

# **'A dress rehearsal for fascism'**

*Trump and Trumpism:*

*The Destructive Politics of American Fascism*

Andrew Kolin

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## **John Newsinger**

**A** Andrew Kolin's impressive *Trump and Trumpism* is determined to locate Trump and the MAGA movement within what can be usefully described as the fascist spectrum. From the opening pages, he chronicles how Trump has 'used hatred and violence against a diverse society to support minority rule and also as a political smokescreen for the clear class bias of his administration'. Moreover, 'the most active and violent part of Trump's base is coming from a segment of the middle class' [. . .] the attempted coup of January 6, 2021 was spearheaded by members of the middle class'. He quotes one study that revealed that of the 501 people arrested over the attempted coup for whom there is employment data, over half were business people or professionals of some kind – doctors, architects, lawyers. Even as outlandish a figure as 'the QAnon shaman (his real name is Jacob Chansley) was wearing a costume that cost hundreds of dollars, paid for by his job as an accountant'. This, as Kolin points out, 'brings to mind the social composition of fascist movements'. As for Trump, he is

'a populist Wizard of Oz, presenting himself as a champion of the masses. But when the curtain is opened, the Trump wizard is revealed as a phoney, who undercuts his own message through policies that clearly benefit the upper classes'.

His personal 'fascist inclinations' have been long demonstrated by his

'admiration of Hitler, his rabid expressions of racism on the infamous Central Park Five case, the promotion of birtherism, his consistent anti-Semitic remarks and his sexism and misogyny'.

All this, from pages 1–3, adds up to evidence 'of his embrace of fascism'. And the danger from Trump and Trumpism is all the greater in the context of the likelihood, indeed near certainty, of 'global climate catastrophes'. (p. 6)

Kolin is the author of a number of other books, two of which are certainly of considerable merit as far as this reader is concerned: his *Political Economy of Labor Repression in the United States* (2017) is essential reading for anyone interested in US history and *One Family: Before, During and After the Holocaust* (2021) is a tremendous account of his own Jewish extended family's experiences in Europe.<sup>1</sup> He brings a truly encyclopaedic knowledge of US history and politics, of the history of violence, of state repression and of fascism to his investigation of Trump and Trumpism. Is Kolin guilty of exaggeration here, of fear-mongering? Now that he has won the election, is Trump a rehearsal for fascism or even going to institute some sort of American fascist regime? Let us consider his arguments.

Kolin relentlessly chronicles Trump's flirtation with fascism. The man famously never reads books, indeed cannot cope with anything of any length or complexity, but, according to his ex-wife Ivana, there was one exception: there was 'one book Trump had kept and read. It was *My New Order*, a collection of Hitler's speeches'. (p. 50) In the aftermath of the Charlottesville demonstrations, Trump's description of the neo-Nazis as 'fine people', clearly showed that there were 'fascist tendencies in Trump's White House'. (p. 19) Moreover, there are today Republicans sitting in both Houses of Congress 'who are openly supportive of Nazi ideology'. (p. 144) And since he wrote the book, the then Republican candidate for the Governorship of Georgia, Mark Robison, has been exposed boasting of being 'a Black Nazi', making clear his support for the reintroduction of slavery, expressing a wish to own slaves himself, among other things, and all on a pornographic website! These revelations cost Robison the election.

As far as Kolin is concerned, Trumpism 'is a social movement with fascist inclinations'. (p. 148) Trump's support is rooted in 'the anxious and fear-driven parts of the American middle class', the people who historically have been the backbone of fascist mass movements. And in America these same people enthusiastically embraced the cult of Trump, rallied to a leader who could do no wrong. This once again is 'in line with an element of fascism'. (p. 27) Moreover there is already in place an American equivalent of the Nazi Brownshirts in the shape of the various far right militia groups, such as the Proud Boys, all heavily armed and loyal to Trump. The Trump movement can most usefully be described as 'a Fascist Dress-Rehearsal'. All the prerequisites are in place:

'extreme militarism, an obsessive gun culture, support from capital, a

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<sup>1</sup> His other books include *State Structure and Genocide* (2008), *State Power and Democracy: Before and During the Presidency of George W Bush* (2010), and *Irrationality of Capitalism and Climate Change: Prospects for An Alternative Future* (2022).

fearful and violent segment of the middle class, a Republican party that embraces extremism, the January 6 attempted coup, anti-intellectualism, anti-science, a mobilization of the passions directed aggressively toward certain segments of the population coupled with a submissiveness directed at the fascist leader'. (p. 150)

Certainly, he presents a powerful case. And there are plenty of other people calling Trump a fascist, including the former chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, who served under him. He has described Trump as 'a total fascist . . . fascist to the core', inevitably earning him numerous death threats.<sup>2</sup>

What are we to make of this? Certainly there is no denying the danger posed by Trump and the MAGA movement's quite open embrace of authoritarianism. Now that Trump has won the presidential election, the country will find itself in the hands of people committed to a brutal authoritarian offensive against their opponents; to the rolling back of the rights of women and gays; to an unprecedented assault on immigrant communities that will potentially involve the arrest and internment of millions of people (what will become of these people if they cannot be deported remains an open question); to enacting the cultural objectives of the Christian Right; and to a massive aggrandisement of the wealth and power of the American super rich. There are without doubt many fascists among his supporters, but what we are dealing with here is an authoritarian right-wing conservatism that has embraced a racist, homophobic, misogynist divide and rule strategy, rather than a fully-fledged fascist movement.

Historically, fascism only really emerged as a mass movement in response to a threat from the left. The ruling class in Italy and Germany were forced to turn to the likes of Mussolini and Hitler in order to crush the revolutionary left and impose the sacrifices and hardships on the working class that were necessary to restore the profitability of the capitalist system. Fascist movements rooted in the middle class persuaded their supporters that it was the working class, the Communists – and in Germany the Jews – who were responsible for the economic and social crises that had engulfed them, and not those really responsible, the capitalist class. The situation in the United States is radically different today.

Trumpism is not a fascist scam being perpetrated on the middle class at the expense of the working class and minority groups. Instead, it represents a

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<sup>2</sup> Bob Woodward in his *War* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2024) p. 179. As for the death threats, Milley, Woodward tells us, has at significant personal expense installed 'bullet-proof glass and blast-proof curtains at his home'. He is very likely one of the people that Trump will go after and, indeed, the newly elected president has already described Milley's conduct in the closing days of his first term as deserving 'DEATH'. (pp. 322-323)

division within the US capitalist class between what can be usefully described as the globalists and the nationalists. Trump represents the nationalist wing of the US capitalist class and their enemy is not a strong well organised working class movement with an increasingly powerful revolutionary component, but the globalist section of the US capitalist class that has dominated the country since the mid-1930s. Joe Biden and Kamala Harris are not socialists, communists or fascists as Trump and his supporters have called them, but are in fact globalists, committed to the belief that the well-being of US capitalism requires the continued exercise of global power. They are determined to maintain the international network of alliances and military bases that are the backbone of US imperialism. The mobilisation of a section of the middle class by means of racism, hatred of immigrants, homophobia and misogyny is all about defeating this globalist section of the capitalist class. This was what the January 6 coup was all about. Of course, all this is complicated, to say the least, by the fact that Trump is an ignorant, incompetent narcissist, convinced of his own genius.

Another problem with characterising the Trump movement as fascist concerns its economic objectives. Historically, fascism favoured a strong state and a regulated capitalist economy; indeed corporatism was an essential component of the fascist programme. This is certainly not something that the Trump movement contemplates. Trump's capitalist backers are completely opposed to economic regulation, regard what exists already as oppressive and to be dismantled. And this has been true of this nationalist wing of the capitalist class going back to the 1930s. There is an interesting comparison to be made between the MAGA movement and the America First movement, led by another celebrity, Charles Lindbergh, that opposed US entry into the Second World War. This movement inevitably attracted the support of American fascists and was opposed to the regulatory economic controls and welfare measures, the so-called New Deal, that President Roosevelt had introduced in order to save the US capitalist system. In this respect, the far right in the United States has to be seen as inhabiting a very different world from that existing in Europe. From this point of view, what we are very likely going to see in the United States, if Trump gets his way, is the creation of a brutal authoritarian regime that ruthlessly crushes its enemies, rolls back civil liberties (all in the name of freedom), intimidates the mainstream media, wraps itself in Christian nationalist dogma, maintains itself in power by rigging elections, and gives the US capitalist class a license to pillage not seen since the Gilded Age of the 19th century.

Obviously the Trump Presidency and the MAGA movement are a massive threat, both to the people of the United States and of the whole world. The frantic whipping up of hatred that the Trumpists have engaged in is certain to

cost lives. Indeed, it already has. Under Trump, the nationalist wing of the US capitalist class has openly embraced authoritarianism and racism, threatened violence and clearly has no problem whatsoever with attracting the support of open fascists. And its denial of the climate crisis threatens global catastrophe. What has to be central to our understanding, however, is that the Democrats and those Republican politicians who have rallied to their cause are wholly committed to what they see as the best interests of US capitalism and of the US capitalist class, of American imperialism. What is being fought out in the United States at the moment is a battle between different wings of the US capitalist class, and millions of ordinary Americans are going to pay the price. The battle has to be shifted onto a different terrain.

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His latest book is *Chosen by God:*

*Donald Trump, the Christian Right and American Capitalism,*  
published by Bookmarks. <<https://bookmarksbookshop.co.uk/>>