FRACTURES

INTERNATIONALIST TEACH-IN SUMMARIES

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Do we still live in a neoliberal world?

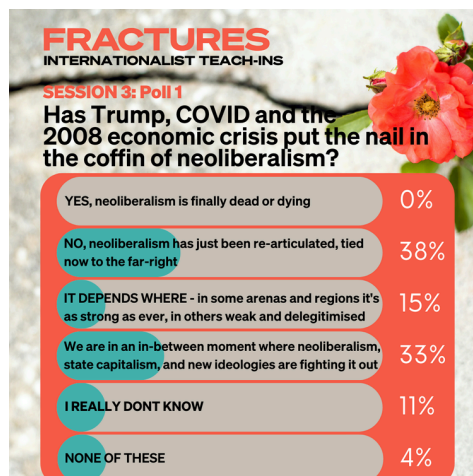Summary of FRACTURES session 3, 14 May

Our third conversation was with:

- **Quinn Slobodian,** author of *Hayek's Bastards: Race, Gold, IQ and the Capitalism of the Far Right,*
- **Daniel Chavez,** co-author of *The Future is Public* and coordinator of TNI's Global Green Industrial Policy Lab
- **Anita Gurumurthy,** Director of IT for Change in India
- **Sofia Scasserra,** a TNI associate researcher who specialises on digital economy, labour and development.

Content below

- Poll of audience
- The state of neoliberalism
- Thoughts on strategy
- Comments in the chat
- Key facts
- Recommended reading
- Key quotes

Poll – Has Trump, COVID and the 2008 economic crisis put the nail in the coffin of neoliberalism?

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SESSION 3: Poll 1
Has Trump, COVID and the 2008 economic crisis put the nail in the coffin of neoliberalism?

YES, neoliberalism is finally dead or dying	0%
NO, neoliberalism has just been re-articulated, tied now to the far-right	38%
IT DEPENDS WHERE - in some arenas and regions it's as strong as ever, in others weak and delegitimised	15%
We are in an in-between moment where neoliberalism, state capitalism, and new ideologies are fighting it out	33%
I REALLY DONT KNOW	11%
NONE OF THESE	4%

There is of course no single answer to these polls - and many in the chat said they would tick more than one answer - but they give a sense of the sentiment of the room.

No-one thought neoliberalism is dead! But many agreed it was re-articulating and being contested in new ways.

The state of neoliberalism

- Quinn Slobodian argued that to understand where we are in relationship to neoliberalism, we need to consider the four distinct ways the term is used: as a historical era, a bundle of policy ideas (like deregulation and privatisation), a form of behaviour or self-identity, and crucially, as an intellectual movement that arose in the 1930s **united around a central goal of defending capitalism from democratic interference.** In this sense, neoliberalism is not a fixed or monolithic concept but has adapted over time in response to political and economic challenges. The **recent fusion of neoliberalism with far-right political forces is therefore the latest strategy to resist progressive and global social movements perceived as threats, but it is not a stable coalition which opens up opportunities for the left.**
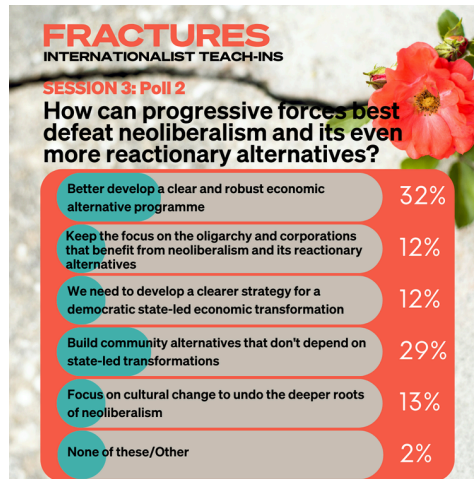
- Anita Gurumurthy argued that **digital capitalism is a unique dimension** of this moment, where a **handful of tech oligarchs— "feudal digital lords"—control both the means of communication and production simultaneously.** This convergence makes digital platforms not just economic entities but central infrastructures that govern social life and public discourse, deeply entrenching structural and infrastructural power. These digital platforms **amplify misogyny, sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination as integral features, not bugs.** The sensationalism, virality, and falsehoods systematically promoted by capitalist-driven algorithms, reinforce capitalist and eugenicist imperialistic logics that dominate the thinking of the Big Tech oligarchs. They also have no answer to climate change and systemic inequities, besides further dispossession, inequality and labour precarity.

- Daniel Chavez agrees that **neoliberalism is not dead but has entered a phase of decay** marked by contradictions and crises evident across both the global North and South, what Gramscians call an interregnum—where the old neoliberal order is in decline while the post-neoliberal future remains uncertain. In this time, **states have reasserted their role in the economy,** particularly since crises like the 2008 financial collapse and COVID-19 pandemic. This resurgence is visible in diverse contexts—from the industrial strategies of China and parts of Asia to renewed developmentalism in Latin America, and industrial and green policies in the global North such as the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act and the European Green Deal. It has a long history as all successful industrialisations—from the U.S. and Western Europe to East Asia—have involved strong, planned state intervention, challenging neoliberal free-market orthodoxy, but as China has shown it can also risk being authoritarian and exploitative and the **climate crisis demands planned state-led transitions that avoid carbon-intensive pathways of past industrial development.**

- Sofia also argued that neoliberalism is not disappearing; rather, it **is deeply embedded**—it is **particularly visible in the way digital algorithms organise** economic production and resource allocation. It is also evident in the presence of far-right governments (e.g., in Argentina under Javier Milei). At the same time, it is **also faces opposition and contestation** from progressive governments and movements across Latin America in countries like Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil.

Thoughts on strategy going forwards

We did another poll which gave a sense of how the audience leaned in terms of strategy. There was quite a varied response in terms of where people feel it is best to prioritise our energies. Again of course these strategies are not mutually exclusive.

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SESSION 3: Poll 2
How can progressive forces best defeat neoliberalism and its even more reactionary alternatives?

Better develop a clear and robust economic alternative programme	32%
Keep the focus on the oligarchy and corporations that benefit from neoliberalism and its reactionary alternatives	12%
We need to develop a clearer strategy for a democratic state-led economic transformation	12%
Build community alternatives that don't depend on state-led transformations	29%
Focus on cultural change to undo the deeper roots of neoliberalism	13%
None of these/Other	2%

- **Quinn:** There are **fractures within the neoliberal right, because there are contradictions between far-right groups that push for more welfare chauvinism and pronatalist policies and the neoliberal emphasis on economic freedom and market deregulatio**n. These lead to disputes over immigration policy and economic priorities—that the left could exploit. There is a **need for credible left populist alternatives** focused on economic justice and democratic control, internationalism, learning from international developments beyond the U.S. and recognising the instability within far-right and neoliberal alliances.

- **Anita:** Time to reimagine digital governance beyond corporate control by **advocating for public goods regimes in the digital realm**. Communities alone cannot solve these challenges due to the "tragedy of the anti-commons" in data ownership and coordination, which means we will need **new public infrastructures** of data and digital commons managed collectively—integrating state, communities, and civil society. In India for example there are initiatives like data trusts for schoolchildren's data co-managed by communities, schools and the state that we can learn from. **Digital non-alignment** is another important strategy for a just international economic order, countering the current US-dominated tech imperialism enforced through trade and intellectual property regimes. We also need **new alliances** across diverse social movements – some of which are already happening - linking digital rights with labour, environmental, feminist, and anti-financialisation struggles—to reclaim the tech agenda as a collective, democratic, and equitable project.

- **Daniel:** Need to articulate and develop a **transformative industrial policy in the global South** that deliberately shapes economic production beyond market dictates to **prioritise social development, planned climate transition and environmental sustainability, and democratisation of economic decision-making.** Core elements of this policy would include state ownership of strategic sectors (notably critical minerals), managing trade and production

systems in ways that break structural dependencies imposed by neoliberalism and unequal terms of trade, and integrating infrastructure, social development, jobs, and skills development into industrial planning. This will only come about by **building robust political power through popular mobilisation of workers, peasants, and intellectuals around developmental alternatives;** fostering new class alliances bridging formal and informal sectors; and enhancing international solidarity through South-South cooperation to challenge neoliberal restrictions on policy space and trade agreements and to decolonise economic knowledge which remains centered on the Global North. Struggles and the transformative construction of alternatives, such as those developed by Trade Unions for Energy Democracy, greatly contribute to forging these new alliances.

- **Sofia:** Drawing from her work with Latin American trade unions, she notes a strengthening internationalism within labour movements. This moment of crisis and uncertainty is an opportunity—where **"everything is questioned, everything can happen."** So the **left has a critical role to generate new ideas and struggles** that can influence the construction of an alternative economic and political order. One of those arenas is trade, where scepticism and opposition by various countries toward fully liberalising e-commerce and digital sectors at the WTO is opening up space for civil society to propose alternative governance models and more democratic policy-making.

Other key points

- **Embrace of anti-globalisation by the right is not necessarily a victory for the left.** Rejection of WTO for example does not mean a rejection of corporate trade rules, but rather that the US wants to unilaterally impose its will on everyone without any international accountability that can affect its interests. Still the rejection of free trade does open space for alternative regional or global trade architectures that do not necessarily align with neoliberalism.
- **Existing mechanisms like "due diligence" frameworks** and advocates for holding technology companies **legally accountable for "tech crimes,"** including wage theft in platform economies **are failing.** We need more root-and-branch transformation of the digital sector.
- As we look at capital/labour relationships, we **need nuanced understandings of "class" and "working people," particularly in the global South, where the informal sector constitutes a majority of employment**. This also demands new labour and political alliances beyond conventional trade union structures to effectively address labour challenges and build worker power.
- There is a **dangerous techno-utopian narrative that AI and digital tech alone can solve environmental crises, which ignores deeper systemic issues.** "There is this misconception that the earth is a datified planet and the datified planet through the magic of AI can deliver us."

Comments in the chat

Ted S: A fantastic treatment of aspects of today's topic by Perry Anderson in a recent London Review of Books: https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v47/n06/perry-anderson/regime-change-in-the-

Kaspar L: Textbook neoliberalism has never been implemented 'fully' as it always requires the state

Simeon G: The focus on oligarchy and tech consolidation of means of production & communication brought up by Anita is something we must focus on. Any movement must find ways to bypass, subvert, thwart, rein in this sector.

Ipek E.V: Simulteneously, we should also consider how we regulate the public AI. There is no guarantee that anything public is going to be for public benefit.

Fahd H: The Left's blind spot when it comes to crypto really hurt us. We should have understood and engaged with the technology from the start as hacktivists wanted. The tendency to discard anything to do with technology or finance as 'bad' left space for this current casino-style culture to take over

Dian B: Here's another crack. People's Health Movement is starting an initiative for Public Pharma. We would really appreciate all of your support

Further reading and listening

Quinn recommendations:

- Blood and soil neoliberalism (Dissent Magazine)
- Interview with Quinn on Crack Capitalism book (The Nation)
- What is neoliberalism interview (Doomscroll/Youtube)

Anita:

- IT for Change's great blog: https://botpopuli.net/
- Declaration from Kerala on a new innovation ecosystem for our collective digital futures
- https://globaldigitaljusticeforum.net/
- Anita and Nandini's piece for TNI's State of Power report on digital power: The Intelligent Corporation: Data and the digital economy

Daniel

- Global Green Industrial Policy Lab
- The Future is public report
- Book (in Spanish) La trama del neoliberalismo: Mercado, crisis y exclusión social (CLACSO 2003)
- Video conversation with Jojo Nem Singh on "Business of the State" and Resource Governance
- Trade Unions for Energy Democracy: https://www.tuedglobal.org/

Some facts

ⓘ By 2050, 40% of the world's youth will be in Africa and 15% in India (55% in total), often living in precarious, informal economies, highlighting the urgency of rethinking global development, labor, and technological policies.

ⓘ Up to 80% of employment in some Latin American and African countries is informal, complicating traditional class analyses and labour mobilization strategy

Key quotes:

Quote from Daniel Chavez

"The future is public, but should also be green, and the only way to make it green is if it's public."

Quote from Anita Gurumurthy

"Where there is a Goliath, there is a David. Many Davids maybe, but they can bring [the Big Tech oligarchy] down."

" There's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.

—Quoting Leonard Cohen "