

**CRISIS OF NEOLIBERALISM AND THE RISE  
OF AUTHORITARIANISM IN THE EARLY 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THIS  
SPECIAL ISSUE**

**Berch Berberoglu**  
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO

Neoliberalism and the neoliberal globalization project promoted by U.S. transnational capital and the state for much of the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century is in deep crisis. The contradictions of this process are seen and felt everywhere, and the disturbing manifestations of neoliberalism—from cronyism and corruption to suppression of civil liberties and human rights in the form of authoritarian states across the globe that violate the rule of law and tremble upon democratic governance—are on the rise in the Age of Trump.

The rise of fascism and authoritarian regimes around the world are not new, as we know from the experience of such regimes in Chile under General Pinochet and Argentina under General Videla, and a host of other military and civilian dictatorships across the world (in Iran under the Shah, in Nicaragua under Somoza, in the Philippines earlier under Marcos and now under Duterte, in Egypt earlier under Mubarak and now under Sisi, in Libya under Qaddafi, in Iraq under Saddam Hussain, in Zimbabwe under Mugabe, and elsewhere throughout the world) were the order of the day in the 1970s and 1980s through the early years of the new millennium to the present, with right-wing authoritarian regimes ruling across the globe.

While Latin America went through a “Pink Tide” that mildly challenged neoliberalism and moved many of the societies in the region to the left, some even establishing various forms of “socialism”

in a few countries, as in the case of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela under Hugo Chavez, or the Sandinista Revolution led by Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, as well as a series of leftist regimes in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay, and elsewhere, where progressive forces came to power to halt the disastrous policies of neoliberal globalization promoted by transnational corporations and global financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the pendulum has again swung to the right with the counterrevolutionary forces gaining the upper hand in the havoc they have created in Venezuela, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, and now in Brazil. Thus, the class struggle is once again in the forefront of the struggles for state power throughout the region.

In Asia, the march of authoritarianism and military-backed regimes have spread from Myanmar to Thailand to Cambodia to the Philippines, where dictators like Rodrigo Duterte have been running rampant across Southeast Asia. This is also the case in India under Narendra Modi at one end and as some might argue Xi Jinping in China at the other. For good or for ill, whether they are right-wing fascist dictatorships with authoritarian leadership or benevolent nationalist movements that have set the path to nationally-based populist projects to make their countries “great again,” the end result is much the same – top down authoritarian regimes that have emerged in the context of the worldwide spread of neoliberal global capitalism and its devastating crises and impact on people across the world.

Two trends seem to have emerged as a consequence of the expansion of the neoliberal project of economic plunder and political repression to further the process of capital accumulation in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first has always benefited the transnational corporations (and their capitalist owners in the center states) and the cronies of foreign capital who, through their corrupt practices, have fulfilled their role as agents of foreign corporations and of the imperial state, thus taking many of these countries down the same disastrous path. The second has emerged in response to the crisis and impact of neoliberalism and capitalist globalization on broad segments of the population across the world in the form of a populist reaction led by pseudo-nationalist forces that have mobilized people under the banner of ultra-nationalism and

xenophobia to prevent the rise of a socialist or communist movement against global capitalism. It is against this background and in the context of the contradictions and crisis of neoliberal capitalist globalization that we need to understand the re-emergence of authoritarianism in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This Special Issue of the *International Review of Modern Sociology* on the “Crisis of Neoliberalism and the Rise of Authoritarianism in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century” is devoted to the study of this urgent phenomenon that has engulfed the world and taken us back to the dark days of authoritarian dictatorships across the globe. The Special Issue consists of four important articles on the crisis of neoliberalism and the rise of authoritarianism, including articles that provide case studies of Russia, China, and the United States, which are at the core of this development in the new millennium. These wide-ranging articles, written specifically for this Special Issue of the journal from different vantage points, provide incisive analyses of key cases of neoliberalism and authoritarianism—i.e., states that have adopted the neoliberal model and imposed authoritarian rule to stabilize their economies and societies through policies that set the limits to democratic governance, whether they be Putin and the oligarchs entrenched in despotism in Russia or Trump engulfed in cronyism, nepotism, and corruption in the United States. Other prototypes of authoritarian regimes in the world—such as those in India, the Philippines, Turkey, Egypt, Poland, Hungary, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Brazil, and elsewhere in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—will be taken up in a future publication (in the pages of this journal or elsewhere) that will expose the inner-workings of authoritarian regimes on a global scale.

The opening article of this Special Issue by Alessandro Bonanno provides a good framework for understanding the nature and contradictions of neoliberalism that has led to its crisis across the globe. Bonanno argues that the rise of populist reaction to neoliberalism in the early twenty-first century is a response to high levels of socio-economic inequality and uncertainty generated by neoliberal globalization that culminated in the Great Recession of 2008-09, which created the conditions for a restructuring of the political economy of capitalism in the form of an emergent “neoliberal authoritarian capitalism.”

Bonanno persuasively argues that the recent wave of authoritarianism across the globe is a product of the crisis of neoliberalism, which generates a dual authoritarian response (one from above—to maintain order under repressive authoritarian rule—and another from below—challenging the neoliberal status quo by providing a far-right populist authoritarian response to the decline of Empire. This response is reactionary, Bonanno points out, as it denounces liberal democracy for being distorted and inefficient, advocates racism, nationalism, and xenophobia, and justifies totalitarian solutions to socio-economic problems. Bonanno concludes his analysis by arguing that the inability of neoliberalism to address the crisis of global capitalism and the imposition of authoritarian rule across the globe to maintain law and order opens the way to fascism and political repression.

Ilya Matveev in his article on the development of neoliberalism in Putin's Russia, examines in great detail the fundamental contradictions of the post-Soviet transformations that the imposition of the "neoliberal policy paradigm" has led to the emergence of an oligarchy that expanded its wealth on an unprecedented scale through the imposition of an authoritarian regime. It is within this context of the promotion of neoliberal policies to facilitate capital accumulation by a new oligarchic class that led to the development of an authoritarian state with Putin at the helm. In explaining these, Matveev is cognizant of the class forces at work in implementing the neoliberal policies of the authoritarian state.

As in other cases of authoritarian states, where cronyism, corruption, and neoliberal state policy are intertwined under the reign of a dominant ruling class, the evolution of neoliberalism in Russia in the post-Soviet period is accommodated by "neoliberal authoritarianism." It is through an understanding of the relationship between neoliberalism and authoritarianism that we are able to delineate the impact of global capitalism on the rise of authoritarianism in Russia. However, the matter of implementing the "neoliberal policy paradigm" in Russia may not be as simple as it appears at first sight, as the interests and actions of the state in intervening and mediating the relationship between neoliberal oligarchs and the state may coincide with the state's broader "nationalist" agenda accommodating neoliberalism. In this regard,

by weaving together the social, political, and economic dynamics of the Russian state, Matveev makes an important contribution to our understanding of the situation in Russia under the Putin regime in the post-Soviet period of neoliberal authoritarianism.

Alvin Y. So in his article on China addresses the changes in leadership that has been going on in that country since the ascendance of Xi Jinping to power in 2012. He argues that, since taking the reigns of the Communist Party several years ago, Xi has systematically dismantled the political reforms of his predecessor Dang Xiaoping, who led China for four decades. These reforms, So points out, had included fixed term limits and enforced retirement rules for leaders and cadres, relative tolerance of intellectuals and limited dissent, and safeguards against the development of a personality cult around the leader. Through recent reversals of these reforms, So argues, Xi has succeeded in establishing an authoritarian regime in China. In examining the process by which this transformation has taken place, So aims to understand the distinctive features of Xi's authoritarian regime, the rise of this regime and its relationship to the Communist Party of China over the past several years, and the implications of this for China and the world in the years ahead.

The critical issue that needs to be addressed, however, is the nature and aims of this regime and its relationship to centers of power in relation to not only the leader as such, but also (and perhaps more importantly) the chief political institutions of Chinese society—first and foremost the Communist Party. It is only through an understanding of the dynamics of this relationship that we would come to know if what has emerged in China is a personalist authoritarianism under the leadership of Xi Jinping or the institutionalization of the rule of the Communist Party *through* its leader (Xi Jinping) to implement the Party's political line and authority. If So is right in calling Xi's regime "Maoist Authoritarianism" and finding it as resting on the rule of the Communist Party, then perhaps what we may have in China today is a return to "Maoist Communism" under conditions of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," as it is officially proclaimed. Whatever may be the case, it is clear that big changes have taken place in China in recent years, and these changes will have a major impact

on the future course of China's development in the twenty-first century.

Turning to developments in the United States following the election of Donald Trump to the Presidency, Alan Spector in his article provides a wide-ranging historical analysis of the rise of authoritarianism and right-wing politics in the United States. Going back as far as the Nixon and Reagan administrations to provide the historical context of the Imperial Presidency that set the stage for the entry of Trump to the highest office in the land, Spector helps us understand the critical relationship between the deteriorating neoliberal economic situation during the past several decades and its contradictions on a world scale, including its devastating impact on working people in the United States, and the populist reaction to the decline of Empire—a recipe for the rise of authoritarianism and fascism, in the absence of an organized left-wing working-class response to the unfolding crisis.

To make sense of recent developments surrounding the rise of Trump and its place in recent U.S. history, Spector explores the changes in the U.S. and global political-economic processes over the past fifty years, and how they are used by xenophobic populists to broaden their political base. Examining the effects of global capitalist expansion and the consequences of neoliberal economic policies on working people in the United States, Spector argues that dominant capitalist forces have promoted right-wing authoritarian reaction to the crisis of neoliberalism to deflect and divert attention away from the problems created by the capitalist globalization process. It is within the context of this broader process of global economic expansion and contraction of neoliberal capitalism and its impact on the United States that one needs to understand the rise of right-wing populism that has emboldened Trump to attain presidential power in the United States.

Whereas the crisis of neoliberalism lies at the roots of the rising tide of authoritarianism that various states have utilized to stabilize and rationalize the adverse effects of neoliberalism through the imposition of autocratic rule, those in power in authoritarian states have not always succeeded in enforcing state-sanctioned repression as has been the case in fascist regimes elsewhere in the world, historically and today. However, given the gravity of the crisis that

the global economy faces today, the powers that be have found it convenient to install authoritarian leaders to do the dirty work of wealthy oligarchs and capitalists to protect and advance their class interests. Those being adversely affected by such authoritarian rule, however, have mobilized their ranks and engaged in protracted political struggles to guard and defend their rights by taking effective steps in their fight against neoliberal authoritarian capitalism and the oppressive class forces that prop-up such regimes. Social movements that are organized to take on these repressive states as part of their struggle for democratic rights are destined to lead the masses to their eventual victory through revolutionary class action to transform their societies. It is gratifying to know that this much is clear when one looks back throughout the course of human history. Thus, it is not unrealistic to expect that, like everything else in history, neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and global capitalism may in fact one day be abolished and be a thing of the past!

