Neoliberalism and the Far-Right: A Contradictory Embrace

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Abstract

This article examines the contradictory relationship between neoliberalism and the politics of the far-right. It seeks to identify and explain the divergence of the 'economic' and the social/cultural spheres under neoliberalism (notably in articulations of race and class and the 'politics of whiteness') and how such developments play out in the politics of the contemporary far-right. We also seek to examine the degree to which the politics of the far-right pose problems for the consolidation and long-term stabilization of neoliberalism, through acting as a populist source of pressure on the conservative-right and tapping into sources of alienation amongst declassé social layers. Finally, we locate the politics of the far-right within the broader atrophying of political representation and accountability of the neoliberal era with respect to the institutional and legal organization of neoliberalism at the international level, as most obviously highlighted in the ongoing crisis of the EU and Eurozone.

Keywords

capitalism, fascism, international political economy, neoliberalism, race, class

Introduction

As the hegemonic form of political economy, neoliberalism has been articulated via a number of political vernaculars and agents, encompassing both the 'centre-left' and centre/right. In consequence, it has come to fundamentally reshape the terrain upon which socio-economic issues and politics are debated and understood across the world; it has engendered new forms of 'common sense' associated with new parameters and limitations of politics, and the possibilities associated with democratic political deliberation and decision-making (Brown,

2015; Duggan, 2003; Mair, 2013; Streeck, 2014). Our concerns here, focus on the particular relationship between an increasingly crisis-ridden neoliberal capitalism and the politics of the far-right.

The neoliberal redrawing of the political, both as a social space for collective and democratic deliberation and the imaginaries derived from and promoted by that space, has helped to create important and historically unique opportunities for the far-right. Thus, whilst the far-right is not neoliberalism the revival of the far-right is suggestive of the particular political pathologies and organic necessities of neoliberal political economy.

In this context, the far-right plays two roles. On the one hand, it articulates angry, resentful grievances across a range of social layers in response to the transformations, instabilities and dislocations of neoliberalism, what some have labelled the 'politics of the left-behinds' (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). On the other hand, it is an important agent of populist insurgency that has come to provide an important democratic and popular veneer to the transformations wrought by neoliberalism and, in particular, the reconfiguration if not actual dismantling of the embedded welfare states that emerged across (Western) Europe after 1945. Yet, the far-right has targeted much of its propaganda and electoral strategy to exposing some of the contradictions and political vulnerabilities for the long-term consolidation of neoliberalism as a form of social rule. It is on these contradictions that this article will focus.

The Roots of a Contradiction

For some authors, far-right positions are simply a constitutive part of neoliberal dominance. In his discussion of 'the politics of resentment' in the USA, for example, Jeremy Engels claims that 'wedge issues' like abortion and gay marriage are 'as much a part of

neoliberalism in the United States as the rhetoric of efficiency, deregulation, and free trade' (Engels, 2015: 124-5). But not every action taken by supporters of capitalism is necessarily beneficial to the operation of that system, including the political rhetoric to which Engels refers. Contrary to extreme functionalist or economic determinist positions, representatives of the dominant classes are not infallible or all-knowing. As Gramsci once noted, we have to allow for the possibility of error, but 'error' is not reducible to a 'mistake': 'The principle of "error" is a complex one: one may be dealing with an individual impulse based on mistaken calculations or equally it may be a manifestation of the attempts of specific groups or sects to take over hegemony within the directive grouping, attempts which may well be unsuccessful' (Gramsci 1971: 408, Q7§24). In what follows we will treat the far-right as an example of a 'specific group or sect', but any attempt to establish the contradictions between it and neoliberalism has to begin by establishing what these terms mean.

Neoliberalism can be sensibly used to describe three different things. First, an *ideology* which emerged in Central Europe during the 1930s in opposition to what its adherents called socialism (i.e. state planning and ownership) and which later migrated to the Economics Department at the University of Chicago. Second, a *strategy* adopted by the alliance of state managers, politicians and employers which began to emerge from the mid- to late-1970s, first in the UK, USA and Chile, in response to the return of economic crisis. It certainly sought to transfer power in the workplace from the forces of labour to the holders of capital, in the first instance by weakening the trade unions; but this was not the implementation of a master plan derived from neoliberalism-as-an-ideology. Once Keynesianism and other forms of state capitalism had been rejected by Western ruling classes as inadequate, they were left with a limited set of options. It is therefore unsurprising that most arrived at the same responses. Finally, neoliberalism is the entire *era* in the history of capitalism which spans the period since this strategy began to be applied. It was not

inevitable that the post-1973 era would have this character: there were moments in most major countries, when different outcomes were possible. By the late-1980s, however, a new settlement weighted in favour of capital had clearly been achieved. In what follows, we are primarily concerned with the second meaning: the strategy and the now-embedded policies which resulted from it.

The contemporary *far-right* occupies a spectrum or continuum ranging from fascism at one end to extreme conservatism on the other. In other words, the span of positions between the British National Party (BNP) and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in Britain, or between the American Nazi Party and 'Tea Party currents' within the Republican Party in the United States; but all wings of the far-right are in fact united by two characteristics. One is a base of membership and support in one or more fraction of the middle-class (i.e. the petty bourgeoisie, traditional middle-class professionals or the technical-managerial new middle class), although, as we shall see, this does not mean that they necessarily lack working-class support. The other is an attitude of extreme *social* conservatism, always in relation to race and nation, and in most instances in relation to gender and sexual orientation: far-right politicians in the Netherlands, for example, have rhetorically invoked the relative freedoms of women or gays in the West as way of denouncing the supposedly oppressive beliefs of Muslims. The political goal is always to push popular attitudes and legal rights back to a time before the homogeneity of 'the people' was polluted by immigration, whenever this Golden Age of racial or cultural purity is deemed to have existed, which is usually at some undetermined period before the Second World War.

There are nevertheless large differences between these two types of organization. Michael Mann argues that non-fascist far-right parties are distinguished from fascism by three characteristics: (1) they are electoral and seek to attain office through democratic means at local, national and European levels; (2) they do not 'worship the state' and, while they seek

to use the state for welfare purposes for their client groups, some (e.g. the Austrian Freedom, the Swiss People's Party and/or the Tea Party) have embraced neoliberal small-state rhetoric; and (3) they do not seek to 'transcend' class (Mann, 2004: 367-368). The first of these distinctions, adherence to liberal democracy, is crucial since it indicates the fundamental distinction between the fascist and non-fascist far-right: the latter, as Peter Mair notes, 'do not claim to challenge the democratic regime as such' (Mair 2013: 45). Activists and commentators often draw an absolute distinction between fascism and other forms of right-wing politics, based on the way the former rely on paramilitary organization and violence as part of their strategy for attaining power. In that sense Golden Dawn in Greece and Jobbik in Hungary resemble classic fascist formations in a way that the Northern League in Italy does not. The distinction is important, not least in determining the tactics of their opponents, but fascism is not defined simply by its recourse to extra-parliamentary or illegal activity.

The second distinction, which flows directly from the first, is their respective attitudes to society which they are trying to build. As Roger Griffin points out, the 'revolution from the right' in both fascist Italy and Nazi Germany saw both movements use the state to socially engineer a 'new man and woman' with 'new values' (Griffin, 2000: 198). This is a project of *transformation*. The non-fascist far-right however tends to insist that the people are *already* the repositories of homogeneity and virtue, but are besieged by 'elites' from above and 'dangerous others' from below. The purpose of the non-fascist far-right is to return the people to their formerly happy condition before these twin pressures began to be applied (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008: 5). This is a project of *restoration*.

It is in the non-revolutionary, restoration politics of the far-right where the contradiction with neoliberalism lies. Until the neoliberal era, the far-right of whatever wing tended to adapt to whatever the dominant organizational forms of capital was at that particular time. Between 1929 and 1973, for example, right-wing military dictatorships in

Latin America–historically the most common type of far-right regime–were as committed, in many respects, to state-led interventionist strategies for development as nominally left-wing postcolonial regimes in Africa and the Middle East: Brazil is a case in point, particularly between 1964 and 1968 (Oliviera, 2003: 45). In the later case of Chile, however, the military junta initially had little idea what economic policies to introduce and, in an earlier period, might well have looked to the Catholic Corporatist model introduced by Franco to Spain after 1939, which had been followed more-or-less faithfully by almost every Latin American dictatorship since the Second World War. In fact, as Karin Fischer points out, 'it took about two years before the neoliberal faction ascended to positions of authority, which enabled technocrats to advance their far-reaching organizational program'. (Fischer, 2009: 317).

The Brazilian and Chilean juntas both belonged to the same genus, even if the brutality of the latter was greater; but they had quite different attitudes towards the role of the state in relation to ownership, control and regulation of the economy. But differences in far-right economic policy are not simply reflective of the different historical periods in which parties, movements and regimes have arisen. Deep in the fourth decade of the neoliberal era, there are marked differences between the demands for less welfare and lower taxation made by supporters of the Tea Party or the Dutch People's Party, which are examples of mainstream neoliberal thinking, and those for greater state intervention to mitigate the effects of globalization made by supporters of Jobbik in Hungary and Golden Dawn in Greece (Pelinka, 2013: 15017). It is the latter which are potentially in contradiction with the objectives of neoliberalism, but these parties were only able to gain popular support because, at the very moment neoliberalism-as-strategy triumphed in the late 1980s, it underwent a crucial mutation.

The all-out frontal attacks on the labour movement and the organized socio-political power of the working class that was characteristic of the 'first stage' of neoliberalism had

largely ceased by the late 1980s. The transition from what Davidson (2010: 31-54) calls 'vanguard' regimes of reorientation to 'social' regimes of consolidation–from Thatcher and Reagan to Blair and Clinton–therefore involved moving from what Gramsci called a war of manoeuvre to a war of position. The first involved a frontal onslaught on the labour movement and the dismantling of formerly embedded Social Democratic institutions ('roll-back'); the second, a more molecular process involving the gradual commodification of huge new areas of social life, and the creation of new institutions specifically constructed on neoliberal principles ('roll-out') (Gramsci 1971: 229-239; Law 2009: paragraphs 2.2, 2.4-2.6; Peck and Tickell, 2002: 40-45). Although these versions of neoliberalism appeared sequentially, they are now available as alternative approaches to governance, setting the limits of conventional politics in our time.

For all practical purposes therefore, members of ruling classes across the West and political parties of both centre-left and centre right are united in accepting neoliberalism as the only viable way of organizing capitalism as an *economic* system; but they are divided in relation to how capitalism should be organized as a *social* system. Consequently there are real divisions of opinion between them concerning, for example, gay rights, environmental protection or – of particular concern to this article – anti-racism.

Support for individual rights and freedoms constitute the main difference between 'vanguard' and 'social neoliberalism'. As we shall see in more detail in the next section, however, many of the claims of social neoliberalism to oppose racism are largely formal and its policies have, in many respects, served to increase and compound the pathology of racism. But even if we take the rhetoric seriously, its impact has been mainly beneficial to the middle classes. As Walter Benn Michaels wrote in the wake of Obama's victory over Hilary Clinton to become the Democratic Party Presidential candidate; this was a victory *for* neoliberalism, 'for a commitment to justice that has no argument with inequality as long as its beneficiaries

are as racially and sexually diverse as its victims'. Society would remain unequal, but 'discrimination would play no role in administering the inequality' (Benn Michaels, 2008: 34).

It is not only that inequality remains intact, or is increasing: the victories of neoliberalism have left the working class in the West increasingly fragmented and disorganized, and, for some workers, appeals to 'blood and nation' appear as the only viable form of collectivity still available, particularly in a context where any systemic alternative to capitalism had apparently collapsed in 1989-91. Individuals may not blame capitalism as a system or themselves as participants in the system for their personal dissatisfactions, but this does not mean that they have dispensed with the need to find someone or something to blame; but whom? If, as Thatcher pointed out in a famous interview, 'there is no such thing as society', but only a 'living tapestry of men and women and people' then there can be no such thing as social groups, social classes or, more to the point, social conflict (Thatcher 1987). But since conflicts nevertheless continue to occur, individuals must be responsible, and held to account, since, as Zygmunt Bauman points out, 'the ideology of privatisation assumes the presence of a culprit behind every case of suffering or discomfort, there ensues a feverish search for the persons guilty of debasing them' (Bauman, 2008: 23).

To explain this apparent discrepancy, politicians and the media have elevated two categories to the forefront of explanation: the Criminal and the Incompetent. These have been exemplified on the one hand by the armed burglar lying in wait to seize the property of the terrified readers of the *Daily Mail,* and on the other by the social worker, alternatively unjustifiably removing children from one family or incomprehensibly failing to rescue them from another, to the uncomprehending fury of readers of the *Sun* newspaper. In circumstances where economics clearly is involved, as in the current crisis, scapegoats can be

found who conform to these stereotypes; Bernie Madoff belongs to the ranks of the former, Sir Fred Goodwin to those of the latter.

But there is also a third category: the Intruder, characteristically an asylum seeker, an illegal immigrant, or increasingly a *legal* immigrant, who have been added to the ranks of the category of 'criminal' while being housed and 'protected' by the Incompetents, enslaved as they are to doctrines of 'Political Correctness'. Migration is therefore a central issue here. And neoliberalism contributes to the revival of far-right politics through the global, structural changes that it has carried through over the last forty years. In particular, it is the connection between domestic socio-economic change, as reflected in the rescaling of welfare assistance, and the compulsions towards labour market flexibility, with the accompanying sense of individualized social insecurity for workers (Theodore, 2007: 252-3). Neoliberalism, then, has rested upon the opening up of labour markets within the mature capitalist economies to competitive pressures on the social wage through both off-shoring production sources in low wage zones and though encouraging migrants to enter labour markets contributing to further downward pressure on wages and driving up the level of exploitation. At the same time, neoliberal policies through the waves of structural adjustment supervised by the IMF and World Bank (and in the European case, the European Commission) have played an important role in compounding economic insecurities and inequalities within many of these countries, thus propelling many people to migrate to the richer zones of the core capitalist countries to secure their livelihoods.

A key element in the neoliberal formula of economic efficiency and competitive markets is economic migration, but this imperative sits at odds with the culturalized and racialized assumptions that inform those aspects of the neoliberal project concerning the reconfiguration of the welfare state, particularly the withdrawal of the public and democratic oversight of, and responses to inequalities and discrimination based on race. Immigration,

then, contributes to the racialized spectre of citizenship rights that neoliberalism exposes through the underlying racist assumptions that welfare is no longer a universal right of citizenship but is, instead, for those who *actively* demonstrate that they deserve it through mimicking neoliberal subjectivities.

Consequently, immigration challenges the prevailing sense of whiteness, especially amongst sections of the working class. The social insecurities that increasingly pervade working classes are the result of the simultaneous off-shoring of traditional occupations with the perception (if not always the reality) of greater competition from migrants for work in their locales. Working class (male) whiteness has tended to be associated with employment that has provided a sense of social and moral worth (see Lamont, 2002), and a basis of citizenship that now appears to be disappearing, as the social contract between capital and labour mediated by the social democratic state that structured the post-war political economy has been dismantled (Saull, 2015c: 145-50). Loss of work opportunities combined with increasing pressures on access to social and material resources takes place within an underlying ideological narrative that whites are 'deserving' of welfare and social assistance rather than non-whites, who are seen as culturally deficient because they supposedly do not wish to integrate and/or adopt a neoliberal subjectivity. This further fuels a crisis of white identity that is increasingly racialized through the destruction of the structures and institutions of social solidarity rooted in class.

Thus, the *class* identity of many white workers in mature capitalist democracies after 1945 was particularly connected to forms of a racialized white identity that was also associated with the creation of post-war welfare states that rested on racialized distinctions and implied social hierarchies within the working class (Omi and Winant, 2014: 161-210; Virdee, 2014:98-122). Consequently, in many respects then, class formation was also race formation. With the breakdown of the post-war racialized social democratic settlement across

much of the West and the Anglosphere in particular since the early 1980s, the racially-infused class identity of many white *and* male workers has been destabilized. It is these developments that go some way in helping to explain the shifts in the political orientation of significant numbers of white workers from their 'traditional' political loyalties towards the social democratic left to the parties of the right and far-right (in the British case see Ford and Goodwin (2014) in particular) as reflective of a crisis of white working class identity as exemplified in increasingly culturalized forms of social and political compensation for socio-economic disadvantage. And, in doing so, reflecting a new racially-charged dynamic to the class politics of such polities.[1]

Here is where the crisis of working class white identity has been picked up by the far-right and deployed as the basis of an insurgent and populist, 'anti-system' politics. The far-right, whilst agreeing with and contributing to neoliberal propaganda against the universalist welfare state, also attack the 'elite' and 'cosmopolitan' cheerleaders of neoliberalism who champion immigration as the means to promote labour market competition and help fuel economic growth. As Andy Jones has noted this has allowed politicians such as UKIP's Nigel Farrage to take on the mantle of defending British *qua* white workers on the basis that immigration is 'good for the rich because it's cheaper nannies and cheaper chauffeurs and cheaper gardeners, but it's bad news for ordinary Britons… It has left the white working class effectively as an underclass and that, I think, is a disaster' (Jones, 2014).

It is at this point that the far-right enters the scene with plausible-sounding answers. Dismissing their views on grounds of irrationality is simply an evasion. As Berlet and Lyons write: '[r]ight-wing populist claims are no more and no less irrational than conventional claims that presidential elections express the will of the people, that economic health can be measured by the profits of multimillion dollar corporations, or that US military interventions in Haiti or Somalia or Kosovo or wherever are designed to promote democracy and human

rights' (Berlet and Lyons, 2000: 348). Yet these beliefs, which are accepted by many more people than those who believe in, say, the literal truth of the Book of Genesis, are not treated as signs of foolishness. The issue, as Berlet has argued elsewhere, is not 'personal pathology' but collective 'desperation' (Berlet, 1995: 285) and this seems particularly pertinent with respect to the support from significant sections of the white working class for Donald Trump in the Republican Primary election (Thompson, 2016). It is more illuminating to ask how such movements come into existence and how far they offer false solutions to genuine problems. In fact, as Joe Bageant writes of the US: 'The New Conservatism arose in the same way left-wing movements do, by approximately the same process, and for the same reasons: widespread but unacknowledged dissatisfaction, in this case with the erosion of 'traditional' life and values in America as working people perceive them' (Bageant, 2007: 81-82). More generally, Paul Taggart has plausibly suggested that far-right movements do not simply deploy similar methods to the left in building support, but that their emergence was in some respects a reaction to that of the 1968 far-left (Taggart, 1996: 17-18).

A potential problem for the stability of the capitalist system is, then, less the possibility of far-right parties themselves coming to power with a program – inadvertently or not – destructive to capitalist needs, than these parties coming to influence the mainstream parties of the right (and left), to the extent that their influence over the policies of the right serve to create difficulties for the accumulation process. The clearest examples of this type of inadvertency are to be found in the Anglo-Saxon heartlands of neoliberalism: the US and Britain. Since the late sixties Republicans have been increasingly reliant on communities of fundamentalist Christian believers, whose activism allows them to be mobilized for voting purposes. But this religious core vote, or at any rate their leadership, naturally also demand the implementation of policies in return for their support. The problem is not only one for the Republicans in that the extremism of fundamentalist Christianity may alienate the electoral

'middle-ground' on which the result of American elections increasingly depend, but that politicians are constrained from undertaking policies which may be necessary for the long-term health of American capitalism.

But it is not only religious belief which can cause difficulties for US capital; so to can overt anti-migrant racism as evident in the campaign of and support for Donald Trump.[2] One concrete example of this is the Tea Party-inspired Beason-Hammon Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act–HB56 as it is usually known – which was passed by the State legislature in June 2011 – making it illegal not to carry immigration papers and preventing anyone without documents from receiving any provisions from the state, including water supply. The law was intended to prevent and reverse illegal immigration by Hispanics, but the effect was to cause a mass departure of workers from the many agricultural businesses which relied on these workers to form the bulk of their labour force. But the effects went deeper. Before the law was introduced it was estimated that 4.2% of the workforce or 95,000 people were undocumented but paying $130.3 million in state and local taxes. Their departure from the state or withdrawal to the informal economy threatened to reduce the size of the local economy by $40 million. Moreover, employers had to spend more money on screening prospective employees, on Human Resources staff to check paperwork, and on insuring for potential legal liabilities from inadvertent breaches of the law (Immigration Policy Centre, 2011).

The British Conservative Party has encountered similar problems to the Republicans, but in their case in relation to Europe. The imperial nationalism unleashed by the Conservatives before 1997 in relation to 'Europe', was not because the EU was in any sense hostile to neoliberalism, but as an ideological diversion from the failure of neoliberalism to transform the fortunes of British capital. The nationalism invoked for this purpose now places a major obstacle for British politicians and state managers who want to pursue a strategy of

greater European integration, however rational that may be from their perspective, and the longer-term interests of significant, if not the dominant, fractions of British capital. A 2013 British Chambers of Commerce poll of 4,387 companies showed only 18 percent agreeing that full withdrawal from the EU could have a positive impact, while a majority of 64 percent supported remaining inside the EU while repatriating some powers (Vina, 2013). Unsurprisingly, the real source of anti-EU feeling is small business, for who increased regulation and improved worker rights, even of a minimal sort, pose a far greater threat to their profit margins than they do to large corporations (*Mail on Sunday*, 2013).

The key beneficiary of the anti-European hysteria has been UKIP and its success has in turn emboldened the right within the Conservative Party, even though the policies associated with both are incoherent. These contradictions may not matter in terms of the political struggle for power. UKIP has given a focus to a range of concerns in the shape of a quasi-imaginary institution called the 'European Union', in a similar way that the Tea Party did in the shape of another quasi-imaginary institution called 'government'; the main difference is that in the case of the former, the institution is foreign, rather than domestic, the crime of local elites being their compliance and 'betrayal' or 'sell-out'. The basis of at least part of its popular support is, however, drawn from a comparable constituency. The authors of the most thorough study of the party note that one might expect that 'at a time of falling real incomes and unprecedented economic uncertainty, voters from poorer and more insecure groups should rally behind the party who can offer them the best prospect for economic support and assistance', not 'a party with a barely coherent or credible economic policy, no track record in helping the disadvantaged and a libertarian activist base who openly favour free markets over the support for the disadvantaged'. The explanation for this 'paradox' is depressing but relatively simple: 'UKIP voters, who are by some margin the most politically disaffected group in the electorate, have lost faith in the ability of traditional politics to solve

their everyday problems and have instead turned their anger towards groups they feel are responsible for the decline in their standards of living and their loss of control over their lives' (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 277).[3]

The Racialized Effects of Neoliberalism, the Politics of Whiteness and the Far-Right

Neoliberalism does not, however, lead to increased levels of racism solely through labour market mechanisms which can be turned into grievances by the far-right. In spite of the claims of its ideological cheerleaders that neoliberalism is, and promotes, a 'post-racial,' 'race-neutral' or 'colour-blind' form of political economy based on individualized subjects (see Friedman, 1962; Omi and Winant, 2014: 211-44) stripped of culturalized identities pursuing competitive market behaviour, the pathology of racism continues to be reproduced out of the social regime of neoliberal capitalism. The racialized effects of neoliberal political economy, particularly its attack on 'welfare-dependency' and a 'bloated state', are evident through popular and racialized stereotypes of the welfare recipient, as well as the iniquitous consequences of the privatization of welfare provision and reductions in public outlays that has also had a disproportionate impact on ethnic minority communities. In addition to this, the management of migration to fuel the neoliberal economy that rests on racialized categories of acceptable and unacceptable immigrants and refugees (Fekete, 1998/99; 2001 Fekete, *et al*, 2014) and the development of a criminal and penal regime that has worked hand-in-hand with neoliberal political economy with markedly racialized effects, most notoriously evident in the incarceration rates of African-Americans, their deaths in custody and as a result of generalized police violence (Peck, 2010; Wacquant, 2010).[4]

Neoliberalism, then, has helped create the conditions for the re-emergence of the far-right whilst, at the same time, the far-right has focused on attacking what it sees as the

symptoms of neoliberalism through racializing its social, political and economic effects. The racism of the contemporary far-right also fits more easily with the ideological assumptions of neoliberalism because the dominant currents of the far-right no longer officially propagate the 'blood and soil' racism of their predecessors. Neoliberal racism and far-right racism can, then, be conceptualized as a new form of racism; what scholars have variously labelled as 'new racism' (Barker, 1981), 'neo-racism' (Balibar, 1991a), 'cultural racism' (Hall and du Gay, 1996) and/or 'xeno-racism' (Fekete, 2009: 19-42). Racism in this sense serves to facilitate certain types of hierarchical and exclusionary social orders based on what are regarded as the inherent qualities or deficiencies in oppressed groups (Camfield, 2016; Seymour, 2010). It connects to a longer-term idea that also centred on cultural or behavioural, rather than purely physiological traits, as in the racist depictions of white but Catholic Irish as 'non-whites' in the nineteenth century Anglosphere. From this, racial difference and thus racist exclusions and discriminations derive from claims as to the incompatible cultural practices of ethnic and cultural minorities with respect to a 'national' or 'indigenous' culture. Racial exclusions are justified but not on explicit claims around white superiority (the 'old racism') but rather because the behaviour of certain groups–above all, Muslims–is regarded as at odds with understandings of the basis upon which social solidarity and citizenship rest (see Fekete, 2004, 2014; Müller-Uri and Opratko, 2014; Seymour, 2010).[5]

The epistemological and ontological dimensions of neoliberalism as a social regime have had serious consequences for the continuation of underlying racist practices. As David Goldberg notes, one of the most significant consequences of neoliberalism has been what he calls the 'privatization of race' as a social and political issue, particularly in the United States (Goldberg, 2009: 337-41). For Goldberg, this trend is an element within the generalized logic of privatization. It combines the upholding of the privileges accruing to holders of private property with the evacuation of the social and democratic presence across large sections of

civil society that had developed as a consequence of social and political struggle in previous decades (Goldberg, 2009: 338, 341). The neoliberal reconfiguration of the state, then, has seen it – the state's – role in, and ability to facilitate race equality and addressing ongoing racisms be increasingly *de-legitimized* and scaled down.[6]

The upshot of these developments is that existing racial exclusions and racist effects across the private sphere are foreclosed from any democratic or legal scrutiny. Goldberg (2009: 337; see also Davis, 2007) makes specific reference to the US case; here, the termination of affirmative action programmes, as well as the racialized effects of dismantling the democratic state through the privatization of public services and cuts in public sector employment has had disproportionate effects on ethnic minorities. These developments have been taken advantage of by the far-right because they have effectively provided a structural and 'mainstream' *legitimation* for its racism. The far-right has been able to claim that a series of outcomes–including the marginalization and non-assimilation of ethnic minorities, dependence on the welfare state and the disproportionate numbers of non-whites in prison– are because of inherent cultural identities and practices within such groups. The absence of public authorities and norms subject to democratic scrutiny and consultation, together with the new ideological common-sense that the neoliberal state and its civil society cheerleaders articulate, mean that causal explanations for 'social problems' such as economic marginalization are increasingly based on cultural identities and practices connected to particular racialized groups. Culture is left as the only explanatory residue for apparent behavioural traits that do not conform to a 'meritocratic' neoliberal subjectivity (Roberts and Mahtani, 2010; Giroux, 2008). The resultant meeting of neoliberalism and the far-right may not be the avowed intention of advocates and ideologues for the former, but it is the inescapable *political* outcome (see Lentin and Titley, 2011).

But neoliberalism also problematizes and reinforces an identity of whiteness. Thus, the unspoken assumption – for neoliberals at least – is that because identities around class, gender and politics have been erased as explanations for social patterns and pathologies, the default of 'whiteness' remains as the explanatory variable determining membership of, participation in, and contribution to society (see Bhattacharyya *et al* (2002); Davis, 2007; Jensen and Howard-Wagner, 2015). This means that membership of and participation in society is inscribed with unspoken and publicly-hidden racialized attributes of whites as that racial grouping identified with those who deserve entitlement to social welfare benefits (see Jensen and Howard-Wagner, 2015).[7] If what Goldberg calls 'presumptive whiteness' (2008a: 1714) identifies those deserving of social welfare support, some scholars (Mudde, 2007) have seen it as connected with the far-right's 'nativism' with regard to the character and focus of the welfare state.

An ideological opening appears for the far-right because this permits the articulation of an explicitly racialized conception of citizenship into the neoliberal 'social vacuum' that is a consequence of the neoliberal project of reconfiguring the social democratic state whereby the institutions and spaces – and their associated anti-racist imaginaries – that were formerly committed to combating racism have either been eliminated or radically downgraded. It is not then that neoliberalism *causes* racism (Pitcher, 2012) in the sense that racism is an organic dimension of it,[8] but rather that neoliberalism is grounded on a *collective socio-economic insecurity* that helps facilitate a revival of pre-existing racialized imaginaries of solidarity, as one of the remaining political-institutional frameworks of solidarity left intact within neoliberal politics, and also because of the way in which nationalist ideological tropes have been utilized by political parties committed to implementing neoliberal policies as a way of mobilizing a 'democratic' constituency for it (Hohle, 2015) –Reagan and Thatcher being exemplars here.

On a number of different levels, then, neoliberalism has racialized effects that have assisted the distinct 'oppositional' and 'populist' politics of the far-right. Thus, whilst (some) immigrants are welcomed and encouraged by neoliberal regimes, at the same time the social policies associated with neoliberalism's dismantling of the social democratic welfare state and its articulation of new forms of individualized subjectivities have served to reinforce and rearticulate racisms that feedback into the long-standing views of the far-right. These are revitalized in a context of socio-economic crises that takes on a racialized appearance both in terms of its source (the international/non-native) and what appears, according to the far-right demagoguery, to be accentuated by neoliberal immigration. It is precisely through this contradictory prism that the far-right appears as an oppositional force to neoliberalism whilst, at the same time, assisting the underlying racialized assumptions that fuel neoliberal political economy.

The Redrawing of the Democratic Political Sphere, Internationalization and the Far-Right

Neoliberalism was always suspicious of democracy and, above all, of interventions by institutions reflecting the collective will of democratic citizens on the operation of the market economy (Hayek, 2001: 73-4). One of the most significant political objectives of neoliberalism has therefore been to reconfigure, institutionally, and reconstitute, politically, the workings of democratic structures and processes and, in particular, how they relate to the organization and workings of the economy (see Bonefeld and Kiely in this symposium; Brown, 2015; Dardot and Laval, 2014; Harvey, 2005; Peck *et al*, 2012; Plehwe *et al*, 2006). Such goals have been significantly achieved across much of the liberal democratic world. Assisted by the collapse of historical communism and the subsequent fracturing and disorientation of the left, the era

of mass democratic politics appears to in terminal decline (Mair, 2013). How do such developments relate to the far-right and to what extent do such changes facilitate the development of far-right politics? In many respects these tendencies towards internationalization and technocracy over key areas of public policy and the resultant emptying out of *democratic* politics from ever-expanding areas of social life have provided a key source of far-right mobilizations (Saull, 2015c).

Internally, the increasing interchangeability of mainstream political parties gives the far-right an opening to voters by positioning themselves as outside the consensus in relation to social policy (Cole 2015: 222-223). Magnus Marsdal notes the decline in Danish public anger between the introduction of pension cuts by the Social Democrats in 1998 and the General Election in 2001 because of the almost total agreement between different parties and commentators about their necessity: "This *depoliticizing of economics* leads to the politicizing of everything else" (Marsdal, 2013: 51; original emphasis).

Externally, the institutional framing of these developments within an organization like the EU has also been influential in conditioning the rise of the far-right, particularly in recent years within the context of responding to the 2008 global economic crisis and the subsequent Eurozone 'sovereign debt' crisis from 2010. Simply put, in a context of economic crisis involving an institution – the EU – with a severe democratic deficit where such international responses have served to entrench and expand neoliberalism with (see Mirowski, 2014; Peck *et al*, 2012), the political opportunities for the far-right have been propitious.

Much of the liberal commentary on the political responses to the Eurozone crisis has emphasized the populist dimensions (see Mudde, 2015)) of the 'anti-system' movements and parties that have emerged, including leftist currents such as Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece. But an equally significant and deep-rooted 'anti-system' response has been the revival of the far-right as the dominant anti-EU or Eurosceptic current. This is because of its

ability to exert populist and demagogic pressure on the forces of the traditional right. In part this is also because the far-right attacks European integration, but does not threaten property rights and some of the associated core principles that neoliberalism has championed in recent years in the way that the radical left appears to. The point here then is that far-right can be seen to operate as an 'internal opposition' or outlet of anger, insecurity and grievance from *within* the neoliberal political-economic universe. Through its populist agitation and demagogic posturing that seeks to involve and offer a 'democratic' outlet for the masses it poses a threat to the neoliberal consensus, which seeks to limit if not eliminate the scope and role of democratic publics on the workings of the market economy (see Davidson, 2015; Saull, 2015b). However, its focus on the spatial and institutional dimensions of neoliberalism means it does not fundamentally challenge the core premises of neoliberalism. The far-right, then, could–and should be–seen as a consequence of the crisis produced from neoliberalism in the way that fascism was a product of the crisis of state-monopoly capitalism after 1918 (Saull, 2015a).

Drawing on the work of Wolfgang Streeck (2014) we can also identify how the institutional architecture of the Eurozone and its connection to neoliberal financialization in particular, centred on the 'supranational sovereignty' of the European Central Bank (ECB) has come to play a central role in the revival of a politics infused with a symbolism and language connected to the far right. The moves towards adopting formal arrangements of central bank (political) independence can be seen as one of the most significant triumphs of 'neoliberal common sense'. The termination of the democratic oversight of these institutions and their operations could also be seen as reflecting the capture of a significant arm of the state by the interests of the finance-capitalist class. Indeed, whilst not referring specifically to financial neoliberalism (nor the EU), the words of former Chair of the US Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan from September 2007 provide a sense of how ruling class policy makers and

ideologues have seen such developments: '[w]e are fortunate that, thanks to globalization, policy decisions in the US have been largely replaced by global market forces. National security aside, it hardly makes any difference who will be the next president. The world is governed by market forces' (cited in Streeck, 2014: 85).

Greenspan's claim is, obviously, an exaggeration but it does point to something significant about the relationship between democratic processes and institutions in the key decisions concerning the economy. National economies have become much more closely inter-connected and integrated, especially so in the context of the EU and the Eurozone, and this has engendered elite-level diplomatic bargaining and the construction of international technocratic regimes to manage these increasingly complex and inter-connected networks of economic relations. So, while capitalist classes are still unevenly connected to one or other national jurisdiction the conditions for their collective reproduction are increasingly set and determined in institutional frameworks at the EU or Eurozone level that are largely off-limits to any democratic oversight from European publics.

Consequently, the social and political connections between the dominant fractions of (neoliberal) capital and subaltern classes across the mature capitalist economies are fundamentally different to previous eras. Socially, it means that the reproduction of dominant class fractions are much less tied to the specific national economies and class relations where they happen to be domiciled. Politically, it means that the political-legal and institutional framework that upholds private property rights and core market rules are determined in institutional settings and via legal arrangements largely outside the oversight of democratic structures which are still substantively rooted in nation-state locales. In contrast to the past, capitalist classes are, then, much less dependent on right and far-right 'democratic' mobilizations from below or constructing cross-class alliances to ward off leftist democratic threats and challenges as they were in the past. And as demonstrated above in section one,

because of the continuing national-focus and institutional location of democratic possibilities within a *national*-demos, this can result in contradictions and antagonisms emerging between the class interests of the dominant fractions of neoliberal capital and far-right political articulations that continue to reify the national as the *singular* ontological space for political deliberation and authority.

The question of the relationship between the forces of the far-right and the capitalist class – or at least its dominant/internationalizing fractions – is beyond the scope of this article (but see Davidson, 2015; Saull, 2015c). What we can say, however, is that the way in which the European/Eurozone neoliberal economy is organized in spatial, institutional and political terms provides a particular political and mobilizing advantage to the politics of the far-right. As Streeck highlights, within the context of crises of neoliberal financialization and their management or resolution, the relations between 'creditor' and 'debtor' states is increasingly played-out within nationalist political language and imaginaries. In Streeck's words, '[t]he upshot is an astonishingly popular reformulation of politics of public debt in nationalist terms with huge demagogic potential, as well as rapid renationalization and nationalist moralization of international political discourse while respect for claims to national sovereignty is made dependent on a country's good behaviour vis-à-vis the global financial markets and international organizations and its observance of the rules of conduct that they prescribe' (Streeck, 2014: 92).

Both the external relations, as played out in public diplomacy and domestic political posturing and the depiction of domestic polities and societies, emphasize a national(ist) homogeneity to the participants, as highlighted in the depiction of relations as between 'German' or 'Finnish' creditors dealing with 'Greek' or 'Irish' debtors. This serves to gloss over and obscure the fundamental *class relations* produced by neoliberalism within these 'politically homogenous' nation-states. The language of politics especially as it plays out

over the media-sphere rests, then, on the *sine qua non* of a far-right political sensibility, that politics is based upon and political identity constituted by nationalist narratives. The significance of this is that such language and sentiment has also infected much of the left, as evidenced by much of the rhetoric associated with Syriza's domestic political strategy after securing office in early 2015.

Neoliberal austerity provides the 'grist to the mill' in lubricating a politics that provides a structural opportunity for the far-right given the nationalist/xenophobic/populist framing upon which the politics of financial crisis and austerity is played out within. Given the way that class differentials are obscured as a *necessary* basis for neoliberalism and its reconstitution out of crisis the far-right provides an important source of popular mobilization and domestic political legitimacy for the maintenance of the social regime of neoliberalism and for the politics of crises within both debtor and creditor contexts. Whilst in the context of the Eurozone crisis much of the electoral landscape has been altered by the emergence of and fluctuating support for a number of 'populist' or 'anti-political' sentiments – see the Five-Star Movement in Italy in particular – we can see political forces with a common far-right dimension (based on welfare nativism, xenophobia, anti-liberal/cosmopolitanism and anti-Muslim racism) securing significant sources of support across a range of Western states from the US – now evident in 'Trumpism' following on from the 'Tea Party' – to Switzerland, France the UK and even Germany with the Alternative fuer Deutschland party (Economist, 2016; Martin, 2016; New York Times, 2016). Whether or not these political currents become a more permanent feature of the political landscape is too early to say but what does appear to be the case is that within the political confines of nation-state democratic imaginaries and in a context of widespread socio-economic insecurity and discredited established elites a 'quasi-fascist' (Eley, 2015) moment appears to be upon us.

We need to be careful in exaggerating the causal relationships in facilitating a politics of the far-right: as Syriza and Podemos have demonstrated, a populist platform does not automatically produce a far-right. Nevertheless, the structural-institutional imbalance between an internationally organized and managed neoliberal capitalism with a democratic political imaginary confined to the nation-state serves to make it much easier for the far-right to prosper. When this is combined with the idea of 'international solidarity' as requiring the sacrifices and pain of austerity, i.e. as a necessary almost public humiliation of a people it is easy to see why a populism infused with a nationalist orientation gains significant political traction.

Conclusions

Neoliberalism does not currently *need* the far-right in the way that a number of national capitalist classes needed 'political rescue' by fascism during the inter-war era; but both significant dimensions of neoliberal ideology and the consequences of its operationalization are closely aligned with the politics of the far-right. Further, whilst the far-right problematizes the reproduction of the neoliberal socio-economic regime it only does so in quite specific and limited ways. In particular, it is the spatial and (international) institutional framing of neoliberalism which is particularly significant in the context of the EU.

The significance of the revival of the far-right, then, should not be under-estimated as it has come to exercise a significant populist current contributing to a new 'common sense' associated with the reconfiguration of Western welfare states and influenced in more recent debates about responses to migration. Indeed, it is in this latter case where the 'embrace' has been particularly contradictory. In general, capital in the West favours the free movement of labour but it prefers that labour to be cheap and insecure. In so far as far-right arguments

against migrants help to maintain these levels of insecurity then they perform an unintended service for the system as a whole. However – and this is where the contradiction begins – if the far-right was ever to achieve its actual goals of preventing migration then it would, in an equally unintended way, perform a far greater disservice, as our earlier examples taken from the USA and UK suggest. In immediate policy terms for the left, the implications are that attitudes towards the EU should not take as their starting point a simple reversal of the far-right position – the far right oppose the EU, therefore we must support it – but begin instead from what is central to capital, which in this case is the role of the EU in maintaining the neoliberal order.

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[1] See the work of Frank (2005) for a discussion of the US case and Rydgren (2014) for European cases.

[2] Trump rallies have been dominated by chants from his audience of 'build the wall' that refer to Trump's promise, if elected President, to build a wall on the US-Mexican border to prevent migrants from Mexico crossing the border, as well as deport the estimated ten million undocumented workers resident in the US.

[3] The outcome – a vote to leave – of the recent (June 2016) UK referendum on its membership of the EU has reinforced this trend given that large numbers of Conservative voters defied their party leadership to vote for 'Brexit'. In doing so such voters not only appear to have been pre-occupied with far-right inflamed concerns over immigration but that enough of them seem to have prioritized this issue over their personal economic well-being. Whether or not the expectations of an economic downturn are realized and/or Britain does end up leaving the EU it seems incontrovertible that the 'Brexit vote' has further problematized the continuation of the existing neoliberal model in the UK – upon which the leading fractions of the capitalist class are tied to – and opened up further opportunities for far-right voices to influence the Conservative party and the wider political debate in Britain. The upsurge of racist abuse and violence (see Stone, 2016) that has followed the referendum result is suggestive of the way in which the contradictions of neoliberal political economy and governance provides political opportunities for forces that otherwise may be dormant.

[4] As Soss *et al* (2011: 295) note, '[t]he state's carceral 'right hand' has risen in importance; welfare discourses and procedures are increasingly criminalized; and welfare and criminal justice operations now function as integrated elements of a single system for managing marginal populations.'

[5] It is important to note here that such culturally-determined racist exclusions are not the exclusive prerogative of white or European political contexts. In India, the politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are closely aligned with what can only be seen as racist attitudes towards non-Hindu minority populations and Muslims in particular (see Ahmad, 2015; Bose, 2009).

[6] The point here is not to overlook the racisms within the structures and processes of the social-democratic state as if the post-war welfare state offers an idealized past because the post-war welfare state was always a racialized one and especially so in the United States (see Quadagno, 1994; Virdee, 2014:98-121) for how best to combat racism, but to, instead, recognize how the reconfiguration of the state across liberal democracies and, in the US and Britain in particular, has ended up dismantling those spaces and resources within the state that anti-racist organizations and campaigns could draw on as part of a legitimate public discourse for politicizing racism as a *political* concern requiring public action. It was out of this context that a number of successful anti-racist campaigns emerged and bore fruit through the 1960s and 1970s in terms of housing, employment and political rights involving anti-racist mobilizations outside of the state but in dialogue with and taking advantage of spaces and resources within the state, limited though these were. Very few, if any, of these spaces or resources exist anymore and it has been the epistemological and ontological assumptions of neoliberalism in thought and action that has provided the source of these changes and, with it, a structural impediment to effectively combatting ongoing racisms. Thanks to John Holmwood and Robbie Shilliam for insisting on clarifying this issue.

[7] This connects to a deeper logic of racism that has come to be called 'the wages of whiteness' first identified by W. E. B. Du Bois (1965: 700) where he discussed the racism of Southern workers in the post-reconstruction United States, 'the white group of laborers, while they receive a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools.'

[8] Notwithstanding the fundamental issue of the initial act of racial dispossession which was foundational to the creation of a global capitalist economy from which neoliberalism emerged.

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