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Hanappi, Hardy

TU Vienna, Institute 105-3, Economics, Vienna Institute for Political Economy Research - VIPER e.V.

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Defending Deep Democracy

Three elections - three surprises - three lessons

Hardy Hanappi

VIPER – Vienna Institute for Political Economy Research
and
Technical University of Vienna, Economics, Institute 1053

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to use the experiences of three surprising election results in 1930, 1916 and 2024 to explain which lessons can be drawn for further development of humanity's evolution. It turns out that deep changes in the organisation of self-governance will be needed to master the evolving crises of global capitalism, which during the last years has been morphing into authoritarian, global, absolute capitalism.

Introduction

To understand what will happen next, it is necessary to interpret what has happened in the past. Of course, not the whole historical record is of equal importance for a specific prediction. The human brain works by example, observing historical examples. The most productive experiences are those that led to surprising results. They are provoking re-evaluation of existing explanations and new approaches.

For whole societies, such pivotal experiments typically are general elections with outcomes that are surprising. In what follows, three such historical surprises are chosen: The election of Donald Trump as president in 2024, the referendum of the UK to leave the European Union in 2016, and the election of the NSDAP in Germany in 1930. For each of the three examples, first the setup of the respective society in the run-up to the election is interpreted, then the election itself is reported, and finally the most important lessons drawn from these experiences are summarised.

In a final chapter, the relevance of these historical experiences is made explicit by underlining the necessity of defending deep democracy to prevent a third World War.

Three Elections – Setting the Scenario

USA

For most political observers, the election of the president of the USA in November 2024 was the most decisive democratic turning point of the last decade. It had been rather obvious that the role of the hegemon of the Western world was called into question by several global crises, which had hit the world economy in the new millennium. It had started with the Great Financial Crisis (2008 – 2009), a collapse of the international financial system. For learned scientists working in political economy, it was not that surprising that evolving disequilibria in the capitalist world first manifest themselves in the world of finance. The mechanisms in finance are reacting extremely fast; they are driven by volatile expectations of decision-makers in high command. Their orders have a global impact and are executed in incomparably quick time scales. So, what happened on September 15 in 2008, was still a surprise – it is rather difficult to predict a precise doomsday – but that something was in the air could be felt. The recovery during the following years, on the one hand, showed the flexibility of global finance. On the other hand, it also made clear where the limits of this flexibility are. The bankruptcy of certain financial institutions and the accompanying further oligopolisation of finance, the regrouping of industrial empires, and the like, all took place within the usual framework of capitalistic reshuffling. What else could have been expected? Of course, some additional safeguarding elements have been added. But the general speculative character of capitalism's big finance is still there and leaves the system as vulnerable as it was before 2008. Again, till today, predicting a precise day of a looming collapse cannot be forecasted; but that a global financial crisis will be a forerunner of any sequence of follow-up crises is certain.

Then there were two more or less permanent global dangers threatening to surmount the management capacity of global capitalism: exploding inequality of income and wealth[1], and incompatibility between accumulation of capital and biological survival under deteriorating environmental conditions[2]. Both capitalism-destructing processes were accelerating in the last decade. As a warning – but implicitly also as a glimmer of hope – the COVID pandemic occurred (2020 to 2022). The global health system already had a weak coordination centre, the WHO, which helped a lot. But to spread the helpful vaccinations across all countries in the world proved to be impossible as long as the medical sector in the capitalist world remained a profit-oriented business. The silver lining on the horizon was that the common effort of scientists across the world was indeed able to develop such a helpful vaccination

[1] Compare the work of Chancel, Piketty, Saez, Zucman documented in the World Inequality Report (Chancel et al., 2022).

[2] See (Burgess et al, 2023).

in a very short time. The pandemic showed that global institutional design – in the end, global democratic governance – is necessary and possible.

This crisis-ridden global evolution took place in a political institutional framework, which had experienced its last shock in 1990, when the Soviet Union collapsed. Since then, three large empires (USA, Russia, and China), each of them basically framed along the lines of capital accumulation, have been interacting. The military dominator USA had an internal governance structure, which was typically shared by two large parties, Republicans and Democrats. With respect to domestic social policy, the Democrats were more open to improvements of workers' conditions by state action (e.g. a public health system), but with respect to foreign policy, both parties had their hardliners, carrying on the rhetoric and activism of the Cold War. The social status of the political elite of the USA, which was leading the two parties, was rather homogenous. Wealth distribution was extremely unequal, and the democratic episodes in governance had not changed much. For European observers of US foreign policy, the Biden years had been very disappointing. The stance of the new democratic president, which followed the first Trump administration, was expected to be a pronounced shift to the left. Biden was thought to bring to an end what Obama had started before Trump took over: In domestic policy, the final introduction of a modern social health system and in foreign policy, a broad cooperative approach across ideological barriers. In both fields, Joe Biden remained more or less on the same track that Trump had already envisaged. For the voters in the USA, the actions of the Biden administration looked hardly exciting. Feeble and weak like the president himself, the quiet, slow growth of the economy nevertheless seemed to promise a slim victory of the incumbent president in the upcoming elections in November 2024. Things changed when Biden's health problems became more visible shortly before the elections. The Trump campaign jumped on the issue and opened fire on the old and sick President Biden. But as a response, the Democrats made a quick move and presented a young and dynamic woman, Kamala Harris, as their candidate. The Republicans suddenly seemed to be helpless; it was too late for them to react. Therefore, just before the election in November 2024, most forecasts gave Harris a slight lead. This was not just the case in the USA; observers in Europe would even be more convinced that the Democrats would win[3].

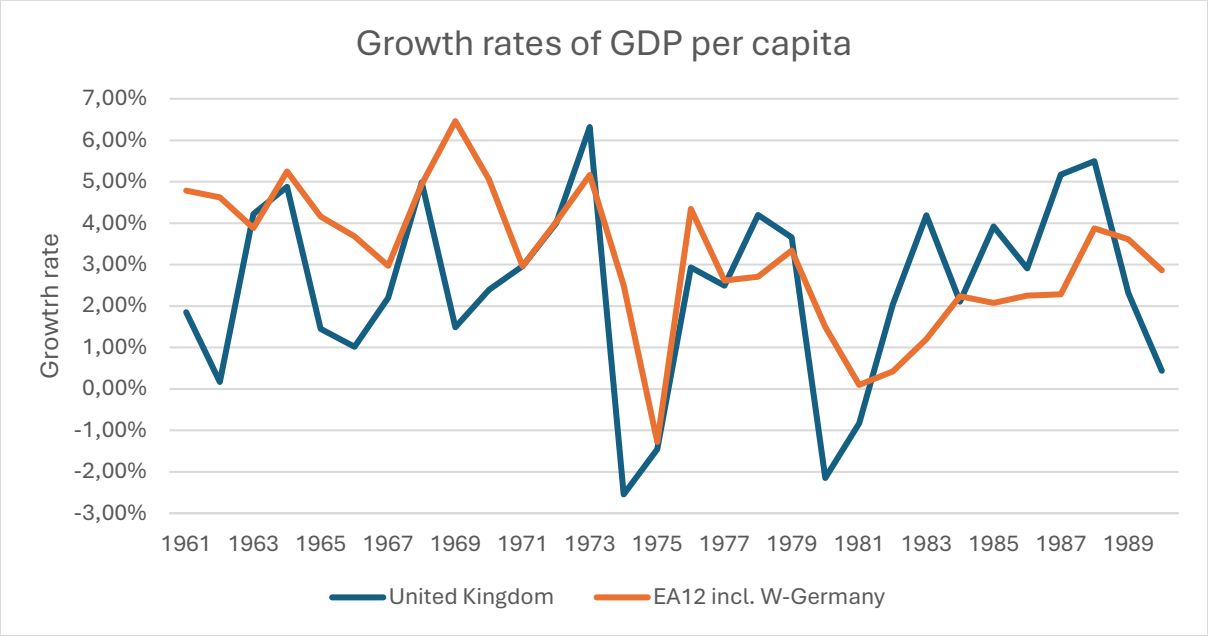
United Kingdom

Another election, which changed the path of geopolitics in a comparable severe way, happened eight years earlier: The 2016 United Kingdom European Union membership referendum. What kind of development in the UK had led to this unique event, which even in

[3] On the 5th of November 2024, the British magazine 'The Economist' published its forecast titled 'On the final day, Kamala Harris moves into a narrow lead'.

the official EU treaties had not been anticipated? European unification had been taken to be a one-way street; the possibility that a member state might voluntarily want to leave this process was not foreseen.

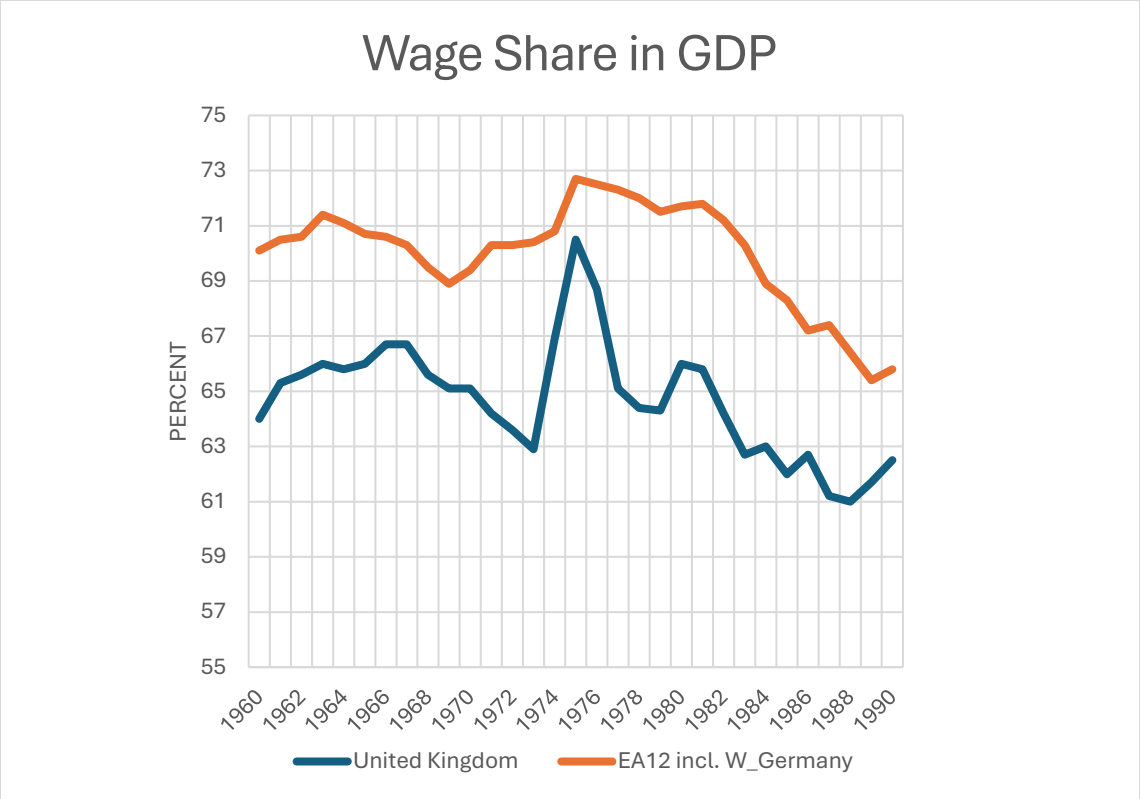
In 1973, the UK, under the conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath, joined the European Economic Community (EEC), which later became the EU. From 1974 to 1978, two Labour Prime Ministers, Harold Wilson and James Callaghan, ruled Britain. Then, in the 'Winter of Discontent', a political earthquake brought a new conservative hardliner, Margaret Thatcher, into power. It is interesting to compare the growth rates of GDP per capita of the UK to those of the rest of the EU countries.



Source: AMECO (EU)

After the stepwise rise of general average welfare during the sixties, the year 1973 (inclusion in the EU) brought a steep increase, followed by a sudden crisis. This was the first oil price shock, which hit the UK as well as the EA12. In 1980, the second oil price shock occurred, but in both cases, the EA12 were hit less than the UK. Being a member of the larger economic area could be interpreted as having a bit more resilience. The overall growth of GDP per capita clearly does not tell the whole story. A look at the comparison of the wage share in GDP is revealing.

Joining the EEC first brought a boost to the wage share, which got closer to the always higher level in continental Europe. But then, with the two oil crises, it fell continuously and fell very strongly. The distance to continental levels even increased. In other words, in the UK, the burden of the two oil price shocks was mainly carried by the British workers.

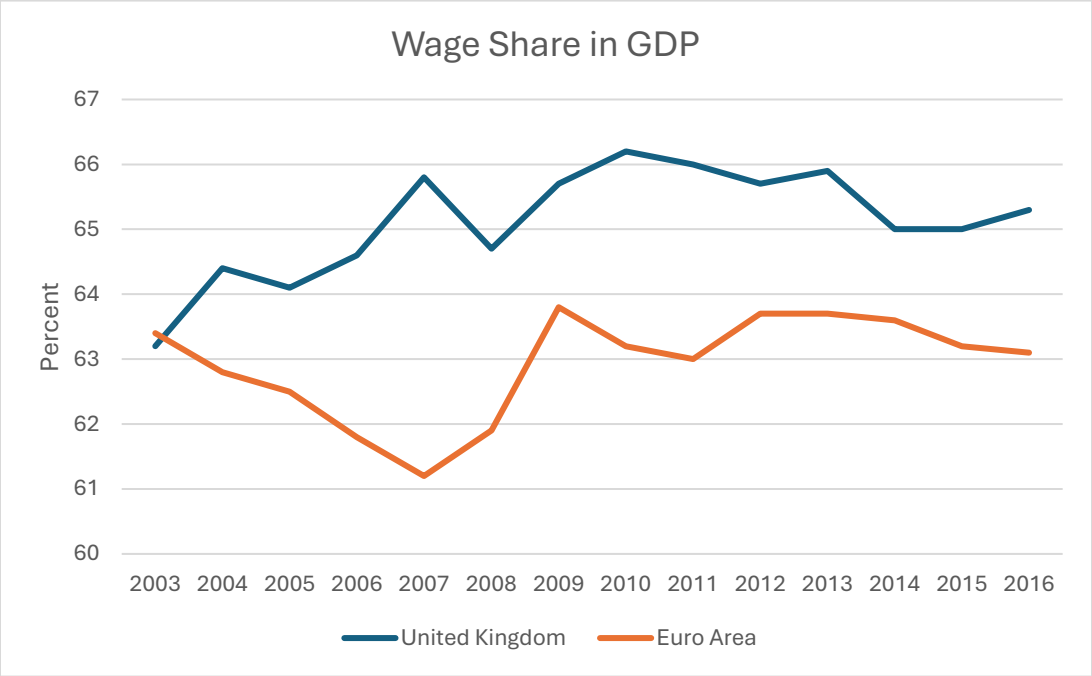


Source: AMECO (EU)

In the new millennium, new global shocks were waiting for the United Kingdom. The most severe one was the Great Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008. London had always been a hub for Europe's finance, a role which it had to defend against Frankfurt as the European Union developed its monetary unification from 2000 onwards. The major counterpart to London, to the UK, in this respect, became now the Euro area.

Moreover, the European Union expanded, and new countries in the East were included; the accessions since 2004 seemed to be unstoppable. A first wave came in 2004 (Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland, Malta, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Cyprus, Estonia, Czech Republic), in 2007 Romania and Bulgaria followed, and in 2013 Croatia completed the wave. Already in 1995, the Eastern flank of the Western world had been consolidated by taking Austria, Sweden and Finland into the EU. These enlargements of the EU brought an additional element to the UK: Workers from the new EU countries, in particular from Poland, immigrated to England. They had to be added to the existing population of migrants, which had been inherited from England's colonial past. As in other older EU countries, this changed the composition of the working force. Poorly paid low-level jobs were increasingly delegated to migrants; also, many of the more sophisticated craft professions now went to the well-trained, handy migrants from Eastern Europe. Of course, the elite of London bankers and managers remained in the hands of the shrinking ruling class of pure British

blood, enriched by a handful of billionaires from all over the world. The communication between the different classes of the UK's society disappeared; the rich communicated only inside their echo chambers, the islands of foreign workers were mostly excluded from participating in British political life and also turned inwards, towards their local communities.

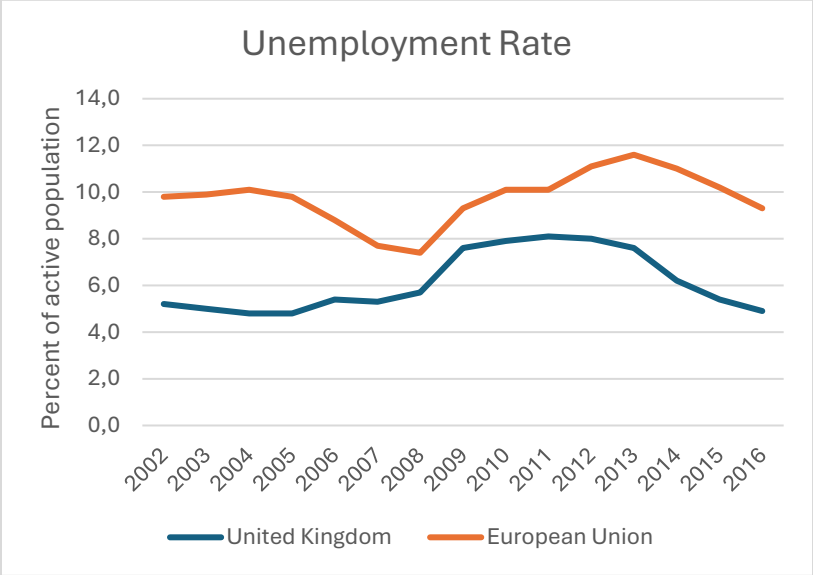


Source AMECO (EU)

After the bubble of the GFC burst, unemployment suddenly increased, and this time, the British middle class was hurt most. Of course, society always needs garbage men, but if medium-level banking jobs can be sorted out as less important, then financial firms will reduce them to avoid bankruptcy. Thus, the wage share of the UK experienced a soft downturn in 2008, but the increased demand from a growing low-level workforce dragged it up again soon. In the meantime, the Euro area saw its wage share constantly low; the conquest of Europe's east meant a boost for GDP, which typically went right into the pockets of the ruling classes of the Euro area. As a consequence of simple algebra, the stagnating compensation of employees led to a low wage share. Today, the extreme deterioration of income and wealth distribution in the Euro area countries is a result of this process.

In 2015, the British ruling class was self-assured that with its unemployment rate being lower than that on the continent, the domestic class structure was under control. On the other hand, the growing unrest in Britain's lower middle class stirred a belief that getting loose from Brussels might turn out to make a return to the past glory of Britain – a fictitious past time when it was sufficient to be British to be superior – possible. Gifted demagogues

like Nigel Farage started to channel this unrest in the population, focused it to take away the blame from British employers, and concentrated it on an accusation of EU policy instead.



Source: AMECO (EU)

Only with the decision of the government, led by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, to initiate a referendum on an exit from the European Union, only with this opportunity to tip over the vague notion of a 'public opinion', Farage's campaign – as always amplified by mass media eager to thrive on improbable outcomes – could gain momentum. But Boris Johnson, as well as most voters in the city of London, were pretty sure that their intention to stay part of the European Union would win the referendum[4].

Germany

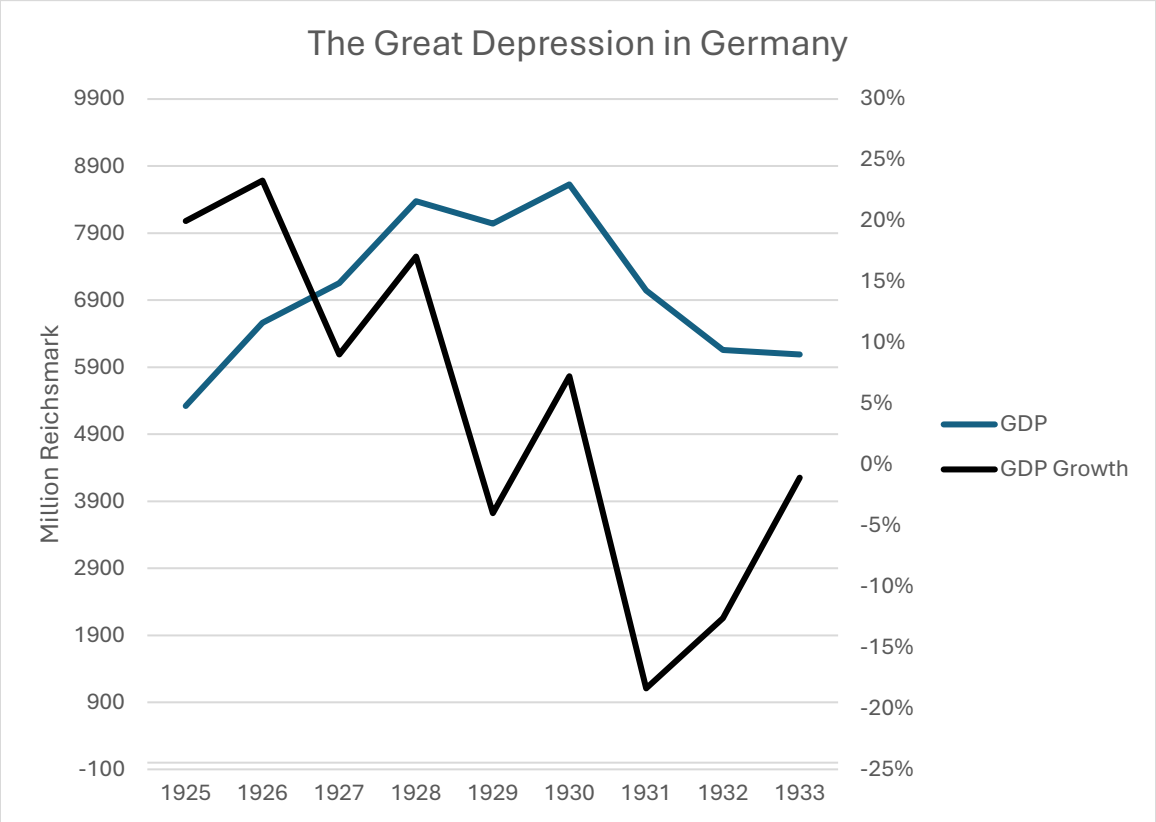
The short synopsis of the run-up to the third election to be considered leads way back to the interwar period. When on the 30th of January 1933, Adolf Hitler was given the power of Germany's 'Reichskanzler' by Hindenburg, this was the climax of the turn of the country to Fascism. It was surrounded by two pivotal elections[5], one on the first of July 1932, the second on the 5th of March 1933. In July 1932, the NSDAP achieved 37,4 % of votes, and in March 1933, this number was 43,9 %. What had happened? The success of the NSDAP in

[4] See (The Economist, 2016).

[5] A third election in November 1932 saw a slight fall in the votes for the NSDAP. It only spurred Hitler to press even more radically to rise to absolute power.

elections during the 1920s had been rather limited: 1924a (6,5 %), 1924b (3,0 %), and in 1928 (2,6 %).

The shortest correct answer to this question is simple: The Great Depression of the years from 1928 to 1933 had changed the living conditions of the German population in a dramatic way. But behind such a brief statement lies a plethora of aspects that go far beyond the purely economic data on shrinking GDP and high unemployment rates.



Source: (Ritschl, 2002)

After the crash of 1928, economic activity broke down. It did decrease till 1933; the worst year probably was 1931.

In a similar way, unemployment rates show how the collapse of growth, with only a little delay, led to an explosion of unemployment up to 25 % in 1931 and 1932. It has to be kept in mind that official, standardised economic data collection only started to be institutionalised[6]. Therefore, what can be shown are always only reconstructed data.

[6] It was one of the lasting side effects of Keynes' new macroeconomic approach that made it mandatory for policy makers who aimed to intervene in saving capitalism from its self-destructive forces, to institutionalize statistical offices collecting macroeconomic data.

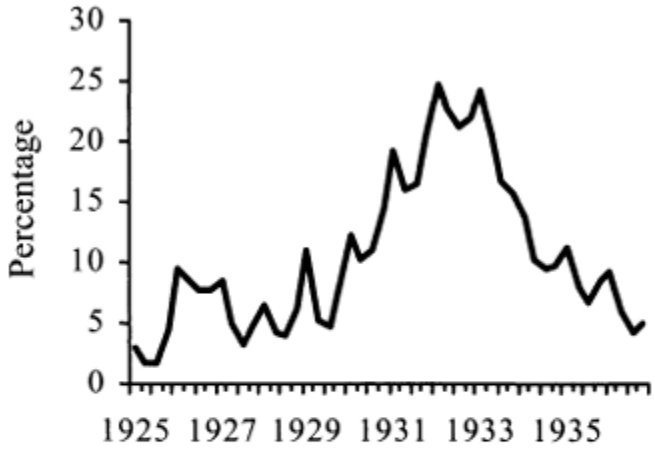


FIGURE 1
PERCENTAGE UNEMPLOYMENT

Source: Dimsdale et al., "Unemployment and Real Wages," p. 46.

Remember that these dynamics of diverse macroeconomic forces were completely new to a society which had just freed itself from the supervision of the feudal class. The old two adversary classes - capitalist firms and bank owners versus workers - had to improvise to govern Germany, a country which had lost a world war. The Weimar Republic actually was an experimental design[7].

In this situation, new players entered the stage of politics: fascist movements. In Germany and Italy, the losers of World War 1, disappointed and impoverished war veterans, sensed that they could combine the general depressive mood, the loss of national pride and identity, with a new promise to give these basic elements back to their nation. In the 1920s, Hitler's movement had a hard time competing with rival competitors. Both traditional blocks of political parties, the conservative block as well as the social democrats, had no clear strategy on how to deal with these new political forces. For the social democrats the need to reach a majority in parliament[8] some of the slogans of the fascists sounded applicable to attract additional voters. For the bourgeois firm owner the basically anti-socialist, radical rhetoric of fascist leaders seemed to be a basis for cooperation, though their political style

[7] The plethora of problems in the 1920-ties in Germany are thoughtfully described by the historian John Hiden (Hiden, 2016).

[8] The strategy to get into state power by achieving a majority in democratic elections was the defining characteristic of German Social Democracy, contrasting the Bolshevik's strategy of organizing a revolution led by a coalition of workers and farmers. The his,torian Eric Hobsbawm, who grew up during these tumultuous times, provided a broader view of social rebellions (Hobsbawm, 2016).

did not fit to their bourgeois cultural habits. The disappointing election results of the NSDAP before 1928 are telling for this calm before the storm.

With the Great Depression starting in 1928, all economic and political processes experienced a dramatic increase in speed. Mass unemployment quickly followed mass bankruptcy, which in turn was an immediate consequence of the collapse in finance. In this turmoil, the fascist leaders were able to appear as saviours, as heroes, who could lead the nation out of chaos into a bright future. It was straightforward that the methods they proposed had to be extreme. There had to be a purification of the nation, of the Arian race. The scapegoat of the current misery had to be pointed at: Jews, communists and foreigners in general.

In his book 'Mein Kampf', Hitler nevertheless sketched that his way to his dictatorship should lead via a victory in parliamentary elections. He was sure that his movement could shape the minds of German voters so decisively that they would carry him to victory by their own decisions. In 1932, he realised that this 'free will' needed support by the brutal coercive power of his fascist gangs – and above all the support of the big players, the firm owners, in Germany's economy. It was this strategic move, to combine these two pivotal elements, which allowed him to reverse the drawback of the election of November 1932. In the end, it is the whole year of 1932, which should be considered as the big, surprising election victory of the NSDAP.

Three Surprises

The three preconditions for the occurrence of a surprise are (1) the existence of an entity, a subject, which is forming expectations, (2) a process going on in a reality existing outside this entity, and (3) the possibility that this external process can justify or contradict the expectations built by the entity. Every expectation is bound to be a preliminary guess; perfect foresight does not exist[9]. How surprising a surprise is, is variable. First, it depends on the precision of the forecast; second, it depends on the volatility and complexity of the real process that is anticipated by the entity.

To predict something in an imprecise and vague way increases the probability that the expectation was met. E.g. to expect that 'all things must pass' often turns out to be correct,

[9] The assumption that perfect foresight of all market participants exists, and that each of them knows that this is the case, is the central argument of the rational expectation school of general equilibrium economists, e.g. Thomas Sargent (Sargent and Wallace, 1976). It results only in an unapplicable mathematical exercise, since if this assumption was correct, then any scientific activity – a process in real life – would be completely obsolete.

while it is daring to expect that average real GDP growth in OECD countries in the next five years will be 3%. In the extreme case, the tendency to produce imprecise expectations to appear correct[10] is bought by the price of producing only useless statements: Wordy fatalism substitutes helpful, but risky forecasts.

Another difficulty stems from the observed real processes themselves, which take place outside the expectation-forming entity. How volatile and hard to predict they are is sometimes described as their level of complexity. That the sun rises tomorrow as it did rise today is a long-time physical process, which can be easily expected to continue next week. In a sense, an estimate for an event that will happen in a short time, based on regular past observations made over a very long time, will be more often correct than expectations with past observations on a similar time scale as the period forecasted. Over longer time scales, the regular behaviour of processes observed in nature does assume the character of a *law of physics*. The original task of natural science has thus been to discover such laws. It proved to be a stepwise process, which, from time to time, had to introduce more basic laws, leaving to some older 'laws' only the role of '*limited special cases*'. Quantum field theory, the current best guess for the host of physical laws, so far seems to escape an easy interpretation along ordinary spacetime. The notion of probability as an indispensable ingredient of lawlike sameness might even lead to a better appreciation of the understanding of the consciousness of human observers of natural processes.

For expectation formation in human individuals and social entities in general[11], it cannot be avoided to model the emerging dynamics as a *complex system*[12]. The important role played by the mere probability of 'social laws' reduces the success rate of expectations in the social sciences considerably. Flawed expectations, therefore, will be a standard experience, which then will be adapted as a means to improve the next round of expectation formation. The progress of science in the social sciences, thus, is almost indistinguishable from social progress itself.

Returning to the scalability of the notion of surprise, this leads to the conclusion that surprising developments are what is to be expected and that those who are surprised can at least be divided into two groups: One group that drives the surprise and one group that did

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[10] This evidently is the trick of certain religious texts: Strong believe in something that nobody doubts is an easy win. Unfortunately, this critic also concerns the lyrics of George Harrison's music with the same title.

[11] To treat human individuals like entities of larger groups of humans clearly needs more specifications, as typically discussed by Maurice Halbwachs for the case of social memory (Halbwachs, 1992).

[12] Compare (Hanappi, 2025a). A major reason for the *new* probabilistic nature of social processes is the infinite regress of game-theoretic expectation formation, which forces the entity to abbreviate reasoning due to the time constraints when facing urgent actions. In the margin of evolutionary selection, this trait can be considered as 'intuitive behaviour'.

not expect the surprise. In this paper, the points in time when a surprise becomes manifest are singled out as general elections or a referendum held in a country. They have been chosen because, on a global scale, they have been outstanding. To sharpen the argument, the three elections are now described in inverted (historically correct) order.

The Great Depression reached its climax in 1932. It had led to mass bankruptcy and mass unemployment, which changed the lives of the workers, the poorer social strata of Germany, as well as those of many small business owners. The ranks of this mass of despairing people were additionally filled by those whom the NSDAP had explicitly declared as the enemies of the German race: Jews and communists.

For this very large disappointed group of people living in Germany at the time, it must have looked not very likely that in a democratic election, a radical right-wing movement could get a parliamentary majority. This - the surprise - has only been possible by a set of measures that the fascists successfully applied.

The ***scapegoat strategy*** singled out parts of society, which were accused of being responsible for the general misery, Jews and communists. Pent-up aggressions had to be redirected against these groups. In many cases, this strategy coincided with a promise to Aryanize the property of the person and to give it to an Arian citizen.

The ***employment promise*** was the central economic argument. It was assigned as the direct answer to the devastating unemployment. To give it some plausibility, it had to be shown that the NSDAP, Hitler, had a close link to the leading firm owners of Germany. Some successful events were organised to demonstrate that Arian capitalists were willing to support Hitler, to *make Germany great again*. The latter promise of a nationalist rise of Germany immediately implied that public employment as soldiers of the German army was already in the wings, though many of the voters did not realise this at the time.

The ***promise of racial superiority in all cultural aspects***. This type of argument is aimed at *restoring* the self-esteem of German nationalists by pointing to an imagined *long-term destiny* of superior human races vis-à-vis inferior tribes.

The use of ***technologically advanced media*** for communication, to gain access to the family level of voters. Broadcasting of Hitler's voice, so it could be heard in each apartment everywhere in Germany, quickly became a cornerstone of fascist policy. What it enabled was to provide an *interpretation* of all the *selected* events that happened in the world. This was a *new level of ideological penetration of the individual minds* in a country. The

technological possibility[13] had allowed the construction of what counted as the outside world - by selection - and how it had to be understood - by interpretation. This close interaction between technical innovation and ideological manipulation certainly has to be considered as ***the*** political innovation at this time.

The opponents of the NSDAP, their later victims, were negatively surprised by the fascist election success, while the most convinced fascists had even thought that they would achieve an *absolute* majority of votes. The latter immediately used the result to push through their seizure of power in all spheres of political life - without any democratic circumventions.

84 years later, in ***2016***, the referendum in the ***United Kingdom*** marked the end of a remarkable movement of European countries to build a common political unit. It had already started in 1960, but only gained momentum during the 1980s, when large European corporations recognised that the renewed push towards undisputed hegemonic power of the USA initiated by Ronald Reagan would leave them without a strong and united political voice[14].

The advantages of joining this unification process seemed to outweigh its disadvantages for most citizens of Europe. Becoming a member of the European Union or one of its precursors meant better access to all European markets and less border control. Consumers as well as suppliers took advantage of the former, while millions of tourists appreciated the latter. Only local political authorities were afraid to be forced to transmit part of their powers to the EU institutions in Brussels. The idea that Europe's unification process was a good thing was so deeply ingrained in the minds of the designers of EU institutions that they did not even include a procedure describing an exit procedure. The EU had been built to overcome conflicts between nationalist countries in Europe; nationalism had been identified as a major cause of World War 2.

Unfortunately, the assumed opinion of the general public is only a very weak indicator of what is really going on within European states. All European states are capitalist states, cum grano salis; they consist of two more or less opposing classes: a ruling class owning and managing the capital stock with the help of conservative politicians, and an exploited class consisting of the rest of the citizens. The project of European unification in the beginning was mainly a project of European ruling classes aiming at streamlining and smoothing political hurdles within Europe to better compete with their US competitors. Only with some delay, European Social Democracy managed to smuggle some social policy regulations into the

[13] The technological masterpiece of the fascists was named by Hitler himself as 'Volksempfänger VE301' (People's Receiver) signalling with its number 301 that he conquered power on the 30th of January 1933.

[14] Compare (Hanappi, 2022, pp. 26-42) for a detailed description of this process.

legal framework of the EU. This basic inequality of the political forces within the EU over the decades proved to be the entry point for its enemies in EU member states. Criticism and rejection of the EU could be stirred up by parts of the respective ruling class, which could correctly hint at EU regulations that reduced the welfare of the exploited class in the country. Of course, it was empirically difficult to evaluate the net effect of an EU regulation, comparing the sum of *all* advantages with the sum of *all* disadvantages implied by a regulation, let alone the information processing capacity available to working classes. After the Great Financial Crisis in 2009, the ruling classes, in particular their transnational corporations, recovered surprisingly fast. Many affiliate sub-firms in foreign locations were closed, and production processes were relocated (often outside Europe) and streamlined. The class conflicts in Europe increased, and the tendency of the EU to support European employers rather than their employees necessarily sped up its loss of popularity.

This was the birth hour of a new wave of nationalist, sometimes even already fascist, leaders. Anti-EU policy, anti-migrants policy, return to national values, return to imagined past greatness - this whole strange melange of feelings, rather than empirically justified observations, became the melting pot with which the new right-wing leaders set out to gain parliamentary majorities, set out to destroy the project of European unification.

All this was very visible when Europe's migration crisis occurred in 2015, but in the eyes of most citizens in Europe, the result of the referendum in the UK in 2016 was nevertheless a surprise: 17.410.742 people, 51.9% of all voters, voted to leave the European Union, while 16.141.241 people voted to remain a member of the European Union. In other words, a surplus of 1.269.501 people (the population of Leeds plus Sheffield) was enough to kick the second largest EU country (by GDP) out of the European Union. This has been a clear sign of several things:

- The discontent of the British population with EU policy.
- The helplessness of the administration in Brussels vis-à-vis a process which endangers its own existence.
- The inability of most members of both classes to evaluate the net value of EU membership.
- The strength of influence which visibly uninformed leaders like Nigel Farage can exert on public opinion.
- The chaotic role which amplifiers like the British mass media can play, they are unguided missiles.

In what followed, the surprise of the election day was prolonged by the discoveries that both classes made in the sequel. The exploiting class was embarrassed by how the already existing split into different camps (bankers, remnants of feudalism, aggressive young

investors, dumb small countryside capital) was exposed by the election. What Tony Blair had experienced when he was nicknamed 'George Bush's poodle' now became the fate of conservative leaders: 'Farage's troop of poodles'. This lot, temporarily having lost the distressing glamour of Boris Johnson, could keep itself nevertheless in power due to the self-destructing infights of the British Labour Party.

The British Labour Party, being the largest Labour/social democratic party in Europe till 2025, had followed a steady long-run shift towards the right at least since 1980. This was not different to other social democratic parties in Europe, but what really was different was the stronger turn towards the USA. For many years, and after a short left-leaning intermezzo of Jeremy Corbyn (2015-2020), the membership fell from 560.000 (2017) to 333.235 in 2024 (Germany's SPD: 365.190). Discontented citizens had started to see social democratic parties as an integral part of the exploiting class. Not only were left-leaning intellectuals leaving social democratic parties, but considerable parts of the workforce, former voters, were also either turning their backs on politics or even joining right-wing demagogues.

Perhaps the most surprising feature of the referendum of 2016 was to discover how weak the two old, well-established classes in British society, in fact, were, how confused and ineffective their policies in the face of a raw and uneducated Nigel Farage appeared.

This idea leads directly to the third surprise: The second election of **Donald Trump** as President of the USA in **November 2024**. The personality of Adolf Hitler disappeared physically in 1945; only very few people older than 80 years can remember having seen him. Nigel Farage is still present as a politician on the British far-right. But no other right-wing leader is as omnipresent today as Donald Trump. The fact that he could return to power in 2024 after having been beaten by Joe Biden in 2016 makes this election a very special case.

In this respect, it is worth reconsidering why a certain type of Caesarism is experiencing a worldwide comeback in politics. The obvious sociopsychological reason is a general mixture of feelings between confusion, angst, and helplessness. If a large enough part of a society is drifting into such a state, then there occurs the longing for salvation, for a 'strong man' who can, with one stroke of his hand, change the current misery. But the misery of future followers is only one side of a dangerous combo. On the supply side of 'strong men', it needs a fine-tuned campaign initiated by another group in society, which expects a substantial increase of power if their 'strong man' marionette - with the help of his followers - can rise to a national leader[15]. While the success of the first presidency of Donald Trump could count on a similar type of followers as in 2024, the type of support from the hardcore supporters

[15] These two sides needed for the rise of an autocracy - a confused mass of possible followers and an appropriate leader backed by big money - have been discussed in the context of Europe's future in (Hanappi, 2025b). There, they are dressed up as Skylla and Karybdis.

at the time was very different. In 2012, the fact that he made it was really just a wild guess. Caesarism had been in the air in the USA since Ronald Reagan, but the explicit launch of a frontman like Trump, host of a TV show, and positioning him as an instrument of the largest US corporations, indeed representing explicitly *and only* the military industrial complex of the USA, this was what made the election in November 2024 so special.

With this embarrassingly purist assault on democratic compromise-handling immediately came Trump's personal, unique new style of brute and aggressive escalation. To see that in a democratic election process, a candidate who openly uses this style gets more than 50 % of the votes, even though he has proven that this is not just election rhetoric four years earlier, this is more than surprising. This is shocking.

Three lessons

From a long-run, historical perspective, Fascism as a form of social organisation is a rather young phenomenon[16]. As an active political force, it emerged in Italy[17] and Germany after the end of World War 1. With the ***first of the three surprises***, Hitler's rise to power in January 1930, the ***first set of lessons*** to be drawn can be formulated.

It is necessary *but not sufficient* for the rise of a fascist regime that there is enough ideological confusion in the population, in other words, a stalemate in the interpretative power of existing 'old' political parties. Having lost a World War plus being the victims of a so-far unknown global crisis, the Great Depression was a fertile ground for becoming confused and disoriented. Moreover, the emerging ***mass unemployment*** in 1928 provided the pivotal element for the NSDAP to offer public employment, from becoming a Gestapo member to a soldier.

Parallel to this process, an ***autocratic leader*** had to emerge and, above all, had to be chosen as appropriate for support by a ***majority of the ruling class***. For Adolf Hitler, this had been a dire political fight - there is a good reason why he called his book 'Mein Kampf'. The promise to Aryanize Jewish capital helped him a lot, in particular by combining it with the general scapegoat propaganda blaming Jews and communists, with which he flooded

[16] There evidently also exist approaches that define Fascism as a psychological trait of certain human individuals. Of course, any such individualistic view is unable to explain the rather sudden success of fascist movements in the 20th century. It is more revealing to understand these traits vice versa as consequences of the membership of an individual in a fascist movement.

[17] In Italy the philosophical trajectory of fascism seems to be s1930somewhat deeper, compare (Moiseev, 2024).

the entire *German race*. This type of ***nationalism*** did build an ideological bridge to the just lost WW1: Make Germany great again.

And then there was the essential ***technological ingredient***, the radio 'Volksempfänger VE301', which was the material basis of Hitler's ***mass manipulation mechanisms*** (call them ***MMM***). Even if many technological advances during the second decade of the 20th century blossomed[18], it cannot be denied that exactly this innovation in communication technology was essential for the whole political process during the 1930-ties.

The ***second surprise*** discussed above occurred in a radically different political-economic environment. Therefore, the lessons to be drawn differ somewhat. First of all, the **United Kingdom in 2016** was still an affluent society. One of the trigger elements of the 1930s surprise, mass unemployment, was not present. If one distinguishes the macroeconomic state of affairs from the way in which ordinary people perceive it, then this second surprise can be attributed to the mismatch between the *expected* majority of private opinions of British voters and their actual opinions. For European observers, such an explanation is only straightforward: Europeans have been misinformed about the British. As a consequence, many Europeans concluded, 'The Britons must be crazy!'. From within the United Kingdom, the situation looked different. No single individual can look into the mind of another when they decide in the voting booth. For them, evidently, the process of ***advanced individualisation*** played an important role. For the pro-Europe voters, the surprise was that so few English voters had been able to decipher what economic disadvantages leaving the EU would imply. For anti-Europe voters following Nigel Farage, the positive surprise was that what they had decided individually, had won, and by this fact, had shown that the simple rule: 'Choose what your personal feeling guesses to be the best for you', is shared by most compatriots. 'Feeling defeats rationality' was a consolidating message for them. A few years later, this triumph looked foolish.

As an important lesson for ideological manipulators, the referendum result in the UK signalled that with ***advanced individualisation***, the point of attack to win a democratic election is not mainly the actual economic state of affairs, but rather how the now more isolated individuals perceive it. The already powerful ruling class turned towards even more control via the mass media. For this type of control, democratic mechanisms keeping them within the lines of democratic governance were severely underdeveloped. And in this respect, the ***revolution of information technology*** since WW2 has been extremely helpful for the ruling class. It not only enabled a boost of individualisation, but it also freed central control from national and continental borders. Only the financially strongest and largest

[18] As Vaclav Smil has beautiful described, the rich inventive activities of the second half of the 19th century now were turned into innovations, see (Smil, 2021).

international networks of IT providers could afford this gigantic manipulation machinery. In this perspective, the coalition between Trump and the five Tech-Oligopolists eight years later makes perfect sense.

This leads directly to the ***third set of lessons***. Again, from 2016 to 2024, two deep global crises, the pandemic and the climate catastrophe, have changed the real state of affairs. Their consequences constitute a severe danger for the ruling classes, which have built their dominance on the accumulation of capital stock, including its materialisation as military weaponry. The threefold military industrial complex of the three dominant capitalist systems (USA, Russia, China) consists of a hardware of means of production as well as hardware for destruction, war material. Both are capital, and by applying them, they can generate a surplus. But for turning a material surplus into the form of a *monetary* surplus, which can be used as an *investment*, an increase of the existing capital stock, the output of the production system must be sold. During a global crisis, global demand shrinks. The smaller internal circuit of consumption goods within the exploiting classes cannot compensate for the demand lost by a deteriorating global income distribution, which results from the impoverishment of the poor South. The capital stock caught in the global production system, therefore, is running into the wall of an insurmountable inequality of global income.

Thus, the only way out for the exploiting class starts to be more use of its warfare capital. This can be used directly by leading wars to acquire the territory of others and the means of production located there. Or, it can be used in pre-warfare bargaining, with which a stronger military country forces its opponent to hand over part of its surplus to avoid a military conflict. This is the rationale for ***Donald Trump's feared deal-making style***. Of course, any militarily strong country from time to time has to start a local war to prove that its deal-making strategy is not an empty threat.

Another important lesson, which is closely linked to the strengthening of the military part within the US military-industrial complex[19] is the shift towards military commands substituting institutionalised democratic decision-making. It was once one of the highlights of early bourgeois societies that they enabled a certain degree of *consumer sovereignty*: With the money one has, one is free to buy what one wants. Military equipment is not bought by single families; it needs states to generate demand in this field. Instead of choice and '*free will*', the families in a country have to be forced via taxes to finance a state executive, which then buys the military equipment. This procedure also immediately explains why controlling mass media manipulation is steadily becoming more important. The 'free will'

[19] For Donald Trump the earlier move of Vladimir Putin in the same direction in Russia surely was the example that he now follows. This explains the currently observable fragile camaraderie between Trump and Putin.

behind sacrificing welfare to build up military power and lead wars - of course, dressed in the disguise of an invented '*growing feeling of a need for security*' - is not easy to implant in the brains of ordinary citizens. Producing directly and indirectly for the military sector implies production processes determined by commands and orders issued by a strong state. The earlier praised qualities of market processes vanish in the background[20]. An authoritarian state with a dictating leader implants this hierarchical style for all lower state levels. In the international sphere, this implies the emergence of a vassal structure of states, with the strongest one on top and the military weaker states bound together in a military alliance like NATO[21]. Trump's new trade rules are only one complementary move to transform the military vassal structure into an economic vassal structure too.

The fact of a surprising second term of Trump's presidency makes clear that the role of the president also has changed some basic characteristics. The political leader on top nowadays is less a person who presides over a group of governing ministers, who in turn preside over lower democratic institutions. It is more of a one-man show, often looking like a marionette put forward by the true leaders in the military-industrial complex. This is also true for Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. The qualities needed for such a role are very different to what was needed for a prime minister or president after WW2. The main difference comes from the new task: Building a military-dominated hierarchy, which gives no room for compromise or diverse cultures. This is an intended goal, which is so strange and outdated that it really needs strange and outdated personalities like Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin to carry out the job. Such a leader has to combine disturbing stupidity and obvious lies that border on clownish behaviour with an impudently sharpness of actionism that leaves opponents speechless. It is the unbound dominance of the military apparatus, of the intimidating power of brute force, which enables leaders like that[22].

Evidently, the lessons to be drawn from the third surprise, though it had happened just a year ago, are already very frightening.

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[20] Neoclassical economic theory never was particularly helpful for the capitalist exploitation process. But with the last turn into absolute, global, authoritarian, capitalism it is completely useless to advise policy. See also (Hanappi, 2025c).

[21] In Russia the less powerful military alliance consisting of only six states is the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

[22] Leaders in smaller vassal states are starting to imitate their big masters. From Netanjahu and Zelenskyy to Lukaschenka and Orban, they all follow a similar script; with the difference that they have to truckle if they disturb their big masters' plans.

The Soul of Progress

There has been progress in the evolution of the human species. From a biological point of view, the reproductive success of humans was impressive. There are more humans, and the average human individual today lives longer and with less pain than ever. For the diverse human societies, the ever-existing class struggles now often have acquired something that could be called a more civilised way of conflict resolution. It often only shifts existing contradictions from one battleground to the next one - but on this journey, new social institutions emerge and sometimes social innovations break into new grounds. Is this all that can be said of progress? Certainly not.

As described in previous paragraphs, progress now is meeting difficulties, which need a deep change of many behavioural traits of individuals and the classes they are part of. It is common that difficulties occur if a social system is running well for a long enough time. Every system enshrined in its set of social institutions consists of rigidities, of rules which are the core of its guiding framework. This applies to smaller cultural networks as well as to the global network of the human species. In the long run, move from parallel smaller networks to the global network – that is, in the biological success of the human species, specific limits of smaller social systems often are broken up. Cultural islands have to adjust somewhat, but some of their traits are also creatively incorporated into the more global network. What is now different is that the difficulties of the largest global network cannot be swallowed in an even larger network[23]. We have reached the end of the flagpole of globalisation.

Turning inside to the core logic of the ***capitalist algorithm***[24], substituting it with a more adequate set of social institutions, could open a door to overcome the current difficulties. This will certainly change what is understood as 'progress' too. Progress will be *felt* as the ability to survive well as an ***organic total entity of the human species***. To achieve it, the actions of the different 'organs' of this entity will have to be guided by a flexible and creative *central nervous system*; *flexible response* will be the name of the game. The nucleus of such a central nervous system of humanity is already emerging with the name 'Science', the global class of scientists, compare (Hanappi, 2020).

It is clear that the future new concept of progress, which goes beyond biological progress, is hard to grasp analytically. There are too many heterogeneous construction sites where flexible response is urgently needed, from unequal access to basic needs and education via mass media governance to global energy management. But that this kind of progress is

[23] The idea of Elon Musk to escape to the planet mars is telling. It is the desperate wish to prolong the capitalist growth dream without a change of its inner logic. By running against this rubber wall, the new techno-feudalism tries to return to IT-supported, pre-capitalist command economies of feudalism.

[24] The capitalist algorithm is described in detail in (Hanappi, 2013).

desperately needed is a rather ***universal feeling***. If things go repeatedly wrong – the three elections described above are typical examples -, then before some overarching analytical judgement can be made, there is always a feeling. This feeling is coming from what could be called the ***soul of a society***. It points at what is needed, but not achieved so far[25] – this feeling provides a measure for progress, no religious connotation needed.

'More self-governance!', this is what most communities, from small to global, are feeling that is needed. Such multi-level self-governance, summarised in the seemingly self-negating concept of 'democracy', is a prevalent, common denominator of a dominant universal feeling. Since it is currently only a wish to be realised on a global level, it has to be distinguished from actual and past efforts to bring to light parts of its components. For this reason, it should be called '**Deep Democracy**'.

In the moment, the enemies of Deep Democracy are prevailing; therefore, it needs defending. For the *most radical enemies*, the human species is ready to be divided into two new species: A small group consisting of a superior human race (the 'winners') and a great mass of inferior human individuals (mostly coloured 'losers'), which can be viewed as somewhere in between the superior race and higher animals. It is significant that such a vision resembles rather closely to the vision of classical fascism in the oldest of our three examples. In the 1930s, the victory of Fascists in Germany led to World War 2; now it needs a ***unified defense*** to prevent World War 3.

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[25] In 1931 the satirist Kurt Tucholsky wrote the sentence 'The people misunderstand most things; but they feel most things correctly.'.

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