

The Resurgence of Fascism in the Contemporary World: History, Concept, and Prospective

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journals.sagepub.com/home/crs**Carlos Eduardo Martins**

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Abstract

In this article, we analyze fascism, considering some of the main theoretical debates surrounding the topic, its historical forms, and its temporal insertion in the world-system to propose a conceptual definition which can articulate its central characteristics to concrete historical conjunctures and contingencies, point to future tendencies, and its importance as a phenomenon in the contemporary world. We address its relation to liberalism and conservatism and the forms it assumes in the contemporary world in the United States, Europe, and Latin America.

Keywords

fascism, liberalism, world-system, United States, Latin America

Introduction

The Brazilian elections of 2022 were marked by the centrality of the debate over fascism as an institutional threat to liberal democracy in the country. This discourse gained hegemony among the vast supporters of the candidacy of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and unites a spectrum that goes from an expressive part of the liberal center-right involved in the 2016 coup to broad sectors of the left. The breadth of this alliance and the strong emphasis on its unity encourages, however, a superficial and limited reading of the phenomenon of fascism, which is seen as restricted in the country only to the actions of the *bolsonarista* extreme right, disconnecting it from the historical context that prompted it, the historic bloc that it was founded in, and the dynamics of geopolitical conflicts in which it is inserted. After the decades of the hegemony of liberal thought during the New Republic, which propagated the thesis of Brazilian democracy's high degree of institutional consolidation and its ability to absorb social conflicts, the coup of 2016 struck popular sovereignty directly, restricted the representative system, criminalized social policies through the EC 95, and paved the way for the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. This thesis obscured the class conflicts in Brazil and the overwhelming evidence of the limits of Brazilian re-democratization during the New Republic, as

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well as the economic, political, institutional, and ideological consolidation of the social segments involved in the articulation, management, and legacy of the coup d'état of 1964, despite contradicting legal directives.¹ The absence of transitional justice violated the American Convention on Human Rights of which Brazil is a signatory and the control of the media monopoly, financial capital, and agribusiness over the state violated various articles of the 1988 constitution, even though there have been efforts to remove amendments, like paragraph 3 of article 192, in 2003, which limited real interest rates in Brazil, but was never enacted by a majority decision (6×4) by the Supreme Federal Court (STF), to which the corporatist prerogatives of the judiciary – out of popular control and under strong pressure and lobbying from rentier interests – have contributed.

Liberalism's ideological hegemony has penetrated key sectors of the Brazilian left and the errors in their analysis regarding the configuration of our state and foundations of our democracy disarmed them of the ability to lead in emerging social and political conflicts, facilitating institutional rupture and the subsequent neoconservative turn. Errors in analysis about these disputes and nature of the forces in conflict may lead to ephemeral victories and new setbacks. In this text, we seek to advance a reflection on fascism as an ideology and political force, its resurgence and the risks it poses to Brazil and Latin America in the 21st century. We address the conditions of its emergence, its links with liberalism, with anti-modernist and anti-Enlightenment traditions, its specificities and contradictions as a political form, its central dimensions as a concept that allow us to refer to its historical and contingent variations, as is done with liberalism and socialism, despite the immense diversity of forms in which they appear historically.

Liberalism, Fascism, and the Temporality of the Capitalist World-System

Since the 1980s, fascism has regained relevance in debates throughout the contemporary world, after its colossal defeat in the 1940s, the reconstruction of the European extreme right, driven by opposition to immigration from the periphery and semi-periphery, principally Arab. It was signaled by the creation and strengthening of far-right parties and the pioneering experience of such a party participating in an Austrian coalition government from 2000 to 2005. However, fascism remained relatively contained as a political and ideological force due to the ample leadership of liberal internationalism, which guided US hegemony by asserting its global governance and the unipolarity of the post-Cold War period, subordinating Europe through the strengthening of NATO and its expansion to the east.

Liberal internationalism was principally responsible for the third global wave of democratization analyzed by Samuel Huntington (1991), preceded by the wave established between 1828 and 1926, driven by the echoes of French Revolution and independence movements in the Americas, and then by the wave of 1943–1962, associated with the defeat of Nazi-fascisms and the processes of decolonization and national liberation. The third wave of democratization, which Huntington dates from the Portuguese Carnation Revolution in 1974, in fact begins with the explosion of anti-imperialist social movements against post-war military Keynesianism but was subsumed and appropriated by the neoliberal offense which the United States began to lead with the support of Great Britain and Germany. Both the first and second waves of democratization led to anti-democratic movements and the author does pose the possibility that the process can repeat itself, suggesting an exhaustion and reversal of the third wave. Regardless of the limits of Huntington's model, heavily centered on the European and US experience and in a liberal conception of democracy, and any inaccuracies in periodization, we consider it useful for providing a framework to analyze the cyclical movements and limits of liberalism in driving the reproduction and expansion of the capitalist world-system.

Liberal internationalism bases itself on the ambition of the United States to impose throughout the globe a combination of economic neoliberalism, political liberalism, and geopolitical realism, reserving for itself the asymmetric privilege to function in accordance with its national interests and North American exceptionalism, both in terms of the protection of commercial, productive, financial, and militaristic interests and in the control of international institutions and the use of unilateral actions. To this end, the United States employs its financial, ideological, and financial power. The gold standard of its political doctrine is liberalism with limited social compromises, adjusted in relation to the zone in the world-system. The United States establishes zones of strategic interest, but the universalism on which it bases itself tends to expand and divide the world into free spaces, under its leadership, and totalitarian spaces, to be conquered by their moral and ideological direction, using hybrid wars—sanctions, blockades, ideological and paramilitary articulation of insurrectionary movements—or military interventions. US liberal universalism tends to multiply international conflicts, clashes with geopolitical realism, but is not radically opposed to it, seeking to incorporate and subordinate it to its own leadership. This paves the way for emergence of the concept of regime change, which neoconservative liberals deploy by leaning toward the use of hard power while progressive emphasize the use of soft power. If George W. Bush crafted the failed coup d'état in Venezuela (2002), the successful one in Haiti (2004) and intervened in Afghanistan and Iraq, Obama was associated with the coups in Paraguay and Brazil (2015), intervened in Libya, continued the war in Afghanistan and supported the civil war against Bashar al-Assad. Latin America and the Caribbean—included in the US sphere of regional hegemony since its projection to the Western hemisphere with the Monroe Doctrine, backed by later domination of the Atlantic—are the object of strategies of moral leadership, domination, and containment exercised both by liberal internationalism, in its progressive or neoconservative version, and by realist thinking, which prioritizes maintaining power, puts the liberal creed on a secondary plane, and considers democracy, as a sociopolitical system, part of American exceptionalism.

Despite prioritizing intellectual and moral leadership, liberalism does not rule out institutional rupture against representative political systems through the use of manipulation, fraud or force, since it includes among totalitarian regimes those that Alexis Tocqueville called in *Democracy in America* (2000 [1835/1840]) tyrannies of the majorities. These refer not only to those that prioritize the pursuit of equality to limit the concentration of income and wealth, as the French author characterized them, but also those founded on the basis of large popular majorities which privilege national sovereignty to the detriment of international arrangements shaped by the hegemonic centers of modern world-system. This opens the space for alliances with fascism. Ludwig Von Mises, in his book *Liberalism in the Classic Tradition* (1927), hailed Mussolini with the argument that he saved Europe from barbarism, defined fascism as a Western force, permeated with the civilizing principle of private property against orientalist Bolshevism, and claimed that the difference between liberalism and fascism was not the use of violence, but the degree of centrality which is given to it. For Mises, the victory against Bolshevism could only be completely attained in the realm of ideas, with fascism offering only a provisional and emergency solution. In *Omnipotent Government: The Rise of the Total State and Total War* (1944), if Von Mises tasked himself with equating Nazi-fascism with Bolshevism as expressions of totalitarianism, he also endeavored to demonstrate their differences, highlighting an interest in preserving and promoting private property in the former despite subordinating it to its own control. Friedrich Hayek, in *The Principles of a Liberal Social Order* (1966) and *Law, Legislation, and Liberty* (1982) pointed to what he called *unlimited democracies* as the principal root of modern totalitarianism, a problematic already evident in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), and defended the creation of transitional dictatorships to destroy and reconstitute them, whenever possible and without fixed timelines, as *limited democracies*, restricted by the limits imposed by private property, a euphemism for capitalist accumulation.

To him, individual freedom is the supreme value and democracies is merely one means to attain it, liberalism being the antithesis of totalitarianism, and democracy the opposite of authoritarianism. For this reason, he defended authoritarian liberalism over totalitarian democracies, leading to his collaboration with the dictatorships of Salazar in Portugal, Pinochet in Chile, and the pro-liberal coup d'états that established such regimes in the Southern Cone during the 1960s and 1970s.²

If Hayek, Von Mises, and the members of the *Mont Pellerin* society represented a specific vision of liberalism, they became reflective of the dominant liberal paradigm from the 1980s onwards, as the big bourgeoisie of the central countries came to support neoliberal policies and reforms to reverse the offensive of labor and social movements and to contain or destroy demands for expansion/preservation of social and individual rights. On the other hand, for Latin America and the Caribbean, the difference between progressive and conservative liberals was always very meager, given the link between patterns of dependent accumulation and the superexploitation of labor power, which required logistical and political support for coups d'état, or military interventions, whether successful or not, by reformist liberals like John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Barack Obama, or conservatives like Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and George W. Bush.

The instrumental use that liberalism makes of fascism propels contradictions and conflicts of varying degrees. The use of violence against representative systems and popular sovereignty strengthens patrimonialism and pushes for the state monopoly of politics, threatening the relative autonomy and centrality of business monopolies that liberalism seeks to impose. Norberto Bobbio in *Dal fascismo alla democrazia* (1997) pointed to differences between a conservative and more subversive forms of fascism. The former constitutes an extension of liberalism, seeking to overcome and perfect it when it loses the capacity to face the threat of the Left or socialism. The latter seeks to impose a permanent change in the state and political regime. We can, from Bobbio's framework, propose the existence of two types of fascism: a liberal fascism which seeks to contain the damage that violence produces in the representative system and in the relative autonomy of civil society vis-à-vis the state; and a radical fascism which seeks to substitute a liberal system with a permanent dictatorial regime.

The study of fascism must be integrated with the world-system analysis to inscribe it in the temporality of the capitalist system. Immanuel Wallerstein (1995) distinguished three major ideologies in conflict at the global level from the 19th century onward: liberalism, socialism, and radical conservatism. The strength of capitalist civilization's expansion led to the centrality of liberalism, which was based on the establishment of a representative political system at the national level and the institution of the interstate system at the global level. This centrality made socialism and conservatism, in most cases, mere appendages of liberalism. This author mentions the establishment of hyphenated ideologies—liberal-socialism and liberal-conservatism—which change substantively the organization and functioning of these proposed political frameworks, subordinating their logics to that of liberalism. However, this subordination is not unconditional and in conjunctural moments of weakness in the secular trends of capitalism, liberalism weakens, and conservatism and socialism tend to seek heightened autonomy, coming back to their prior radicalism and breaking with liberal frameworks. Wallerstein sees fascism as the most advanced form of radical conservatism, and it is possible to see its relationship with the liberal order as adaptive and contradictory at several levels, which leads it to vary in the forms it assumes (Wallerstein, 1983). Fascism can survive as a movement and political party under a representative system, gravitating toward a liberal center, and in tension with its original formulation, hence the post-war dilemma of the Italian Social Movement, the National Democratic Party of Germany, Action Française, and the National Front. It can also constitute a dictatorship first of all restricted to the national level, like Mussolini's fascist regime until 1935 or Hitler's Nazi regime until 1936, and the

Latin American states of exception in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s; or it can assume the form of an expansive and imperialist regime challenges the interstate system and liberal hegemony at the global level, threatening a key pillar of the capitalist world-system. The point made by Immanuel Wallerstein and which we keep in our book (Martins, 2020) is that we are entering a period of systemic chaos, of a terminal crisis of neoliberal globalization, which undoes liberalism's centralizing capacity, opening space for the emergence of radical forms of fascism and for the reversal of fascist movements and parties' subordination to liberalism. Such a scenario is made evident by the proliferation of movements and leaders of a fascist nature and their international development challenging liberal hegemony. The recognition of the temporal insertion of such movements and parties into the historical process of the capitalist world-system is analytically necessary and calls into question attempts to classify and abstract extreme right movements and parties as post-fascist or neo-fascist, which end up neglecting the dynamics of the concrete reality in which they are inserted. A return to the central elements of the fascist paradigm is a growing possibility and a conceptual approach to fascism should seek to distinguish its strategic elements from the historically contingent forms which it assumes at different conjunctures, in the same way that is done with the concept of political liberalism to refer to the overarching continuity of the defense of the principles of capitalist accumulation through a representative state and the defense of the interstate system, however varied its forms may have been, from monarchical to republican, with census or universal suffrage, with the annexation of peripheries and semi-peripheries through formal or informal imperialism.

Fascism: Concept and History

In *The Destruction of Reason* (2021 [1954]), Gyorgy Lukács analyzed German fascism as the most developed form of irrationalism, albeit not necessarily the last, and whose primary objective was to destroy the project of human emancipation from class society, be it radical and revolutionary or moderate and progressive, in altering power relations between classes. The strength of fascist irrationalism would thus correspond with the power and scope of the emancipatory project in the world-system which it would seek to exterminate. Possessing an eminently destructive capacity, the history and development of its internal logic would be conditioned by the enemy it seeks to destroy. Its content, form, method, and narrative would be linked to the negation of the ongoing process of social emancipation with the development of the forces of production and the political and social organization of workers. In this way, fascism could thus present itself cyclically in history. Defeated in the class struggle, contained or destroyed, fascism could return the moment this project reconstituted itself.

The interpretation of fascism as an ideology centered on the bourgeoisie's struggle against workers, driven to combat a working class organized around an emancipatory project, was criticized by Nicos Poulantzas (1976), who saw it fundamentally as a solution to intra-bourgeois conflicts when the working class was already defeated. He situated fascism as an alternative project to renew relations of domination during the imperialist stage of capitalism in the context of a general ideological crisis, which includes Marxism-Leninism as a revolutionary vision for the transformation of social reality. This alternative implied the extinction of traditional parties, the imposition of fascist one-party rule, creating new contradictions between the petit bourgeoisie which made up its original political leadership and its commitments to the interests of monopoly capital.

If Lukács' approach overestimated the centrality of struggles between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the advent and affirmation of fascism, by emphasizing contradictions within the bourgeoisie, Poulantzas loses sight of the strategic dimension of conflict between capital and labor. The decline of liberalism, the preferred ideology of big capital, is indeed a key element in the rise

of fascism, but its emergence as a solution to an ideological crisis, rather than the re-establishment of past forms of domination such as monarchy and aristocracy, is related to the existence of a new social class as a threat, the proletariat, which to combat requires a hybrid synthesis between the appropriation of modern institutions specific to liberalism and a return to the past to recreate them in a distinct form, in an attempt to destroy and control social process unleashed by the development of the forces of production. On one hand, the defeat of the most organized sectors of the working class is of critical importance to prevent an emancipatory ideology from filling the ideological void left by the decline of liberalism. On the other hand, it is this threat that fuels fascism and dries the adherence of the principal segments of capital to the political leadership of the small and middle sectors of the bourgeoisie and upper fractions in decline. Regardless of the defeat of insurrectionary movements in Germany and Italy, from 1919 to 1920, the threat of revolutionary socialism in the West lasted throughout the years from 1930 to 1940, until it was controlled by the reemergence of liberalism under the hegemony of the United States, the military occupation of Western Europe, the institution of the Bretton Woods system, and a new pattern of global accumulation, limited geographically by the influence of the USSR and the socialist camp, despite the instability caused by the movements of national liberation in the periphery, in particular in Algeria, Cuba, and Vietnam, which had the ideological effect of creating counterinsurgency doctrines.

In characterizing fascism, we must consider its objectives, class base, and its nature as a regime, political movement, and ideology. We can define fascism as a regime of terror and a dictatorship for the big capital, tied to the creation of monopolies and the fusion of banking and productive capital. Fascism selects socialism, proletarian internationalism, the emancipatory and reformist organization of workers, and the social ascension of the poor as its main enemies. It aims to substitute or subordinate liberalism through the institutional or parallel use of violence to eliminate political competition or restrict it to a secondary plane. It seeks to impose the creation of a totalitarian or corporatist society, to obscure or naturalize class divisions, through the reinvention of integralist folkloric identities, exterminating or persecuting those who threaten or exist outside of their limits through the redefinition of violence and war as virtues. The social bases of this corporatist society are established through principals of faith and conviction and by the primacy of irrationalism over reason. Fascism aims to build a rigidly hierarchical society under the direction of a leader, opposing the democratic principal of majority rule in favor of demands for a natural aristocracy. It strikes out against modernity and the Jacobin constitution of 1793, utilizing the instruments of modernity itself through the appropriation of mass organizations, political parties, and powerful state bureaucracies.

We define a fascist regime as a dictatorship which utilizes terror for the big capital, which is not directly employed in its typical political system, liberalism, which allows bourgeois civil society's control over a strong state and its monopoly on violence to control and subjugate workers, but which is vulnerable to business monopolies because of the subordination of political elites to the mechanisms of electoral competition and to the global capitalist market through disputes over flows of capital and markets. Ernest Mandel used the term political expropriation of the bourgeoisie to characterize fascist regimes, pointing to the central contradiction between the social class for whom they crafted their policies, big capital, and the intermediary which exercises political leadership, the small or medium bourgeoisie. Mandel (1978) rightly criticized the Third International's simplification, in the 13th Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, which defined fascism as a reign of terror led by the most reactionary sectors of finance capital and inscribed itself in the development of the theory of social fascism, which equated fascism with social democracy and traced its origins to Joseph Stalin, Grigory Zinoviev and in 1924 to Rudolf Schlessinger, its most prominent original theorist in the German Communist Party.³ This framework exerted great influence in Marxism and was even maintained by authors such as Georgy

Dimitrov (1972), who was partially responsible for the Communist International's policy shift from that of social fascism to the popular front. Dimitrov asserted that fascism represented the power of financial capital, even though he pointed out that it implied a shift from one form of the state to another, and not just a change in government, as the theory of social fascism suggested. Even an author as sophisticated as Theotonio Dos Santos (1978), who brought a set of pioneering and innovative concepts to the analysis of fascism, defined it as a reign of terror of big capital, enacted by the *petit bourgeoisie*, during the imperialist stage.

The specificity of the fascist regime as a *dictatorship and regime of terror for the big capital* outlines a contradiction in the sphere of politics which is important to highlight and which permits a richer analysis of conjunctures and concrete situations, pointing to contradictions and tensions between fractions and power blocs. The use of a monopoly on political power by the *petit-bourgeoise*, or other sectors declining fractions of capital, constitutes a mechanism for social mobility that provides results which are impossible to achieve through the capitalist market, hence its interest in preserving and expanding it, taking advantage of the structural crisis in capital's system of domination. This contradiction can express itself in varying degrees, depending on historical and geopolitical conditions and the depth of the crisis facing global liberalism. This opens the debate over whether fascism constitutes merely a reactionary and negative regime, subordinated to big capital, and tied to the destruction of the left and the repression of the proletariat's political autonomy, or if it can lead to the establishment of a new global political system. The responses of Immanuel Wallerstein and Ernest Mandel are positive in this respect, suggesting the former the possibility of the establishment of a political empire that would eliminate the interstate system and capitalism as its dominant system; and the latter, based on the experience of Nazi Germany, the replacement of salaried labor with slave labor.⁴ If such a regime could impose a new world-system without exterminating humanity, given the destruction such a feat would imply, remains an open question which we hope history will never answer. Theotonio Dos Santos (1978) also highlights the key contradiction of fascism in dependent countries between its control over the state monopoly and the policies it carries out in favor of primarily foreign big capital through the national state, which could evolve into critical economic, geopolitical, and ideological conflicts.

Theotonio dos Santos points to the importance of distinguishing between fascism's most essential characteristics from its more particularistic, historically contingent, and provisional dimensions. He argues that fascism is an internationalist and expansive ideology, which competes with liberalism and socialism in the world system, regardless of its national and regional specificities. He differentiates fascist regimes and movements, pointing to the relatively autonomy and contradictions of each. In doing so, he gives priority to the former to analyze fascism as a system of power, contradicting the literature influenced by the rise of the most notorious cases in Europe—Italy and Germany—which posed its ideological offensive above its historical evolution and saw in its mass base an element indispensable for its eventual configuration. Dos Santos suggests that fascism reaches its pinnacle as a social movement in its earliest stages of seizing power, but its conversion into a regime implies an increasing distance from its origins. What defines its essence as a system of power is the installation of a dictatorship that suppresses and hallows out a democratic system, transforming it into a plebiscite rite, defends the big capital, uses coercion against labor, and promotes the partial or total destruction of its organs of representation and hard-won rights, persecutes and physically eliminates physically leftists, promotes imperialism and the international assault on socialism. As the regime advances, so does its tendency to express its legitimacy through coercion rather than consensus. Popular support itself is not an indispensable or central element of a fascist system of domination.⁵

Based on his definition of the essence of fascism, Theotonio dos Santos classified the Latin American military dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s as atypical cases, given their condition of

dependency, which limited their base among the petit bourgeoisie as a social movement, due to the superexploitation of labor power that restricted the expansion of this sector, constituting weak fascisms supported by the military technobureaucracy, whose political monopoly of the state apparatus could lead to subimperialist conflicts with foreign capital and imperialism. This was exemplified by the attempt of the Brazilian dictatorship to assume control of the nuclear and computer technology sectors, in its break with the military agreement with the United States, or the military conflict between Argentina's military dictatorship and Great Britain over the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands. The fragility of the fascist social movement of origin limited the reach of Brazilian fascism, and the liberal wings of the 1964 military coup were able to hegemonize the process, reaffirming the Brazilian state's commitment to dependency, which was exacerbated by the imperialist neoliberal turn on foreign debt accumulated during the neo-developmental period of the 'Brazilian miracle'. The author pointed out, however, that the Latin American military dictatorships dismantled in the 1980s were the first stage of a long-term process of fascistization, leveled against a potential democratic reorganization which would call into question key pillars of dependent capitalism, such as the superexploitation of labor (Martins, 2018, 2022). Dos Santos also suggested the increasing involvement of sectors of big capital in this fascist offensive, in the face of a shrinking of the petty bourgeoisie and expansion of the lumpenproletariat. In turn, this involved a tendency for a return of fascism to the core countries after its long post-war defeat, although he mistakenly interpreted the long-term recessionary conjuncture opened in 1967 as similar to the one of 1917 to 1945, considering only variations in the Kondratieff cycle.

From this set of analyses, it is important to consider the following in the formulation of a definition of fascism: fascism is an heir of antimodernist and anti-Enlightenment traditions which emerged in opposition to the French Revolution, but represent a shift in scale and character in its repression of emancipatory projects, since its main target is the destruction of workers' organizations and their struggles against class, imperialist, ethnic-racial, gender, and ecological oppression. They synthesize other forms of anti-liberalism into a specific framework, subordinating aristocratic, medieval, monarchical, and colonial traditions to a modern and repressive state. As a state, it constitutes itself as a *dictatorship for the big capital* in the imperialist period, open to or coupled with political liberalism, which it subordinates and transgresses, through the power exercised by representatives of medium classes and decadent fractions of the bourgeoisie. In the course of its development, the fascist movement is connected, in a contradictory manner, to a mass insurrectional movement, which it utilizes to constitute itself and subject the state to its own hierarchical centralization of the monopoly of violence. Its difference from old Bonapartisms and military coups lies primarily in its scale of organization, not only in its mass party and foreign policy, as suggested by August Thailhemer (2009 [1930]), but also in the repressive apparatus it uses to limit the autonomy of civil society. Fascism develops an irrationalist ideology, based on faith and dogma, which is upheld in the long duration of the imposition of coercion on the libido, the profound vital energy, and a sense of revolt, which it does not unleash, but serves to reinforce the use of violence as part of the ascendancy of a new power elite, as Wilhem Reich (1972 [1933]) argued in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*.

Fascism as a force capable of disputing and attaining state power does not appear by itself in history, but as part of a historic bloc with liberals and conservatives which it aspires to lead. The classical expressions of fascism, in Italy and Germany during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, followed a rise to power which combined a hybridization of violence and liberal institutionality, with the increasing dominance of the former, which was only possible through an alliance with liberals and Catholics. We can point to these main characteristics of fascism during the years 1919–1945: (a) the designation of Marxism, communism, bolshevism, and social democracy as the principal enemies to be eliminated; (b) a visceral rejection of liberal internationalism and its main political

and economic forms, that is, representative democracy and capital untied to the national state. The bourgeois aristocracy which it upheld should be restructured, subordinating it to fascist leadership and purging it of its antinational elements. Antisemitism put these limits on the financial capital class, and circumscribed opposition to ethnic-racial parameters, not class. Financial capital was divided between parasitic and predatory, being antinational and Jewish, and other sectors would be seen as benign and productive, capable of being integrating into national planning and development; (c) corporatism, driven by racism, was used to dissolve class contradictions into a belonging in an integral, national community. This concept of race was defined as much by biology as by cultural and spiritual characteristics. International fascism's need to control populations through the state demanded that race be defined in an abstract, arbitrary, and malleable manner, to include and exclude populations, groups, and individuals in accordance with its contingent political requirements. Inclusion in the national community implied passivity and submission to propaganda, dogma, and obedience. Authors like Alfred Rosenberg (1978 [1924]) defined the national-socialist state as a folkloric rather than national state; and (d) fascism involved an exacerbation of inter-imperialist conflict, culminating in the use of violence and full-scale war against the Soviet Union and the centers of liberal imperialism in Europe, despite its initial pretense to establish an alliance with England and concentrate its forces on the western front against France.

Fascism Today

The contemporary conjuncture is linked to the crises inscribed in the current context of systemic chaos, marked by the crises of capitalist civilization, the hegemony of the United States, and the neoliberal regime of accumulation. In this contest, distinct projects are in conflict with each other. Fascism and socialism tend to break with their subordination to liberalism and enter into dispute over the reorganization of the world system. Fascism increasingly presents itself as an international force, oriented toward leadership over the struggle against socialism, anti-imperialism, empowerment, and organization of workers.

The United States veers toward its transformation into the epicenter of global fascism, driven by the extreme-right that increasingly takes over the Republican Party and organizes itself in civil society, establishing leadership and penetrating large segments of the White working class which is disorganized and concentrated in declining economic regions. US fascism originates from the reaction of the nationally based bourgeoisie and the middle sectors to neoliberal globalization, and the new scales of internationalization, concentration, and centralization of capital it drives. Such reaction finds popular base in the most disorganized segments of workers, unable to formulate an independent class alternative to the extension of the superexploitation of labor power to the core countries, as well as to the resulting inequality and productive decline (Marini, 1996; Martins, 2020). However, the growing loss of its power among the more transnationalized US bourgeoisie, displaced by Chinese competition, drives it closer to a formal imperialist project which seeks to subordinate the global market to the force of the US state. US fascism appeals to racism to forge a Caucasian and Anglo-Saxon national identity, selecting socialist China, revolutionary nationalism, multiculturalism, and Latino, African, and Asian immigration as its main enemies. Through the use of social networks, some segments of the national media, and evangelical Christian fundamentalism, US fascism mounts a strong and irrationalist offensive. In doing so, it adapts the thesis of the great replacement—invented by the Islamophobic French Fascist, Renaud Camus to banish the Muslim population of France—with the final aim of targeting immigration, especially from Latin America and the Caribbean, associating it with a threat to the preservation of US cultural and racial identity. Its tendency toward rupture with liberal order and policies is evident in the assault on the US Capitol, foreign policy that breaks with liberal internationalism, and the scope its struggles

against ‘autocracy’ assume. It seeks to define US interests and select strategic enemies in realist terms, but the unilateralism it establishes, manifested in its claim to charge for military protection, is combined with the extension of coercion to its own coalition of allies, with the aim of intensifying its siege against its opponent, but broadens the scope of conflict. US fascism breaks with neoliberalism on the commercial plane and aims to restrict the circulation of productive capital but maintains the internationalization of finance to reap the benefits of an overvalued dollar. However, it maintains a strong connection with the military industrial complex and, in the face of the eventual weakening of the dollar and that financial bubble that sustains it, can boost military spending and promote war as the basis of a new pattern of accumulation.

European fascism is driven by productive decline, the centralization of capital, and the inequality associated with the neoliberal character of European integration. However, it finds itself limited by the US military occupation and NATO, which it is unable to disentangle from. Rejection of China in an increasingly bifurcated world ends up aligning European fascisms with US leadership, restricting its claims to national autonomy, military sovereignty, and the potential for approximation with a conservative and anti-liberal Russia. Contrary to neo-fascist expectations, the US liberal foreign policy option is to block Europe’s ties with China, preventing rapprochement with Russia as an intermediary country. In the context of the war in Ukraine, Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni, and Victor Orban have all ceded to US leadership. What unites these various European fascisms is a rejection of African and Asian, but primarily Muslim, immigration. Nonetheless, this rejection takes on several forms, including a moderate approximation to some liberal values—driven by LGBT and feminist movements—conceived as part of European civilization in contrast to the Arab or Eastern world, as in the case of Marine Le Pen, or the embrace of directly illiberal and catholic fascisms, such as Georgia Melloni, Victor Urban, and Vox. Limited by its political subordination to the United States, European fascism lacks the strength and ability to confront the liberal political regimes in which it finds itself, but an eventual return of the extreme right in the White House could expand its room for maneuver.

In Latin America, the resurgence of fascism came as a response to the wave of left and center-left movements that emerged between 1999 and 2015, and against the political erosion of the financial, industrial, and primary exporting bourgeoisie that drove the turn to neoliberalism and made them incapable of bearing traditional liberal alternative policies. The global economic crisis negatively affected commodity prices and the international flow of capital from 2013 to 2015, creating space for the destabilizing processes articulated by the internal bourgeoisie and imperialism, resulting in coups d’état and assault on the most radical movements. The coups d’état in Brazil (2016) and Bolivia (2019), preceded by Honduras (2008) and Paraguay (2012), marked the turn to the right that expressed itself in the election of Mauricio Macri (2015), Sebastián Piñera (2018), Ivan Duque (2018), and the rightward shift of the Lenin Moreno government. However, the turn to the right did not establish a stable pattern and had the important exception Manuel Lopez Obrador’s election in 2018. This right seeks to not only destroy the social and political advances domestically but also crush hopes for Latin American integration and the articulation of a geopolitical axis in the Global South, centered around China and Russia.

The paradigmatic case of this resurgence of fascism in Latin America is Brazil. The coup of 2016 and the arrest and revocation of Lula’s political rights, accomplished under the hegemony of the liberal right, required a radical mass support which came to drive the fascist offensive. In turn, the elections of 2018 pointed to the failure of the liberal right and led to Jair Bolsonaro’s massive victory in an atypical electoral cycle. Bolsonaro relied on an emerging bourgeoisie that began to displace the more traditional internationalized bourgeoisie which until then led the Brazilian New Republic. This emergent bourgeoisie was based among the large evangelical enterprises, which came to challenge the Catholic Church, by the government-aligned media which began to compete

for *Rede Globo's* dominance, by agribusiness that once again expanded the rates of ecological destruction and by segments of the retail, drugs, and weapons industries. This bourgeoisie amounted to a business community willing to exchange militant ideological activism for favors and support from the state. Bolsonaro's discourse pointed to communism and the left as enemies which needed to be eliminated, connecting them with state corruption which could only be dealt with through ultra-neoliberalism.⁶ Neoliberalism, however, is in global decline and unable to provide favorable results in terms of economic growth, employment, or the reduction of inequality in Latin America, even more so with declining global flows of capital, international commerce, and the deacceleration of the global economy, hinting toward possible entry into a phase B, the recessionary period of the Kondratieff cycle. Such a contradiction limits fascism's capacity to expand its mass base, leading to its dependence on an eminently negative appeal to mobilize it the enemy, given its inability to present satisfactory economic and social results.

The Brazilian elections and defeat of Bolsonaro demonstrated not only the weakness of fascism but also its organizational capacity to replace and restrict the traditional neoliberal center-right to a minor role in the context of polarization with the left. The liberal aristocracy, with its strong cultural influence, great economic power, and capacity to craft public policies, but lacking competitive electoral leadership, had no alternative but to ally with Lula and the Workers Party to defeat Bolsonaro and resist his attempts to undermine its influence over the state in favor of the emerging bourgeoisie. The liberal aristocracy loses a large part of its willingness to curb the democratic and social project underway in Brazil, as it has very little margin to handle the alternative of destabilization since it runs the risk of fueling fascism, which experienced significant organization under Bolsonaro, raising far dangerous conditions than from 2016 to 2018. On the other hand, despite strengthening, fascism finds itself in a situation of great vulnerability. Its most extreme fractions demanded military intervention to block and destabilize the return of Lula's government to power but its leader finds himself embroiled in a dilemma: if he assumes the route taken by Trump, the lack of a popular majority risks putting him jeopardy vis-à-vis the justice system; however, if he takes a more moderate and diplomatic route, he risks losing his prestige vis-à-vis the most radical wing that supports him. The failed coup attempt on January 8 was marked by hesitation, improvisation, and disarray, resulting in a major failure that put the fascist wing on the defensive.

The lefts also find themselves confronted with a set of restrictions that limit their room for maneuver. Lula opted to broaden his alliances and incorporate segments of the center-right who were linked to the 2016 coup into an antifascist front. This approximation won him few votes. Ties with old PSDB cadre, like Geraldo Alckmin, did not stop Lula and Fernando Haddad—candidates for President of Republic and Governor of São Paulo, respectively—who garnered practically the same share of votes, from losing in São Paulo, demonstrating the high degree of polarization and the disconnection of the voter choice from the individual characteristics of the candidates. The presence of this center-right lead to conflicts with the Lula's government progressive agenda and restricts a program of development committed to the reduction of inequality, national sovereignty, cultural autonomy, sovereign and Latin American integration and solidarity, an orientation toward the Global South, the preservation of ecosystems, an expansion of the state and public spending, reindustrialization, the bolstering of science and technology, and the fight against poverty. It also creates resistance in its confrontation with media monopolies, agribusiness, financial capital, and the crimes of state terrorism and genocide. The liberal base of power continues to support itself on the superexploitation of labor and becomes increasingly incapable of upholding a solid representative democracy, seeking instead to preserve the fascist wing that emerged in the armed forces with following the 1964 coup and limited re-democratization post-1985. Brazil is perhaps the only country in South America that did not establish any process of transitional justice to punish the crimes of state terrorism. Brazil's strategic importance in the region, in turn, leads to the surveillance

and containment of the United States, which has established deep connections with the armed forces of the country and seeks to impede its ascent of a regional leader with similar territorial dimensions and populations, occupying a key geographic space to articulate the countries of the South American subcontinent into converging economic and political processes.

The election of Lula seals the hegemony of a new wave of center-left governments in Latin America. The challenges that Lula will face among the liberal wing of his government, and US imperialism and fascism, should be responded with the ample engagement of the popular movements that support the social advances that he promotes. Education and public health workers can play an important role in promoting socialist and democratic agendas, leading Lula to overcome the limits imposed by the current power structures and by his own centrist tendencies. The centrist approach of the Dilma government led to the defeat of the most combative leaders in these radical sectors, driving their ideological decline and opening space for the right's offensive. Realizing a new pact with organized social movements must be a priority for the new government, actively including them in the popular front to construct a developmental program which enables ideological connection with the large precarious masses. The challenge for the Workers' Party and Lula is not only to affirm a social-democratic and reformist government, but to break the ties to the development of democracy that the new regime, established by the Coup of 2016, has imposed. For this it is necessary to go beyond the current institutional frameworks, articulating a large mass movement that confronts its limits. The accommodation of the Lula government to the current political regime or the failure to overcome it could re-establish a new fascist wave, which, as we have seen, is fueled by the decadence of liberalism and the inability of the left to replace it among the popular masses.

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Notes

1. We defend the thesis that the 2016 coup and its institutional legacy, which violates popular sovereignty and limits the representative system, ended the Brazilian New Republic, establishing a new political regime, defined by the criminalization of social policies, subjected to fiscal austerity by constitutional amendment, and the transfer of the command of monetary policy to the Central Bank, also by constitutional amendment.
2. Milton Friedman, another collaborator of Pinochet's dictatorship, stated in his article *The line we dare not cross* (1976) that the communist risk affected not only Allende's Chile, a poor state in the 1970s, but also the United Kingdom itself, much richer and with a long liberal tradition. The threat of destruction of freedom, for the author, comes from the pressures of the majority to increase public spending (Friedman, 2017 [1976]: 96).
3. See the article by Lea Haro (2011), 'Entering a Theoretical Void: The Theory of Social Fascism and Stalinism in the German Communist Party'.
4. 'In the extreme form which it took on especially in Germany during the Second World War, fascism passes from the militarization of labor to the suppression of free labor itself, to a return to slave labor on an ever-widening scale. The "economic laws" to which this work responds are specific laws which no longer have anything in common with the laws of capitalist economy [. . .] This means that, in the framework of a political dictatorship, the last phase of capitalism tends to become a slave state. And so it happens since competition disappears also from the labor market, a fact of crucial importance'. (Mandel, 1978 [1962]: 201)

5. In his formulation of the doctrinal foundation of fascism, Mussolini predicted the role of the individual to grow ever more reflective of the state, in relation to what he called the complexity of civilization, with an increasingly restriction of individual liberties and transferal of the will of the mass to the top leader:

We were the first to affirm, before demo-liberal individualism, that the individual exists only insofar as he is within the state and subject to the state's demands, and that as civilization assumes more and more complex features, individual freedom becomes more and more restricted. (Mussolini, 1932)

6. Jair Bolsonaro represents the segments of the military dictatorship for big capital, established between 1964 and 1985, that did not accept re-democratization, and whose greatest expression was Sylvio Frota, Minister of the Army, who opposed the political opening, tried to organize a military uprising, and was dismissed by then President Ernesto Geisel in 1977. The Brazilian military dictatorship crystallized four currents in the armed forces: the liberal wing, called 'Sorbonne', which was organized around the leadership of Generals Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco and Ernesto Geisel, former Presidents of Brazil, and Golbery do Couto e Silva, the main ideologue of the 1964 Coup, and understood liberal democracy—restricted by anti-communism, and subordinated to a greater or lesser degree to US imperialism—as a long-term national objective, accepting the transitional dictatorship and the instrumental use of fascism to prepare it; the wing organized initially around the leadership of Marshal Artur da Costa e Silva and later of General Emilio Garrastazu Médici, also former Presidents of Brazil, that broadened and deepened the use of fascism, increasing its elasticity, being called 'hard-line', but that converged with the first, accepting the initiative of the international and internal bourgeoisie for the re-establishment of the autonomy of civil society and of more solid mechanisms of political representation; the one expressed by Generals Afonso Augusto de Albuquerque Lima, Costa e Silva's interior minister, and Hugo de Abreu, Geisel's military chief of staff, being the less organized and systematic, that leaned toward state capitalism and, upon realizing the impossibility of making it viable in the context of the military dictatorship for big capital, broke with it; and finally that represented by Sylvio Frota (2006), who had to manage internally the dependency and the link with the most neoliberal and conservative factions of North American imperialism, not accepting pressures from the liberal bourgeoisie and the democratic movement.

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