

A Catalyst for Fascist Reaction

Liao

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The fallout from the attempted assassination on United States presidential candidate, Donald J. Trump, will bring an increase in fascist propaganda and reactionary attitudes, while also having serious societal repercussions for marginalized groups and political dissidents. While anarchists typically, and rightfully, disparage engagement in electoral politics, the occurrence of this event will likely have effects far beyond just the 2024 United States election. The main focus of this article is to engage with the likely fallout and effects of such an assassination attempt, rather than discuss the actuality of the attempt in a substantive manner.

Likely, the most widespread effect that the assassination attempt on Trump will have is a rise of fascistic attitudes among the US populace, as propaganda furthers the fear that leads to reactionary attitudes. Within hours of the assassination attempt, far-right media and politicians immediately began publishing and spreading misinformation that only made an uncertain situation even worse. The *New York Post*, a newspaper considered to have a conservative viewpoint, was the first paper to give information on the shooter, and identified him as a “Chinese man.” While this was later proved to be untrue and the article changed, the initial fear-mongering and Sinophobia on social media became extremely prevalent in the few hours between the *New York Post*’s initial statement and information from more reputable sources coming out.

In this political climate, many people of color and members of other marginalized groups are at risk of persecution if a single member of their group does anything to agitate the far-right and worsen their already bigoted perception of these groups. Fortunately, as the shooter is a white person, there is less of a chance that already at-risk minorities will be targeted. Though, of course, right-wing media has already begun to shift and claim that the shooter was Queer and transgender, and that the LGBTQ community is responsible, so perhaps not.

Additionally, there is still the ideological angle. Similar to the *New York Post*’s unsubstantiated claim that the shooter was a “Chinese man,” right-wing media online also began claiming that he was an Antifa member named “Mark Violets.” Violets is, firstly, not the would-be killer, and secondly, not affiliated with Antifa. In reality, the actual would-be killer, Thomas Matthew Crooks, was a registered Republican that had donated to ActBlue, a progressive organization — ideologically, he was likely some sort of liberal or conservative — either way, a part of the right wing. But just as Antifa and far-left groups have been blamed for actions of the far right such as the January 6th insurrection, the violence at Black Lives Matter protests, etc., it is highly

likely that right-wing media will paint this as yet another example of the radical left “deep state” attempting to silence Trump.

As right-wing media and politicians spread false narratives, existing goodwill towards left-wing movements will likely be undermined, and fear will increase as they are portrayed as violent threats to national security. This not only delegitimizes political opposition, but will also be used to lend credence to increased surveillance and repression of political dissent. It is very possible that Trump will use the current moment to further crack down upon the US-left and political dissidents in a manner that parallels the Reichstag fire, where Hitler used the burning down of the Reichstag — the German parliament building — to persecute communists and other political opposition while significantly diminishing civil liberties as the Nazi party took full governmental control.

This attempted assassination will likely transform Trump’s already existing cult of personality — built upon populist rhetoric, charismatic leadership, and idealization as savior — into a martyr for many of his followers. Framing himself as a victim of a conspiracy, whether that be from the radical left or the deep state or some other entity, will likely further influence his existing far-right base. Moreover, such a narrative will likely amplify the polarization already present in the US, drawing more staunch support from his far-right base who see the attack as an affront to their vision of a nationalist, culturally conservative, and traditional US values.

Meanwhile, Trump’s propagandistic characterization as a victim will likely attract some sympathy from moderates who could view him as a figure who was targeted by his opponents for standing up for what he believes in. While the latter is less likely due to Trump’s general reputation in the United States as a corrupt tyrannical liar, it is possible nonetheless. The largest and most probable repercussion of this narrative is the potential to galvanize his supporters into more fervent attacks on the left and marginalized groups. The response will likely take form in acts of violence towards those whom they deem responsible and a further support for reactionary policies in the name of security.

Historically, assassinations or even attempted assassinations of high-level political figures have created climates of fear and instability which often lead to the adoption of reactionary policies and attitudes. Some of the more relevant historical examples are: the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, the attempted assassinations of Benito Mussolini, and the assassination of William McKinley. Fascism is dependent on the fear of political instability in order to take power, as people surrender their liberties and target outgroups seen as responsible for the instability. Meanwhile those who are scared are encouraged to return to a glorified historical past or status quo. This tactic is not new as it mirrors historical patterns where fear and uncertainty are exploited to erode democratic norms and civil liberties.

Perhaps the most obvious and likely most egregious result of this assassination attempt will be the curbing of civil liberties in the US, potentially making it a catalyst for severe governmental reactions aimed at tightening security measures. This response to political violence of this scale often includes increased surveillance, restrictions on public assembly, and limitations on free speech in the name of national security and stability. Fascist movements capitalize on such moments of fear and uncertainty, exploiting them to undermine democratic institutions and consolidate power that the people will never get back. As usual, fear stands as the greatest threat to freedom.

More than ever, it’s frightening to live in an increasingly fascist US., and it’s likely that the aforementioned targeting of minorities, demonisation of the left, and removal of civil liberties will

only continue and get worse as time goes on. At this moment, it is essential that self-proclaimed socialists work towards organising within their communities. Whether that happens to be community protection, mutual aid, anti-fascism, or some other form of organization, we must be active in combating rising fascism within our own communities.

In the case of violence breaking out, knowing tactical combat casualty care, and means of self-defense for yourself and those in your community are more important than ever. Those who can defend themselves and others must and those who cannot, should focus on supporting their communities as much as possible. On a larger scale, combatting and calling out misinformation is extremely important when it occurs, as propaganda is extremely effective, but the more we can poke holes in false narratives, the faster they fall apart. Fear and misinformation are the most effective weapons of fascism and the far right. Only through action and education can we persist.

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