

SO YOU'VE BEEN IDEOLOGICALLY DISCREDITED



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So You've Been Ideologically Discredited

Spring, 2024: more common than you'd think!

Take this as a self-help book for people who have spent a considerable amount of time wrapped up in a political project, and who have allowed their social life, their hobbies, and their online life to messily merge with a vision for changing the world. It is for people who spent a long time being as cynical as everyone else, but who got the idea that things could be different, and carried that thrilling little spark of faith around with them, until the spark was put out. Perhaps you led a double life, supporting your work and relationships as you always did, before furtively logging on, to obsess over shifting news stories about your favoured party or candidate, to argue about it with strangers and friends-of-friends, or to build local organisations. In other words, it is self-help for people who wanted a world that was less selfish, and who were tired of seeing people like them disappointed, or policed and spied on, or told they were no good, sent to wars, or allowed to die at home. Some of these people are on the left and some are on the right, and, while they don't think they have much in common, they at least share that they were willing to put their name and character on the

line for something received opinion took to be either a joke or wicked and dangerous. There are a lot of people like you. In the couple of decades before the ‘long 2016’, all we ever heard about was how people had disengaged from political processes, that they didn’t join parties anymore or even vote. Certainly, they didn’t believe that ordinary people could work together to make things different. Trump, Brexit, Bernie, Corbyn, Syriza, Podemos, Mélenchon, M5S – to speak only of ‘electoral politics’ – changed the situation for lots of us. All those projects dramatically outperformed the normal political calculus for a while, and then – with a few exceptions – either managed to win and immediately disappointed their supporters, or they collapsed, leaving you – someone who only wanted to make the world better – *ideologically discredited* and wondering what to do next.

The pieces collected here mainly chart the half-life of Corbynism after its defeat (most were published in *Jacobin* or *Sublation Magazine* and are lightly revised). I am a 2017 man. My politics is defined by the conviction that when Jeremy Corbyn went from being an electoral nonentity to coming a shocking few percentage points shy of winning the 2017 UK general election, it showed a realisable pathway to victory for a certain ‘left pop-

ulism'. Despite criticism at the time that 'one cannot build socialism in one country', there is even a counterfactual imaginable where, after Corbyn's victory, the US and several leading countries of the EU could have also entered the 2020s with similar radical social democratic governments and began – perhaps even in cooperation with some countries led by populist nationalists – the project of dismantling globalisation, austerity, and forever wars. When it all fell apart, I was left thinking, *was that so much to ask?*

Corbyn's 'left populist' 2017 campaign worked by uniting a highly motivated core of left-wing activists and their base of *downwardly mobile* younger graduates, with a more temperamentally conservative and *already down* older working class. It did this using a remarkably simple formula: (1) show that the graduate fraction and the older one agree on core material issues: they both resent the regional underinvestment and shitty jobs of austerity, outsourcing, and offshoring; (2) make the graduate fraction offer the older one something of symbolic importance: the younger cohort didn't vote for Brexit, the older working class did, and Corbynism was willing – in 2017 at least – not only to give it to them, but to make a repatriated post-Brexit economy a cornerstone of its economic project; (3) convince the

older working class that they agree with the radical left on something they didn't necessarily think they did: in this case anti-imperialism. I have described elsewhere how, after a dreadful terror attack in Manchester, Corbyn's showing the background of such disasters in UK foreign policy wrongfooted the commentariat – left and right – when it turned out the public agreed with his arguments.

Populist electoral movements have a short shelf-life today: at best there is usually only one chance before – as happened with Corbynism – the bourgeois elements in the project ruin the fine balance of the formula by tipping the emphasis towards their own preoccupations, and away from the interests of the working class elements. It also doesn't take long for the constant barrage of attacks from the mainstream media to go from making your leader seem like a rebel to making them seem instead like a naughty schoolkid. But this is not yet another book about why your favourite counterhegemonic project lost its way. There are a million books in the world about how to avoid losing in politics. There are fewer on the more difficult question of how to avoid inadvertently making things in the world worse after you lose. Kid-do, it's more common than you'd think! In politics, everyone is a populist when they think their side

is winning, and everyone feels the temptation of misanthropy when disabused of that belief. (Out of the recent projects just listed, only Trump's more committed supporters were able to break this rule, through bloody-minded refusal to believe that he had been voted out at all). *Anti-populism* is too often the outcome. Even though you've been *ideologically discredited*, it's important that you learn how to avoid thinking like this.

In what follows, I argue that the anti-populism of defeat played a big part in how the western left found itself offering up its remaining political capital to help defend the west's disastrous establishment consensus on huge crisis events such as COVID-19 and the Russia/Ukraine war. These were issues that required a principled stance of non-alignment, and the highest bar for free speech over possible solutions. Instead, the defeated left transformed itself into an attack dog for big tech and big pharma, before turning against its own most durable anti-war institutions out of fear of seeming pro-Putin. Only weeks before October 7th and one of the biggest spontaneous upticks in popular dislike for British foreign policy in history, one ex-Corbyn advisor could be found calling for the Corbyn-founded Stop the War coalition to disband, over its insufficient support for pouring arms into

Ukraine. To the most recent crisis, the crushing of Gaza, the left has – for what it is worth – responded far better. The tone-scolding, the conditional solidarity, the wounded attachment to progressive capitalist parties, the anxiety of being accused of antisemitism, conspiracism, or ‘Tankie-ism’: all of those bad impulses seem to have been put on hold, and the ‘activist’ left has been rude and right in support of the Palestinians. As David Slavick and I have claimed on The Popular Show, quite apart from what it is doing to the Middle East, the social mediatized obliteration of Gaza has the potential to scramble the political spectrum in the west... but that is a story for another text.

Summer, 2023: two history lessons

One of the intellectual mentors of Corbynism, the late Leo Panitch, concluded his final book with the hopeful observation that the 2019 election defeat concealed a substantial rejuvenation of socialism in Britain: the fruit of a unique generational collaboration between the Labour left formed in the 1970s, and a new one that would carry the project forward. How’s that going? Obituaries for the Labour left, whether its boomer or millennial strands, are, sadly, low-hanging fruit at this point. No match for the former director of public prosecutions Sir Keir

Starmer and his right-wing coup, veteran leftist figureheads were suspended from the party, sitting left-wing officials at all levels of government were routinely vanished from their candidacies on any formal pretext, and the Labour Party machinery was reconfigured to make further growth of the Labour left — let alone a left-wing leader — impossible. Worse, what political propositions the Labour left and broader ‘Corbyn’ ecosystem *did* manage to come up with in defeat tended toward anti-political technocracy and were — to put it kindly — far from equal to the times. Things seem impossible. Yet we’ve done impossible things before.

Two such impossibilities occurred within the first year of ‘Corbynism’. Younger readers may not recall that the turning point in the 2015 Labour leadership election that allowed Corbyn to wholly distinguish himself from his centrist rivals was the party’s edict that Labour MPs show their toughness by abstaining on (rather than opposing) the Welfare Bill proposed by the Tory government. As John McDonnell remarked at the time, the bill’s sadistic and arbitrary cuts to household income for the poorest was something one should ‘swim through vomit’ to oppose, but Corbyn alone among the leadership candidates did so. This simple presentation of the political difference between Corbyn and his main-

stream Labour rivals was an important turn in the fortunes of the Corbyn candidacy, which had previously been assumed to be impossible. Apart from overcoming the impossibility of being elected from the radical left at all, the second impossibility of the Corbyn project was its survival of the ‘Chicken Coup’ of June 2016, when forty-four shadow cabinet ministers resigned in an attempt to force the end of Corbyn’s leadership. It is difficult to mentally reconstruct how utterly extraordinary Corbyn’s refusal to resign in that situation was. That impossible act proved the resilience of the new generational compact on the UK left that Panitch described; it gave the pretext for Corbyn to elevate young left-wing allies into senior shadow cabinet roles; it showed that there was a left supporting Corbyn ‘out there’ in the country that mainstream commentators and politicians had no understanding of. It was also a reminder that every advance of socialism in Britain requires the humiliation of the ordinary decorum of the Labour Party.

These are stories that should be kept in the left’s collective memory, but what good are they now? To the first: the 2015 Welfare Bill that sealed Corbyn’s victory contained among the earliest formal references to a two-child cap on benefits in Britain (i.e., withholding tax credits and other benefits af-

ter recipients parent a third child). By some historical quirk, the two-child cap was again driving the political conversation in Britain in summer 2023, after Starmer announced that an incoming Labour government would not abolish it, despite this policy directly keeping hundreds of thousands of children in poverty. To those who remember, the dynamic was briefly 2015 all over again: not least when Corbyn's media appearances condemning Starmer's position coincided with surprise polls that placed him as the most popular current or former Labour leader, while the media salivated over the prospect of the circus of him running against Labour in the next general election. To the second: the memory of Corbyn and the left's negotiation of the 2016 Chicken Coup presented a lesson for responding to expulsions of high-profile left-wing figures from Labour by Starmer. Jamie Driscoll, for instance, the sitting Labour mayor for the North of Tyne, was one of the most conspicuous promoters of 'Corbynite' industrial policies in local government, until he was barred from standing again as the Labour mayoral candidate following the kind of Kafkaesque guilt-by-association antisemitism accusations that became routine under Starmer's leadership. Driscoll's announcement of an independent run immediately attracted over £100,000 in small donations. Where is the Chicken Coup in

this? It has been a long time since a Labour-left MP was in a position to resign from anything in protest, even if they wanted to. But the Driscoll moment presented a far better alternative. A concerted series of appearances by Labour-left MPs alongside their comrade Driscoll would have forced Starmer's hand in one of two directions. Either he overlooks the misdemeanour, and the left claws back some autonomy for the first time since 2020. Or – more likely – he kicks them all out of the party, creating in an instant a new parliamentary radical left and a galvanizing focus for the listless ex-Corbynistas out in the country.

Of course this was not to be. One of the most frustrating things about the Labour left's timidity, inertia, and lack of leadership is how unnecessary it has been. Driscoll's mayoralty is a reminder of how underused Corbynism's innovative 'Community Wealth Building' anti-neoliberal industrial policies were in the 2019 election. That cutting-edge policy prospectus has sat preserved in amber ever since. If timidity was unwarranted on policy grounds, then my sketch here of a possible 'high' political strategy shows it was unnecessary on tactical grounds too. Even years after defeat, the good will of a movement, the precedent of recent history, and the serendipity of opportunity were all still there.

With these opportunities squandered, and lacking guidance, open leadership, or any model of courage from the parts of the left that – for the time being – still had access to the machinery of the state, it was inevitable that their directionless ordinary supporters would collapse into the pathologies I am about to describe.

Summer, 2021: a defeated left is a dangerous thing

Minutes after the exit poll, the Corbynite narrative was set. Brexit, not socialist policies, had cost Corbyn's Labour the 2019 general election. Those inside the movement who had counselled that Brexit must be honoured claimed vindication. Left influencers' former flirtation with anti-Brexit politics evaporated as completely as the Astroturf 'People's Vote' campaign itself. We're all Lexiters now. Yet the dynamics that allowed the radical left's shot at state power to be squandered remained substantially uncorrected. In the year or so after its defeat, the UK left reacted to both the COVID-19 pandemic and the bandwagon in favour of electoral reform in *precisely the same way it had responded to the vote to leave the EU*. The motives leading good Corbynistas to all these blunders might best be summarized using terms coined by Hal Draper in the 1960s: a

technocratic and moralizing ‘socialism from above’ is prioritized over a chaotically democratizing ‘socialism from below’. Today, ‘socialism from above’ may take the form of a checklist of the following pathologies: (i) anti-populism (a misanthropic suspicion of “the people” as tendentially reactionary, racist, and ignorant); (ii) hyper-partisanship (the reflex to blame ‘the Tories’ and their supporters, rather than the four-decade cross-party consensus on neoliberalism, and to think of Labour or Democrat centrists as ‘the lesser evil’); (iii) a revulsion at petty bourgeois nationalism un-tempered by equal dislike of the Davos-class globalism of *actual* elites; and (iv) a ‘retreat from class’ and toward bourgeois institutions, procedures, or identity politics framings. These are the self-defeating temptations of a political fraction that wants the best for people and rarely gets it, and that is increasingly drawn from a class different to the one it sets out to liberate. In its most glorious moments, Corbynism transcended these constraints. But the left’s self-sabotaging mistakes — from the second referendum policy to the flagship positions taken after — have invariably been coded by them.

The second danger of this strain of ‘socialism from above’ is that it has the potential to be not merely self-sabotaging, but also actively regressive. The de-

feat of Corbyn and Bernie Sanders was followed by a carve-up of their ideas – from the Green New Deal to interventionist industrial policies – by the ruling centrists in the United States and EU, and the ruling right wing in Britain. Far from the left ‘winning the argument’, as Corbyn himself put it, this has resulted in superficially left-wing ideas around climate, racial justice, anti-fascism, and indeed a new settlement on the role of the state, being stripped of their liberatory, democratizing content, and put in the service of projects that are only interested in re-legitimizing elite power. If they find themselves cheerleading for such crumbs, defeated left rumps can end up advancing the exact opposite political outcomes to those they promised when their projects were still on the rise. If this seems an unduly brutal appraisal of the fate of left populism, it’s not like it hasn’t happened before. As writers as diverse as Christopher Lasch, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, Adolph Reed, Nancy Fraser, and Peter Hitchens have all argued, the apparent defeat of the 1968 ‘New Left’ was followed by many of its demands, aesthetics, and frames of feeling being embraced by victorious elites as part of neoliberalism’s ‘new spirit of capitalism’. As Fraser puts it:

Conscripted in the service of a project that was deeply at odds with our larger, holistic vision of

a just society [...] utopian desires found a second life as feeling currents that legitimated the transition to a new form of capitalism: post-Fordist, transnational, neoliberal.

If the New Left were revolted by the standardisation, national isolationism, paternalism, and statism of the post-war welfare consensus, then so were Thatcher and Reagan. When 1968 failed to replace welfare capitalism with the New Left utopia, a neoliberal dystopia was ready to run through the door it had opened and finish the job. It was at one point vogueish to suggest that state responses to COVID-19 augured an 'end to neoliberalism'. If this is right, we should remember that the last such transition was to a yet more exploitative form of capitalism, dressed in the clothing of the defeated left.

For all the opportunity afforded by the dire Sir Keir, leadership from the Labour left of the movement Corbyn bequeathed them has been non-existent. From this awful vacuum, two recognizable positions emerged as the post-Corbyn left's initial *raison d'être*: replacing Britain's 'first past the post' voting system with proportional representation; and pursuing a 'zero COVID' strategy of maximum containment of the virus. Both were extremely popular among the left in the years immediately

following Corbyn's defeat, but could unfortunately trace their lineage back to the same 'from above' instincts that brought us to the second referendum position. This is not the place for a thoroughgoing 'left case against proportional representation', and I acknowledge there are reasonable arguments for it. What is troubling, however, is the unanimous support the policy suddenly gained on the left the moment Corbyn was gone. Momentum even took PR as its number two policy aim for 2021 – easily swatted away by Sir Keir for the irrelevance it was – at the very Labour conference that finalised the total marginalisation of the left from the Labour Party's processes. At such a moment, this was the spontaneous priority we emerged from the radical liberatory experimentation of the Corbyn project with? *Really?* The prospect of campaigning on a complex meta-political issue at one remove from the real exploitations of people's lives smacked of Corbynism's nadir: the constitutional nit-picking over a 'no deal' exit from the EU and the proroguing of parliament in autumn 2019. When the Conservatives legislate to change electoral boundaries and introduce voter ID, or when the Labour right changes the rules on Labour leadership elections, we know it is because they doubt their ability to win 'honestly' under the current systems in the future. How, then, can we accuse them over this

when our own response to defeat is to beg to move the goalposts?

The best case for PR is the virtual Tory hegemony that FPTP has yielded over the past half-century. But Corbyn's 2017 performance under FPTP would have won handily in any previous election since the millennium. Do we now join with the entire political class in pretending that never happened? It will never happen again if we adopt a system which has in every other national context made power brokers of centrist liberals. FPTP, it should be added, was hardly bad for Labour governments in the 1960s and '70s. If we wanted to argue that something has changed in British democracy that illegitimately makes Tory hegemony structurally insurmountable, a more obvious and direct target would be media ownership. Unlike PR, this is something the left could meaningfully campaign over without the blessing of the Labour Party, and – such are the sins of journalists – with the appropriate populist framing, could rightly garner visceral public support. *Anti-populist* in its disbelief that a near-majority of the 'rainy fascism island' would ever support Corbynite policies again, *hyper-partisan* in its delusion that 'taking the fight to the Tories' with a progressive alliance of Liberal Democrats and Greens is something that animates huge swathes of people,

and a retreat from class in its eagerness to make alliances with reactionary liberal factions (inside and outside the Labour Party): the campaign for proportional representation is a virtual checklist of the self-defeating pathologies of ‘socialism from above’, and a mirror image of the campaign for a People’s Vote.

If the Labour left’s enthusiasm for PR was merely self-sabotaging, ‘Zero COVID’ – a monomaniacal insistence on maximal containment of the disease – was outright regressive. Hindsight is a fine thing, and the radical left were hardly alone in failing to countenance alternatives to the hugely damaging blanket lockdown policy adopted all over the world. But again, what is disturbing is the extraordinary unanimity of the post-Corbyn left in supporting the most ‘from above’ position possible. It risked putting the left in the service of a dramatically regressive transformation in society, analogous to that the ’68 New Left has been accused of accommodating in the neoliberal revolution. What other responses could a newly marginalized left have adopted in the face of an unprecedented suspension of liberties and upward movement of wealth and power? To record in real time the material losses experienced by the working class during lockdown in preparation for a 1945-style reckoning

after the crisis? To campaign for not-at-risk young people to be deployed to pandemic-controlling infrastructure projects? To at least uphold a culture of enlightened scepticism about the sudden and uniform reversal of almost all public health orthodoxy... not least the World Health Organization's explicit ruling out of lockdowns on principle just weeks before the historic volte-face in 2020?

Instead, the post-Corbyn left spent the pandemic urging a strategy that – if pursued – could only have entailed *yet more* unquestioning submission to a government it supposedly regarded as ‘far right’; to pharmaceutical companies it had spent the 2019 election representing as vultures circling our most intimate data; to borders it fulminated against whenever they were mentioned by Brexiteers; and to police it was *at the time* calling to be abolished as agents of racism and gendered violence. It is true that some saw lockdowns as a bridge to liberatory pro-worker policies. But was the gift of the left's unlimited moral ballast for lockdowns ever attached to conditions of any kind? Was the left's support for undemocratically imposed measures whose implementation it couldn't influence *really* likely to result in the spontaneous flowering of Corbynism by other means? It needs to be reckoned with that the left was not just unreflectingly complicit with main-

stream liberal opinion in this, as it was sometimes argued to have been over Brexit. It was the most pro-lockdown of anyone: the UK's main zero-COVID campaign described itself as 'jointly convened by Diane Abbott MP and the *Morning Star*'. Though Boris Johnson ultimately demurred from imposing vaccine mandates in England, the Welsh Assembly – the closest thing to the Labour left in government – saw fit to impose them on Wales. Public compliance with lockdowns and vaccination was formidable, and – disturbingly – to this day polling suggests that many people would be happy to see some restrictions permanently return. The collapse of economies and living standards across Africa and other poor regions, greater polarised inequality within the rich west, healthcare and basic freedoms made conditional on citizens' consent for experimental treatments, the collapse of separation between social media and the security state, and a more online, lonely, and philistine world are the only fruits of that time. Yet in Britain, the left's energies of resistance were reserved for the fight against a barely existent COVID scepticism and a Tory government who 'weren't doing enough'.

To refer to my checklist again (for your future use, it is reproduced at the back of this book): as with the second referendum and PR, the left's intuitive

reaction to lockdowns was *anti-populist*: it anxiously suspected the public of being selfish yahoos, when they were in the main either deeply compliant or sensibly flexible (e.g. defying the ban on seeing loved ones outside or visiting beaches, but in many cases continuing to mask in crowded areas after the mandate to do so expired). This reaction was *hyper-partisan*: a government of asset strippers led by a celebrity journalist was unsurprisingly ineffectual. But the left was so eager to attribute the country's poor COVID performance to Boris Johnson's personal genocidal impulses, that it missed the opportunity to tell the more important story: that Britain's poor preparedness was the outcome of forty years of neoliberal demobilizing of state capacity, which passive lockdowns have only exacerbated. Johnson was duly deposed, and Sir Keir – the left's greatest tormentor – immediately soared ahead in the polls. Finally, the increasing influence over the left of a downwardly mobile professional class meant it was more likely to see lockdown from the perspective of those who often work from home anyway (or who stood to save a fortune on commuting), than it was to take the perspective of the 'essential workers' making deliveries to them in increasingly alienated conditions.

The 2017 election proved that a functional majority

in Britain can support radically social democratic and anti-imperialist policies, even under FPTP. But it comes at the entry price of a performed willingness to show trust in people beyond the left's familiar constituencies, and a populist precision about who stands to gain by supporting us. For the Many, Not the Few. Everything that has happened since has been a journey away from that. Electoral reform and zero-COVID were not things that anyone cared to follow the defeated left's advice about. Which is fortunate, because on both issues it was as anti-populist, hyper-partisan, class-blind, and malignly 'from above' as it was on the drift to the second referendum.

Spring, 2023: *Capitalist Realism* all over again

Such is the whiplash of the left's fortunes in the near-decade and a half since Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* (2009) that many of us are already onto our second 'reappraisal' of the great book. At the start of my *Other People's Politics* (drafted in 2018), I reflected with gratitude that the atmosphere of nightmarish compression and lack of possibility that made *Capitalist Realism* so resonant after the 2008 financial crash, seemed now to have been suspended. We had gone from the 'slow cancellation of the future' Fisher spoke of, where 'there

are no breaks, no “shocks of the new” to come’, to an abundance of such shocks. Between 2014 and 2017, British politics had served up the near-misses/probably-next-times of Scottish Independence and Corbynism and the victory of Brexit, not to mention the rise of a panoply of populist formations internationally. Whatever one made of these projects, it didn’t sound like ‘capitalist realism’ when – in retort to economic critiques of Brexit – Nigel Farage said ‘there’s more to life than economic growth’ or when Boris said ‘fuck business’. On the left, this new voluntarism of the right was answered with a suspension of realism of our own. After 2017, polls were bullshit; the evidence of our senses (in the bleak mass door-knocking exercises of 2019) was bullshit; the new Jerusalem would be delivered by the omnipotence of our political libido come election night. Realism be damned.

What has occurred in the interim? A profound enclosure of the populist unpredictability of the long 2016: a ‘Restoration’, to use Fisher’s borrowed term for such demobilisations. The heterodoxy in both domestic and foreign policy – on both right and left – in those years has been smothered in the twin nightmares of COVID-19 and Ukraine. For today’s elites, there is once again ‘no alternative’ to technocratic edict and permanent inequality at home,

the supremacy of NATO abroad. Our leaders have relearned arts Fisher saw them deploying at the start of the century. Then, the War on Terror was a ‘normalization of crisis [...] in which the repealing of measures brought in to deal with an emergency becomes unimaginable’. What scattered resistances did emerge ended up surreptitiously reflecting the anti-democratic state-of-emergency outlook of the powers they were protesting: ‘politics has to be suspended in the name of ethical immediacy’, as Fisher put it, in a dynamic he dated back to the original Live Aid. Today, once again, unlimited and open-ended powers are claimed by states in the name of crises that are *too important* to be hazarded to democratic oversight or protest.

While the Western left’s approbation for *Capitalist Realism* has only grown since Fisher’s death in 2017, it has struggled to apply the book’s insights to these circumstances. Virtually the only function of the post-Corbyn/post-Bernie left on COVID-19 and Ukraine has been to drench the political field in anti-political moralism, ensuring any attempts to maintain either event as politically contestable *problems* remains eccentric and marginal. On COVID-19, government containment measures could never be extreme enough for the left’s satisfaction. On Ukraine, the left’s figureheads have been more

than willing to offer up the Tankies of the ‘pariah left’ for sacrifice, or (see the complete absence of left resistance to either Joe Biden or Keir Starmer on the issue) to defer to reactionary liberals on the acceptable parameters of debate. Attempts to provide leadership to the many otherwise unpolitical people who oppose Western escalation and intervention in the region – or whose memory of NATO finagling there goes further back than the current news cycle – has broadly been abandoned to the opportunist dissident right. I don’t presume to guess what stance Fisher personally might have taken on these issues had he survived (there is no reason to presume he would be different to any other leftist intellectual). The striking thing is more the paucity of critiques available today compared to what Fisher managed in 2009.

Another anachronism of the book is its comfort with targeting ‘liberal’ billionaires such as Bill Gates and George Soros (philanthropists Slavoj Žižek’s writings of the time referred to as ‘liberal communists’). For Fisher, ‘one of the successes of the current global elite has been their avoidance of identification with the figure of the hoarding father’. The dynamic was no longer – as in the Christmas movie *It’s a Wonderful Life* – the avaricious rich man versus the little guy who just wants to do good for his community,

but an absorption of the good and selfless mannerisms of the latter into the material interests of the former. As Fisher remarks, even ‘climate change and the threat of resource-depletion are not being repressed so much as incorporated into advertising and marketing’. Today we are living with the completion of the dynamic Fisher described. The leading Western states speak the language of the Green New Deal while treating a massive reduction in living standards as unavoidable. The international consensus on COVID lockdowns, surveillance, and universal compulsory vaccination was conjured by a World Health Organisation to which the Gates Foundation is the second-biggest donor (after the United States), and which – as Toby Green and Thomas Fazi have shown – reflected Gates’s personal and historically idiosyncratic opinions on global health. And yet for Fisher’s admirers today, an undue interest in Gates, Soros, and the malign interest elites might have in pursuing radical climate or public health measures are ‘red flags’ of right-wing conspiracism. Figuring themselves as the heroes of COVID and the climate crisis, billionaires have shed their image as ‘hoarding fathers’ even in the eyes of the left itself.

Looking at *Capitalist Realism* from something approaching a generational distance reminds us that

it is also a book about generations. At the level of the title, Fisher's justification for speaking of 'capitalist realism' rather than the abundance of available near-synonyms (postmodernism/neoliberalism/end of history/late capitalism/new times etc) is a generational one. The critiques from the 1980s and 90s that established those terms were made when the neoliberal order and the postmodern culture that reflected it were still being 'fought for and established'. They were addressed to an audience that had grown up with the existence of what we might call *the big alternative*: a communist World Power. Fisher wrote of a world significantly further down the pipe. As time has passed, first-wave 'mass' works of postmodernism, like *Alien* and *Blue Velvet*, have come to seem qualitatively closer to challenging melancholic modernist works like *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, than they do to today's postmodern experiments in intellectual property bricolage produced by Disney. Similarly, whereas Jean-François Lyotard's postmodern subject of the 1970s was famously 'incredulous' about the possibility of redeeming metanarratives and coherent being, the next-generation Fisherian subject of 2009 didn't even think of them at all. 'For most people under twenty in Europe and North America', Fisher concludes, 'the lack of alternatives to capitalism is no longer even an issue'.

Perhaps reflecting the place of British ‘cultural studies’ in Fisher’s education, the under-20s of 2009 do not appear in *Capitalist Realism* as sociological abstractions, but as some of the most textured representations in the book. Drawing on his own teaching work in further education (in Britain, usually 16-18 year-olds), Fisher invokes a teenager who always wears headphones in class, and protests that he wasn’t even listening to anything when challenged. In another class, Fisher notices the same student’s headphones lying on the desk, quietly playing music that the student then protests that ‘he can’t even hear’. Fisher’s indispensable term for such compulsions is ‘depressive hedonia’, the nervous and pleasureless need for continual stimulation (even if it is only ‘the other’ who is being stimulated on our behalf). Fisher felt he was working with students with uniformly dreadful mental health, and very little conceptual apparatus with which to gain mastery over their predicament. Reading was ‘boring’: not so much the subject matter being taught, as the act of sustained reading itself. In many cases ‘dyslexia’ was a misleading diagnosis for a much more generalised ‘*post-lexia*’, unable to break through the morass of digital micro-stimulations even if it had been motivated to try.

How to read these portraits today? On the one hand, we must ask whether Fisher was unduly pessimistic. Some of the students in whom he saw such unescapable and debilitating hopelessness presumably went on to join the 'Generation Left' that coagulated around Corbynism. The enduring lesson of 2017 is that one should never write off the possibility of people acting – albeit momentarily – as political subjects, even in unpromising circumstances. At the same time, the situation now is still more unpromising for the younger cousins of Fisher's students. During the post-2009 period, the relatively unregulated Internet on which Fisher made his reputation (as the blogger k-punk) has been enclosed by a cohort of monopoly platforms, sustained by maximising addictive and aggressive behaviour in their users, and gladly answerable to the American security services. It is unsurprising then, that post-lexia has spread from Fisher's working-class kids in underfunded UK state schools, to some of the most expensively educated young people in the world. As one Harvard professor recently put it, 'the last time I taught *The Scarlet Letter*, I discovered that my students were really struggling to understand the sentences as sentences'. If depressive hedonia/post-lexia was already universal by the time of the left defeats of 2019/20, the COVID lockdowns that

followed – their privatized online mediation of all social interactions and cruel misnomer of online learning – disabled and pathologized a generation yet further.

And what of the other side of the working arrangement Fisher describes? While depressive hedonia/post-lexia was the condition of the students in *Capitalist Realism*, ‘Market Stalinism’ was the condition of the staff. The marketisation/privatisation agenda ‘third way’ neoliberal governments promised would free entrepreneurial animal spirits from statist bureaucracy had resulted instead in a swelling of bureaucracy, as workers now had to constantly announce and affirm how efficient and competitive they were being, in a performance of massaged figures, mutual audits, and self-assessments worthy of a Stalin show trial. On the surface, it is surprising that the ‘Market Stalinism’ analysis did not have more currency for the 2015-2019 left, especially when Brexit had among its dominant tones an anti-bureaucratic, anti-red tape impulse. The left had in the pages of *Capitalist Realism* a ready-made and rhetorically brilliant critique of the time-consuming, counterproductive and soul-destroying performances of auditing which – as Mareile Pfannebecker and I note in *Work Want Work* – increasingly cut across both the

labour of working-class low-level administrators and bourgeois professionals. As Corbynite measures like workplace democracy, the 4-day week, and banning zero hours contracts strived to redeem the world of work, Fisher's critique could have added a much-needed populist attack on the thing a great range of people hate most about their jobs. *Capitalist Realism* even ends with a forgotten piece of genius left strategy: the replacement of the tactic of blanket strikes with a 'withdrawal of forms of labour which will only be noticed by management: all of the machineries of self-surveillance [...] which managerialism could not exist without'.

Could there be a deeper significance to the reticence about embracing Fisher's critique of Market Stalinism within the radical left? The recent accumulation of progressive cultural 'reckonings' – on sex in 2018, race in 2020, and more chaotically on transgenderism in the years after – has usually meant the empowerment of precisely the caste of managers, tsars, and administrators Fisher denounced, as a means of imposing progressivism 'from above' via equalities training, renaming of buildings, and policing of employee behaviour. How can the left oppose Market Stalinism when it depends on it as a tool to enable progressive employees in prestige workplaces to 'stand up' to their employers on is-

sues it supports (campaigns to remove Jordan Peterson and Dave Chappelle from Penguin and Netflix for example, or to push Disney to oppose Ron DeSantis)? COVID-19 containment measures meanwhile were a triumph of Market Stalinism. Continual testing of healthy people, continual refreshing and tinkering of rules, an explosion of QR codes and other monitoring in our personal lives, and a massive rewriting of policies and risk assessments in every workplace, plus – in the new emphasis on ‘working from home’ – an even greater orienting of the economy around unproductive ‘email jobs’. How could a critique of Market Stalinism be sustained on the left, without slipping into the ranks of the ‘lockdown sceptics’, the leftists’ *bête noire* in the period? *Capitalist Realism* deserves its status as the ‘patron text’ of the 21st century left. But we have to learn to read it afresh. On almost every salient issue interrogated by Fisher, the left is now either silent, under-theorized, immune to the necessary debates, or – at worst – actively malign. Then as now, the famous question of Fisher’s subtitle – ‘is there no alternative?’ should be answered in the (double) negative. There is always an alternative. But we can only see it if we treat *Capitalist Realism* as a shock from an already-alien past, not as the foundation of the feeble position we find ourselves in now.

Autumn, 2020/Spring, 2022: against anti-populism

The socialist left's sporadic successes in recent years have correlated with its being prepared to ride the wave of anti-systemic populism. Its failures, meanwhile, have usually followed instances of giving in to establishment pressure to defend the status quo against 'the wrong kind' of populist incursions. The Bernie movement was hurt by its flirtations with #Russiagate anti-Trumpism ahead of the 2020 primary and stunningly vanished as an autonomous force when it threw itself behind Biden in the presidential election. The disaster of Corbyn's Remain-ward drift over Europe is well-rehearsed. After these Anglophone catastrophes, Mélenchon is wise to refuse to endorse Macron against Le Pen, and to uphold his condemnation of both. Yet to make such observations is usually to be met with the objection that any attempts to associate socialism with populism are at best an opportunistic obfuscation. To go along with populism's framing where 'the people' are pitted against 'the elites' may at times be 'good enough in practice' (enough to create surprising electoral over-performances such as Corbyn's in 2017) but it is not, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, 'good enough in theory'. Theorists from

the liberal Jan-Werner Müller to the communist Žižek are in agreement in conceiving of populism as an anti-democratic trick whereby political actors idealise and homogenize ‘the people’, before claiming that ‘they, *and only they*’ are qualified to speak for them. This move, we hear, comes with a ‘long-term proto-fascist tendency’, since to so idealize the united ‘people’ is to falsely blame all antagonisms on those who fall outside it. ‘When we hear someone dedicating themselves to the “great mass of people” or to the “whole community” or to the “common man”’, as Thomas Frank summarises this way of thinking, ‘we know they are secretly confessing themselves to be guided by racism, or xenophobia’. Rather than defending left populism against this charge (I have done that so many times, and – honestly – how much left populism is there left to defend?), it would be better to respond by turning this critique onto what, as we have seen, is a more prevalent self-sabotaging habit of thought on the left today: *anti*-populism. If populism stands accused of essentializing a coherent ‘people’ it presumes to be tendentially good, anti-populism is the habit of tacitly assuming a coherent ‘people’ who are tendentially bad. If all wise heads agree that the first is an obfuscation, then it follows that so is the second. Yet as much handwringing and debate as ‘left populism’ has prompted over the past

decade, left anti-populism has less often even been named.

In his address to the 1965 Selma to Montgomery march, Martin Luther King presented his celebrated analysis of how white supremacy percolated through post-Civil War America, preserving the opposition between white and black, and binding poor whites to political beliefs inimical to their own interests. Despite the pertinence of the theme to our own moment, the plot against black equality was not, in Dr King's analysis, motivated by what Robin DiAngelo characterises today as the pathologies 'foundational' to the 'very identities' of white people. Nor did Dr King make white supremacy sound so permanently ingrained as to be 'likely' – in Ta-Nehisi Coates' recent remark – 'to afflict black people until this country passes into dust'. Instead, he claimed, white supremacy had only needed to be so monstrously and artificially imposed from above because, comparatively recently, poor black/white solidarity had seemed to be on the verge of becoming a reality. In the 1892 presidential election, a new third party ran on a program of radical redistribution and ambitious currency reform, winning a startling twenty-two electoral college votes. This was the People's or *Populist* Party, and it scandalised elites by alerting, as King puts it, 'the poor white

masses and the former Negro slaves to the fact that they were being fleeced'. King frames segregation and the laying of 'the roots' of modern American racism itself as an elite counter-insurgency, motivated to 'cripple and eventually destroy' populism. As King conceives it, racism became synonymous with America not because the struggling majority of whites and blacks couldn't recognise their shared interests, but because for a startling moment, they had come too close to doing so.

Dr King's analysis was already in counterflow with the main current. As Thomas Frank's *The People No! A Brief History of Anti-Populism* argues, beginning in the 1950s, American liberals lost their identification with 'the people', idealising instead the specialised expertise of educated professionals. In Frank's assessment, this went hand in hand with a new suspicion of the anti-intellectualism of the masses, with the evils of McCarthyism its supreme expression. Not even the resurgent radicals of the '60s New Left and counterculture were immune. Uncomfortable around the institutions of orthodox labour movement itself, the New Left sought the redemptive subjects of history just about anywhere other than the 'tight-lipped, tense, crew cut, correctly-dressed, church-going' blue collar American. The belief that 'working-class whites were re-

actionary and authoritarian' was now the common coin of all branches of left liberalism. 'The university president in his three-piece suit believed it', says Frank, 'and so did the long-haired student who had just trashed his office'. Frank concludes his book with a plea for a return to progressive populism, and views Bernie's two presidential campaigns as a model. But a note of caution is required. After reading Frank's history of American liberalism's struggle between its common-touch populist and scolding anti-populist tendencies, it is hard not to hear something of the second rumbling under the post-Bernie left's stated embrace of the first.

During the 2020 Presidential election, AOC took to social media to urge her supporters to vote for Joe Biden in the name of 'stopping fascism'. Doing so, she implored, would require a 'mass movement', comprised of 'women, gender-expanding people, immigrants, Black folks, indigenous folks, Latinos, people of colour of all stripes, old people, young people, etc'. AOC's suggestion is not – as was Dr King's – that despite their superficial differences, this coalition may awaken to their fundamental shared interests. Instead their stubbornly disparate interests will need – she says – to be 'stitched together' for the sole purpose of defeating Trump. In a sense, this lowered ambition is quite consist-

ent with AOC's own words. Without hearing about their economic position, there is no reason to assume that a given 'gender-expanding person' and cisgender Latino have anything material in common whatsoever. Given the increased ethnic minority vote for Trump in 2020, plenty of people addressed in AOC's list apparently didn't think so either. The fact that low earners somehow got left out of this extemporised popular front is also perfectly revealing. Everyone now scoffs at Hillary Clinton's 2016 anti-populist clanger where she appeared to condemn anyone contemplating a vote for Trump as a 'deplorable'. Yet the ease with which defeated Bernie supporters embraced the idea that Trump and his supporters are uniquely illegitimate fascists (as opposed to – say – one political rival among others) is hardly substantially different.

After the 2020 presidential election, things scarcely improved. The COVID-19 pandemic and the socialist left's tendency to demand ever more extreme restrictions from governments is an unavoidably egregious example. Lockdowns were initially broadly popular, and vaccine uptake was in the first instance enormous across the rich world, so I do not mean to suggest that there is anything inherently populist about opposing COVID restrictions in itself. Rather, it is the concerted an-

ti-populism of the messaging around many of these restrictions – undertaken with the left’s almost uncritical support – that warrants interrogation. Take the difference between Thanksgiving/Christmas 2020 and 2021. The common agreement in the first (pre-vaccine) holiday period was that the decent thing was that we all avoid meeting in person, lest ‘we kill Grandma’. Many more of us later became sceptical that this was ever the right decision, but the real shock comes in comparison with the widespread messaging a year later. In the holiday period 2021, the demand was now specifically for unvaccinated family members to stay away, lest ‘you kill grandma’. The apparent universalism of the first demand had revealed its secret anti-populist sadism against anti-science chuds in the second. The Biden Administration’s then-habitual references to COVID as a ‘pandemic of the unvaccinated’ underlined the way the disease was shifting from being represented as a tragedy that had befallen all of us, to being the fault specifically of reactionary parts of the ‘people’.

The original rationale for lockdowns was conducted on similarly anti-populist lines. As the epidemiologist Mark Woodhouse’s memoir of the time notes, the death count predictions that pushed Britain into lockdown in March 2020 were based on comparing the lockdown scenario with one in which no measures were introduced and *nobody changed their*

behaviour in any way whatsoever. Officials were presented with a choice, in other words, between suspending freedom of movement and assembly altogether, and the idiot ‘people’ continuing to blunder around coughing on each other as if nothing was different. Of course, this was a totally false assumption on the part of the modelers. Woodhouse notes that mobile phone data in the weeks between the disease’s outbreak and the imposition of lockdown shows people spontaneously taking considerable wise precautions of their own. It is tempting to say that the vast harms caused by state-mandated blanket lockdowns were in this regard the product of ‘institutional anti-populism’. When resistance to extreme COVID measures did emerge – such as in the Canadian truckers’ anti-vaccine mandate convoy in late 2021/22 – socialist commentators on both sides of the Atlantic were more invested in digging up dirt on the drivers than in wondering whether their demands were right.

For a further example of the dynamics of left anti-populism, we can take Florida’s ‘Parental Rights in Education’ bill, signed in early 2022. The law was criticised for using ‘Libs of TikTok’-style examples of educators going to wacky lengths to promote niche gender theories as a wedge to criminalize any acknowledgment of non-heterosexual and

non-cisgender identities in schools. Even commentators who shared some of the bill's anti-trans agenda disavowed it for encouraging frivolous litigation against teachers. Perhaps more than any other issue, the millennial left is – for good or ill – Pavlovian in taking the most pro-trans side in almost any argument, so it is unsurprising that they recognized the most regressive face of populism in the bill's invocation of effeminate elites 'grooming' innocent children. But at the same time, the bill contains its own well-placed traps and triggers for left anti-populism. The Republicans' focus on banning schools from recognizing and cultivating students' non-cis/heteronormative gender identities without informing the child's parents seems custom-designed for this purpose. Knee-jerk attacks on this ban from the left are well-meaning in their urge to defend the ability of gender-nonconforming children to flourish in school in ways some cannot at home. Yet the anti-populist dimension becomes visible when we note how the scenario abandons any ambition that 'ordinary' parents could be brought around or convinced to listen to and support their children. Never mind that they could have some kind of wisdom about their child that a teacher in the thick of a highly emotive and zero-sum culture war doesn't share. Parents are instead the *subject supposed to be reactionary*, the 'tight-lipped, tense, crew cut' of

old, and are discounted from the start in favour of the education system's respectable professionals. This isn't to fall into the trap of characterizing underpaid state schoolteachers as elites. It is simply that the left's intuitive preference for the assumed expertise of progressive teachers against the assumed reactionary ignorance of parents *does* fall into the anti-populist trap. During this controversy, one leading Democrat was mocked for avoiding the question 'what is a woman' by replying 'I'm not a biologist'. Wherever one stands on questions of trans identity, the answer to that question cannot be the preserve of some imagined caste of qualified experts. Liberation comes when people are convinced of its truth in their own language: not by narrowing the pool of those with the credentials to comment while turning apparently simple questions into Mad Hatter riddles in the eyes of everyone else. All this is not to say that the left should rush the other way and copy the card-carrying right-wing populists' positions. Rather it needs to learn to spot the bad habits of anti-populism within itself, and to produce responses to conflicts between right-wingers and liberals that avoids the false populism and anti-populism of both. Žižek may have said that populism can be effective in practice but is disastrously wrong 'in theory'; but anti-populism is wrong on both counts.

Winter, 2023: the master's tools? No thank you!

As Gaza was pulverised in retaliation for the October 7th attacks and a new McCarthyism against criticism of Israel draped itself across the west, leading figures of the rump Labour left called for an independent investigation into Islamophobia in the Labour Party. Zarah Sultana, once imagined as an English AOC, described how the party's policing of pro-Palestinian opinion and its contemptuous briefings about Muslim voters early in the Gaza crisis were of a piece with its indifference to racist abuse directed at her and other Muslim MPs. This contrasted with the near-continual handwringing about antisemitism by Labour MPs and the media during Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, which yielded the Chakrabarti Inquiry into antisemitism (2016), the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) investigation into Labour's processes in policing it (2020), and the Martin Forde QC Report (2022), interrogating how Labour apparatchiks pursued those processes factionally. For Sultana, all this substantiated Forde's conclusion that the party operates a 'hierarchy of racism', with the needs of Muslims near the bottom. Of course it's all true. A party can hardly maintain the impeccable Atlanticism Labour has – outside the Corbyn interregnum – always prided itself on,

without holding the views of Muslims in a certain amount of robust contempt. But this doesn't mean petitioning for Islamophobia to be treated in the same way as antisemitism is a good idea.

The focus on antisemitism during the Corbyn years occurred with the endorsement of many on the left. Naturally nobody on any side of the affair said they supported antisemitism, and everybody involved repeatedly and vociferously urged their desire to see it 'eradicated' and 'torn up by the roots' (whether in the form of 'left antisemitism' or of the 'real' antisemitism the campaign against Corbyn was frequently accused of distracting from). What is more, barely anyone across the political spectrum questioned the principle that a political party ought to monitor the online interactions and personal beliefs of its members, that problematic views are incompatible with party membership, and that independent barristers, codes of conduct, and nominally apolitical compliance officers are the proper arbiters of what constitutes undesirable beliefs in a democratic movement. Yet following years of 'war on' and 'zero tolerance for' the 'poison' and 'virus' of antisemitism, the most recent UK *Antisemitism Barometer* (published 2022) concluded that 'there is a noticeable reversal in optimism [...] Fewer British Jews believe that their community has a long-term

future in the U.K.’ Within the Labour Party itself, the ‘zero tolerance’ model adopted by Keir Starmer famously resulted in Jewish members becoming five times more likely to face charges of anti-Israel antisemitism than non-Jewish ones. What does this tell us about the tools adopted to fight antisemitism, which, it is now suggested, we ought to embrace in order to fight Islamophobia?

That the compliance model of antiracism ‘from above’ did not deliver a reduction in perceptions of antisemitism begs the question of what such processes do achieve. Writing of the United States, Walter Benn Michaels and Adolph Reed Jr warn that it is a mistake to make the ‘old left’ class-reductionist argument that race and ethnicity-focused identity politics is a distraction from class politics proper. ‘Identity politics is not an alternative to class politics’ they caution, ‘but a form of it’, practiced most successfully by the upper class. It should be illustration enough that, between 2015 and 2020, the most visible and sustained antiracist project in recent British history was aimed at destroying the most pro-working-class political party platform in British history ever. But this is not the only way of demonstrating this kind of antiracism’s class character. If followed to the letter, the EHRC report and Forde Report would entail a bonanza of ‘Market Stalinist’

hirings for the managerial and consultant class, all paid for with Labour members' money. Forde calls for 'compassion training' and 'training for members to develop deep listening and reflection skills'. Publishing scandalous evidence that Labour apparatchiks used to perform ad hoc keyword searches on social media to seek out Corbyn supporters who they could put under investigation (a cynical game they referred to as 'Trot hunting'), Forde's dry response is that 'if algorithms are to be adopted to carry out [...] social media searches, they need to be professionally advised upon'. The EHRC meanwhile, acts like a guild for such elite professionals, chastising the party for seeking staff training on antisemitism from the old-fashioned intellectuals at Birkbeck, University of London, instead of their own preferred brand of specialized compliance staff. In the anthropologist Tereza Østbø Kuldova's terms, this is how the 'Compliance-Industrial Complex' operates: moral panics such as those around 'hate' of various kinds provide the pretext for new hirings of training professionals, compliance bureaucrats, and digital programmers, plus new forms of surveillance for the rest of us, regardless of these processes' efficacy in actually solving the problems that prompt their introduction.

It is, in reality, hard to imagine Islamophobia be-

ing galvanizing enough for this class fraction for it to be adopted in this way. If antisemitism has been the British establishment's bigotry of choice in past eras, Muslim-baiting has something of that role today. But even if this weren't the case, extending Labour's anti-Islamophobia processes would, in practice, only be to provide a tool for taking more power out of the hands of ordinary members and democratically accountable officials and into the hands of the leadership and the cadre of managers and consultants below it. And this is not the only reason that a 'Forde Report for Islamophobia' is a bad idea. Sultana denies that the call is driven by factional animus: 'to frame this as just a right/left factional thing is really offensive [...] this is about how we can actually be a broad church'. This use of Labour's habitual metaphor for its uneasily 'broad' ideological collocation of right- and left-wing MPs is reminiscent of Forde's proposed addendum, that 'a broad church also requires the party to embrace [...] those with protected characteristics'. While no one would disagree with this on the face of it, taken in the context of a report that constantly counsels therapeutically achieved unity over genuine political differences, it is ominous. A party that in power pursued the 'war on terror', Prevent, the Terrorism Act, extraordinary rendition, and anti-immigrant populism is now once again led by the faction that

did all this. With Starmer's performative refusal to criticize Israel, it is today outflanked to the left on Palestine by the Conservative foreign secretary. Most so-called Labour Islamophobia is not a symptom of insufficient training or bad workplace processes, such as a new Forde Report would diagnose. It is, rather, a perfectly accurate expression of the Atlanticist, pro-war, pro-domestic surveillance ideology of the Labour right itself. For this reason, Sultana was on considerably more promising territory with her excellent Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill, attacking British manufacturers' role in producing the weapons today tearing Palestine apart. Drawing attention to the violence done by Britain's elite, rather than seeking new powers for the liberal part of it, is almost the opposite approach to an Islamophobia review. Speaking in 2016, when the Labour antisemitism affair was barely off the ground, Norman Finkelstein remarked of Corbyn, 'he has to say: no more reports, no more investigations, we're not going there any more. The game is up'. The left failed to embrace this advice when alleged antisemitism on its own side was in focus. It should not make the mistake of embracing the depoliticizing fig leaf of 'compliance' framings over the anti-Muslim positions of its rivals.

Socialism from Above: a checklist of what to avoid

Are you trying to decide what stance to take on an issue while ideologically discredited? Just make sure you're not basing your decision on any of the following:

Anti-populism

You are assuming 'the people' are tendentially reactionary and their agency is something to be curtailed or contained.

Hyper-partisanship

It is not your job to protect a liberal capitalist party that hates you, no matter what the right is threatening to do instead. Kiddo, they wanted it this way!

Revulsion of the petty bourgeoisie

Yes, they're nationalist possessive individualists (and they're on the housing ladder!) but better them than rule by Davos, Amazon, and HR.

The Retreat from Class

We all know 'race is a modality through which class is lived', but don't let non-class characteristics be (in Walter Benn Michaels' words) "the modality through which class is totally fucking suppressed".

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