're taking over. It was that communism and the left in general was never strong enough to take state power in either country. But they were strong enough to interfere with profit rates and the capital accumulation process, and this was threatening enough for the monied interests.

I don't want to deny fascism's ideology and its irrational appeals. But even these irrational elements had a rational class control function. I've said many times that much of politics is the rational manipulation of irrational symbols. Because you've

got irrational symbols, it doesn't mean that the people who are putting them out don't know what they're doing, that they're just stupid and we're the only ones who know. In fascism, look at the irrational appeals. There's the atavistic appeals: Go back to the mythical roots of our people. For Mussolini, it was going back to the grandeur that was Rome. For Hitler, the ancient Volk. There's the cult of the leader. Il Duce. The Führer. In fact, the Nazis called it the "Führerprinzip," the leader principle. With leader worship and state worship, there's the glorification of militarism, war and conquest. But these are all basically conservative symbols. There are all basically to get people distracted from their own immediate interests, political, economic, class interests, and get them galvanized into this kind of thing, the war, the conquest, the militarism.

I remember when I was roaming around in Italy in 1951 I met a couple of other young guys in the street. We got talking, and they took me over to the Piazza Venezia, where Mussolini used to come out on the balcony and make his speeches. The two of them started to imitate the blackshirts. This is only about six years after the war. They would go, "Duce, Duce, Duce. Voyamo la guerra." We want war. These guys were standing there and chanting this way. Most of the Italian army, in fact, ordinary recruits, putting the blackshirt fanatics aside, most of the Italian recruits had no taste for war whatsoever. In fact, they would tend to dissolve or retreat or swiftly surrender the minute they discovered that the other side was using live ammunition. [laughter]

Italy at war with America was a very divisive issue among Italian Americans of that day. I remember in the 1940s the heated debates in my neighborhood, and even in my own family, where my grandfather Giuseppe and the older men tended to be for Mussolini. Grandpa thought Mussolini brought respect for the immigrants who were so marginalized and looked down upon. That's a phenomenon common among many ethnic groups. They become the object of bigotry and marginal treatment and they develop a compensatory nationalism. Sometimes they become more nationalistic when they're here than they were when they were in the old country. That certainly was true of my grandfather. The younger men in my family, the uncles and cousins, tended to strongly identify with the U.S. and scorned Mussolini. I remember one uncle of mine who gleefully told the story of how the Italian army attempted to invade the U.S. and landed in the Brooklyn Navy Yard only to be routed by the night maintenance crew. [laughter] Grandpa was not at all amused by that story.

So the fascist doctrines do stress these monistic values. Oneness. Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer. One people, one state, one leader. The people are no longer to be concerned with class divisions but they must see themselves as a part of a harmonious authoritarian whole, a view that's very supportive of the socio-economic status quo. This is very much in contrast to a left agenda, which advocates a sharpened awareness of class injustice and class struggle, the articulation of popular demands and the self-generated participation of popular forces.

Fascism, especially the Nazi version, had an explicit commitment to racism, as you all know. Human attributes are said to be inherited through blood. Genetics and biology are said to justify the existing class structure, just as our academic racists today are doing with their Bell Curve theories and their

warmed-over eugenics claptrap and all that stuff. [applause] Fascism also supports sexual inequality and homophobia. The oppression of gays was often criminal and homicidal. The oppression of women was traditionally patriarchal. Mussolini: "A man is not a man unless he is a husband, a father and a soldier, giving orders in the first two roles and taking orders in the third. A woman's greatest calling is to tend to the needs of her husband and children, producing as many as she can for the state." Children, not husbands.

This patriarchal ideology, I would maintain, is linked to a conservative class ideology. If women get out of line, what will happen to the family? If the family goes, then the entire social structure is at risk. And if the social structure unravels, what will happen to my position, my privileges, my wealth? That's still the concern today in this country. They're all pursuing and advocating policies that are very harmful to the family and very harmful to children and the task of raising children. So they use the issue to mobilize voter sentiment and to evade economic issues.

In Nazi Germany, racism and anti-Semitism were used to re-channel some legitimate grievances to irrelevant enemies, scapegoating, as we would call it. Many middle class Germans knew they were victimized by very powerful economic forces, but they were too bound up in the conventional social order to really adopt a revolutionary course. They couldn't do that. So they went in a fascist direction. They started voting for the Nazi Party. To the extent that the Nazis had any kind of mass base, it was among the middle and upper middle class. Some of the photos of Nazi audiences are very revealing. The people are very well dressed. This image that Hitler went among the common people is rather questionable. It was a combination of middle class, petty bourgeois, and some lumpenproletariat. There were lumpenproletariat, beer hall rabble and those people who became the storm troopers who did have a kind of a leftish position. I'll talk about that in a minute.

Not more than one-fourth to one-third, it varied from elections, of the organized workers ever voted for the Nazi Party. The overwhelming majority voted for the communist parties or the Social Democrats. Anti-Semitic propaganda was very emotive and irrational, but it was cleverly crafted to appeal to certain groups. So to workers and peasants, they were told, It's the Jewish capitalists who are doing this, the Jewish usurers. To the middle class, they were told, It's the Jewish trade union leaders, the Jewish communists who are doing this. To the superpatriots, the Jew is the enemy alien internationalist. So it depended on the group. The propaganda was crafted to make very definite appeals. So the Nazis may have been crazy, but they weren't stupid. Again, it's what I was saying: The rational use of irrational symbols and arguments.

What distinguishes fascism from ordinary right-wing autocracies, which today are also called fascism, and I think justifiably, because they fulfill the same function, ultimately, was the way it attempted to cultivate a revolutionary aura and give the impression of being a mass movement. Fascism offers a beguiling mix of revolutionary-sounding mass appeals and reactionary class politics. The Nazi Party's full name was the National Socialist German Workers Party. They were very consciously left-sounding, stealing the thunder of the left in various ways. The storm troopers had a share-the-wealth

mentality. After Hitler came into power, the SA, the brownshirts, were suppressed because they were waiting to divide up some of the wealth. Both the Italian fascists and the Nazis made a conscious effort at imitating the left: youth organizations, mass mobilizations, rallies, parades, banners, symbols, slogans, uniforms.

Fascism is a false revolution. It makes a revolutionary appeal without making an actual revolution. It propagates the widely proclaimed new order while serving the same old monied interests. Well, communism, doesn't it really resemble fascism in its atrocities and its repression and all that? That's what we hear, and certainly during Stalin's reign people were executed, interned, or forcibly relocated. But if you read Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov and the U.S. press, long since Stalin's gulag kept operating, right on down to the last days of communism. Ladies and gentlemen, if so, where is it? What happened to it? When the communist states were overthrown, where were the millions pouring out of the internment camps of the former Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland and the other nations, millions with their stories of travail and torture? Even in Romania, the most repressive, if we're to believe the media hype, even there, where were the masses of victims that were to be released from the gulag?

I did read in the *Washington Post* once a couple of years ago that when Vaclav Havel became president of Czechoslovakia, the first thing he did was he got back all of his big apartment buildings and he became a rich landlord again. The next thing he and his cohorts did was they emptied all the jails in Czechoslovakia under the assumption that anybody who had been in prison under the communist system was a victim of the system and a decent fellow. The article goes on to say they discovered that they had released substantial numbers of really unsavory and violent criminals. You shouldn't really criticize Havel. When you criticize Havel, I have two critiques of him, two mentions of him in my book, *Land of Idols*, where I talk about his mysticism and his anti-democracy mysticism. I also mention that the guy was raised by chauffeurs and governesses and was very rich and had a particular perspective. I can't tell you the academic bobby soxers who adore Havel and wrote me, reviewers, all made a point of saying, You shouldn't say this about Havel. He's a playwright. He's an intellectual. He's sensitive.

One of the things conveniently overlooked by mainstream scholar-propagandists is the way that Western capitalist states have tolerated and cooperated with fascism. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was positively cozy, he and many of his class saw Hitler as a bulwark against communism in Germany and they saw Nazi Germany as a bulwark against communism in Europe. After World War II the Western capitalist allies did little to eradicate fascism from Italy or Germany except for the Nuremberg trials. But the police, the courts, the military, security agencies, the bureaucracies have remained largely staffed by those who had served the former Nazi regime or their ideological recruits. That remains true to this day. How do you murder six million Jews, a quarter of a million Gypsies, several million Ukrainians, Russians, Poles and others and thousands of homosexuals and get away with it? The only way you get away with it is that the very people who are supposed to look into these crimes were themselves complicit.

What happened to the U.S. businesses that collaborated with fascism? Corporations like DuPont, Ford, General Motors, ITT? They owned factories in these enemy countries that produced fuel, tanks and planes that wreaked havoc on Allied forces during World War II. After the war, instead of being prosecuted for treason, ITT collected \$27 million from the U.S. government for war damages inflicted upon its German plants by Allied bombings. General Motors collected \$33 million. Pilots were given instructions not to hit certain factories. The devastation of Cologne, there were several factories owned by ITT and Chrysler that after a while the German people learned to go in there and use them for air raid shelters because they wouldn't get hit by the American pilots because they were owned by the American corporate interests.

Since the war, U.S. leaders have done their part in keeping Italian fascism alive, giving millions of dollars to right-wing organizations and neofascist organizations in Italy. In 1975, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger met with the Italian fascist leader Giorgio Amarante in Washington to discuss what alternatives might be considered should the Italian communists win the election and take control of the government. Over the years fascist terror groups have engaged in assassinations and bombings in any number of Western European countries to destabilize the existing democracies, what's called the "strategy of tension." While the U.S. press focused on the Red Brigades, some Italian newspapers pointed out that most of the killings and the other acts of violence were perpetrated by fascist groups, most of which were shown a generous tolerance by the police.

A coalition of neofascist and separatist groups headed by media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi won the 1994 elections in Italy. Their platform? A single tax rate for rich and poor alike, school vouchers, a stripping away of the welfare state, the introduction of private retirement accounts, and of course the privatization of just about everything. Ladies and gentlemen, the Italian neofascists are learning from the American reactionaries how to achieve fascism's goals under democratic forms with democratic façades. They're using upbeat, Reaganesque optimism. You convince people that government is the enemy, especially its social democracy aspects, at the same time you strengthen the repressive capacities of the state. You instigate resentment against the newly arrived immigrants. That's going on in Italy right now. You preach the imaginary virtues of the free market.

So we might do well to stop thinking of fascism as a simple either/or condition. The political system of any one country encompasses a variety of seemingly incongruous institutional practices. To insist that you don't have fascism until every vestige of constitutional government is destroyed and the jack boot is right on our necks is to overlook the very disturbingly anti-democratic manifestations inherent in many states that call themselves democracies, especially when they're dealing with left dissenters. The political center is always described as the moderate place between the extremes of left and right, fighting a war on two fronts against right and left. A closer reading of history should tell us that the center is more inclined to make common cause with the right against the left. This is because the center and the right share a commitment to corporate capitalism and the free market mythology. Throughout the Weimar Republic, Franz Neumann wrote: "Every law aimed supposedly against both communists and Nazis is invariably

enforced against the entire left but rarely against anyone on the right.” This is Neumann going on: Those leftists who were critical of the illegal rearmament of Germany during the Weimar found themselves charged and tried for treason, while rightist assassins or putschists were “either not prosecuted at all or dealt with lightly.” In fact, Neumann brings together some very interesting statistics which for some reason he sticks in the footnote, but I think they’re very important. The prosecution of political murders in the centrist social democratic Weimar Republic from 1918-1922, left groups were charged with committing 22 murders. For those 22 murders, 38 people were found guilty. Ten people were executed. The average time served in prison of the others was fifteen years. Right-wing groups committed hundreds and hundreds of murders, only 354 of which were investigated. 326 were not even prosecuted at all. Twenty-three people were discharged, let go, despite entering guilty pleas. Twenty-four were found guilty in part. Not one was executed. Average time served: four months. This double standard of the centrist state in dealing with the left and right I would say continues to this day in the U.S. and most other Western capitalist nations.

Consider how for generations how gently the murderous, lynching night riders, the Ku Klux Klan, was treated by federal authorities in this country. Compare that to the way the Black Panthers were treated. Consider how the right is investigated compared to the left. When the Center for Cuban Studies in New York was bombed by a right-wing Cuban group, which boasted, admitted that they did the act, the FBI didn’t have a clue. Just a couple of weeks ago I got a call from the FBI myself. The guy says—I’m not making this up—Mr. Parenti, we’d like to come and see you because we have a charge here that you may be the Unabomber. [laughter, applause] They said, Sir, could we come and talk to you. I said, I wouldn’t miss this for the world. I’m not going to go any further. You’ll see the movie. [laughter]

The way the mainstream shades off into the fascist right can be seen quite clearly in the Republican Party. The GOP agenda today is really not much different from the kind pushed by Mussolini and Hitler. It’s fascism without the swastika. It’s fascism in a pin-striped suit. First, break the labor unions. Depress wages. Impose a rightist ideological monopoly over the media. The rest of the GOP agenda: Eliminate cultural dissidence in the arts. Attack the rights of women and gays. Abolish taxes for the big corporations and the rich. Eliminate government regulations designed for worker and consumer safety and environmental protection. Privatize and plunder public lands and enterprises. Wipe out public services. And cloak this whole reactionary agenda in a kind of revolutionary sound. We’ve got a revolution going here in Congress. Some revolution. It’s the same old reactionary class agenda.

Today in the U.S. we witness some middle-class Americans, like the middle-class Germans of yore, beset by real economic difficulties. They really are facing economic injustices, and they’re turning their anger toward irrelevant or imaginary foes: the immigrants, the Jews, the poor, the welfare mothers, people of color, feminists, gays, atheists and others.

There’s something else that’s happened that I think explains the speed-up of reactionism in America today. That is the fact that for years U.S. leaders and political-economic elites saw

themselves in mortal combat with communism for the allegiance of people at home and abroad. The argument was made that U.S. workers enjoyed a higher standard of living than their counterparts who lived under communism. It was a very conscious thing. Civil rights, too, the same thing. We’ve got to compete with the communists for all these Third World countries and people of color. We’ve got to clean up our act, get rid of Jim Crow, segregation. That was always the theme. Our workers earn more. Our workers live better than anybody on a commune. We live better. Stick with capitalism. Free enterprise is the best for you. That was a conscious thing. The pressure of being in competition with an anticapitalist or alternative system set limits on how thoroughly the higher circles dared to mistreat the working populace. I don’t want to overstate that. Long before the collapse of communism they tried to break unions. They tried to repress wages. But now they’re pulling out the stops. They’re dropping all pretenses at “capitalism with a human face.” And they were always mindful of the potential threat of workers getting radicalized, very much so in the 1930s, very much so in the 1960s and 1970s. It comes out in their statements.

Of course, that wasn’t the only restraining factor. There was also the working classes’ ability to fight back, to win democratic victories, the eight-hour day and a number of historic victories, Social Security and various benefits. When the communist nations were overthrown in Eastern Europe, there was much rejoicing among conservative circles, but within a very short time there was a very interesting, querulous, irritated, irate note that began to appear in some of the conservative publications that I looked at. It went like this: If in Eastern Europe they’re now moving toward a total free market, why must we here in the U.S. still have to tolerate these collectivistic, liberalish regulations and restraints that are put upon us? Now is the time to cast off all restraint and sock it to the public. The competition for their hearts and minds is over. There’s no competing system to which they might think of turning. There’s no need to tolerate any accommodation with those who have to work for a living. There’s no reason why masses of people in this country should have a middle-class living standard, why working people should have that. It’s time that these people lower their expectations, work harder and be satisfied with less. The more they get, the more they’ll demand, and we’ll end up with a social democracy—or worse. Better to keep them down and hungry with their noses to the grindstone. It’s time to return to the good old days. In *Against Empire* I call it “Getting back to 1893.” The kind of conditions that prevail in the Third World have a weak, unorganized, demoralized mass of people that work for subsistence. You have below them a large contingent of desperately poor unemployed who help further to depress wages and can often become the object of resentment by the people just above them, and you have a small, insecure middle class that’s hanging on by its bleeding fingers and above that, a very tiny, obscenely rich owning class that has it all.

Also, a change in attitude toward the Third World. During the Cold War and the competition with the Soviet Union, the whole option was development. We’ll develop these countries. Prosperity will come in. Give them aid. A middle class will develop that will stabilize and they will not succumb to the

appeals of communism. With the collapse of communism there's been a shift in policy there, too. First of all, they found that policy wasn't working. Third World governments began to close off key sectors of their economy. That's the only way you're going to develop it is to close it off against U.S. capital competition. They were doing things like forming consortiums for better trade deals and better money deals. They were trying to break the global monopoly of Western media. They were looking for more authority over their own seed beds and resources. And they were producing goods that were competing with the U.S. market even at home. So the new policy toward the Third World is also a hard line. As with their own working class in the U.S., so with Third World nations. You've got nowhere else to go. You're not going to turn to Moscow now. Moscow's in our pocket. So they're hitting them hard. The IMF, the World Bank, GATT, NAFTA, undermining the sovereignty of Third World nations, making an end run around them, directly plundering their markets and drastically cutting non-military foreign aid to these countries. In some cases, directly invading them and destroying the government that had any reform tendencies or maintained any economic development, as in the case of Iraq, Panama and a dozen reformist revolutionary governments. So they don't have to worry about a communist competitor. U.S. leaders are making war against economic nationalism in countries like India, Brazil, Mexico, Iraq, Panama, South Korea, Taiwan and so forth.

There are a lot of people who still don't get it. They don't get it that these guys are playing for keeps, that they are going after you, that they are not going to leave any little bit left for you. There's only one thing that the ruling circles throughout history have ever wanted, and that's everything. [laughter, applause] There's only one thing they want: all the wealth, the treasures, and the profitable returns, all the choice lands and forest and game and herds and harvests and mineral deposits and precious metals of the earth, all the productive facilities and gainful inventiveness and technologies, all the control positions of the state and other major institutions, all public supports and subsidies, privileges and immunities, all the protections of the law and none of its constraints, all the services and comforts and luxuries and advantages of civil society with none of the taxes and none of the costs. Every ruling class in history has wanted only this: all the rewards and none of the burdens. Their operational code is, We have a lot. We can get more. We want it all. And if you don't know that, you're in a sad place. If you know that and you don't know anything else, you know more than if you know everything else and you don't know that. [applause]

In the final analysis the danger of fascism comes not from skinheads or the militia or the Christian right fanatics, but from the ongoing practices of the national security state and its various enforcement agencies. It comes from the boardrooms of corporate America. But before we pronounce ourselves doomed, keep in mind that at the present time there are people who are demonstrating and getting arrested and raising hell to protect the environment and the forests. There are others who are doing the same at nuclear submarine bases. There are people who are demonstrating for justice and against racism in the judicial system as the national protests for Mumia Abu-Jamal

demonstrate. There are people protesting against nuclear testing in the South Pacific, against Medicare cuts and family assistance cuts, against the suppression of the homeless, against the anti-immigration laws and for affirmative action. There are large majorities in this country who even support welfare, if you don't call it welfare. If you say, Should government help the poor? Should government do more for the poor? it's surprising what people say. We have to get a lot angrier and a lot more determined. They want everything and everything is at stake. Many people are getting angrier and angrier and increasingly concerned. Our job is to see that they direct their anger at the real perpetrators of their misery and not against the very people who want to make common cause with them.

Well, Parenti, what do you have against wealth? All the time we hear this talk. It trickles down. More wealth up there means more down for the rest of us. I just heard that recently by the ruling class propagandist Rush Limbaugh, the best mind on the right. [laughter] He said—this is pretty high-level stuff for Rush Limbaugh—“It's not a zero-sum society. A bigger pie is better for all.” No. *It is* a zero-sum society. The size of the pie is one thing. How it's sliced is another. If you take a 20 oz. pie in which I got a 10% slice and you shrink it down to a 15 oz. pie and I now get a 70% slice, I like the 15 oz. pie better. At least a plutocrat would. And wealth doesn't trickle down. It is siphoned up from the labor of the many into the pockets of the few. [applause] I don't like great concentrations of private wealth because it causes public poverty. Corporate wealth is the greatest single cause of poverty. It is theft. It makes a mockery of democracy. In every society where you have wealth you have poverty. That's how you get wealth, by creating poverty. [applause] That's how the slave owner could live in such opulence and luxury, by having slaves who work at a bare subsistence and create this for him. That's how the feudal lords could live with their refineries and luxuries and their tables laden and groaning with food, by having serfs and servants working and producing this. In societies where you don't have great concentrations of wealth, you generally don't have mass poverty, or very little of it. It's a very interesting correlation. Wealth causes poverty, and that's what I've got against wealth.

Brothers and sisters, when labor is in retreat to capital, when the power of capital is increasingly untrammled, all of us are put at risk: the environment, the sacred forests, the beautiful and mysterious creatures of the sea, the ordinary people who with their strength, brains and inventiveness create community and give to life so much that's worthy of our respect. The real burden to society is not the poor but the corporate rich. We simply can no longer afford them. [applause] Conservatives complain whenever we fight back and whenever we criticize their antidemocratic class privilege they say we're engaging in class war. They engage in class war on our heads all the time, every day, everything they do, every newspaper, every political ploy and move is doing this, every lie they tell is consciously doing that. The minute we fight back and try to expose it, they say we're engaging in class war. Well, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, I believe it is class war. But I also have another name for it. When people unite against the abuses of wealth and privilege, when they activate themselves and militantly attack the hypocrisies and lies of the powers that be, when they fight back and become the active agents of their own

destiny, when they withdraw their empowering responses and refuse to toe that line, I have another name for that. I call that democracy. Their first loyalty is to the dollar. Our first loyalty is to democracy and to the well-being of our society and our mother earth. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. [prolonged applause]

Program closing music-

Billy Bragg- "All you Fascists are Bound to Loose"
From the album- Must I Paint You a Picture?

Other Alternative Radio programs featuring Michael Parenti:

Globalization & Imperialism
The Manufacture of History
The Hidden Ideology of the Mass Media
The Sword and the Dollar
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