

Argentina: Is Milei a fascist threat?

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The majority of the socialist left opted to abstain in the second round of elections on Sunday 19 November in Argentina, arguing that Javier Milei is not an expression of a fascist movement. But that is no reason to shirk the task of confronting the far right. [Jacobin AL]

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Argentina is experiencing days of extreme political tension. There is no workplace, family or group of friends without debate and concern. Anguish and anxiety are felt in the atmosphere on the streets. Meanwhile, the Marxist left is in the midst of a controversy that conceals its own “crisis of representation”: the left-wing voter is shocked because most of the Trotskyist parties, grouped in the Frente de Izquierda - Unidad (FITU) (Left Front - Unity (FITU)), decided to be neutral in the second round that could bring the far right to the head of the state institutions.

Ordinary people, on the other hand, seem to have a good understanding of what is at stake. And they sprang into action to try to avert catastrophe. Already in the first round of 22 October we saw a defensive reaction of the working class, which was expressed in the recovery of Peronism and the stagnation of Milei. A militant reaction from civil society was set in motion: people getting on public transport to explain the danger posed by Milei, handwritten posters taped to the walls, makeshift tables in the streets, small rallies and demonstrations in different neighbourhoods.

For a few days now, we have been witnessing an intense mass movement, mostly spontaneous and micro-political. An impromptu popular election campaign. However, the majority of the Marxist left remains oblivious to this mobilization and expresses itself equidistant in the great political struggle underway. At the heart of the FITU's argument is the view that Milei is not a fascist. Let's look at the issue.

The Far Right and Fascism: A Global Issue

The debate on fascism is once again at the centre of international controversies as a result of the growth of the far right around the world. Milei's case in Argentina was no exception.

However, the discussion around fascism at times seems to hinder the analysis of the contemporary

far right. It is easy to observe, on the one hand, an indiscriminate inflation in the use of the term. There seems to be a certain intellectual laziness among those who can see in today's extreme right nothing more than the simple repetition of a political phenomenon that owes too much to the exceptional peculiarities of the interwar period: the decomposition of the state monopoly of violence, the brutalization of societies as a result of the war, the economic depression, the crisis of liberal democracy, the revolutionary threat coming from the working class.

Many aspects of classical fascism are not repeated in any movement today: totalitarian-corporate states, mass parties such as the German NSDAP, paramilitary groups such as the Italian Blackshirts or the German SA. These differences are obvious, and no serious analyst proposes such a mechanical transposition. Hence the new terms that try to capture similarities and differences with the interwar period: neo-fascism, post-fascism, radical right and so on.

However, there is an opposite error, which consists in referring to the differences with fascism between the wars in order to reject any comparison and any validity of this political phenomenon. This symmetrical error shares with the previous position the underlying idea that the analysis of classical fascism is useful only in the case of simple repetition. In my view, since the interwar period provided a unique precedent for reactionary mass movements acting both inside and outside constitutional institutions, and given that we have a wealth of theoretical studies and strategic lessons on this subject, "the lazy thing to do," as Ugo Palheta wrote, "is to deprive yourself of this comparative study."

But it is even more important to look at this issue from the point of view of its practical and strategic consequence: if we look to the fascism of the 1930s as a yardstick by which to measure a threat to democratic rights, we are setting the bar too high and thus disarming the left in confronting the real and current threats to democratic freedoms.

What was fascism?

Classical fascism consisted of a particular kind of authoritarian reaction. In a previous text we stated that "it differs from other reactionary or authoritarian movements in that it puts on the garb of rebellion (against politicians, finance, elites, etc.), and this allows it to capitalize on social frustrations of different kinds (with the economy, with repressive cultural norms)." Fascism had the capacity to bring together a reactionary policy with a mass movement. It thus gave rise to a "counter-revolution from below" that ultimately consisted of promoting a physical clash between one sector of the population and another, at a time when the authority and repressive capacity of the state were notably weakened. Fascism, Hannah Arendt asserted, was "the temporary alliance of the mob and the elite."

This difference with other authoritarian movements was perceived by the most lucid Marxist analysts contemporary to historical fascism. Togliatti defined it as a "reactionary regime of the masses" as he observed the great mass mobilization that accompanies its rise, and which takes the form of a "plebeian rebellion" against the "elites." Trotsky wrote that "in the epoch of the decadence of bourgeois society, the bourgeoisie needs . . . a 'plebeian' way of solving their problems."

In fact, fascism saw itself as a "revolution against revolution": a "total mobilization of society," especially of the petty bourgeoisie impoverished by the economic crisis, to prevent the revolutionary mobilization of the working class. Because of these peculiarities, fascism differs from other authoritarian movements, such as military dictatorships.

A second very distinctive feature of fascism, and one that has been increasingly studied in recent

decades, is the enormous political and state autonomy that it was able to deploy. The theory that fascism was an instrument of big capital against the workers' revolution, which was the official doctrine of the Stalinized Communist International, has been rejected by almost all subsequent academic literature. But we could say that it was also partially rejected by the writings of the most lucid Marxists of the interwar period, who already identified political autonomy as a central factor: Guerin, Trotsky, Gramsci, Togliatti, Bauer, Tasca, Rosenberg. Trotsky said:

The decadent bourgeoisie is incapable of maintaining itself in power by the methods and means of its own creation (the parliamentary state). But the established bourgeoisie does not like the fascist way of solving its problems either, because clashes and riots, although in the interests of bourgeois society, also entail risks for it. This is the origin of the antagonism between fascism and the traditional parties of the bourgeoisie.

However, despite the acuteness of the analyses and intuitions, none of them managed to completely elude the instrumental conception. This is ultimately a consequence of the fact that the instrumental conception of the state was long hegemonic in Marxism. It was not until the 1970s that there was a theoretical debate that significantly advanced the Marxist theory of the state and made it possible to break with rudimentary instrumentalist conceptions. One of the favourite objects of study to assess the autonomy of the capitalist state was precisely fascism.

Nicos Poulantzas, one of the protagonists of this renewal of the theory of the state, devoted himself in his work "Fascism and Dictatorship" to examining the position of the Third International in relation to fascism. In this analysis, he questioned both the instrumentalist and economistic perspective and the ultra-left politics that derived from this conception - the so-called "third period" or "class against class" policy, which consisted of putting an equal sign between reformists and fascists and rejecting defensive alliances against fascism. Poulantzas highlighted the political autonomy of the fascist movements, showing their contradictions with the "monopoly capital" of which they were supposedly their instrument.

Ernesto Laclau, participating in the same debate on the theory of the state, in his excellent work "Fascism and Ideology", went in the same direction. Reviewing the typical argument of capitalist financing of fascist gangs that would supposedly prove that these were "the preferred formula of big capital," he writes: "Monopoly capital maintained alternative policies until the last moment: in Germany the conjunction brought about by Schacht's intermediation took place belatedly, when Nazism had come to constitute itself by its own means as an alternative power, and in Italy the industrial sectors thought, until the very eve of the march on Rome, a political solution through Orlando, Giolitti, or, especially, Salandra was possible, in which the fascists occupied only a subordinate place."

Contrary to what conventional theory suggests, there was not an instrumental relationship between fascism and the ruling classes but a process of mutual adaptation and limitation. The bourgeoisie always prefers, first of all, some form of pluralist regime, typically a parliamentary republic, where it can exert decisive influence on the political system without depending on the personal leadership of a caudillo or taking excessive risks. However, in critical situations, big capital tends to adapt and take advantage of the benefits that an authoritarian regime of exception can offer, while at the same time seeking to control its excesses and avoid unnecessary risks.

Finally, it is important to highlight a third point. Fascism was never implemented abruptly, but was the result of a political process and dynamic that developed over a considerable period of time. That is to say, the implementation of fascism always implies a process of fascistization that necessarily goes through mediations, transitions, leaps and ruptures. Fascism is not adopted overnight because it is not a button that the bourgeoisie presses in crisis situations, as instrumentalist theory seems to

believe. Fascism was not an instrument or an epiphenomenon of the needs of capital, but the product of a complex and autonomous process, where ideological questions, political dynamics, and even unexpected accidents converged.

This processual dimension also makes it possible to keep in mind the difference between a fascist current and a fascist political regime. A fascist political current aims to move towards an authoritarian political regime, but its access to state power does not necessarily mean that it succeeds. Moving from access to government to regime change requires shocks, leaps, and ruptures whose outcomes cannot be defined in advance. For this reason, too, any fascistization of a political regime is a more or less protracted political process, not an immediate act.

Keeping this in mind serves to avoid summary and definitive characterizations of today's far right. Its nature is not something definitive, but unstable, disputed, and ultimately the product of political struggle. If the far right did not manage to fascistize, it is, to a large extent, a political conquest. Bolsonaro's failure in Brazil is illustrative: a neo-fascist current came to power but managed to be blocked by the unitary defensive response of the left and the working class.

Trotsky without isms

The reaction of the Communist parties of the 1930s to the fascist danger led, in Trotsky's words, to "the most tragic page in modern history": Hitler's rise to power, with so little resistance in the country with the largest, best organized, most cultured and most politicized working class in Europe. Stalinist policy consisted in placing an equal sign between fascism and social democracy ("social fascism") and opposing any defensive alliance of the working class as a whole in the face of the reactionary threat. And in characterizing a future National Socialist government as a small interlude to proletarian revolution ("after Hitler, our turn").

Very few voices opposed the criminal policy of Stalinism within the Marxist left. Among them, two stood out that developed parallel but disconnected efforts as a result of loneliness and isolation: Antonio Gramsci from Mussolini's prison and Leon Trotsky from the Turkish island where Stalin had exiled him. In the words of Perry Anderson, Trotsky's writings on fascism "have no parallel in the annals of historical materialism" and "constitute the only direct and elaborate analysis of a modern capitalist state in all of classical Marxism." Anyone who has taken the time to explore Trotsky's analyses, warnings, forecasts and political indications in that period cannot help but be struck by the acuteness of his interpretations and the accuracy of his predictions. An exceptional theoretical heritage that, however, does not seem to be well valued by a large part of the currents that claim its legacy.

It is difficult to summarize Trotsky's approach in a few lines. It should be noted that he put his utmost effort into combating, at the same time, the equal sign that the Stalinists put between reformism and fascism and the class conciliation of Social Democracy. He counterposed the tactics of the "united front" that the Communist International had elaborated in the 1920s and differentiated both social democracy from fascism and the different bourgeois options from each other. Hence the famous quotes about Brüning and Hitler to which he often returns: "We Marxists regard Brüning and Hitler, together with Braun, as component parts of one and the same system. The question, which one of them is the "lesser evil," has no sense, for the system against which we are fighting needs all these elements. But these elements are momentarily involved in conflicts with one another and the party of the proletariat must take advantage of these conflicts in the interest of the revolution."

And then he added: "There are seven keys in the musical scale. The question which of these keys is

“better”: Do, Re or Sol is a senseless question. But the musician must know when to strike and what keys to strike. The abstract question as to who is the lesser evil: Brüning or Hitler – is just as senseless. It is necessary to know which of these keys to strike. Is that clear? For the weak-minded let us cite another example. When one of my enemies sets before me small daily portions of poison and the second, on the other hand, is about to shoot straight at me, then I will first knock the revolver out of the hand of my second enemy, for this gives me an opportunity to get rid of my first enemy. But that does not at all mean that the poison is a “lesser evil” in comparison to the revolver.”

Admittedly, this did not imply that Trotsky supported Brüning electorally. This was one of the few arguments put forward by Juan Dal Maso of the PTS, in response to an article of mine about the irruption of Milei and the tactics that the left should follow. His brief text follows the typical combination of avoiding the core of the debate and adding personal disqualifications, a distinctive feature of what we could call sectarian literature. It is true that Trotsky did not support Brüning, but it is necessary to understand the whole of his reasoning in order to give it its precise meaning. Trotsky questioned the Social Democrats for supporting the Brüning government electorally and politically, as he foresaw that the situation was evolving towards polarisation. According to his analysis, this polarization was going to lead to a revolutionary offensive, which would only be possible through the united action of the working class (Communist-Social-Democratic), or, otherwise, in the victory of fascism.

In this picture, Brüning’s government could only be an ephemeral government. To support it was to partake of the illusion that it served as a blockade to fascism, when the real way to confront fascism was to unleash the strength of the unified working class that could only emerge from concerted action by Communists and Social Democrats.

What is important about this for our discussion? Trotsky at no time identifies electoral support with political subordination. That’s not the point. That is not the consequence of their refusal to support Brüning. To understand his tactical position, you have to understand his overall understanding of the situation, regardless of whether he was right or wrong. It follows from his differentiation between Brüning and Hitler that Trotsky fully understands the difference between a fascist political regime and one that does not (although, let us remember, he regarded the Brüning government as a “bureaucratic dictatorship”). When we distinguish, in our own conjuncture, the “small daily portions of poison” from the “revolver” calling for a vote against the far right, Dal Maso replies that this would be the equivalent of calling for a vote for Brüning. Dal Maso, in fact, is incapable of giving concrete meaning to the distinction made by Trotsky.

Trotsky understood perfectly well both the importance of a presidential election and that voting does not imply political subordination. As an example of this, it suffices to refer, as Rolando Astarita pointed out in a recent text, to the fact that Trotsky did not advocate blank votes or abstention in the face of the Spanish Popular Front in 1936 (which did not confront fascism, which would only appear later with Franco’s coup, but the conventional right!). Also, in 1936 Trotsky questioned the Independent Labour Party for refusing to give electoral support to Labour against the Conservatives (as Lenin had recommended years earlier to the young British Communist Party).

If it’s not fascism, then what?

These last examples take us to the heart of our polemic. We will discuss later the relationship between Milei and fascism, but we don’t need to go that far. The central question is more elementary: Do we only resort to Trotsky’s suggestion of the united front or, more generally, to unitary defensive policies, when we are faced with a fascist threat? And what do we do when we

confront military dictatorships? Or phenomena such as Fujimorism (or others like Bukele or Erdoğan today), which accede to government by legal means and transform the political regime from the inside while maintaining the external appearance of constitutional democracy? as in the case of Thatcherism? Is there any point in saying “this is not fascism”? The question answers itself.

The use of physical coercion, the stifling of democratic freedoms, the authoritarian hardening of states does not necessarily depend on the implementation of a fascist regime or a change of political regime. This is obvious. The use of violence is, of course, a permanent resource of class domination. And its intensification to inflict a long-term defeat on the working class can take all sorts of forms, including a wide range of options in between on a spectrum from the authoritarian hardening of liberal democracy to a fascist regime. Will we treat all forms of authoritarianism routinely until fascism appears with all the features of the interwar period?

Let's see how another PTS author, Fernando Rosso, tried to argue the point. In a recent text, Rosso quotes Palmiro Togliatti: “First of all, I want to examine the error of generalization that is ordinarily made in the use of the term ‘fascism.’ It has become customary to use this word to designate every form of reaction. When a comrade is arrested, when a workers’ demonstration is brutally broken up by the police... on every occasion, in short, when the so-called democratic freedoms enshrined in bourgeois constitutions are attacked or violated, one hears shouting: ‘This is fascism! We are in the midst of fascism!’ (...) But I do not understand what advantage this can bring us, except, perhaps, as far as agitation is concerned. But the reality is something else. Fascism is a particular, specific form of reaction; and it is necessary to understand perfectly what it consists of in its particularity.”

As in the case of Gramsci's reference to the “hegemonic tie,” which we discuss in another text, when Rosso turns to Togliatti he does not see the consequences of the reasoning he uses. If fascism is only a form of reaction, only a way in which so-called democratic freedoms can be “violated,” why do we reserve unitary defensive politics for that form alone? What do we do in all other cases? The united front is valid if we were facing fascism, what if it is another variant of the far right?

With regard to the classics in general, and Trotsky in particular, it is simpler and more profitable to try to understand the way of reasoning than to look for literal interpreters of the roles of the past. When studied in a scholastic way, the letter is prioritized over reasoning, and that ultimately prevents us from understanding both the spirit and the letter. Trotsky writes with a specific form of reaction in mind, which was fascism. He opposes a policy of defensive alliance with reformism. In order not to have a romanticized image of the Social Democracy of that time, let us remember that Trotsky defined it, “despite its working-class composition” as “an entirely bourgeois party, run under ‘normal’ conditions in a very skilful way from the point of view of the aims of the bourgeoisie.” It was the party of Noske and Grzesinsky, responsible a few years earlier for the murders of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. Trotsky writes about fascism, but that does not mean that the field of application of his reasoning needs Hitler, Hilferding and Thaelmann to be personified before our eyes. They are useful insofar as we understand their reasoning and method and as long as we avoid analogies which are too hasty.

The underestimation of the political-electoral moment

Let us proceed to the next point of the reasoning of our polemicists. While the PTS unambiguously claims that Milei represents a “hyper-reactionary” project, what is it willing to do to prevent it? This is where another central argument appears: the idea that the extreme right is fought in the streets and not at the ballot box. A few hours before the polls indicate whether a far-right government takes over one of the main countries in the region, this argument is outlandish. But let's try to take it

seriously and follow the logic of his argument.

The PTS says in all its communiqués something that can be summed up in what Guillermo Pistonesi wrote: “Marxists understand that revolutionary changes and eventual counterrevolution can only be defined through an open class struggle and not with an election.” This statement combines a truism with a ridiculous idea. Of course, for revolutionary Marxism the class struggle is the ultimate force that settles major political events. But does this mean that a presidential election where the far right can come to power is irrelevant? Does the outcome of such an election in no way affect the class struggle? Does Pistonesi find any precedent in the vast Marxist literature for such an extravagant statement? Positions that ignore the election result are not deduced from Marxist literature, at least not from the tradition that goes back to Lenin and Trotsky. In any case, it is closer to autonomist and anarchist approaches or, within Marxism, to the exotic and distant Bordigist tradition.

This idea doesn’t seem improvised by a single slip. In a recent text by Gabriela Liszt and Matías Maiello, the PTS describes its understanding of the united front tactic. I don’t want to go into too much quotation because it is clear from reading the article that the united front for these authors is reduced to street fighting and, more specifically, to physical clashes against fascist gangs. In other words, for the PTS, the united front does not extend to the electoral question. That is why they constantly oppose class struggle and elections (is it worth asking what the PTS is doing when it intervenes electorally if not by taking the class struggle to that terrain?). In other words, in a mental exercise, if there had been a second round in 1933 between the SPD and the Nazi Party, the PTS would have defended abstention, because any other option would have implied political subordination to social democracy. And, at the same time, it would have called for common action by the SPD against the physical threat posed by the Nazis.

There was a certain enthusiasm among the “people of the left” when Myriam Bregman stated that “Massa and Milei are not the same” in a radio interview. The PTS takes it upon itself to repeat this phrase in all its documents. However, not to put an equal sign between the two but not to draw the practical conclusions from this distinction is to enter the realm of triviality: nothing equals nothing, as Leibniz’s metaphysics demonstrated in the seventeenth century. In the end, it doesn’t change much. It is a way of not getting involved in the struggle against the extreme right or, to use Trotsky’s expression, of “capitulating without a fight.”

Is Milei a fascist?

As we have tried to show, it is not necessary for Milei to represent a fascist threat to oppose him with a unitary defensive policy. It is enough that he represents a reactionary, Thatcherite and authoritarian response to the Argentine crisis. Milei hypothesizes a potential evolution towards a form of authoritarian Bonapartism within liberal democracy, with the aim of facilitating the implementation of neoliberal shock therapy. This should be enough to know how to orient yourself. Now, what is the relationship between Milei and fascism? I will point out some aspects of Milei—and in some cases of the global far right—that raise some politically relevant relationships with classical fascism.

The increasingly popular character and capacity for social mobilization of the global far right presents a significant symmetry with the interwar period. Former working-class strongholds are beginning to turn towards positions of this kind, such as support for Trump in the North American rust belt or the penetration of Le Pen in the deindustrialized working-class north of France. This shows the breakdown of conventional relations between the popular classes and their traditional political representations.

It is true that classical fascism was based mainly on the petty bourgeoisie, but on a “plebeian” petty bourgeoisie, economically ruined by the crisis. A conventional petty bourgeois does not get involved in paramilitary gangs, but rather makes money from his liberal profession or his small business. And it also grouped behind it popular sectors from various sociological categories, thus consolidating a popular and mobilized base of support.

This popular and exalted base allows the extreme right to increasingly show a great capacity for social mobilization. Of course, there are no paramilitary gangs at the moment, but there is an increase in mobilization, mass politicization and an ability to take the initiative, in many cases, violently. This translates into the ability to organize activist structures that put pressure on the political system (as we saw in the assaults on the Capitol in Washington and Brasilia). This popular base of combat is an additional force that the far right can weigh on in its competition with the traditional right.

In Argentina, Milei’s activist capacity is inferior to that of *Bolsonarismo* or Trumpism. But during the election campaign, especially when they felt safe because of the election result and the reactionary upsurge, we already witnessed their ability to embolden small neo-fascist groups, which began to conduct small attacks against symbols of human rights or their organizations, configuring a climate of intimidation towards the left that anticipated the future. Can anyone even doubt that this intimidation would increase tenfold — as it did with Trump and Bolsonaro — if the far right controlled state power? You have to be blind to deny it. Therefore, a radicalization of extra-parliamentary groups cannot be ruled out in the event of Milei’s victory.

As it is not difficult to see, there are no rigid or stable boundaries between the right, the far right and fascism. As Alex Callinicos puts it, “it is not so much a question of determining what label to put on particular formations, but of understanding the contemporary far right as a dynamic and rapidly changing field of forces.”

Authoritarian radicalization is one of the hypotheses, as is its counterpart, that it enters a process of bourgeois normalization, adapting itself to the conventional logics of politics and becomes a slightly harder version of the traditional right. The result is open. And we are not observers of the situation, but active agents who must fight the extreme right in order to prevent an authoritarian radicalization that, if it comes to power, could take a qualitative leap. That goes for Javier Milei as well.

On the other hand, in relation to the autonomy of politics and the state that characterized classical fascism, there is another element here that is worth replenishing. As in the case of Le Pen’s passage to the second round in 2002 or the rise of Trump in 2016, the centre of economic power seems to reject the candidacy of Javier Milei. However, the attitude of the business community and imperialism is more ambiguous than it initially seemed, especially since the agreement with Macri and a sector of PRO was finalized. This was anticipated by none other than *The Economist*, that international platform where the ruling classes dialogue with themselves. In one of its latest issues, the weekly called for a coalition of the right and the extreme right in Argentina in its cover article.

On the other hand, while Biden supports Massa, Trump, who has a high chance of being the future president of the United States, backs Milei. However, it remains true that the core of economic power still perceives Milei as a dangerous venture. There are some sectors of the left that are too enthusiastic about this distrust or that have even made it the definitive criterion for positioning themselves tactically: see the pronouncements of the Partido Obrero (Workers’ Party). They would do well to review the history of the 1920s and 1930s or to remember Trotsky’s warning when he wrote in a text maliciously called “Learn to Think: A Friendly Suggestion to Certain Ultra-Leftists”: “The policy of the proletariat is not at all automatically derived from the policy of the bourgeoisie,

bearing only the opposite sign – this would make every sectarian a master strategist.”

This does not mean that Milei represents a fascist threat for the time being. But his victory will be a step forward in a process of authoritarian radicalization of the state with an uncertain destiny. It is not fascist, but neither is it a conventional bourgeois party. And that merits a tactic that responds to an exceptional situation.

Digression: Democracy vs. Capitalism

Regardless of the election result, the left must face a long-term debate about its relationship with the democratic conquests of the previous period and, more generally, with the institutions of liberal democracy. This is not just an academic exercise. We are in a historical cycle where there are many signs indicating we are moving towards an authoritarian hardening of states. In the late 1970s, Poulantzas coined the term “authoritarian statism” to describe the hypothesis that an authoritarian distortion could emerge from within the liberal democratic regime. This distortion would not be presented as a “regime of exception,” but rather as a “normal” political regime, which would be based on “a radical decline of the institutions of political democracy and a draconian and multiform reduction of formal so-called freedoms.” This hypothesis is set for the future, and the global rise of the far right is one of its signs.

The fall of the so-called “socialist camp” at the end of the 20th century left the left stripped of alternatives considered socially viable. Much is written on a daily basis about the need for the left to recover a dimension of the future. On this absence of horizon, the extreme right is also advancing in the popular sectors, that is, individualistic and desperate solutions to the crisis prevail. Reconstructing the hypothesis of a society superior to capitalism is a long-term strategic task. But to achieve this, we must stop thinking of socialism as an “absolute beyond” that we can only approach through an exercise in utopian imagination.

A society stripped of class domination exists embryonically in our present, fundamentally as a product of popular struggles that have achieved conquests and reforms. The relationship between the archaic and the new is more complex and useful than an imaginative exercise. Imagining a new society begins with the conservative attempt to preserve what is worth preserving: democratic freedoms against the increasingly authoritarian evolution of capitalism, social rights against the bourgeois offensive, the outsourcing of sectors of the economy, such as public health, against the drive for privatization.

In every popular conquest, a possible future society breathes with difficulty. From the defensive eagerness to preserve conquests will emerge the offensive struggles for a new society. This approach, as is obvious, is opposed at the apex to the conception that underlies the book published by Gabriel Solano, the main leader of the Partido Obrero, entitled *La democracia fracas* (“Democracy Failed”).

In “The Night of the Proletarians”, Jacques Ranciere describes the horizon of expectations of the nineteenth-century working class: A “workers’ vanguard which thinks and acts not to prepare for a future in which the proletarians would reap the legacy of a large capitalist industry formed by the dispossession of their labour and their intelligence, but also to prepare for a future in which the proletarians would reap the legacy of a large capitalist industry formed by the dispossession of their labour and their intelligence, but also of the proletariat, but to stop the mechanism of that dispossession.” That is to say, the workers’ struggles of the late nineteenth century did not draw their strength from the utopian dimension of socialism, but from the defence of identities and forms of labour that were being eradicated by the overwhelming extension of capitalist labour exploitation

(artisanal labour, fundamentally). From these initially defensive struggles, which longed for a world that was not going to return (that of the self-employed artisanal producer), the union between the workers' movement and socialism emerged.

In the relationship between capitalism, democracy and socialism perhaps we should conceive of a similar dialectic: only the anti-capitalist struggle can defend the civilizational conquests of our time (rule of law, civil liberties, political rights, pluralism) from the threat posed by the authoritarian evolution of capitalism.

The most ignoble passivity

Let's go back to our imminent juncture. In a few days, we face a decisive presidential election, both for Argentina and for the region. The great novelty of the last electoral period was the emergence of a large democratic social movement, in the form of small, decentralized campaign actions. This social movement is a fulcrum for the struggles to come, whatever the election outcome on Sunday. It allows us to rediscover collective action, confidence in our own strength, and the social and democratic reserves that characterize Argentine society, despite the deterioration of the situation in recent years. The absence of most of the parties of the Frente de Izquierda (Left Front) in this mobilization is a major strategic error.

Rubén Sobrero, the most important trade union leader of the FITU member parties, is a member of the only FITU party that called for a vote for Massa to prevent the victory of the extreme right. He recently declared in an interview: "I will continue to be an opponent of Massa, but I have to call for the halting of those who demand dictatorship." This aroused a current of immediate sympathy that included the social base of Peronism. It is a small example of the transcendental role that the FITU could have played if all its activist forces, mainly through its charismatic presidential candidate Myriam Bregman, had taken their place in the fight against the far right.

It wouldn't even have been necessary to make an explicit call to vote for Massa. A slogan such as "no votes for Milei" (as the French Trotskyist left used more than once against Le Pen) was enough to occupy a militant place in the field of struggle against the extreme right and to connect with the social movement and sectors of the working class concerned about the threat that looms over them. This would have greatly increased the authority of the Frente de Izquierda and would have made it possible to establish a bridge with the popular base of Peronism.

But the FITU's attitude generated the opposite: it buckled up the base of Peronism with its leadership. Let us recall something central to the classic tactic of the "united front": it was not only a question of defensive unity with the reformists, but also of a policy for the "conquest of the majority," that is, for increasing the influence of the revolutionaries and disputing the hegemony of the reformists. Instead of propagandistic delimitation, constructing a unitary framework where delimitation is a by-product of the reformists' inability to conduct a common struggle is a tactic that has proven far more effective.

A recent successful example was seen in the performance of Brazil's PSOL in the struggle against Bolsonaro: a generously unitary and defensive attitude, calling for the unity of the left and including the PT, allowed the PSOL to grow very significantly in a highly defensive and adverse context such as that imposed by the extreme right in power. activists, parliamentarians and social influence.

To quote the old Russian revolutionary for the last time: as Trotsky said, "The wise men who boast that they do not see the difference 'between Brüning and Hitler' in reality "under this pseudo-radical bluster ... conceal[s] the most ignoble passivity."

MARTÍN MOSQUERA

P.S.

- IVP. WEDNESDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2023:

<https://aurdip.org/le-compas-du-deuil/>

- Translated by *International Viewpoint* from *Jacobin America Latina*:

<https://jacobinlat.com/2023/11/17/es-milei-una-amenaza-fascista/>].