



**Your on the Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Populism vs. Fascism**



# Populism versus fascism

Is populism akin to fascism? The answer is no. I hope to discount those who claim the recent left- and right-wing protest movements against America's entrenched establishments represent anything remotely akin to fascism. For this article, these movements are exemplified by Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump respectively.

Why bring up this issue? Because influential people throughout the world have stated the proclamations of so-called populists such as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders (as well as noted European leaders, such as France's Marine Le Pen) smack of fascism. The conservative and prominent writer Robert Kagan made this reference to the rise of Donald Trump: "This is how fascism comes to America."

This supposition is incorrect for several reasons. One, fascism is anti-democratic. During its most infamous years (between the ends of World War I and World War II), Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco made this philosophy clear. Two, fascism is deeply skeptical of the practice of capitalism.

Populism is not against a democratic society or the practice of capitalism. Instead, populism seeks to improve the democratic process and make the rewards of a capitalistic society trickle down to others, rather than a minuscule number of people. True populists are not seeking gratuities. They are seeking fairness.

However, a danger associated

with this fact is that political and financial vested interests look for ways to exploit the earnest, well-meaning and sometimes naïve intent of populism.

Populism is also a protest against gerrymandering and the consequent safe havens Congressional representatives have carved out for themselves. Populism protests against the privileges that both houses of our national Congress have created for its members.

Populism seeks redress against the accumulating excesses that come with the unfettered excesses of Wall Street's financially vacuous practices; as well as that of entrenched and expanding nonfinancial businesses. As three examples, closed trading exchanges for some instruments; the creation of financial packages of no social value; the increasing difficulty of small businesses to compete against large quasi-monopolies.

Three, fascism is for a one-party state, one in which this party is in control of all aspects of its citizens' lives. I can see no parallel in this philosophy to that of populism or to that of Trump and Sanders.

Indeed, Sanders is not a populist. He is a Scandinavian-type socialist. Trump is far from being a populist. He is a dyed-in-the-wool capitalist. (It will be interesting to see what his Tea Party and populist supporters will come to think of his actual practices.)

If government and private industry do not respond to the present grievances of America's citizenry, our present structure of a republican democracy will be undermined; not to a point

of fascism, but toward that of a less-democratic nation.

We live in risky times. But what is new? We always have. How we handled this risk during America's history has defined much of the greatness of this country. Painting a democratically loyal protest movement as a fascist ideology is undemocratic and dangerous.

That said, if we citizens do not right our own ship, history tells us that someone else will attempt to do so, often with anti-democratic measures. And while this article claims populism is a far cry from fascism, during the 1920s and 1930s, right-wing populism in Europe abetted the rise of fascism in Germany, Italy, and Spain. The budding authoritarians in these countries exploited the discontent of the people, just as some large commercial conglomerates and well-funded political action groups in America are taking advantage of the populist surge to advance their own self-interests.

The next few years will test the mettle of America's democratic foundations and its institutions. If we hold to our values; if we hold the national politicians' and entrenched big businesses' privileged feet to the fire, we will be fine.

We must be diligent and stay informed and aware of ongoing events. The recent tumultuous events in this country's political arena should serve as a warning shot across America's bow.

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Guest Opinion