

The Anti-Fascist Dilemma

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According to game theory, the Prisoners' Dilemma is a tool often used by the police to get suspects to inform on one another. The two prisoners are kept in separate cells and questioned where they are unable to hear what the other says to police. Each is told that their friend has already spilled the beans and admitted guilt as well as accused the other of being an accomplice. The "good news" is that a deal is being offered to get a reduced sentence for the crime, if the prisoner being questioned admits guilt and tells the police who else was involved. What the prisoner does not know is if the police are lying just to get a confession. The prisoners' dilemma is whether to trust the police and assume their accomplice has already sold them out, or take a chance that their friend has remained silent, in which case both prisoners go free. More often than not the prisoners assume the worst case, one or both rat on each other, and both go to jail.

The left in the United States has been confronted with an electoral version of the Prisoners' Dilemma in the form of the presidential contest between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Trump may or may not be a fascist in the mold of Hitler or Mussolini, but one certainly can't tell from his rhetoric. Trump has threatened to deport millions of undocumented men, women, and children, without regard for how many years they have lived or worked in this country and how many children may be separated from their parents. Trump has threatened to kill the families of Muslim insurgents in Iraq and Syria. Trump has threatened to ban Muslims from entering the United States. Trump has applauded and encouraged racist thugs to attack protestors at his rallies. Trump has made threats against women who have had abortions, as well as their doctors. Trump refused to repudiate the endorsement of David Duke and the KKK with the claim that he did not "know who they are." Trump is the brutal cop threatening to throw his prisoners into the deepest darkest dungeon.

On the other side of the bargain is Hillary Clinton. Hillary Clinton is no fascist, but neither is she a friend to working people. Clinton was an unofficial member of her husband's presidential administration. Bill Clinton fast-tracked NAFTA, which devastated the unions in this country, particularly good-paying jobs in manufacturing. Bill Clinton ended Aid to Families with Dependent Children, resulting in increased poverty among children and women. Bill Clinton deregulated Wall Street and the banks, which made possible the great recession, the loss of millions of working class homes, and the devastation of pension funds. Clinton passed mandatory sentencing laws that resulted in thousands of black men being incarcerated for drug offenses by a judicial system that targeted them due to race. Hillary was her husband's principal advisor

and she had her hand in all of this. As Secretary of State under the Obama administration, she supported the military coup in Honduras, the wars in Libya and Syria, and enabled the TPP by turning the trade negotiations over to corporate lobbyists. Clinton is the “good cop,” the “plea bargain,” the neo-liberal alternative to Trump’s neo-fascism.

Anarchists were confronted by a similar choice, although with much higher stakes, in Spain in 1936. Spain, like the rest of the world, was in the grips of the Great Depression. Massive unemployment and wage cutting had brought on strikes and insurrections by the workers resulting in the arrest and imprisonment of thousands of militants, particularly members of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT. The anarchists joined the rest of the left in parliamentary elections and put liberals and socialists in power to stave off the right wing and to get amnesty for their own imprisoned comrades. What the right could not win at the polls, the fascists decided to take by force. On July 19, the Spanish Army revolted against the elected Republican government with the aim of creating a fascist dictatorship similar to the ones in Germany and Italy at the time. Anarchists were faced with a choice to either “go for broke” with a social revolution or support the Republic in a struggle against fascism. The leaders of the two major anarchist organizations, the CNT and FAI, chose the latter, but the Republic was defeated after three years of civil war and Spain was ruled by the fascists for nearly forty years.

Once again the left, the socialists, anarchists and liberals, have been confronted with the political version of the Prisoners’ Dilemma. Support Hillary Clinton, the “anti-fascist,” or do nothing and let the “fascist” Donald Trump take power. The leaders of the Democrats, the so-called “progressives,” have taken Sanders’ political revolution off the agenda. Good-paying jobs, economic equality, social justice, climate stability, all the goals of the left are just empty campaign promises that will be sacrificed to the neo-liberal agenda as soon as the election is over. Nothing will change.

There is a solution to the dilemma. If the left, the prisoners in this game, maintain solidarity and do not collaborate with the cops, do not snitch on one another, they will go free. As far as this election goes, it is too late. Hillary Clinton will most likely be elected, but the game is not over. President Clinton will quietly push her neo-liberal agenda, while demanding support from the left against “a vast right-wing conspiracy.” Just as was done during her campaign, the Democrats will continue to divide black against white, old against young, women against men, liberals against socialists, always with the accusation that somehow her critics just aren’t anti-fascist enough. Yet only by joining together against both the neo-liberals and the fascists can the people go free.

It is time we begin to do what Sanders did not do, build networks across the divisions within the working class. We must learn the lessons of the Spanish Civil War and not fall into the same trap. The revolution and the war against fascism are inseparable. Fascism has its roots in the economic authoritarianism of capitalism and the political authoritarianism of the State. Fascism relies on putting the blame for the failings of capitalism on racial minorities, non-conformists, labor unions, and the left.

Fascists are the bullies of the bosses. These bosses are the very same ones who are pushing the neo-liberal agenda. Only by building a mass movement whose aims go beyond stopping fascism and creating direct democracy in the workplace and the community can we end the threat of fascism.

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