

# Internationalism, Campism: The Two Identities of the Label-Driven Left

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**Conservative left movements have both a past and a present, and both define them as a political project: their past is campism and their present is sectarianism.**

The political distinction between left and right, although it had earlier expressions such as the struggle against feudalism and slavery, gained its modern form with the French Revolution. At the time, the “mountain” was the Jacobin left and alliances between factions moved gelatinously until they were crushed by the coup of 18 Brumaire and Napoleon Bonaparte’s victory. The reference to the political geography of left and right remained. However, this map has always changed throughout historical circumstances: the Soviet revolution redefined the split between the two factions of the Russian Social Democratic Party, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, and brought closer to the former a portion of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, who were then the largest electoral force and who organised the peasant masses. The German left was also shifting: Karl Kautsky, who had been seen as Engels’ theoretical heir, left the Social Democratic Party in protest against its support for the war and joined the Independent Social Democratic Party, where Rosa Luxemburg was (but later returned to the SPD). However, after the formation of the USSR, a significant part of the left began to define itself as part of this political camp, despite its degeneration and Stalinist repression – Stalin had more communists murdered in his country than Hitler did in Germany. Obedience to the Kremlin became their identity. This is the origin of campism.

## Campism

A century later, and 35 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which symbolised the end of this system and the beginning of the USSR’s disintegration, it might seem a historical anachronism that conservative left movements identify with a “camp” that no longer exists. However, this phantasmagoria has a history and is potent: for some communist parties, support for Putin and the Russian regime is simply a continuation and nostalgia for Stalinism and the bipolar world in which their military and symbolic power was organised. It is done in the name of history, even that which has already ended. This commitment can emerge in many forms, including the most skewed, such as the claim that Putin is now the warrior chief in the fight against fascism and therefore deserves leniency regarding internal repression, discourse against women’s rights, religious fanaticism, complicity with and promotion of oligarchs, and even the plundering of his own country’s resources. On the other hand, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate the paradox of this anti-fascist discourse and, at the same time, its commitment to Trump’s victory, the financing of Le Pen, the intimate relationship with Salvini, support for Romanian far-right and others. If there is a rise in fascist forces, the Putinist camp is complicit in this process.

In any case, defining politics based on camps of international obedience has always been a trap for the left. Doing so when the beacon is an autocratic and plutocratic regime is even more bizarre and creates irreconcilable contradictions: those who classify China as today’s socialist system must remain silent when a Chinese public company buys EDP or REN, in an investment resulting from its

capital accumulation on an international scale. Alignment with Moscow in the invasion of Ukraine is another of these contradictions, given that the Russian president was explicit about his motivation: to correct Lenin's error in accepting Ukrainian self-determination instead of maintaining the borders inherited from the Tsarist empire.

Beyond this imprisonment in obedience to the Putin regime, campism has a domino effect. It implies a succession of compromises with other regimes that may have been, or may be seen as real or potential allies of the "camp". In the case of the PCP, and also other communist parties and conservative left forces, this was one of the factors that determined support for regimes such as the MPLA in Angola. There was continuity in this—some leaders of the liberation movement against Portuguese colonialism had collaborated with the PCP during Salazarism and had lived in exile in Eastern European countries. This bond of solidarity was a historical reality. However, the processes of independence and civil war led these leaderships to choices, and one of them was the assassination of communist militants in Luanda in 1977, as was the case with Sita Valles. Even if this case hadn't occurred, it was still evident, especially under José Eduardo dos Santos, that the Angolan regime became an instrument of force to protect corrupt accumulation for the benefit of dominant families. Campism, by inventing the image of a progressive government, concealed the theft.

Another consequence of campism is the protection of corrupt regimes, particularly when they perpetuate themselves through electoral fraud. The current case of Mozambique is an expression of this contradiction. Frelimo declared it had its greatest electoral victory ever, with 70% of the votes; the result would surpass the support obtained by the most popular leader in its history, Samora Machel. However, evidence of fraud, concealment of electoral records, and lack of ballot box verification consolidated the certainty of falsified results, in a period when the regime's isolation is expressed in the scale of popular protests. The same pattern occurred in Venezuela, with the non-disclosure of electoral records. Thus, campist support for these regimes comes at a price: the conservative left accepts abandoning the democratic principle of electoral transparency, which has consequences for its discourse in its own country. This support is further aggravated by sympathy for the Chinese regime, which is constitutionally a one-party state. The effect is profound: for the fight against the far-right wave, abandoning the democratic rule and the demand for respect for electoral truth is an error that accommodates our enemies. In this way, the campist left tells its people that it dispenses with fidelity to democratic rights that were won by workers' and popular movements. Campist labelling is the abandonment of internationalism and the socialist struggle, which is the only truly existing expression of the democratic fight against fascism.

## **Sectarianism**

Campism has other expressions and it is about one of them that I want to draw your attention. Recently, the Brazilian Communist Party underwent a split, with a faction that came to designate itself as PCB-RR (Revolutionary Reconstruction). There's no need to recount here the history of this process, nor the evolution of this party, which in the middle of the last century was Brazil's most important left-wing force. It was also a campist party, and Luís Carlos Prestes, its secretary-general, when he decided to support a candidate of President Getúlio Vargas in São Paulo in 1945 (and they participated together in a rally), aligned forces with the man who had imprisoned him for nine years and had handed over his wife, Olga, who was Jewish and of German origin, to the Nazi authorities (she died in a concentration camp in 1942).

In our time, the PCB is a minor party—its presidential candidate in 2022 received 0.04% of the votes (in Portugal, even MAS got 0.1% in recent elections). This split it has undergone has no international relevance, but serves only to point out a fact: it arises from an internal debate led by influencers and uses social network communication as the propulsion for sectarianism. Perhaps you recognise this

pattern in politics closer to home, which replaces the use of social networks for communication with the concentration of political debate through virtual cascading emotional intensification. This intoxicating discourse aims to distance itself from currents with which the sectarian might have occasional agreements in social struggle, and those who witnessed PCP militants' attack against the Bloco's choice to confront the right's provocative discourse about November 25<sup>th</sup> in parliament had a portrait of what this infantile sectarianism is.

My point is also this: sectarian discourse itself needs to place itself in an impregnable position, and that's why it intensifies on virtual networks. It lives better in a public space that is private, and the use of networks facilitates its aggression and apocalyptic discourse, given that there it's natural to shout to seek some attention. Now, if politics becomes an overlapping of shouts in the virtual world, as in the Brazilian case mentioned or this example of multiplying insults about November 25<sup>th</sup>, it becomes contaminated by a process of intoxication. The virtual space distorts all political discourse and its rationality of social mobilisation. In fact, it is manipulated by modern capital's form and, to summarise, follows the drug trafficking model: social networks offer universal support for much of human life, thus constituting itself as a parallel reality, which selects high emotional intensity activities; it is based on the diffusion of a hallucinogenic drug (users have access to products and actions that release dopamine, the neurotransmitter that offers us the pleasure of reward); it is dominated by giant companies that control the traffic-traffic; thus creating a dependency that reproduces itself in anxiety and loss of social skills; and reproduces itself in multiple means of entertainment, work and culture, including engagement in systems that promise life changes through submersion in the virtual world. This magic establishes the individual without individuality: the prototype of the metaverse inhabitant is a new species, born from the commodification of attention, tourism of trivial knowledge, degradation of language and collapse of the notion of time. This is a form of capitalism's universalisation, which reaches and submits everything and everyone, vampirising emotions and thoughts. In this world, the politician of the virtual network is a sectarian by nature.

If campism is what defines the conservative left in the world and if its language is the illusion of virtual guerrilla warfare, nothing remains of a socialist project.

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