# Chapter 4. The Politics of the Precariat: Revolution and Social Populism

During the revolutionary wave of 2011, I was briefly in New York as Occupy Wall Street activists temporarily re-occupied Zuccotti Park. In 2013, I spent a fortnight in the still-revolutionary Cairo, with its charred government buildings and politicized soccer hooligans, in charge of public (dis)order in one of the biggest cities of the world. In Tahrir, as the sunset, I saw columns of bi-gendered black blocs (an unexpected sight in a Muslim country), ready to confront the police placed at the gates of a palace. The clashes continued until dawn. The following day, my host - sociologist Paolo Gerbaudo – and I woke up to flames coming from the island in the middle of the Nile: soccer hooligans were torching the police officers’ club and Egyptian football league offices, after news had broken of the verdict concerning the deaths of El Ayed supporters in Port Said. The luxury island of Zamalek, hitherto spared by the 2011 revolution, was up in flames.

The precariat has already managed to fight creative and impassioned battles. Precarious creatives gave rise to the EuroMayDay network in the 2000s, which acted as a masthead for temps, intermittents, queers, and migrants across Europe, while the precarious underclass exploded in the mega-riots that took place in Paris (2005) and London (2010). In Paris 2006 and 2016, the mobilization of a whole generation against precarity challenged executive power with insurgent determination. Place de la République seethed with indignation at the flagrant corruption of elites and now-discredited political parties. Since the Great Recession of 2008, and the revolutions of 2011, the precariat has been the vanguard of the people in the Arab Spring, the Spanish May, and in the Occupy and Blockupy movements. These movements all fueled the anti-establishment sentiments that burn strong today across the European Union, America, and the Middle East.

## Great Recession and National Populism

The precarious have been shortchanged for a long time, and a sustainable solution to the Great Recession requires greatly expanding their purchasing power via higher wages and basic income. In doing so, aggregate demand can be boosted, and a progressive solution to the crisis can be found; this solution – most importantly – reduces inequality. These social conquests will have to be seriously fought for, against both the lingering forces of neoliberalism, and the growing influence of nationalist forces in Europe, bolstered by the victory of Trump. America is turning toward national populism and white supremacism thanks to Donald Trump’s capitalizing on the discontent of the deindustrialized working-class of the Rust Belt during the election. The forces of neo-conservatism are being revived and put to the service of a fascist agenda, one which includes the mass persecution and deportation of immigrants, and the reassertion of a white patriarchy.

The explosion of urban rebellions from Washington to Portland, the mass resistance to the Muslim ban, and especially the Women’s March, show us that resistance to national-populist aggression will be strong. Black Lives Matter emerged in the late Obama presidency to fight against police brutality; now the battle is against racist rule. European movements must provide solidarity to the mounting mobilizations of African-American militants, Latino migrant groups, LGBTQ groups, and ex-Occupy activists. The unprecedented election of a far-right president in America puts the seal on years of growing authoritarianism around the world, from Putin's neo-tsarist Russia, to Erdogan's neo-Ottoman Turkey. Putin played a crucial role in Trump's victory. A KGB-agent-turned-president having his man in the White House is something not even Le Carré could have imagined. Yet all of this is frighteningly real. Trump was hailed as a savior by Nigel Farage in Britain, Marine Le Pen in France, Frauke Petry in Germany, Heinz-Christian Strache in Austria, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, and Matteo Salvini in Italy. All of these figures are either funded or supported by Putin, and share his ultimate objective of dissolving the European Union. Most of the xenophobic European movements assembled in Koblenz in early 2017 are directly bankrolled by the Kremlin. Since 2008, Putin's Russia has engaged in active revanchism from Georgia to Ukraine, and now threatens both Finland and the Baltic Republics. Poland, which has historically feared Russia, has fallen into reactionary hands, sharing the fate of Hungary and Slovakia (however, unlike the former, the latter do not feel threatened by Putin).

The world created at Yalta by Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill is gone forever; a rising nationalist international (to use Yanis Varoufakis’ expression) now threatens to rule the world from Istanbul to Vladivostok, in concert with a jingoistic America. Whereas the Great Depression led to the New Deal, the aftermath of the Great Recession sees America moving to the extreme right after the initial shift to a Keynesian center-left under Obama. In Europe, the liberal-, social- and christian-democratic concert that has governed since 1957 is being undermined by europhobic forces in France, Germany, Italy, the initial bedrock, together with Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, on which Europe was built. After the likes of Boris Johnson and Steve Bannon, liberal democracy has left Atlantic waters: the historical destinies of Anglo-Saxons and Europeans no longer seem tied. The empowered national populism of America and Britain, has forced Europe to get its act together, culminating in Macron's victory and a new pact with Merkel to relaunch Euro-governance. Whilst Western and Eastern Europe are diverging politically, the Eurozone could reverse this trend by actively striving to deepen overall integration.

In this turbulent scenario, the precariat must become the voice of the people, and articulate a global project that pragmatically addresses the basic needs left unanswered by the terminal crisis of neoliberalism. This project is ecosocialpopulism. The precariat needs to develop an equivalent of 20th century socialist parties and labor unions, in order to defend its interests (which are themselves in the general interest). Social populist parties and syndicates are needed to counter the reactionary headwinds blowing in.

The creation of precarity was the crime perpetrated by neoliberalism in order to profit from labor flexibility and globalization. Now that neoliberalism is meeting its demise at the hands of xenophobic and inegalitarian forces, the precariat, its size greatly increased by the Great Recession, must build an anti-fascist, anti-racist, and populist front. This front must challenge, on both physical and ideological terms, nationalist and xenophobic movements either in, or clamoring for, power across Europe, America, and Asia. The precariat attempted to start a global revolution in 2011. Now it must defeat reactionary forces, and establish an alternative to neoliberal society.

## The Precariat as Vanguard of 21stCentury Revolution

Tahrir, Sol, and Occupy Wall Street were the three topical moments of the 2011 people's revolution. Each of these movements were incubated, and led, by the vanguard of the precariat: young university graduates without a job, and young professionals saddled with a precarious one. In the third year of the Great Recession, the precariat seized squares in major cities around the world in a cycle of mass struggles unprecedented in their width and scope. Indeed, the historical significance of these upheavals may be greater than that of the global mobilization of students in 1968; it makes sense to consider the revolutions of 2011 as the 21st century equivalent of 1848, the Spring of Nations. The Arab Spring began in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, in 2010, and soon spread to Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Bahrein in 2011. This sequence of revolutions then sparked revolutions elsewhere, with protests soon engulfing Spain, Catalonia, Greece, America, Slovenia, Bosnia, Turkey, and Brazil in our century’s Spring of the People. Three dictators (Ben Ali, Muhammad Mubarak, Muammar el-Qaddafi) were toppled in 2011 alone, and Bashar al-Assad’s position was endangered to such an extent that he had to declare war on his own people, who had dared to question his regime. He bombed and gassed them. This reaction sparked the bloodiest civil war since 1945, with Syrian troops being bolstered by Russian air support. Libya in turn has become a failed state, partially post-Bush Iraq, where ISIS has similarly found fertile ground, and partially post-soviet Afghanistan, with rival warlords vying for control of state resources.

Writing from the perspective of early 2017, it’s important to resist the claim that the revolutions of 2011 brought unmitigated pain to the world. The so-called Movement of the Squares, led by educated but unemployed youth, meant to create agoras from which a parliament of people could rise and challenge the power of political and financial elites, by reclaiming democratic sovereignty and campaigning for social measures that would redress the exploding inequalities caused by the 2008 financial crisis. The Great Recession, by causing mass youth unemployment (a phenomenon still plaguing contemporary capitalist countries worldwide), created the conditions for revolutionary movements to expand and cross-pollinate across borders. Occupying city squares around the world were vast sections of the citizenry, enraged at the bailouts being handed to bankers and politicians who had been scheming with global financial institutions and transnational corporations. The revolution of 2011 demanded political democracy in the Middle East, and a return to popular democracy and welfare rights in what used to be the West, until Trumpism rose to power in America. In Europe and the Americas, the people loudly questioned austerity and inequality, by denouncing the perpetrator of the crisis: neoliberal capitalism and its inherently inegalitarian project of empowering the few at the expense of the many. 2011 meant to empower the many at the expense of the 1%. Its fighting troops were a societal aggregate plucked from across the spectrum of civil society, and bound together by a common cause. The young, who had been made jobless and (supposedly) useless by the crisis, demonstrated alongside the unionized working-class and members of the aggrieved petty bourgeoisie. The revolutionary contribution of the precariat was vital to the mobilization of these previously disparate groups; the propagation and organization of the logistics of protest were spread overwhelmingly via social media platforms. Facebook groups, like the April 6 Youth Movement in Egypt, and Twitter accounts like Democracia real YA! in Spain, were pivotal in spreading the message of the revolution. Authoritarian regimes invariably tried time and again to censor – or even entirely shut down – the internet, but in doing so simply signaled their terminal weakness.

## Anarcho-Populism as the Ideology of 2011

2011 marks the irruption of the precariat into political history. As Paolo Gerbaudo argues,[[1]](#footnote-1) the ideology of 2011 was a mix of cyber-anarchism, no globalism, and true populism, of the sort seen previously across Russian and America in the late 19th century, which sought to educate the people (the Narodniks), and stop the depredations of trusts and robber baron (the People's Party). The Anonymous mask became the veritable symbol of the Revolution, and was sold in street markets from Cairo to Oakland (this also made money for Warner Bros., as sales of trademarked masks of Catholic dissident Guy Fawkes boomed). In fact, the revolution was also about pop culture, as the author of V for Vendetta,*[[2]](#footnote-2)* Alan Moore, crossed swords with the author of Dark Knight,*[[3]](#footnote-3)* Frank Miller,over the patriotism of the Occupy Wall Street Movement. This tension presaged the two fronts of the cultural and political war which was soon to come: the war of social and national populisms.

Many of the cadres of the 2011 revolution were also part of the anti-globalization movement of the 90s and 00s, and brought with them their knack for media subvertising, and consensus culture rooted in general assemblies and affinity groups. However, whereas the anti-globalization movement fought global neoliberalism as a largely abstract enemy which temporarily materialized as World Trade Organization, G8, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank summits, the movement of the squares fought national oligarchy first and foremost – worrying less about ideological purity, and caring more for inclusivity – by involving ordinary people in public discussions, reflecting on their needs and aspirations, and thus aggregating a set of disparate demands into a mighty whole, which converged on one issue: the lost legitimacy of the existing political and business classes. Neoliberal elites created the financial crisis and then profited from it thanks to bailouts and quantitative easing, throwing millions into poverty and precarity in the process. The revolution loudly proclaimed what many had already come to think: that incumbent governments had broken the democratic pact by failing to secure the livelihood of the majority of the population, and the protection of liberties that are fundamental to a fair society: welfare, labor, gender, and cyber rights.

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|  | **Anti-Globalization Movement** | **Movement of the Squares** |
| *Ideology* | Black anarchism, red marxism, pink feminism, green ecology | Social populism and cyber libertarianism |
| *Values* | Anarchy, autonomy, diversity | Inclusiveness and unity |
| *Actors* | Global activists | National citizens |
| *Enemy* | Neoliberalism aka the Washington Consensus | Political caste and financial oligarchy |
| *Media* | Indymedia, discussion mailing lists, hacker Groups | Anonymous, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit |
| *Organization* | Squatted social centers, affinity groups, social forums | General and neighborhood assemblies |
| *Aim* | Organizing the unorganized and the excluded: precarious, migrants, peasants | Mobilize the enraged citizenry, defend society from austerity |
| *Campaigns* | Third World debt, climate crisis, persecution of migrants, labor precarity | Financial and political scandals, impoverishment of middle class, government repression |
| *Protest Tactics* | Mass blockades, White Overall resistance, black bloc rioting | Mass encampments in central squares, mass demos and encirclements of government buildings |
| *Projection* | Transnational | National |
| *State and Civil Society* | Global civil society vs neoliberalism: anti-statist | The people vs the elite: reclaiming democratic sovereignty |
| *Relation with Left* | Collaboration | Competition |
| *Geopolitics* | South vs North | Democracy vs authoritarianism |
| *Economics* | Fair trade and social responsibility | Basic income and social expenditure |
| *Historical Utopia* | End of capitalism | End of inequality |

Table 19.

### Social Movements: the 00s vs the 10s

It makes sense to compare the anti-globalization movement in Genoa (2001) with the Indignados movement in Madrid (2011). To do so, I have included below a table from The Mask and the Flag, in order to illustrate how the political landscape has shifted, and how the precariat should continue the counteroffensive against national populism. I will do this via comparing the anti-globalization movement with the Movement of the Squares (as the revolution of 2011 is also known), given its method of occupying the central squares of cities in order to stir the population against the elites.

## Revolution and Reaction

Every revolution engenders a counterrevolution. After the French Revolution came the Vienna Congress, and the repressive armies of the Holy Alliance of Austria, Russia, and Prussia - the three reactionary powers who had been defeated by Napoleon Bonaparte at Austerlitz and Jena, but had ended up winning the war in alliance with Great Britain at Waterloo. After the Bolshevik revolution, the counterrevolution triggered the Russian civil war, which was eventually won by Leon Trotsky's Red Army on behalf of Lenin's Communist Party, against the White Army which was supported by Western powers. In Europe, reactionary Freikorps and fascist Blackshirts ensured the restoration of the bourgeoisie by dismantling council communism in both Italy and Germany between 1919 and 1922, while in America, President Woodrow Wilson destroyed the post-war ‘red threat’ by persecuting wobblies and socialists, painting them as traitors to the nation.

The every-revolution-is-followed-by-reaction thesis has been confirmed by the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, which deeply alarmed capitalists and dictators around the world. During the Arab Spring, and the demonstrations in Gezi Park, Hong Kong, Oakland, and Brazil, the people clamored for equality and democracy. What they got instead was repression and greater inequality; movements must now confront a reactionary backlash sponsored by Putin and Trump, while the (hopefully subsiding) terrorist actions of ISIS are fanning the flames of anti-immigrant parties in Europe, emboldened by the unexpected turn to nationalism in the heartlands of neoliberal capitalism. The double threat that Putin and Trump pose to the existence of Europe becomes more apparent every day. Trump wants more countries to leave the Union and imitate Britain’s increasingly europhobic Brexit, and chastises open-border policies favored by Germany and the European Commission. This is the reason Merkel has greeted Macron’s victory with a sigh of relief and is ready to compromise on German economic domination. While the potential catastrophe of disintegration has been averted, the Eurozone is still in deep trouble.

## Neoliberalism and National Populism Compared

The rich might still rule the world, but neoliberalism is economically, politically, and ideologically dead. The Great Recession of 2008 killed the illusion that neoliberal democracy was the end of the history, and that free markets led to prosperity. The revolution of 2011 questioned and subverted the legitimacy of neoliberal governance, but failed to dislodge global neoliberalism from power. With the hindsight of 2017, we now know that neoliberalism has been substituted in its Anglo-Saxon core by neo-isolationist and reactionary forces that I place in the umbrella category of national populism, while the European liberal center has held. Still shocked by the unexpected electoral victory scored by Bannon and Trump, many leftists have rushed to conclude that Trumpism is government by and for corporate executives that brings neoliberal tendencies to their logical conclusion, the highest stage of neoliberalism (to paraphrase Lenin's interpretation of imperialism). I think this interpretation runs against basic political facts, and that national populism is a distinctive political current that is opening up a new phase in the history of capitalism, as its toxic mix of nationalism, xenophobia, and military escalation signals the death of Friedmanite neoliberalism (1980-2008). Indeed, it undermines the entire concept of the western world that was initially built by the Anglo-Saxon liberal powers that emerged from World War Two, and consolidated in the long Cold War against Communist Eurasia. We are navigating uncharted waters. As a provisional compass in stormy seas, below follows a comparison of the basic characteristics of neoliberalism and national populism, so we can better understand the nature of the threats posed to democracy.

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|  | ***Neoliberalism*** | ***Nazipopulism*** |
| *Economy* | International free trade  restrictive fiscal policy, expansionary monetary policy | Nationalist protectionism, restrictive monetary policy, expansionary fiscal policy |
| *Geopolitics* | Partnership with China, rivalry with Russia, European Union as NATO ally | Partnership with Russia, rivalry with China, European disintegration, rebalancing of NATO |
| *Technology* | Green capitalism | Fossil-fuel capitalism |
| *Ideology* | Conservative/ moderate  liberalism, christian democracy, social democracy | Reactionary nationalism, racism, neoconservatism. |
| *Population* | Mass migration and multiculturalism | Closed borders and white supremacy |
| *Culture* | Individualism, liberal feminism, cosmopolitanism  Scientific reason and technology as efficiency | Populism, misogyny, provincialism, manipulation of irrationalism and technology as domination |

Table 20.

## Social Populism vs. National Populism

The politics of the precariat have emerged as a radical response to neoliberal policies that brought unemployment, insecurity, and exclusion to swathes of society. As a neoliberal empire consolidated after 1989, a global counterhegemonic movement coalesced around anarchist and autonomist principles, and engaged in grassroots practices. The struggles of the precarious and the unemployed retained this framework by fighting global corporations, and resisting global summits. Since the revolution, the politics of the precariat have been left-populist, or social-populist, and aim to restore political and economic equality. The precariat has shed some of its anarchist and communist purity in order to experiment with forms of radical democracy based on popular mobilization and electoral consent. Conversely, the politics of the oligarchy that constitutes the reaction to the revolution is right-populist, or national-populist. I argue that both constitute major departures from either the inherited left or the neoliberal right. Social populism is different from traditional leftist politics because it rejects class, and embraces the people as a democratic counterbalance to oligopoly and oligarchy. It is not explicitly anti-capitalist, although anti-capitalists are part of the social-populist front. Like classical populism, it favors direct producers and small firms over major corporations and financial concerns. It advocates an increase in social spending to escape the recession, and thus is a sworn enemy of neoliberal austerity. Similarly to national-populists, social-populists oppose free trade, as in the case of the protest movements against TTIP/CETA, but on grounds of fairness, not of protectionism. Whereas national-populists are hostile to immigration, and seek a return to isolationism and closed borders, social-populists are in favor of open borders, solidarity with refugees, and a rebalancing of both regional and global trade. Spanish Podemistasdenounce international capital movements as ways for the corrupt bankers and politicians to further enrich themselves and are likely to reintroduce capital controls if elected.

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|  | **Social Populism** | **National Populism** |
| *Ideology* | Egalitarianism, feminism, anti-racism | Nationalism, white supremacy, male chauvinism |
| *Actors* | Precarious youth, indignant citizens | Oligarchs, xenophobic working-class and petty bourgeoisie |
| *Enemy* | Financial elite, political caste, police state | Cosmopolitans, women, minorities, muslims, immigrants |
| *Geopolitics* | Southern Europe, Middle East, Latin America | U.S., Russia, Britain, Turkey |
| *Demands* | Radical democracy, living wage, basic income, climate justice | Cronyism, nepotism, fossil-fuel capitalism |
| *Economics* | Fair trade, local development, alternative currencies, expansionary fiscal | Protectionism, restrictive monetary policy |
| *Distribution* | Egalitarian | Inegalitarian |
| *Technology* | Open source, sustainable energy | Proprietary, fossil-fuel energy |
| *Media* | Neighborhood councils, protest social media | Charismatic gatherings, fake news viralization |
| *Tactics* | Women's Tide, mass civil resistance, labor rights campaigns | Moral crusades, immigration walls, Muslim bans, criminalization of protest |
| *Slogans* | No Es Una Crisis, Es Una Estafa (Indignados), Fight for $15 (Fast-Food Workers), Rêve Général (Nuit Debout), Refugees Are Welcome (No Borders), Ni Una Menos (Feminist Strike) | Make America (Russia, Turkey) Great Again |

Table 21.

National populism is authoritarian capitalism. Just as Putin filled government and Gazprom with his Chekist cronies, Trump is filling his cabinet with his own oligarchs: a racist Justice, an oilman at State, a climate-denier at EPA. The attempted appointment of a fast-food billionaire Andrew Pudzer as Secretary of Labor was thankfully defeated by the Fight for 15 movement, as it emerged that he was both exploitative and guilty of domestic abuse. National populism is pushing the oligarchic and oligopolistic tendencies of neoliberalism to their extremes and, unlike neoliberalism, it is deeply nationalist and irrational. Neoliberalism had an irrational faith in markets, but espoused scientific rationality in the name of efficiency. National populism is so enmeshed in the world of ‘post-truth’ that it no longer believes in science when it is not politically advantageous (exemplified by Trump’s exit from the the Paris climate treaty). Bush, however jingoistic and inegalitarian, remained an Atlanticist who refrained from racism and gynophobia. Trump, on the other hand, is a gleefully immoral and corrupt person. More importantly, he is a post-neoliberal who openly rallies for the disintegration of the European Union and NATO, to the dismay of Germany and France. Romano Prodi, long-time Italian prime minister and head of European Commission during enlargement to the East in 2004, recently proclaimed that his Europe (meaning those in Europe born in the 50s) ‘is dead’, and that he, a progressive catholic, could only pray to fend off what comes next. This leaves social-populists in the Eurozone with a big question: what are they going to do with Europe? The time has come for movements across the European Union to take up strategy that seeks to direct Brussels and Frankfurt against the remnants of neoliberalism, and defend Europe from internal and external aggressions. It will not be easy; the populist right is singing the tune of democratic sovereignty to better effect, because people instinctively attach it to the notion of national sovereignty, and this is the central theme of their entire position.

In fact, ‘sovereignty’ has become a fascist buzzword today, even though the origins of the concept lie in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the French Revolution. A European citizenship would be much more inclusive than national citizenship, especially in this period of widespread anti-immigrant sentiment. ‘I thank Italy, I thank Europe’, the Gambian president of the Black Panthers Football Club said while accepting an anti-racist prize in Milan. This soccer team is composed of young African refugees, and is supported by the local autonomous movement (they are also frighteningly good). It struck me that he thanked Europe. Much like the Syrian refugees waving the European flag as they walked along Balkan highways to reach Germany in 2015, Milan’s Black Panthers grasp that Europe is the land of human rights, a political assembly greater than the sum of its parts. Left-wing Europeans should ponder this, and not leave the European cause to the likes of Macron and other European neoliberals. Do not expect liberals to stop fascism, though. They are vulnerable because they are not people of action, as they are only trained to administrate the world, not to defend it. They are too attached to existing institutions to make the leap necessary to save Europe from nationalism.

The revolutions of 2011 have been defeated everywhere, except in Spain. In molotov-torched Athens, the crisis brought the Trotskyists of Syriza to power, but the Tsipras government was unable to resist the draconian demands made by Germany and the Eurogroup to extend international loans. The Tsipras’ government relented in spite of the result of the so-called Oxi referendum in 2015, the only tangible consequence of which was the resignation of Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, the only policymaker in Europe with enough intellectual weight to denounce the falsehoods of austerity-centric macroeconomic policy (namely that government spending must be cut in times of crisis, and that the payment of international debts comes before the welfare of the people).

Neoliberalism lost both its intellectual credibility when it crashed in 2008, and its political legitimacy due to ineptitude of its technocratic lackeys in their handling of the crisis in the subsequent decade. The Great Recession was very much self-inflicted, and neoliberals’ pavlovian response - advocating for smaller governments and a reduction of the welfare state - has proved suicidal. Neoliberalism is now being supplanted by nazi-populism. Its thirty-year rule won’t be missed by the majority of society. However, since 1989, neoliberalism has been decidedly cosmopolitan, preaching open markets and open societies. Neoliberalism means free trade and the free movement of capital, which means open borders to let people move around the world in search of jobs and opportunities. National populism is none of that. It is protectionist, racist, and misogynist. It pursues the wages of war rather than the business of peace. It seeks to reinstate the power of Whites in societies made multiethnic by neoliberal globalization.

## Europe: From Dream to Nightmare

For a moment, imagine you are suddenly back in the year 2000 again. Europe was optimistic. The economy was strong, and Al Gore seemed poised to succeed Bill Clinton as president of the United States. Whilst noglobal protesters had emerged as spoilers of the party of monetarism and neoliberalism, and the cinders of the Balkans were still smoldering, the West appeared triumphant, and neoliberal hegemony inevitable. The European Union seemed one of its most civilized achievements, having abolished war and created prosperity, all the while setting out to absorb post-cold-war Central Europe into its body of supranational institutions. The euro was just one year old when German politician Joschka Fischer, in a famous lecture at Humboldt University, sketched out a plan for a federal, multicultural, and liberal European Union that united the East with the West. Subsequently, members of both the European Parliament and European Convention drafted a constitution that would give a political skeleton to both the single market and single currency.

However, this fledgling constitution was rejected by French and Dutch voters in 2005. The tide propelling neoliberal eurofederalism had irreversibly turned. European elites tried to patch over the problem with the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, but the europhobic cat was out of the bag. This sentiment only grew as the Great Recession made its bite felt between 2010 and 2011 during the euro crisis, when the sovereign debt of indebted Eurozone countries such as Greece was downgraded by international speculation, prompting the European Central Bank to intervene, in order to save the euro and restore financial stability.

Seventeen years later, eurofederalism, once the progressive ideology commanding the allegiance of European elites, is definitely passé: Britain is leaving, Greece is bleeding, and the European Union, enlarged to East in 2004, is weakened by the joint threat of Putin and Trump. Germany is putting its national economic interest above that of the Union, while Southern Europe fails to counterbalance Northern Europe’s pressures for fiscal probity and budget cuts for institutions. The much-touted European miracle of a transnational polity turned out to be a mirage. The currency is shared, but the debt burden is not. Money is in the hand of a temporarily enlightened technocracy that buys debt that is issued by separate national governments, each of which has a different degree of credibility in the eyes of international investors. Because of differing credit rankings, German Bunds pay negative interest and Spanish Bonos pay positive interest rates. Belonging to the monetary union has actually amplified financial shocks, debtor countries are now sitting ducks for international financial speculation. The neoliberal project that propelled the idea of a united Europe forward with the Maastricht and Schengen Treaties now lies in shambles. The euro did not lead to growth, but to austerity and unemployment. The free circulation of goods and labor has yielded to closed borders, and hate for refugees. National-populist forces are warping politics in France, Italy, the Netherlands, and even in Germany; all core countries that began the process of European integration 60 years ago. In short, political Europe lies in ruins, as nationalism and xenophobia are dangerously on the rise in both its Western core and Eastern appendix. Reverting to the warring age of nation states seems an eminent possibility as America turns its gaze inward, and long-buried rivalries reemerge from the dark past of European nationalism.

Yet the populist answer to this scenario – exiting the euro – is a mistake, not only because it would signal the end of Europe, but because leaving would be a lot costlier than remaining, as sociologist Claus Offe has argued.[[4]](#footnote-4) Protectionism and a return to a national economy are right-wing options that would cut real wages by drastically increasing the price of imports. The only reformist option for softening the external constraint, which dictates restrictive fiscal policy in all European countries with adverse consequences on the population, is to change the terms of the Maastricht Treaty, and create a parliament of the Eurozone, one which would hold the Bank, Commission and Council accountable to European citizens and residents. France is leaning toward this position. The revolutionary option would instead be to seize power in the European Union and orient all politics and institutions towards popular, egalitarian, and environmental ends. A revolutionary call of this kind would read as such: we, the precarious and immigrant generation of Europe, must seize power in Brussels and Frankfurt to establish a neutral, social, and radical Europe. However, there is no existing European movement or party that can command the kind of mass appeal necessary for such a radical social-populist transformation. Mainstream European unions, composing the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) have been content with sitting in purposeless discussion over social Europe with EU employer's lobbies for years, having little effect on actual EU employment and social policy. Green parties have a European policy, but these mostly comprise of green lobbying and policies oriented towards liberal capitalism. Red parties sit together in Strasbourg and Brussels, but have only sporadically expressed a unified position on Europe, especially regarding what the European Union should be. National politics remains paramount for all leftists, while communists in the various countries of the Continent have historically opposed European integration.

Right now, Europe seems to be coming apart at the seams, with an unloved political structure, an outdated economic policy, and an outmoded foreign policy. Trump is betting on the dissolution of the Union, hedge funds are betting on the dissolution of the euro, and Germany is repatriating gold from France and America. The Great Recession hit Europeans harder than Americans, due to the neoliberal and monetarist inertia built into existing European institutions. In fact, the European Union had never weathered a major recession before. Will it survive the economic crisis its institutions never thought possible? After Macron’s election, I think it will, since the Franco-German entente upon on which modern Europe was built is solid (although it should at least be tempered by a special relationship between Italy and Spain). What is clear is that the Eurozone’s enlargement to the East has failed to integrate those countries into the political idea of Europe. However, this aside, the Baltic Republics are firmly inside the Eurozone, and as such should be defended from any potential future aggression from Russia (or elsewhere). What is emerging, in the liberal European center represented by Macron and Renzi, is the need to create political institutions for the governance of the euro, the need for which was made painfully apparent when the unaccountable Eurogroup,[[5]](#footnote-5) the Eurozone’s group of finance ministers, laid out draconian (and ultimately unsustainable) conditions for rescuing the Greek economy in 2015 (taking their orders from Schäuble, the German finance minister).

Fearing Brexit and its consequences, I wrote a piece for Euronomade titled The revolution of the European Continental Republic,[[6]](#footnote-6) proposing a movement for the establishment of a European republic in the euro area. As Britain leaves and the European Union is in retreat, my idea is to strategically consolidate the remnants of Europe into a single state with open borders and federated cities, regions, and nations. The eurocracy is too scared by recent events to even consider this. In Juncker’s five scenarios for Europe,[[7]](#footnote-7) a step toward political unification was not even contemplated. Angela Merkel said she was interested in ‘doing less more efficiently’, while France is clearly for the position ‘those who want more do more’ on debt and defense. At the moment, no country wants to do ‘much more together’. I think the only politically viable solution is the Eurozone does so much more that it becomes a federal republic. In a future parliament of the euro area, German economic power would be finally counterbalanced by the deputies of France, Spain, and Italy. An alliance between any two of these three countries would put Germany in the minority.

## Euthanasia of the Left

If the precariat is to resist the nazi-populist onslaught in Europe and America, it must develop a persuasive populist alternative in the institutional realm. The precariat simply cannot win the battles it is currently fights across the world if it does not develop its own distinctive ideology, organization, and strategy. The precariat could be the core of a transnational political movement, defending society from national-populist reaction, and engendering its emancipation from neoliberal subjugation. In order to do so, the reliance of the precarious class on communist ideology in the fight for equality would be dangerous. Today, equality is a populist concern, socialist demand is not.

The red left has little to offer the cause of the precariat, save old memories of 20th century working-class insurrections in what today are industrial wastelands which overwhelmingly vote right-wing candidates, and the now-dead guerrilla revolutions led by Giap and Che Guevara. The left instinctively defends full-time employees and pensioners, whose interests are always put ahead of the vital needs of precarious people. However, the interest of the precariat is in fact the general interest, because the young (and their children) are the future of society. Defending high pensions at the detriment of welfare has made younger generations both impoverished and existentially insecure, reducing birth rates and the formation of new households. The left has decided to turn its back to the future, by adopting what is essentially a defensive, and ultimately conservative, posture that will end in certain defeat. Capitalism is in crisis, yet communism will never recover, because it stands at odds with contemporary social reality. Its geopolitical worldview is hopelessly dated, and its understanding of online society and culture is very limited. The left has only rhetorical gestures with which to respond to the plight of the precariat, and its thirst for social and climate justice. Time and again, unions have spurned basic income for the young, and stayed away from organizing temporary and posted labor.

Although it is true that Occupy Wall Street brought about a socialist revival in the America, both in terms of ideological debate[[8]](#footnote-8) and political mobilization, there is still no socialism in America, a century after Sombart first analyzed American exceptionalism, and there is no longer democracy in America, two centuries after Tocqueville investigated its fledgling democratic society. Bernie Sanders and Michael Moore notwithstanding, Trump’s white supremacy program finally carried the day against Clinton's tone-deaf interpretation of Obama’s cosmopolitan liberalism. It’s possible that the movement around Sanders will create a successful brand of radical-populism that can be embraced by Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, and militant sections of the white precariat in their fight against the encroaching nazi-populist regime.

But ‘Feeling the Bern’[[9]](#footnote-9) aside, wherever red flags are waved, the crowd consists mainly of gray-haired pensioners. Socialist and social-democratic parties are declining and out of government in all European countries, save Sweden and Portugal. It’s a telling sign that the traditional left has no future. Today, the ranks of the left are mostly made up of people who were radical in the 70s, and are now approaching old age. When the wind of public opinion changed, and began to oppose the sanctity of free market deregulation and liberal technocracy, the left was unable to successfully resist austerity, and propose an economic alternative to neoliberalism. This crucially weakened its relevance and weight. What neoliberalism ultimately failed to achieve – the complete destruction of the left in Europe and Latin America ­– the Great Recession is accomplishing. Christian-Democrats and Liberals still rule Europe, largely due to fear of what might come after them: full-blown fascism across the Continent. Spanish left-populist party Podemos, and its ally in Catalonia, En Comù, have been the only political movements wielding constituent power after the revolution of 2011, in order to advance a political agenda for and by the precariat. The social center run by Podemos in Madrid is named Casa Morada, (Purple House), since this is the color of the party’s flags. Purple is also the color of anarcho-feminism. Indignadas and Indignados of the world, the new horizon of the people is morado! The hopes and struggles of precarious people could be enshrined in a purple flag with a shocking pink feminist fist. Precisely because it’s an empty signifier, a new revolutionary flag could be a powerful symbol to express the unity of the enraged precariat, who are leading the people toward political and social change.

I argued in Anarchy in the EU that chromatology is essential to understand contemporary political movements. In that text, I discussed how studying the queer pink punk, black anarchist cyber-syndicalist, and green climate action components of the post-left would grant us an idea of where these movements were directed, published as it was in the final phase of the anti-globalization movement and as the first convulsions of the Great Recession began. Anarchy is not dead, but communism is, I argued. This sounds even truer now, as the Chekists (named after Lenin's secret police), that compose Putin’s inner circle are scheming for world power, meddling in Europe and the Middle with nefarious intent, and murderous consequences. On the centennial of the Russian revolution, I think of the Soviets workers and soldiers, to from Kronstadt and the Ukrainian anarchist Makhno to the generously populist Social-Revolutionists, who won the only elections held after the October revolution. It’s even possible that Putin will use the heritage of 1917 to cement his power. Somebody must storm his Winter Palace.

I'm not questioning Marx's enduring importance as theorist of capitalism and capitalist crisis. With the Great Recession, Marx’s work is more relevant now than it has been since the end of the Cold War. In the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis, Das Kapital became a surprise bestseller in Germany. When a capitalist crisis occurs, it is natural to turn to Marx, and Marxist thinkers. For example, the global revival of Gramsci and his theory of political hegemony stressing the role of popular culture is again relevant in the fight against right-wing populism. As Perry Anderson, in his inimitable style, writes the Sardinian communist imprisoned by Mussolini has inspired some of the best Marxist writing since 1945, in particular the works of Stuart Hall, Giovanni Arrighi, Ernesto Laclau, and Ranajit Guha. Fordism is, of course, a Gramscian concept, on par with hegemony, and the notion of historical bloc. Laclau and Chantal Mouffe borrowed from Gramsci to define the essential discursive elements of a left-populist strategy.[[10]](#footnote-10)

We have already noted how Negri’s discussion of autonomia (autonomy)has strongly influenced anti-globalization movements, and the discourse on precarity. On another front, the critical sophistication of the Frankfurt tradition of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse, lives on in Judith Butler’s philosophy regarding the queering and gendering of subjects and Streeck’s political and economic sociology. Marxist feminism, as represented by the seminal works of Luisa Muraro, Bell Hooks, Nancy Fraser, and Selma James (among others) has become a stronger intellectual and social force than it ever was, even at the height of the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s.

As long as capitalism exists, Marx and the Marxian body of thought will stay relevant in the 21st century. My polemic is not against Marxism, but against what’s left of communism,[[11]](#footnote-11) which looks like a dead-end strategy by which to emancipate society, and seize state power. Marxist formations look down on the precariat and secretly hope for an impossible return to the 70s, the heyday of red influence. They would like to rewind history to a time before their defeat at the hand of neoliberalism, and the its subsequent dismantling of the world built by the Russian Revolution. However, Che Guevara will not rise from the dead, and Sandinista is now just a Clash album. The red left is moribund, and the Great Recession hasn't resurrected it. In fact, the longer the communist corpse is left unburied (to borrow a metaphor from Bifo), the harder the process of defeating inequality and oligarchy will be. It is revealing that the most important Marxist work written since the Great Recession, Capital in the 21st Century*,* has been vehemently attacked by Marxists everywhere for not being sufficiently faithful to the letter of the prophet.[[12]](#footnote-12) Having equality and democracy as twin polar stars, the leftist Post-Keynesian nevertheless exposes neoliberalism as the most unequal economic regime in living memory, and encourages people to fight against the financial oligarchy. Most communists, however, consider it ideologically impure.

Piketty was the main intellectual force behind the doomed presidential campaign of Benoit Hamon, who arguably had a forward-looking program: basic income, ecology, taxation of robots, and a parliament for the Eurozone. By waving the French flag, Mélenchon managed to annihilate him and the French Socialist Party built by Mitterrand in 1971. In Germany, former European Parliament President Martin Schulz is campaigning on a platform centered around universal free tuition (among other welfare measures) in a desperate bid to end Merkel's long hold on the German chancellorship. As things stand, he will be defeated, also because he's let Angie play the European card he should have been playing. Considering current political trends, it is hard to shake the feeling that social-democracy is going the way of communism, fading into historical irrelevance. In Greece, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) has evaporated, the Spanish Socialist Worker’s Party (PSOE) has been deserted by young voters, in France, the Socialist Party (PS) is dissolving in internecine strife, in the Netherlands the Labor Party (PvdA) was almost erased at the ballot, the Belgian socialists are out of government, and Scandinavian social-democracy is threatened by populism and xenophobia much like the rest of Europe (a border post has been erected on the bridge linking Copenhagen to Malmö to stem the tide of refugees into Sweden). Collaboration with neoliberalism in the 90s and 00s, most evident in Tony Blair’s Third Way, is the curse that is keeping the left out of power now that the crisis could restore its appeal. Today, most people, frightened by precarity and unemployment, would subscribe without a thought to the old social-democratic compact of universal welfare from cradle to grave. The fact is that both socialists in Latin Europe and social-democrats in Northern Europe sold out to neoliberalism, and have lost any credibility they once had, undermining their attempts at campaigning on issues such as equality, and the welfare state.

The inherited culture of socialism has often proved conservative with regard to recent social, technological, and intellectual developments. By remaining focused on the working-class and public employees, it has refused to acknowledge the precariat as the new class produced by neoliberal globalization, and thus overlooked precarity as a structural social condition specific to neoliberalism, the harbinger of a new radical subjectivity evident in the revolutionary wave of 2011. Just as the industrial proletariat led the struggle for emancipation in the 20th century, the postindustrial precariat will lead the fight for 21st century radical democracy for all and by all across the globe, by defeating fossil-fuel capitalism, thus staving off catastrophic climate change and the end of civilization. In order to fix the metabolic rift with the biosphere (to use theorist McKenzie Wark’s expression), we have to adopt the ‘labor perspective’:[[13]](#footnote-13) the perspective of precarious labor. The left is descending into political irrelevance. It will not be resurrected by its historic socialist parties, or communist movements. The precariat needs to look elsewhere for its ideological arsenal, namely, populism, feminism, and environmentalism. Red is dead, but pink is very much alive.

As such, my basic message is that we should retain Marx, but let go of communism. There are two main sources of communist nostalgia. One is Trotskyism, the minority tendency in international communism that resurfaced after 1991. It was a major influence on C.L.R. James and Marxist cultural studies, but the political parties it has inspired in France, Britain, and elsewhere tend to be sectarian beyond repair. The 4th International usually stands on the right side of geopolitical issues, because, since due to its historical opposition to Stalinism, Trotskyists instinctively reject authoritarian regimes. The other source of this nostalgia is none other than Red China, led by a communist party which embraced neoliberal capitalism and thus survived, unlike their Soviet doppelganger. Giovanni Arrighi (formerly an Italian Maoist) wrote that a Smithian China committed to global free trade could usher the world toward a post-imperialist phase, no longer characterized by the center-periphery dichotomy which had shaped all previous cycles of capitalist accumulation.[[14]](#footnote-14) As the Braudel-Wallerstein tradition of historiography tells us, the world economy has been governed by a succession of dominating financial centers: Amsterdam until the 18th century, London until the 20th century, and New York until the 21stcentrury. The election of Trump makes Arrighi's prediction highly relevant. In my view, the only form of intellectually coherent communism to support China's rise to global hegemony, similar to what European communist parties did by supporting Communist Russia during the Cold War. Since I side with Hong Kong and Taiwan’s young democracy activists, I don't recommend anybody should go that far. However, now that Europe is caught between Putin and Trump, a deal with China seems a good idea. It’s the last remaining world power committed to peace and free trade, because the former is the condition of the latter and China's only pursuable path to mass prosperity. Furthermore, in a world plagued by increasing irrationality, the Chinese leadership remains rational and committed to a long-term plan, as evidenced in Xi Jinping’s charm offensive at the World Economic Forum, and now his rapprochement with Trump, after China rattled its nuclear sabers over maintenance of the One-China policy.

## The Precariat at Davos

What used to be the annual ritual of self-congratulation held by corporate elites and their political allies (a ritual that anti-globalization movement used to vehemently target), has now become a soul-searching symposium attempting to understand why neoliberal globalism has been voted out of office in Britain and America. Guy Standing chaired a session on the precariat and its political makeup,[[15]](#footnote-15) his thesis being that the shift to the populist right is due to the precariat becoming xenophobic and nationalistic. While I do not buy into this premise, let us examine it more closely. Fundamentally, he argues that there are two precariats: one nostalgic and atavistic, and the other progressive. In a nutshell, one voted for Brexit, the other for Podemos. Many mistakes aside (lumped precariat, instead of lumpenprecariat*;* the weird category of proficiansfor neoliberal careerists and entrepreneurs; immigrants labeled as nostalgics, considered intermediate between right-wing atavists and left-wing progressives) evidence disproves his claim that precarious millennials ever dreamt of voting for either Farage or Trump. The precariat is not the gelatinous mass of middle-aged people losing their jobs, as he argues, but is the multicultural multitude of young people stuck in temporary employment and unemployment, as this book seeks to point out. This kind of precariat has an overwhelming anti-fascist and anti-racist sentiment, as mass protests have shown time and again since 2011.

My experience is that migrant labor and precarious labor have joined forces against racism, abusive work practices, detention centers, gender inequality, homophobia, and many other kinds of social discrimination. Second-generation immigrant youth are already prominent actors in social conflict and labor organizing; if you are young (and thus precarious), you tend to care more about class than ethnic or religious identity. In fact, for Generation Z, multiethnicity is a way of living. The precariat is spontaneously social-populist, always seeking the welfare of the greatest number of people possible. You have to look elsewhere for nostalgia, in the White working-class and the White lower middle-class of shopkeepers, artisans, pensioners, and other social strata still attached to the nation-state. All things told, this is what the class pyramid in contemporary capitalism actually looks like:

|  |
| --- |
| Financial Elite |
| Office Salariat |
| Petite Bourgeoisie |
| Industrial Proletariat |
| Service Precariat |
| Urban Underclass |

Table 22: The Class Pyramid of Advanced Capitalism, 2010s

Below the commandeering 1% of financiers and tycoons, there is a privileged stratum of salaried employees and professionals. They are the insiders of the informational job market, and upholders of the neoliberal regime now damaged beyond repair. Government employees and officials also belong to this category. The salariat mostly votes center-left and center-right, and tends to be immune to the worst forms of racism. Below them come the traditional petty bourgeoisie and working-class, which have mostly shifted towards the right in the last two decades, after a century of voting for socialists and communists. Considering the role of Wisconsin, Michigan and the Rust Belt states in securing the electoral vote for Trump, we must look to the white working-class and underclass if we want to locate people fueling right-wing populism today. The precariat either does not vote, or votes for left-populist candidates. Millennials have fewer social guarantees than the salariat, and display stronger individualism, but have moved to the left since the Great Recession. They have also been harbingers of innovation in political communication; from the victory of Zapatero in 2004 (the SMS chain the spread the news of the right-wing government’s deception, after media outlets were shut down), to the victory of Obama in 2008 (strategic use of social media in winning primaries and presidential elections), and, most importantly, in the revolutions of 2011, where the alliance of the cognitive precariat with the insurgent population through social media was central in achieving large-scale participation in protests.[[16]](#footnote-16) It’s the precarious Millennials that are also behind the rise of Sanders in America and Corbyn in Britain.

In my own country, the precariat largely votes for the Five Star Movement, the populist force led by mercurial comedian Beppe Grillo, which defies easy classification. The movement practices a warped form of online democracy, embraces environmental issues (especially of the unscientific kind), and has an overall egalitarian stance. It also has a left-leaning mayor in Turin, who, unlike her colleague in Rome, is competent and sufficiently respected. However, the movement – founded by Grillo and now deceased internet entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio – has also flirted with the kind of Europhobia and racism practiced by Lega and the fascist right. They could well win the upcoming general elections against Renzi’s Democratic Party, which has been in disarray since their stinging defeat over the referendum on whether to reform the constitution and abolish the Senate, a personal reversal for the Florentine leader. One of the most popular points in their program is the introduction of a basic citizenship income, in order to combat poverty. This priority clearly makes them social-populist, while their hostility to the euro and immigration places them in the national-populist camp. Also, whilst their online deliberation platform – Rousseau – is similar to that used by Podemos, votes can be reversed if the omnipotent leader says so, as recently happened in Genoa, where internal elections for candidate to mayor were voided, and the winning candidate replaced by one favored by Grillo, who miserably lost the election (Berlusconi's right-wing coalition won). In order to classify the Five Star Movement, I often use an analogy from chemistry. They are like sodium chloride (table salt) neutral on the political litmus scale, but the result of a combination of a left acid and a right base. Territorially, of the two large city administrations they currently control, Turin leans to the left (the NoTav movement voted massively for Chiara Appendino), while Rome leans to the right (and the incompetent mayor, Virginia Raggi and his collaborators come from right-wing formations). A significant minority of the precariat, influenced by social movements in large cities, instead votes for Italy’s fragmented left, or is anarcho-autonomist (and thus refrains from voting at all).

The Italian precarious workers’ movement rose and fell with the fortunes of the anti-globalization movement and of the European project, but is now adapting to the new political framework created by the Great Recession, the revolution it spawned, and the global reaction against it that is currently taking place. The politics of the precariat must be to occupy the state to defeat precarity. The conquest of basic income is fundamental, but, politically, is only the first step. The precariat must seize the city, as the proletariat once sought to seize factories. This is the reason the revolution of 2011 occupied metropolitan squares, not industrial workplaces, and led to the conquest of municipal, rather than state power.

The ultimate defeat of national populism and the superseding of neoliberalism depends on the mobilization of the precarious youth, who will lead the people in a broad front against financial oligarchy, and form new transnational municipal and labor alliances. Traditional parties are lost, but the people are not, and labor unions are reawakening thanks to the pressure of grassroots movements. However, expansionary policies for a leftward solution to the issues of the Great Recession will have to be bitterly fought for against vested money and oil interests, and ecological constraints are likely to put limits on an egalitarian growth strategy.

It is the precarious youth that have lost the most because of the Great Recession. Their disillusionment and rage has, however, made history, from Tahrir to Occupy Wall Street, and Madrid to Istanbul. The Indignados Movement that paralyzed Spain in the spring of 2011 was started in Plaza del Sol, Madrid’s central square, by a group of precarious young workers and students who erected their tents and refused to move until their demands were heard by the rest of society (they put little faith in the then socialist government). People from all walks of society responded in huge numbers (although young precarious individuals made up the single largest section of those involved), and set up permanent protest camps (acampadas) in all the major cities of Spain, including Barcelona’s Plaça Catalunya, on 15 May. It was a social upheaval that involved between 6 and 8 million people, and was supported by the majority of Spaniards, according to opinion polls. Occupy Wall Street followed suit on 17 September 2011, and the protest camp in Liberty Square became a magnet for all those outraged at how the financial class had been bailed out at the expense of the people. Student workers, disgruntled temps, interns, and the unemployed were at the forefront of the protests, and were the main social force behind the popular assemblies that vented the anger, and articulated the demands, of the 99%. A form of anarcho-populism is evident in both movements, as sociologist Paolo Gerbaudo[[17]](#footnote-17) wrote in The Guardian. They both talked on behalf of a wronged people against economic and political elites, as in traditional-populist discourse, but they shared with traditional anarchism a passion for direct (online) democracy, and renewed anarchist praxis in their quest for free social networks and transparent democracy (evident in associated movements like Anonymous).

It is the precarious who are the revolutionary activists of the 21st century, from Tahrir to Plaza del Sol, Zuccotti Park to Gezi Park, and far beyond. The precariat is not the working-class of communist lore, it is the digital generation politicized and radicalized by the crisis, even though, much like the industrial proletariat of yore, it occupies a central position in the production of value under capitalism, particularly in the lucrative information and creative industries. The precarious are at the core of contemporary accumulation, but remain on the periphery of political and social citizenship. Even in Europe, they are excluded from the social contract and the inherited welfare state, which is largely conditional on full-time employment, and thus cannot address the generalization of precarious work.

In 2011, the precariat has combined technical expertise, creative forms of struggle and popular mobilization, giving birth to the largest protest movements the world has seen since 1968. Cross-fertilized by the Seattle-Genoa antiglobalization protests of the early 00s, a generation of activists has become a generation of revolutionaries. Government employees went on strike and protested, while young people built barricades and rioted, until the invariably heavy hand of the state squashed budding social alliances that threatened incumbent governments (which, of course, included members of the elite who had a stake in the existing financial system). The Indignados Movement (locally known as the 15-M Movement) survived the repression, and morphed into a catalyst, turning public employees against austerity economics (Mareas Ciudadanas), from the defense of public health and education to the huge movement against evictions (PAH), to damning exposes of the financial corruption (Partido X) of the austerity government led by the conservative, centralizing, and militantly catholic Popular Party (PP) in power. In America, the Occupy Movement was squashed by concentrated police repression orchestrated at both the local and federal level, and further declined after the partial success of the 2012 May Day General Strike (the flashpoint of which was Oakland, a trade port, rather than the financial marketplace of New York). These defeats aside, the precariat is still on the move, from Korea to Brazil.

Precarity is both exploitation and liberation. It deprives young workers of their labor and welfare rights, but leaves them uncommitted to the work ethic, and strict discipline of their forebears. Precarious people express themselves outside work, establishing communities of scope and support. Yet with the crisis the exploitative element of flexible jobs is increasingly apparent: the precariat must flex its muscle and fight for its own rights, for its interests are at odds with those of traditional blue- and white-collars. Fundamentally, the left sees the precarious as lacking in a fundamental quality that would make them fully-fledged workers and citizens: steady employment. Precarity is thus perceived as a lack thereof, rather than as a new condition that calls for new types of organization and conflict.

No matter, for the precarious have bypassed unions and parties and gone straight to the heart of the state, by being at the vanguard of the barricades and acampadas that have rocked the world since 2011. In fact, it is hard to explain the success of Podemos in European and local elections without continuous reference to the problems created by precariedad laboral(precarious work) and the financial abuses committed by the political caste. Spain is a country where half of the country’s young are unemployed, and one in four workers are precarious. Indeed, almost all of the political cadres of Podemos, as well as the activists behind the urban coalitions rising to municipal power in Barcelona and Madrid, are of the precarious generation. The precariat is behind the rise of Bernie Sanders in America and the expressions of civic power in Iceland, Slovenia, Bosnia, and Romania (to name but European examples). Syriza’s growth and victory at the polls in Greece was crucially due to the mobilization of the precarious generation. A transnational network of progressive municipalities on immigration and the environment is being led by Ada Colau and other left-leaning city administrations. A coherent social-populist international has yet to coalesce, though, not least in Europe, where it is vitally needed in order to shake off neoliberal austerity and defeat national-populist reaction.

A new class comes into being only when it has forged a new culture and a new ideology, new forms of self-organization, and a sense of political activation. The precarious need to build their own organizations. Timidly, some have begun to emerge: for instance the Freelancers Union in North America and the Freeters Union in Japan, as well as the network of Italian anti-precarity activists that has launched the very successful national strike dubbed #scioperosociale in November 2014, and especially the Coordination des Intermittents et Précaires, the leftist network that managed to organize France’s stage hands against cuts to unemployment subsidies, in a labor dispute that has been ongoing since 2003.

I think that what the precarious absolutely need is a transnational advocacy, one that spreads news of the worst injustices that they suffer via sophisticated, non-violent direct actions and media interventions, while at the same time pressuring governments and supranational institutions. PrecariatSyndicate is currently my favorite name for such a labor advocacy. It would combine media subvertising and workplace picketing with knowledge of the legal and political issues surrounding precarity, in order to affect social legislation and revert the deterioration of labor standards. Precarious individuals from all over the globe could join and fund it. It would be the Act Up! of the precarious. Such an advocacy would spearhead the cause of the precariat and defend the rights of protesters, migrants, strikers in solidarity with antira and antifa movements.

People are taking to the streets and the networks to make their demands heard by governments: a halt to austerity, an expansion rather than a contraction of welfare benefits, less leeway for corporations to evade taxes and impose precarious employment relationships, open borders and hospitality to refugees, the extension of citizenship to long-term immigrants, the resolute defense of the existing welfare state, social security, healthcare, public education and public housing, and an ecological commons. The syndicalist platform of the precariat can be summarized as a simple triad: gender rights, cyber rights, and labor rights.

In a regulatory crisis such as the current one, ideological power matters enormously, since it provides the ideal blueprints to rebuild the failed economic and social institutions of the previous phase. I tend to share activist-cum-theorist David Graeber’s point that the Seattle-Genoa movement was mainly about anarchism and black blocs,[[18]](#footnote-18) although autonomous Marxism played an influential intellectual role. Also, the main geopolitical effect of the anti-globalization movement was the wave of red Bolivarianism across South America - the Porto Alegre effect critically underscored by Michael Hardt.[[19]](#footnote-19) Anti-capitalism has been the ideology of protest movements since the anti-globalization movement. This is a catchall term that hides very different positions, from communist to anarchist groups, and from autonomist to queer movements.

In the table below, I take the revival of anarchism as a starting point from which to offer a sociological taxonomy of contemporary anti-capitalist movements that combine anarchist ethics and tactics with the three other major sources of resistance to capital: Marxian autonomy, green environmentalism, and pink genderism:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Anarcho-green** | **Anarcho-syndicalist** | **Anarcho-autonomist** | **Anarcho-feminist** |
| Aim | Defend the Earth | Subvert the economy | Smash the state | End the Patriarchy |
| Issue | Climate justice | Social inequality | political domination | Male violence |
| Ideology | Radical ecology | Revolutionary unionism | Autonomous Marxism | Queer theory |
| Direct Action | Ecotage | Wildcat strike | Urban riot(s) | Pink protest tide |
| Actors | Ecohacktivists, vegans, animalists, indigenous peoples | Precarious/migrant workers, landless, unemployed | Unemployed youth, immaterial labor, multiethnic underclass | Women, LGBTIQ persons |
| Movements | ZAD, Climate Camps, Earth First! | EuroMayDay, Spanish CGT, IWW | Nuit Debout, No Border, Antifa, Invisible Committee | Ni Una Menos, #Feministrike |

Table 23: Anti-Capitalism: Anarchy, Autonomy, Ecology, and Feminism

It’s vital for anarchists and autonomists of all stripes to look out to the wider world, and open up to the queer and creative influences coming from contemporary society and popular culture. Concerns with ideological purity and historical fidelity are usually hindrances to the effectiveness of political strategy, especially now that national-populist reaction threatens everything anti-capitalists hold dear: labor is under attack, nature is under threat, and patriarchy is regaining ground.

Anti-capitalist movements have adopted queer pink, anarcho black, and radical green ideological forms. Pink, black, and green insurgence seems the name of the game. Pink, because since the rainbow flag threw the gauntlet of protest against homophobia, queer has become revolutionary for all sectors of society: it’s no longer simply a matter of identity politics and civil rights, it speaks of a radical social transformation, such as the contemporary women’s movement fighting for the end of patriarchy and sexism. Pink because it refers to deviant pinko political tendencies in non-pacified urban subcultures, experimenting with the radical mixing of codes, genders, and ethnicities. Pink like a clown insurrection. Ecotopian greens call for reclaiming the streets, guerrilla gardening, critical mass-vélorution, the climate action camp, and setting a new template for ecological protest. It’s a DIY, eco-hacking way of dealing with environmental issues, exploring how to empower the people in adopting alternative forms of socialization and social organization. It is an urban insurgence, much like those which have mobilized the Europe's autonomous youth to defend to the last social squatting as a way of life, a way of life which has become integral to the notion of European urban culture over the last three decades. Self-managed zones and radical collectives are federating all across the world, making sure that the political legacy of anarchism and autonomism survives in contemporary cities of the world.

We have to act in defense of the biosphere, and remove carbon lobbies from power that prevent action against climate change, while maintaining the digital civilization which common labor, information, and knowledge has created. Revolutionary direct action needs to be employed for ends that are ultimately reformist: an energy and transportation system based on renewables, an urban environment friendly to disadvantaged sections of the population, a new welfare system favoring precarious individuals and families, a reregulated labor market to prevent fraud, posted labor, and other anti-union practices, carbon taxation, and levies on individual wealth and corporate profits. NGOs and civil society cannot mount an effective resistance and transformation of society without the help of radicals, because they are best activists and most imaginative organizers. Even if the precariat hates capitalism and what it does to people and the planet, its anti-capitalism and opposition to neoliberalism is likely to trigger fundamental reform, rather than a revolution. It will finally tax the rich, rather than hang them.

A new (pink, black, green) political ideology is needed to give substance to the anti-capitalist movement, which (in a nutshell) is the interbreeding of the autonomous, anarchist, anti-fascist, queer, and vegan tendencies that have been brewing in metropolitan subcultures. I think anti-capitalism stands a better chance if it acts in conjunction with a social-populist project, in order to prevail over nationalist authoritarians and military-carbon corporatists.

It is important to not just showing rage at capitalist inequality, but to reverse it. It is important not simply to prevent the self-destruction of civilization, instead of simply claiming lack of. The fight is not to return to pre-industrial nature (whatever that was like), but foster non-capitalist relations between society and nature.

1. Paolo Gerbaudo, The Mask and the Flag: Populism, Citizenism and Global Protest, London: Hurtst Publishers, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Alan Moore, V for Vendetta, New York: DC Comics, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Frank Miller, The Dark Night Returns, New York: DC Comics, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Offe, Europe Entrapped. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Its head, the Dutch Labour politician Jeroen Dijsselbloem, recently attacked southern European countries, comparing PIGS to males wasting all their money on alcohol and prostitutes, then asking for financial forgiveness for their behavior. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Alex Foti, La Rivoluzione della Repubblica Continentale Europea, Euronomade, 20 February 2016, http://www.euronomade.info/?p=6759. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. They are: ‘Carrying on’, ‘Nothing but the Single Market’, ‘Those Who Want More Do More’, Doing Less More Efficiently, ‘Doing Much More Together’, and can be found on the Commission’s official website: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\_IP-17-385\_en.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Publications such as n+1 and Jacobinbeing the most important examples, as well as the newborn Catalyst. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. ‘Feeling the Bern’ was the campaign slogan of Bernie Sanders in the 2016 presidential elections. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In seminal works such as Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Agonistics, and The Illusion of Consensus. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In practice, it is hard to distinguish between intellectual and political Marxism, because every Marxist wants to start their own party. Marx himself was a great theorist and a bad politician. The same can be said of Toni Negri, who still professes himself to be a communist, albeit on the side of the precariat, as he recently argued in an interview on Italian TV. This aside, today's last line of defense for communism is, in my view, the Zikek-Badiou Hegelian neo-orthodoxy. Communists without a cause, the two are ready to ridicule everything except their own failings (significant in the case of Badiou, the last survivor of French Maoism). Although I am no philosopher, and this is a book of social theory, I find that the conflictual democracy of Jacques Rancière best expressed the philosophy of the 2011 revolutions, certainly better than the hugely popular Indignez-vous! by old resistance hero Hessel. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This unfortunately includes David Harvey, author of the best commentary available on the three volumes of Marx’s Capital. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. McKenzie Wark, Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene, London: Verso, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Giovanni Arrighi, Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the 21st Century, Verso Books, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Guy Standing, ‘Meet the precariat, the new global class fuelling the rise of populism’, World Economic Forum, November 9, 2016, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/11/precariat-global-class-rise-of-populism/. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. I owe this synthesis to Emanuele Cozzo of Fundación de los Comunes. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Paolo Gerbaudo ‘Why it’s time to occupy the state’, Guardian, December 10, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/10/occupy-protesters-electoral-politics. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. David Graeber, ‘The New Anarchists’, New Left Review, 1999. https://newleftreview.org/II/13/david-graeber-the-new-anarchists. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Michael Hardt, ‘Porto Alegre: The New Bandung?’, New Left Review, 2002. https://newleftreview.org/II/14/michael-hardt-porto-alegre-today-s-bandung [↑](#footnote-ref-19)