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- This Carnival holiday, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro tweeted a video that was considered pornographic to "alert" his supporters about the dangers of "cultural Marxism". Some jurists say there is grounds for impeachment. Do you have any recollection of a Twitter political incident that can be compared to this one?

It is a typical tactic of far-right politicians to try to take single cases and generalise them in order to scapegoat and badmouth a whole culture. Participants of Brazilian carnival culture have in general been quite critical of Bolsonaro. Attempts of trying to scapegoat whole cultures or subcultures are not unique in history. Think of how for example McCarthyism in the USA tried to present Hollywood as being communist. Today, there is a tendency that far-right politicians try to build up a new Red Scare and to make use of communication tools such as Twitter and Facebook. There'll be much more of the new Red Scare soon in the USA when Trump will face the threat of Bernie Sanders becoming the Democrats' presidential candidate.

- How did Twitter become a platform for populist leaders? Was Donald Trump the first to use it to spread his political views?

Donald Trump was not the first right-wing demagogue using Twitter to reach out to his supporters. There was Modi in India or Erdoğan in Turkey, who have 46.2 million respectively 13.5 million followers in comparison to Bolsonaro's 3.5 million. Twitter favours narcissism, the accumulation of attention, and individualism. Authoritarian politics' focus on a strong leader resonates with Twitter's communication structures. So, Twitter is a communication platform that is particularly suited for supporting authoritarian leaders.

- Can political and economic changes explain the rise of Twitter as a political tool and ideological weapon?

Corporate social media are the world's largest advertising agencies. They sell advertising space and reach billions of users. Their commodity logic is blind to the content that is being circulated and advertised because these platforms just want to make profit. Right-wing authoritarian politics is a reaction to the crisis of global capitalism. The individualistic and advertising-centred logic of social media and the rise of new nationalism and new right-wing authoritarianism coincide in many places and countries, which results in far-right social media politics.

- The political use of Twitter can be a sign of authoritarianism?

Twitter authoritarianism is not the cause, but a symptom of the rise of a new stage of capitalism that I call authoritarian capitalism. We can observe the ideology of authoritarian capitalism on Twitter.

- Bolsonaro's tweet was aimed to his very conservative and religious followers. When populist presidents use Twitter to spread controversy are they just communicating with their political bases or aiming at a larger audience? How

important is for populist leaders to communicate with his supporters via social media?

Far-right authoritarian politicians try to reach out to a broad range of people across different class backgrounds by nationalism and scapegoating minorities and political opponents. They do so in order to distract from the real class differences in society that separate groups in terms of income, wealth, lifestyle, etc. So, when such politicians take to Twitter, they try to reach as many people as possible with their propaganda in order to distract from capitalism's class contradictions.

- What are the characteristics of authoritarian capitalism? Is current authoritarian capitalism different from other authoritarian periods, like European fascism or military dictatorships in Latin America?

Authoritarian capitalism is a form of capitalism that is based on the combination of authoritarian leadership, nationalism, the use of the friend/enemy-scheme for scapegoating constructed enemies, law-and-order politics, militarism, and a patriarchal order. Its ideological dimension distracts attention from class conflicts. Its principles are general ones. What is new are its means of propaganda: Nowadays, social media and user-generated content play an important role as means of propaganda in authoritarian capitalism.

- Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro is very hostile to the major media outlets in the country and he and his supporters usually label professional journalism as fake news. He uses Twitter to communicate with his supporters and to announce his government policies. How does governing via Twitter impact democracies? Is it harmful?

Look at how Donald Trump in the USA talks about the mainstream media. He declared the New York Times, NBC, ABC, CBS, and CNN as the "enemy of the American people". The underlying logic is quite ideological: Trump equates himself with the US people and argues that any criticism of him is therefore anti-American. He also argued that one must "do something about it", which sounds like a threat to freedom of speech and freedom of journalism.

- How should the opposition behave when the president is governing via Twitter? Should it occupy the internet as well?

Yes, the opposition must also make use of social media and Twitter. In such cases, oppositional political work will fare best if there are critical celebrities, who have lots of social media followers, that actively endorse oppositional movements. But at the same time, there can very well be the problem that celebrities who have a large followership on social media support right-wing demagoguery or are simply silent or indifferent about it.

- Do Left-wing leaders or non-populist leaders also use Twitter in order to obtain political gain? Is there a safe and healthy way for political leaders to use social media?

- What can we do to prevent social media to harm our democracies?

Social media use is very common in politics throughout the world and on all sides of the political spectrum. The basic problem we face in contemporary politics has resulted from the political economy of contemporary capitalism, so the political conflicts have very deep causes. In order to prevent threats to democracy, we have to change political economy. This includes changing the political economy of platforms, but such a move is not sufficient. We need non-commercial, non-profit oriented media that decelerate political debate and give citizens time and space for real political debate. One aspect of populism is that it simplifies, accelerates, and tabloidizes political information and communication. We need social media that are no longer digital tabloids, but engage citizens into conversations with each other based on thought- and debate-stimulating content. A public service YouTube and Club 2.0 are two important [visions](#) that matter in this respect.

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

In situations where right-wing demagogues appear and aim at dominating the public sphere, one needs collaborations of alternative/citizen media, public service media, and the quality press in order to establish a critical public sphere.