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Introduction

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Introduction: The Nouveau Right

Frank Ruda & Agon Hamza

Prelude:

Earlier this year, *Crisis and Critique* lived through its 10th anniversary. To date, we have published twenty-three issues (including the one that you are about to read) and are working on another issue scheduled to appear later this year. *Crisis and Critique* as a project is expanding beyond its initial idea, both in terms of its scope and in the range of elements involved.

Both concepts of “crisis” and “critique” remain of immense political and philosophical importance. Our premise is that we should not be too hasty in assuming that we already know what these two concepts mean or ascribe a too stable substance to either. Starting from this reflection, we edit every issue such that we invite authors to discuss its topic from the perspective of the present, because we assume that neither “crisis” nor “critique” have a transcendental or transhistorical status and therefore we do not attribute them a pre-given or predetermined unchangeable status.

The main aim of *Crisis and Critique* is to be a platform that addresses and discusses the most pressing philosophical, theoretical, political, scientific, psychoanalytical, religious, and artistic topics openly. Our editorial policy aims to abide by strict and rigorous scholarly principles where each author is not a representative of a group or an identity but speaks exactly as they think, namely for her- and himself.

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According to many accounts of the contemporary political world we're confronted with a new political phenomenon, something that is sometimes referred to as the new right, and maybe we should – having the *nouveau riches* in mind – speak of a *nouveau right*. But even with the nomenclature problems begin. Is this right actually new and if so, what is new about it? From a certain moment in time onwards – 1789 – “right” and “left” were categories that were used to describe political positionings (actually, it first was a seating order in the National Constituent Assembly where the “radicals” sat left and the aristocrats sat right). Yet, these terms have frequently been challenged and in more recent decades described as being effectively, i.e., practically useless and theoretically disorienting. Not everything that moves is red (or left) (“tout ce qui bouge n'est pas rouge”), as the French once put it. Is the current resurgence of a “right-wing tendency”, of a novel “right-wing extremism” (Adorno) just another instance of this long-lasting disorientation?

Walter Benjamin is believed to have once remarked that the emergence of any fascism is the result of and thus caused by a failed revolution. If we take this as a basis for an analysis, then we are led to infer that the emergence of the new right must be the direct result of the failure or disappearance of revolutionary attempts or of emancipatory politics since the decline of Soviet Union (certainly pre-1989) which was mediatically epitomized in fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The rise of right-wing populism

is, in such a reading, a symptom of the weakness of the present politics of emancipation, and therefore not – or certainly not only – of the potency of the right. But the emergence of the new right raises additional issues and questions: these concern its relation to both “the left” and the “earlier” existing or the “previous” right.

While “the left” appears to be today a meaningless signifier, the “right” is strangely presenting us with a particular turn of the screw of disorientation. The left does represent or articulate neither an alternative nor a danger to capitalism and its newest ideological supplements and defense mechanisms. And, echoing Marx, we might venture to claim that the nouveau right conjures the language of the left and many of the talking points of previous emancipatory positions, appropriates them and transforms them into non-emancipatory policies that are then – different from previous emancipatory attempts – even implemented and realized, so that they effectively change the world (into what Alain Badiou describes as a “non-world”). Today, it is the far-right (leaders) who speak of and to the working class, address exploitation, the poor, national liberation, breaking the dominance of big corporations, et cetera, whereas the ultimate horizon of politics for the left appears to be embodied in the idea of *recognition* (of identities). Even though recognition is not necessarily a problematic category in itself; the problem with it in today’s world springs from its dominant interpretation, which suggests that one has to seek recognition from those who rule. But what does this become when those who rule are not the nouveau riches, but the *nouveau right*, those who rule only because there is a failure on and of the left? The situation here becomes again topsy-turvy.

In addition to these components of disorientation, the emergence of the nouveau right also poses the question of its relation to the previous (embodiment of the) right itself. What does the “new” right, retroactively, make us understand about its previous iteration? Are we here not confronted with a peculiar paradox: there is supposed to be some kind of novelty in a position that stands for the absence of novelty? Here methodological caution seems key: one ought to avoid too swiftly seeing and identifying something new in old categories that does not – at least not without proper analysis – apply to it. It can be part of a general disorientation, if one were to describe the “nouveau” right immediately as fascist, because it is precisely this very concept that can sometimes obscure and obfuscate the newness of the political, ideological or cultural phenomena we are confronted with. We might simply be facing something quite different. Its proponents might be figures that belong to a properly new ideological phenomenon or to a reinvention of it. Could it (not also) be that we do not yet have the correct terminology to name this current – or is the nouveau right ultimately just an ideological revenant? Could it not also transform classical right-wing positions and ideology, including fascism and produce an ideologico-politico mixture that makes all of its compo-

nents worse? This is not meant as a relativisation of highly reactionary and dangerous ideological and political positions. Rather this new current, spreading throughout the world so quickly and taking on multiple different shapes, *could* turn out to be also truly catastrophic (and already started to demonstrate its destructive potential all over the globe).

But here a difference to previous fascisms emerges: in the last century, fascist regimes abolished formal representative democracy and ruthlessly imposed their new order. That this is not yet the case with the nouveau right. This could be (at least partially) a consequence of their political and ideological incoherence. They do not want to get rid of the established order and impose their own vision – because they often do not seem to have one –, rather they pretend to be the new order within the existing framework in the form of the restoration of an old(er) order (which often is nothing but an invented tradition, in Eric Hobsbawm felicitous term). This might be why one features of the nouveau new right is the postponement of achieving their central aims (building a wall, etc.). This does not mean that they are not doing anything; but it means that delay and postponement is an inbuilt aspect of their political operativity.

They inhabit a sphere created by saturated opposition between the liberals and the “deep state”, between the “leftists” and the corrupt elites, even though the nouveau right are frequently quite close (or identical) to the latter. How can such an inconsistent and disorientating heap of ideological elements be successfully represented as a (fake) politics for / of the people? Is this contemporary politics new opium for the people? And is – in this sense – populism a crucial component of the nouveau right? It presents itself as being in principle sceptical of political representation and thereby also of representative democracy, but – paradoxically – in the name of a (fake) reference to the people and the nation (which should be made great again). The nouveau right thereby feigns to speak directly for the people and this even affects the form of general public discourse itself: the nouveau right is repeatedly using the supposedly vulgar language of the common (wo)man, they are breaking – implicit – discursive rules wherever they can and thereby appropriate what once was a subversive privilege of the left. But this fake discourse of the *vulgus*, where subversion becomes conservation, starts to affect the entire political edifice, the entire discursive universe of politics. What is to be done with this politico-ideological pile?

The present issue of *Crisis and Critique* seeks to address this problem from a variety of different angles and deals with a variety of international phenomena. We tried to bring together thinkers who are courageous enough to face this ideologico-political shift in the present world and provide their very own approaches, answers and problematizations.

Frankfurt/Prishtina, June 2024.