

A SHORT HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF THE RADICAL RIGHT

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Abstract: *Richard Saull's work on the far right makes a fundamental contribution to our knowledge of the post-fascist phenomenon in today's world. Although the book presents itself as a historical sociology of the far-right's connections with neoliberal ideology and politics in the United States, United Kingdom, and Western Europe, it goes beyond these methodological boundaries, indicating the emergence of a new concept, far-right neoliberalism. Despite the author's small shift toward a left-wing perspective, R. Saull demonstrates post-fascism's ability to survive with the Western neoliberal elite and adapt to new political, social, economic, and ideological goals. Furthermore, the extreme right has recast itself as an anti-system force and movement, continuously identifying new actual, imagined, or fabricated adversaries. Post-fascism retains its "traditional" populist and militant elements while remaining within the confines of legality for the time being, not proposing or failing to restructure the societies in which it exists in a totalitarian sense.*

Keywords: *anti-system movement, Establishment, far-right neoliberalism, historical sociology, militant features, neoliberalism, populist features, post-fascism, totalitarian.*

Rezumat: *Lucrarea lui Richard Saull dedicată extremei drepte reprezintă o contribuție semnificativă la înțelegerea fenomenului post-fascist din zilele noastre. Deși cartea ni se relevă ca o sociologie istorică a legăturilor extremei drepte cu ideologia și politica neoliberală din SUA, UK și Europa occidentală, lucrarea depășește aceste limite metodologice, indicând apariția noului concept, și anume far-right neoliberalism. În pofida unei ușoare balansări a autorului spre o viziune de stânga, R. Saull reușește să ne*

demonstreze capacitatea post-fascismului de a conviețui cu establishmentul de nuanță neoliberală din lumea occidentală și de a se adapta la noi obiective politice, sociale, economice, ideologice. De asemenea, extrema dreaptă s-a reinventat ca o forță și o mișcare anti-sistem, găsindu-și în permanență noi dușmani reali, imaginari sau inventați. Păstrându-și trăsăturile populiste și militante „tradiționale”, post-fascismul rămâne deocamdată în limitele legalității, ne-propunându-și, sau în orice caz nereușind, să transforme societățile în care există în sens totalitar.

Richard Saull graduated from Portsmouth Polytechnic University in 1990 with a BA in Political Science and later earned an MA in International Relations. He taught English for two years in the Czech Republic and Spain. He returned to the UK in 1994 and earned a PhD in International Relations in 1999. He lectured at SOAS University in London¹, American International University (London), the University of Leicester, and Queen Mary University of London. His most recent publications focus on far-right social and political forces in the modern era and their historical development. R. Saull's studies focused on materialist and post-colonial sociological and historical approaches to international relations. His primary research interests include revolutionary internationalism during the French Revolution, the theory of international relations during the Cold War, the historical evolution of this period, theorizing American hegemony and debates about the decline of the United States, international historical sociology of far-right movements, neoliberal political economy², and so on.

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² Richard Saull wrote and published a series of valuable and interesting books: *The Far-Right in World Politics*, London, Routledge, 2024, co-edited with Alexander Anievas; *Capital, Race and Space*, Vol. I, *The Far-Right from Bonapartism to Fascism*, Leiden, Brill, 2023; *The Longue Durée of the Far-Right: An International Historical Sociology* (eds.) with Alexander Anievas, Neil Davidson and Adam Fabry, London, Routledge, 2015; *The Cold War & After*, London, Pluto Press, 2007; *The War on Terrorism and the American Empire After the Cold War*, London, Routledge, 2005, editor with Alejandro Colás; *Rethinking Theory and History in the Cold War: The State, Military Power and Social Revolution*, London, Frank Cass, 2001. He also published studies and articles of high academic value - *The Far-Right in World Politics/World Politics in the Far-Right*, "Globalizations", 20/5, 2023, pp. 715-30 – with Alexander Anievas; 'Reassessing the Cold War and the Far-Right: Fascist Legacies and the Making of the Liberal International Order after 1945', "International Studies Review", 22/3 (2020), pp. 370-395 – with Alex Anievas; *Racism and Far-Right Imaginaries within Neoliberal Political Economy*, "New Political Economy", 23/5 (2018), pp. 588-608; *Neoliberalism and the Far-Right: An*

Saull's work on the far right has two volumes: Volume I covers the far right from *Bonapartism to fascism*, while Volume II covers the far right from "*post-fascism*" to *Trumpism*³. The book provides a global historical sociology of the radical right, with a focus on alterations inside developed capitalist countries. Volume II of the historical study contains three chapters that describe the evolution of the far right as a post-fascist form of politics, beginning with the early years of the Cold War and continuing through the current developments of the radical right in Great Britain, the United States, and Western Europe. The shifts within right-wing extremist movements and parties happened in an environment marked by overlapping crises in geopolitical organisation and liberal international order.

The first chapter, *Fascist Legacies, the Far-Right, and the Making of the Cold War Liberal Order*, examines the establishment of a new liberal system under American hegemony following World War II. This chapter examines the impact of the fascist far-right's legacy on capital accumulation, private property, and other issues. Thematically, he explores topics such as fascist legacies and reminiscences within the liberal state model after the Second World War; theoretical analysis of the Western liberal order during the Cold War; far right-wing movements and parties within liberal constitutionalism after the Second World War; racialized anticommunism, racialized capitalism, and political economy. According to Richard Saull's left-wing vision, postwar international relations were characterized by a social and moral logic, manifested by the defence of liberal capitalism against the "assault" of democratic forces on the moderate and radical political left. The liberal historical bloc entailed incorporating different and often opposing political and ideological forces while simultaneously subordinating them to the American hegemonic model.

According to Richard Saull, capitalist hegemony excludes democratic action, discussion, and political legitimacy. As a result, an authoritarian liberalism therefore emerged, able to rationally and organically embrace far right-wing groups and parties.

Introduction, "Critical Sociology", 43/4-5 (2017) - with Ray Kiely; *Neo-Liberalism and the Far-Right: A Contradictory Embrace*, "Critical Sociology", 43/4-5 (2017), pp. 707-24 - with Neil Davidson; *Capitalism, Crisis and the Far-Right in the Neoliberal Era*, "Journal of International Relations and Development", 18/1 (2015), pp. 25-51; *Capitalist Development and the Rise and 'Fall' of the Far-Right*, "Critical Sociology", 41/4-5 (2015), pp. 619-39 etc.

³ Richard Saull, *Capital, Race and Space*, Vol. II, *The Far-Right from 'Post-Fascism' to Trumpism*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2024.

The second chapter, *Neoliberal Globalization and the Rise of the 'New' Far-Right* discusses the resurrection of a new type of far-right politics in the 1980s and its linkages to neoliberalism in the United Kingdom and the United States. This chapter examines themes such as the racial imaginary, the origins of the far-right in the modern world, the evolution of neoliberal thought and politics, the political landscape after the Cold War; racialized social conservatism, nativism, and racialized social protectionism; political economy; the nature and limits of the far-right; anti-capitalism, post-fascism, and commitment to liberal democracy.

During the neoliberal era, before and after the 2007-2008 financial crisis, far-right parties began to exhibit similar traits to neoliberalism, such as opposing the welfare state's collectivist and Universalist orientation and perceiving humanity in terms of natural inequality and hierarchy. Richard Saull argues that both neoliberalism and the far-right use authoritarian tactics against left-wing movements and parties. In today's society, the radical right has developed a strong anti-system stance.

The Third Chapter - *Crisis Neoliberalism and the Far-Right* - includes interesting topics such as Trump and the American far-right; Trumpism and the US political economy after the 2007-2008 crisis; the presidency of Donald Trump; Great Britain, Brexit, and the crisis of neoliberalism; the relationship between Brexit and the far-right; the contradictions of the neoliberal order in the EU; the post-crisis political economy of Europe; the refugee crisis; synthetic examination of the far-right in nations such as Germany, France, Italy, and Greece etc.

In the 2020s, the far right resurfaced in both the United States and Western Europe. This renaissance does not represent the return of fascism, but rather a consolidation of populism that opposes COVID, crises, unemployment, and immigration.

The author concludes that Brexit was the culmination of radicalized neoliberalism paired with nativist sovereignism, reviving a specific brand of white working-class Thatcherism. The social and political forces associated with Brexit were not limited to the far right; they also included large elements of the Conservative Party, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), and the British National Party. Although certain members of the Labour Party's left supported Brexit because they disagreed with EU institutions and activities, it was mostly associated philosophically and politically with the British radical right.

The election of Donald Trump as president of the United States is a result of the crisis, but it also marks a period of heightened support for the country's far right. Trump has used demagogic and populist techniques, such as the *Make America Great Again* slogan, to portray himself as a radical anti-establishment

insurgent who views the old political class from the outside. From an ideological perspective, Trumpism seems to be a concoction of neoliberal internationalism, managerial federalism criticism, and white grievances. Republican leaders have remained supportive of Trump during his presidency, believing that the office's responsibilities will restrain his actions. The House of Representatives attempted to remove him twice because of his authoritarianism but was unable to do so since there was not a quorum. The dismissals were linked to abuses of authority, corruption, and constitutional norm violations. Following Trump's defeat in the 2020 presidential contest, supporters of the former attempted to obstruct President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration on January 6, 2021, by storming the Capitol building in Washington, DC.

The far-right political group *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) emerged in 2012 as a Eurosceptic party oriented against the liberal order, consisting of intellectuals and economists with close ties to the conservative establishment and criticizing the Eurozone's legal framework as well as Germany's role in it. It gradually developed into a mass party characterized by xenophobia and populism. Between 2013 and 2017, its electoral support increased, and following the 2017 federal elections, it emerged as the primary opposition force to the Social Democrats (SPD) and Christian Democrats (CDU).

Far-right parties in Germany have achieved notable success in small towns and rural areas, with middle-aged males exhibiting higher voter turnout. In general, imported (mainstream) German parties refrained from associating or collaborating with the AfD; however, there were few exceptions. In 2020, the CDU branch in Thuringia worked with the AfD to remove the SPD chancellor and form a new right-wing coalition. This reality triggered a crisis in the Christian democratic camp. The AfD's national populism was focused on subjects of interest or controversy in Germany, such as racism, anti-Islamic xenophobia, the refugee crisis, the country's public debt, and so on.

The rise of the AfD reflects disillusionment among certain CDU circles, rather than a continuation of Nazism or neo-Nazism. The formation comprises two ideological currents: nationalist and liberal. In the May 2019 elections, the AfD won 11% of the vote. However, it is unlikely that this party will be able to govern alongside mainstream political entities such as SPD or CDU.

The National Front made less progress in France than the AfD did in Germany. Under the leadership of Marine Le Pen taking, the group has seen a new ascent and rejuvenation. Following the 2007-2008 economic and financial crisis, the French far-right integrated significant topics of French politics into its ideology, such as anti-immigrant speech, anti-Muslim bigotry, the Republic's

economic and social crises, and so on.

The French National Front (FN) opposes the European Union and favours policies such as economic and social protectionism, and governmental intervention in investments and regulations. The collapse of François Hollande's presidency and the socialist government contributed to the birth of this radical right-wing party. The FN's anti-EU stance, while strong and consistent, lacked the unilateralism and degree of schism that marked the British far-right Brexit campaign.

During her 2011 inaugural statement as group leader, Marine Le Penn declared her support for the French Revolution, human rights, and republicanism. Furthermore, the National Front has toned down its anti-immigrant rhetoric, discarding extremist components such as the mass expulsion of immigrants and the reinstatement of the death penalty. It championed republican secularism, demonstrating the party's detachment from Catholicism. The political organization founded by Marine Le Penn disguised its anti-Islamism by promoting secular ideals relevant to the functioning and safeguarding of a liberal democracy.

Regarding the economy, the National Front coupled nativism and the promotion of social and economic policies centred on national preference with the notion of a *welfare state*, tax reductions for small and medium-sized businesses, raise to the minimum wage, etc.

The role and significance of Italy's far-right vary from those of the radical right in Germany and France. During the neoliberal era, Italian far-right parties were in power. Because the Italian political and electoral systems are significantly more fluid, several far-right groups have been able to form coalition governments. The populist coalition of the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the Northern League, which controlled Italy from 2013 to 2019, did not favour leaving the Eurozone. Matteo Salvini modified the party's orientation after taking over as leader of the Northern League in 2013, prioritising Euroscepticism over regional autonomy. Salvini led various anti-EU initiatives, including "No Euro Day!" on November 23, 2013, in which he described the EU as a dictatorship and demanded revisions to the treaties and the Schengen framework. During the 2014 election campaign, critics who accused the European Union's bureaucrats, thieves, and crooks referred to the Euro currency as a "crime against humanity".

Salvini's repositioning plan was bolstered by the outcome of the 2018 general election, which saw the Northern League overtake Silvio Berlusconi's Center-right Force, becoming a relevant national political force. The Northern League has used social media effectively, yet, it has associated with or implicitly condoned the anti-immigrant violence of neo-fascist groups such as Forza Nuovo and Casa Pound. The League's electoral success in 2018 continued into 2019 when

the party obtained over 9 million votes in the European parliamentary elections. League voters share the following characteristics: they live in small towns, are middle-aged, and have a low level of education.

Greece stood out for both the severity of the Eurozone crisis's social and economic consequences, as well as the severe political response, which was shaped by the rise of the neo-Nazi political group Golden Dawn. Although this political formation did not make it to the government, as the Northern League did in Italy, nor did it win a large number of votes, as the FN did in France, its existence, radical views, and street violence served as a warning sign for Greece's political and democratic health. Parallel to this, the radical political left (Syriza) saw a dramatic increase, eventually gaining control of the government in 2015. Between 2011 and 2015, Greek society experienced a significant political crisis involving traditional party clientelism, a social crisis marked by levels of poverty unprecedented since World War II and crushing austerity measures for the population. The onerous restrictions imposed by the European Union to keep Greece in the Eurozone have resulted in widespread Europhobia, which the far right has exploited.

Golden Dawn advocated not just the country's secession from the EU, but also its transformation into a national dictatorship that would safeguard the Greek race and foster national rebirth, including actions such as racial cleansing. This party's political radicalism has been demonstrated by the use and justification of violence, disrespect for institutions and democratic processes, street fighting, and political assassination (for example, the April 2013 murder of anti-racist rapper Pavlos Fyssas in Athens). Support for Golden Dawn was strongest in urban and semi-urban areas, including the capital and the Attica region, as well as the northern border districts. This party's voters were largely young and had low levels of education.

The rise of a far-right-wing party in Greece also has a nationalist component. External meddling in the country's future has reawakened nationalist passions and myths about Nazi Germany's occupation of Greece. Chancellor Angela Merkel was referred to as a Nazi due to her determination on enforcing the severe regulations that accompanied the economic bailout.

The radical right underwent a series of transformations between 2008 and 2019 in response to the 2007-2008 financial crisis and its political, socioeconomic, and geopolitical consequences. The radical right's evolution has often been uneven in that, except for Italy between 2018 and 2019, far-right parties have failed to seize power and enter government. With the start of the 2020s, far-right currents, movements, and parties have begun to integrate within the social

structures of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Western Europe, frequently partnering with mainstream politics and reaching a degree of legitimacy and normality. This occurrence does not indicate the return or rebirth of fascism, but rather an evolution of the far right towards national-populist, sovereigntist, and anti-European ideologies.

Although the author covers a wide range of topics concerning the evolution of neoliberalism in the modern world, correctly revealing the link between its crises and the rise of the far right, we contend that he overstates the role of capitalism's systemic flaws in the emergence of far-right neoliberalism.

In addition, when discussing the drawbacks of the US hegemonic paradigm, R. Saull occasionally exaggerates the importance of American imperialism in the world's development and transformation since the Cold War era. The author employs formulations of the *international neoliberal order* type, implying the existence of a distinct form of authoritarianism with liberal or neoliberal roots. Liberal ideology is not only concerned with man, individual rights, and liberties, but it also adheres to the concept of democratic governance. Liberalism promotes equality before the law, which is one of the bases of democracy, whereas conservatism's beliefs of natural inequality can lead to authoritarian forms or serve as the foundations of right-wing totalitarianism. That is why it is so difficult for liberalism to take on authoritarian, let alone totalitarian, forms. If this happens, the liberal/neoliberal political and ideological model will be destroyed. Although Saull discusses the far right in Western Europe, his research only includes instances from the UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Greece. However, post-fascism has many faces, expressions, and evolutions across the continent that would have merited even a simple empirical or synthetic investigation. For example, Saull's work differs from Enzo Traverso's in that it does not address the core elements of Right-Wing Identitarianism, such as Identity Politics, Laïcité, Intersectionality, Identity and Memory, and Civil Religion. Some authors compare radical forms of Islam to new post-totalitarian forms⁴ and interpret fascism and post-fascism through mentalities, culture, imagery,⁵ etc.

R. Saull provides new approaches to investigating the transformations and syncretisms of current phenomena impacted by fascism, commonly known as post-fascism. Richard Saull, who is developing a historical sociology of the far right in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Western Europe, proposes a novel

⁴ See Enzo Traverso, *New Faces of Fascism Populism and the Far Right*, London, Verso, 2019, *passim*.

⁵ See Michel Onfray, *La Pensée postnazie. Contre-histoire de la philosophie, X*, Paris, Éditions Grasset et Fasquelle, 2018, *passim*.

concept: *far-right neoliberalism*. One could argue that neoliberal principles cannot combine democratic and authoritarian ideological lines. However, we believe that such criticism is relative and subjective because all ideologies have a viral-metamorphic quality (i.e., they absorb parts from prior ideologies, including contradictory ones, to form new ideologies). Can we discuss *far-right-wing neoliberalism* considering that the modern world has understood the viral-metamorphic ideological construction of neo-Marxism for over a decade? If capitalism was able to integrate neo-Marxist intellectual structures, then neoliberalism was able to incorporate similar ideological aspects with the far right, even introducing interesting novelties. We recall here the social basis of political support, "its ideology of social conservatism rooted in a racialized hierarchical ideological imaginary that also extends to issues around gender and sexuality; the welfare nativism that provides a key element in its social conservatism and racialized national protectionism and also where its ability to traverse the ideo-political terrain of both neoliberalism and social democracy..., its political economy and the significance of immigration in particular in defining the neoliberal far-right, as well as the nature and limits of supposedly 'anti-capitalist' and 'anti-systemic' radicalism; its international orientation and the role of international relations and geopolitics in its overall political orientation, its attitude towards and presence within the constitutional politics of liberal democracy and the extent to which the neo-liberal far-right can be considered post-fascist"⁶. Richard Saull's work demonstrates the far-right's political and intellectual adaptability to the neoliberal welfare state model. In our opinion, the infection of neoliberalism with specific aspects of the far right poses a threat to current society; but, if it does not lead to the development of new totalitarian state models, it represents a *manageable, benign pathology*.

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⁶ Richard Saull, *Capital, Race, and Space*, volume 2, p. 161-162.

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