

# The Trumpist Coup, Fascism U.S.-Style in an Era of Capitalist Decline, and Some Loci of Resistance

written by Kevin B. Anderson | February 16, 2025



## What We Are Facing in Winter 2025

In a veritable *blitzkrieg*, the Trumpist fascists have changed U.S. and global society irrevocably in a matter of weeks.

They have already carried out the following, without any real chance of reversal in the courts or Congress in the immediate future, as these actions seem to lie within the “prerogatives” of the imperial U.S. presidency:

- Begun a massive racist, militarized crackdown on migrants, sure to be ratcheted up. This has spread an atmosphere of fear to millions of people, as thousands of members of the U.S. working class are being dragged away and deported in chains. They have also targeted refugees from Latin America, including Haiti and Venezuela, with Ukrainians also under threat.
- Freed 1,500 hardened fascists who participated in the January 6, 2021, coup attempt.
- Pulled out of the World Health Organization and placed anti-vaxxer Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. as Secretary of Health and Human Services. Of all of their measures, these will cost the most lives, both in the United States and abroad.
- Pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement and upended hundreds of U.S. environmental rules, assuring that environmental destruction will escalate. Over time, this could be even more damaging than their undermining of public health.
- Eradicated all federal rules supporting or allowing transgender rights.
- Eradicated thousands of federal rules supporting racial or gender justice as part of their attack on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI, in some institutions DEIA, including “accessibility” rights for people with disabilities). Large corporations like Disney and General Motors and scientific organizations like the National Academy of Sciences have hurried to eliminate DEI in anticipatory obedience, undermining decades of hard-won gains.

- Enacted or threatened punitive tariffs on longstanding friendly nations, starting with Canada and Mexico, amid demagogic assertions that this will create jobs at home. Clearly, the era of neoliberal “free trade” capitalism is over.
- Engaged in new types of territorial imperialism, making specific threats to seize both Greenland and the Panama Canal by military action, and vaguer ones to absorb Canada. Here, Putin’s invasion of Ukraine was surely a precedent.
- With Trump’s plan to “remove” all Palestinians from Gaza, extended and deepened the U.S.-supported genocide of the past 15 months, at the very least giving Israel the green light to carry out a total ethnic cleansing and land seizure in Gaza.
- Pulled back support for Ukraine’s struggle against Russian imperialism in favor of a forced settlement dismembering the country.

The Trumpist fascists have also carried out these additional measures, which could be reversed or seriously modified in the courts or in other ways, but may not be, especially as they are threatening not to obey adverse court decisions:

- Attempted to abolish birthright citizenship, a right won during the Civil War by Black and white liberation soldiers at the cost of 360,000 of their lives and enshrined in the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.
- Shut down government agencies like the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the U.S. Agency for International Development, including the latter’s massive global public health programs.
- Taken over the federal payroll system, threatened wholesale dismissal of hundreds of thousands of civil servants, and fired hundreds of those suspected of support for DEI or racial/gender justice, or simply not kowtowing to the Trumpist fascists and their minions.

The above constitute only the most serious actions that have taken place during the first weeks of the Trump administration.

Every day brings new chaos and more attacks on the democratic order. Their sheer volume sows confusion, something that is in fact a Trumpist goal. Because of this, it is important to keep in mind the most serious actions – as opposed to pure distractions like abolishing the penny – as well as their likelihood of going forward unimpeded.

Another Trumpist goal is to shackle or dismantle those parts of the state apparatus that actually serve human needs, even if in alienated form.

Yet another goal is to block state mechanisms that protect the rights of people of color, women, trans people, and the working class.

While what remains of the oppositional liberal media, itself capitalist to the core, does not emphasize workers’ rights, workers with even a modicum of class consciousness can recognize in the multi-billionaire oligarch Elon Musk and his minions their own bosses, especially the new ones that come in speaking of “reorganization” or in Silicon Valley speak, “breaking things.” Firing longtime employees at a moment’s notice, threatening others to make them quit, turning around workers’ lives by ordering them to suddenly come into the workplace after years of remote or hybrid work no matter how that will disrupt childcare, elder care, or simple human dignity, are all part of the playbook. It is as if Musk is carrying out a takeover of a company he intends to wring out like a dishrag.

At another level, these purges – and that is what they are – echo aspects of what we have seen in the Stalinist and Maoist ones of the past. One notable feature here is the public humiliation of former

leaders, like Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Linda Fagan, the only woman to lead a service branch, who was fired for “excessive focus” on DEI on day one. Originally given sixty days to find new housing, on Feb. 4, Fagan was suddenly told to vacate her home on three hours’ notice, not even enough time to grab her personal effects. Of course, removing such leaders from the military apparatus, and replacing them with fascist-inclined or at least more reactionary ones, also helps bring about the transition from a somewhat constitutional military to a fascist one loyal to the leader. Moreover, such treatment of high officials is intended to intimidate the population as a whole.

But the most high-pitched viciousness so far has emerged in the immigration raids. When asked about family separation, the most brutal feature of the first Trump administration, Trump officials like Stephen Miller or Tom Homan state with barely muffled glee that they won’t separate families again. Rather, they’ll just deport the citizen children born in the U.S. along with their families. The use of Guantanamo Bay as a holding area, articulated by Trump himself, has no rational basis in terms of logistics. But it does associate these new immigrant detentions with the torture inflicted on the September 11 terrorists, something Trump not only endorses but is proud to have associated with his immigrant roundups. It is performative cruelty, pure and simple.

### **How Did We Get Here?**

Trumpism burst on the scene in 2015 and has ebbed and flowed since then. To be sure, it grew out of the soil of U.S. racism and slavery, as seen in the outright authoritarianism based on racial terror that existed in the Deep South until the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964-65. Thus, the U.S. has been a political democracy even in the formal sense not for 250 but 60 years, except for the revolutionary period of Reconstruction, 1865-76. And ever since 1965, conservative forces have appealed to veiled racism, starting with Richard Nixon’s “southern strategy,” something centrist liberals have often engaged in as well, even as they “support our police.” In recent years, reactionaries have been able to restrict voting rights in many states.

Trumpism also grew out of deep-seated sexism, misogyny, heterosexism, and transphobia. These have been stoked for years by a growing Christian Right that has attacked abortion rights and other gains of the past five decades.

Trumpism also fed off the legacy of political repression in the United States, especially the McCarthyite witch hunts and Richard Nixon’s attempts to create an overtly authoritarian state before he was forced to resign the presidency in 1974.

Trumpism has continued and deepened the rightwing assault on any kind of environmental protection, in conjunction with fossil fuel interests both at home and abroad.

All of the above have been staples of rightwing, reactionary politics since the 1970s-1980s, if not earlier.

What then is new in Trumpist fascism?

First, it became an outright fascism by 2020-21. It did so by deepening and radicalizing all of the above, as seen most notably its willingness to engage in a violent coup attempt in January 2021. This was followed by its success in getting the entire Republican Party to acquiescence – or at least to remain silent – with respect to the coup attempt, something achieved gradually since 2021.

Second, Trumpism stoked and then grew from anti-immigrant hatred, something less prominent in the United States than in Western Europe until relatively recently. This is a key indicator of the extent to which Trumpism has managed to change both elite and mass public opinion.

Third, Trumpism has embraced and then extended all kinds of anti-public health measures, starting with the anti-vax movement under COVID-19, couched in terms of individual liberty. This is a new element not even present in 2015-16, one that has brought new layers of the population to Trumpism, even as its propaganda has expanded those layers.

Fourth and most important in electoral terms comes Trumpist protectionism through tariffs and its talk of reviving coal and steel production inside the United States. This, combined with anti-migrant nativism, has broken away sections of the working class and lower middle class – including some Latinx and Black workers — from trade union and Democratic Party politics. These sectors are outraged by decades of economic stagnation under neoliberalism and especially since the Great Recession of 2008, in which Democrats as well as Republicans have been instrumental, beginning with the “Reagan light” Clinton administration of the 1990s.

Fifth, and most recently, Trumpist fascism of 2024-25 has won over a much larger than before portion of the dominant classes, particularly the tech billionaires, as exemplified by but not limited to Musk. Moreover, it has won at least the neutrality of major liberal institutions, from the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* to Harvard University. Almost all established media organs have ceased to use the word fascism, which many of them were using with growing urgency in the period leading up to the 2024 election.

A sixth new feature is the targeting of all who oppose it, North as well as South, and including those at the highest levels of wealth and status, with violent rhetoric and precipitous actions that echo McCarthyism, or worse, lynch law.

A lot of ink has been spilled over how Trumpist fascism has managed to win over much of the white working class, and in 2024, of the Latinx population, especially men. Yet we also need to look more closely at what has happened with the dominant classes and their shift toward Trump. What are the key factors here?

One, at the economic level, profit rates have been stagnant or declining for decades. The mirage of neoliberal prosperity dissipated in 2008. This has led capital into increasingly desperate efforts to shore up the profit rate, but to no avail. Why not at least try fascism then, especially in the utterly venal and corrupt Trumpist form, where one can loot the state revenues and gain something even as society itself is falling apart? The *après moi le deluge* mentality of these elites, which has become more widespread than ever, was captured well in the 2021 satirical film, “Don’t Look Up.” Decidedly, this is not a capitalism confident of its ascendancy.

Second, a new kind of toxic masculinity has penetrated the highest levels of the corporate elite. Again, Musk is the standard-bearer here, but Mark Zuckerberg is not far behind with his description of Trump’s fortitude after the assassination attempt in Pennsylvania as “badass.” This is linked to a kind of hyper-individualism that resents both public health restrictions and DEI or “Me Too” initiatives that call for changes in personal behavior. It should not be forgotten that these same elites welcomed Obama in 2008 and in many cases supported at least moderate attempts at racial/gender justice reform in the wake of the Movement for Black Lives of 2020-21 and Me Too. The point here is that these people from the top layers of the capitalist class have changed under the impact of Trumpist fascism, as much or more than have sections of the working and middle classes.

A third element that moved parts of the dominant classes toward Trump was Israel’s genocide in Gaza and the massive worldwide protest movements it has sparked. Liberal politicians, leaders of universities and foundations, and the liberal media have all tended to side with Israel, just as did the Trumpist fascists. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party lost out in two ways. Sections of the youth, people of color, and the intellectuals — not to speak of Arab and Muslim Americans in Michigan —

deserted the Biden presidency and then the Kamala Harris campaign. At the same time, the centrist Democrats who lead the Party, among them many members of the dominant classes, saw that the rank-and-file has turned against Israel, while the Trumpist fascists have not. This too was a factor in bringing members of these elites if not to Trumpism, at least in the direction of neutrality toward it after the election. The latter applies more to media moguls and foundation leaders than politicians holding office.

### **What to Do? How to Resist? How to Fight for a New Humanist Society Amid the Carnage?**

First, we need to admit that this is a big defeat for us. It will not have positive elements for the working class, as some class-reductionist radicals are proclaiming even as they join the bandwagon vs. DEI.

Second, we need to assess which parts of the ruling classes, especially under pressure from the left, from the streets, could spark a deepening of the kind of internal split that is a precondition of real change. Here it should be noted that some giant media institutions like the *New York Times* have bent but not yet buckled under the pressure and continue to hold that it is Trump vs. the Constitution. This is also true of some corporations and university officials, as well as the progressive wing of the Democratic Party.

Third, the Black Church (and the smaller but still important liberal Protestant ones) remain crucial here. Thus, it was not a coincidence that on Inauguration Day the only protest voice that penetrated amid the noise of Trumpism was that of Bishop Mariann Budde's warning about oppression of the people. Black Churches are, as always, already on the move, as are progressive Muslim, Jewish, and other religious organizations. The Catholic Church will give us some support too, as Pope Francis has just done on immigrant rights. But their poisonous stance on gender and sexuality cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, all this will at least open up some space for the resistance to Trumpist fascism.

Fourth, and here moving away from the middle classes, let alone the elites, another large institution that can help us even more is the trade union movement, which has already organized demonstrations in support of the federal government workers. While far more needs to happen on this front, these actions are at least beginning. Moreover, it is notable that trade unions, as well as religious organizations, depend mainly on dues from their own members, which gives them a certain degree of independence from the state, corporate capitalism, or liberal foundations. This forms a contrast with universities and other cultural institutions, which have already shown cowardice in the face of the Israel Lobby and are so far refusing to confront Trumpist fascism openly. However, the trade unions will have to deal with noxious elements like Teamster leader Sean O'Brien, let alone their aging bureaucracies that in many cases confine themselves to supporting political candidates and will need to be replaced by a more militant leadership, as has happened with the UAW.

Fifth and most important, resistance has to come from the streets, from the left and from the movements of Black and Latinx liberation, the rank-and-file labor movement, the feminist and women's liberation movement, the LGBTQ movement, the environmental movement, and above all, the youth. Not surprisingly, it was thousands of Latinx working class youth, many of them of high school age, who tied up downtown LA on February 2 and the next day, as a leading part of the first real resistance on the streets to protest Trumpist fascism's mass deportations. But the trade unions and larger immigrant rights organizations need to come out now and not wait until May 1, which is when Latinx and pro-immigrant groups intend to launch a giant series of strikes and demonstrations. It should also be noted that massive resistance is occurring in the everyday actions of the people, who are refusing to cooperate with ICE, who are stoking the "know your rights" initiatives, slowing down their racist raids on members of the working class whom the Trumpist criminals dare to label

“illegal.” Here, the ongoing, persistent, and courageous Palestine support movement will also be a key factor.

While the United States is facing its greatest crisis in decades, if not more than a century, we also need to note and learn from how, in some parts of the world, our movement is going forward. This is the case in Syria, where despite the contradictions, a real political opening is occurring after a half-century of a dictatorship that unconscionably gained the support of the worldwide campist left. It is also the case in Serbia, where a corrupt nationalist government is under huge pressure from a student movement that has persisted over the past several months. It is true in Sri Lanka, where a pro-feminist leftwing government has been elected. It is also true in Germany, where hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets and, at least for now, blocked the political normalization of the far right.

As the above remarks suggest, we need a leftwing network of resistance to Trumpist fascism that, while firmly anti-capitalist, avoids the pitfalls of both campism and class reductionism. Under such a banner, we can join the larger resistance movements while retaining our political independence, not least our fight for a humanist alternative to capitalism.