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**THE HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF NAZI-FASCISM THROUGH CLASSICAL MARXISM:
PERSPECTIVES TO UNDERSTAND THE ADVANCE OF THE EXTREME RIGHT IN
CONTEMPORARY TIMES**

Kleiton Wagner Alves da Silva NOGUEIRA  

ⁱ Universidade Federal de Campina Grande – UFCG, Grupo de Estudo e Pesquisa Sobre Estado e Luta de Classes na América Latina – Práxis, Unidade Acadêmica de Ciências Sociais. Campina Grande, PB, Brasil.

Author de correspondence: Kleiton Wagner Alves da Silva
Nogueira kleiton_wagner@hotmail.com

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Abstract

The contemporary rise of far-right governments: Bolsonaro in Brazil; Trump in the US; Erdoğan in Türkiye; and the extremist demonstrations in Italy with Meloni; and in France with Le Pen, he inquired into characterizations such as 21st century fascism; neofascism; tropical fascism. Given this context, we aim in this article to carry out a reflective itinerary on the theoretical production of classical Marxism on interwar fascism. Methodologically, we base ourselves on the production of authors such as: Leon Trotsky; Clara Zetkin; Evgeni Pachukanis; Antonio Gramsci; Daniel Guerin; Nicos Poulantzas and Ernest Mandel. From the reading and selection of the main arguments of these intellectuals, we understand that interwar fascism implied not only a bourgeois action aimed at the violent elimination of socialist and communist political organizations, but a classist phenomenon, which had in

the petty bourgeoisie the consolidation of a phenomenon of masses with a view to maintaining the capitalist order.

Descriptors: Fascism; Far right; Capitalism; Marxism.

<p>A ANÁLISE HISTÓRICA DO NAZIFASCISMO PELO MARXISMO CLÁSSICO: PERSPECTIVAS PARA ENTENDER O AVANÇO DA EXTREMA-DIREITA NA CONTEMPORANEIDADE</p> <p>Resumo</p> <p>O ascenso contemporâneo de governos de extrema-direita: Bolsonaro no Brasil; Trump nos EUA; Erdoğan na Turquia; e as manifestações extremistas na Itália com Meloni; e na França com Le Pen, inquiriu caracterizações como: fascismo do século XXI; neofascismo; fascismo tropical etc. Diante desse contexto, objetivamos no presente artigo, realizar um itinerário reflexivo sobre a produção teórica do marxismo clássico sobre o fascismo de entreguerras. Metodologicamente, nos baseamos na produção autores como: Leon Trotsky; Clara Zetkin; e Antonio Gramsci. A partir da leitura e seleção dos principais argumentos desses intelectuais, entendemos que o fascismo de entreguerras implicou não apenas numa ação burguesa direcionada à eliminação violenta dos organismos políticos socialistas e comunistas, mas num fenômeno classista, que teve na pequena burguesia a consolidação de um fenômeno de massas com vistas a manutenção da ordem capitalista.</p> <p>Descritores: Fascismo; Extrema-direita; Capitalismo; Marxism.</p>	<p>EL ANÁLISIS HISTÓRICO DEL NAZIFASCISMO A TRAVÉS DEL MARXISMO CLÁSICO: PERSPECTIVAS PARA COMPRENDER EL AVANCE DE LA EXTREMA DERECHA EN LA CONTEMPORANEIDAD</p> <p>Resumen</p> <p>El ascenso contemporáneo de los gobiernos de extrema derecha: Bolsonaro en Brasil; Trump en los Estados Unidos; Erdogan en Turquía; y las manifestaciones extremistas en Italia con Meloni; y en Francia con Le Pen, indagó en caracterizaciones como el fascismo del siglo XXI; neofascismo; fascismo tropical. Dado este contexto, nos proponemos en este artículo realizar un itinerario reflexivo sobre la producción teórica del marxismo clásico sobre el fascismo de entreguerras. Metodológicamente nos basamos en la producción de autores como: Leon Trotsky; Clara Zetkin; Evgeni Pachukanis; Antonio Gramsci; Daniel Guérin; Nicos Poulantzas y Ernest Mandel. De la lectura y selección de los principales argumentos de estos intelectuales, se comprende que el fascismo de entreguerras implicó no sólo una acción burguesa encaminada a la eliminación violenta de las organizaciones políticas socialistas y comunistas, sino un fenómeno clasista, que tuvo en la pequeña burguesía la consolidación de un fenómeno de masas con miras a mantener el orden capitalista.</p> <p>Descriptor: Fascismo; Extrema derecha; Capitalismo; Marxism.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, the rise of far-right governments is drawing the attention of the academic community because it is an international phenomenon. Through conservative Christian agendas, questioning of feminist movements, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersexual,

Asexual and Pansexual (LGBTQIAP+) movements dressed up as reactionaryism and scientific denialism, and the direct practice of xenophobia; misogyny, transphobia and homophobia, this rise is associated with the defense of capitalism as the only possible mode of production, and is therefore functional for the bourgeois fractions around the world, which have hegemony through neoliberalism.

The Brazilian case, with the rise of the Bolsonaro government, is the materialization of this logic. Faced with the conciliatory exhaustion promoted by the thirteen years of management of Brazilian dependent capitalism by the Workers' Party (PT), and the impacts of the 2008 global economic crisis on the domestic situation, we saw a turn to the right by the PT's management in the second term of former president Dilma Rousseff (2015-2016), impacted by the street demonstrations of June 2013, which went beyond the control of the union bureaucracies of the *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* - CUT and the *Central dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras do Brasil* - CTB, and by the attacks of the media with Operation Car Wash, in 2016 we witnessed the media-parliamentary-institutional coup that gave way to Michel Temer (2016-2018), of the Brazilian Democratic Movement - MDB, to deepen the neoliberal agenda in the country. Faced with the Brazilian crisis, which was not only economic but also political and social, the traditional right, embodied in parties such as the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), faced with the PT's crisis of direction, was unable to capitalize on the situation in 2018 and rise to power, with the emergence of Bolsonaro (2019-2022), who, by presenting himself as an *outsider* candidate, a Christian and defender of the values of honesty, heteronormativity and capitalist freedom, forged his way to the presidency via *fake news* and promises to clean up corruption.

Bolsonaro's rise in Brazil is not dissimilar, on an international level, to the US case with Donald Trump, who, in questioning the globalist consensus in the face of the trade war with China, sought to use media strategies based on *fake news* and appealing to US reactionarism in the 2016 elections. A similar movement can be found in countries like Italy, the cradle of interwar fascism, which in 2022 elected Giorgia Meloni, leader of the far-right *Fratelli d'Italia* party, and who throughout her political life has been part of the Movimento Sociale Italiano - MSI, *Alleanza Nazionale* - AN and *Il Popolo della Libertà* - PdL, all far-right parties. Similar cases can be identified in France with Marine Le Pen of the *Rassemblement National*; Turkey through Erdoğan of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*; and in Poland with the ultra-conservative Andrzej Duda of the *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*.

At least since the world crisis of 2008, the center of gravity of international politics has shifted, demanding attacks on the working classes through the withdrawal of labor rights and the deepening of counter-reforms in the fields of social and labor policies in the face of the imperative of rentierism and the tendential fall in the rate of profit. However, such processes in capitalism are nothing new, and the two Great Wars experienced by humanity in the 20th century were the result of the weakness of imperialism and inter-bourgeois disputes at international level, which saw the rise of fascism. Therefore, far from mimicking historical processes as repeatable in the same conditions and forms, we believe that the historical interpretation of fascism between the wars by three 20th century Marxist intellectuals: Leon Trotsky, Clara Zektin and Antonio Gramsci shed light on elements that make it possible to understand the current historical situation.

In this sense, the aim of this article is to carry out a reflective itinerary on the theoretical production of classical Marxism on interwar fascism. Methodologically, we base ourselves on the production of the intellectuals cited as a way of grasping historical elements in order to think about the current state of international capitalism and the rise of far-right movements. To this end, the text is subdivided into four parts in addition to this introduction and the concluding remarks: in the first part, we look at Trotsky's analysis of the workers' united front and his characterization of Nazifascism as a phenomenon linked to capitalism; then, in a similar interpretation, we look at Clara Zetkin's thinking; in the third part, we discuss Antonio Gramsci's considerations on his analysis of the Italian case, and last but not least, we reflect on the topicality of the question of the rise of extremism.

TROTSKY AND THE WORKERS' UNITED FRONT AGAINST NAZISM

Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) was a Bolshevik revolutionary who played an active role in the Russian revolution of 1917. As well as being a strategist, he contributed to the analysis of the degeneration of the Stalinist's Third Communist International; the party bureaucracy as a political phenomenon; and issues associated with the international proletarian revolution. His analysis of Nazi-fascism is carried out against the depreciation and debasement of Marxism by Stalinism. With Lenin's death in 1924 and the domination of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the perspective of revolutionary tactics and strategy was lost, and the party itself became an anti-revolutionary agent and fomenter of defeats all over the world.¹ In this context of degeneration and bureaucratism, Trotsky's task was threefold: in addition to fomenting

a left-wing opposition to the process of bureaucratization and Stalinism, he elaborated the Fourth International as an element in the struggle to regain the perspective of the proletarian revolution from an internationalist perspective, as well as carrying out analyses of the rise of the extreme right in Europe, anticipating the Second World War.

Regarding his analysis of fascism, Trotsky² considers fascism in Italy to be a spontaneous mass movement, but one that had popular leaders. In its origins, it was a plebeian movement, but in the course of its development it was financed by big capital. This origin had a class perspective as its demiurge, in which the petty bourgeoisie, the lumpenproletariat and some sectors of the working classes were the molecular agents of this plebeian force. In the German case, there was an analogous process: a mass movement and leaders who used socialist rhetoric in a distorted way.

It is striking that the perspective of social classes is always present in his analysis of the subject. In our opinion, this methodological stance is useful because it is superior to analyses centered on the subjectivity of the leaders, the personalities of Mussolini and Hitler, implying that concrete history is driven more by the subjective actions of men than by the concrete and material processes that exist in the social relations of production. In this sense, when looking at the question of the social classes that make up fascism, Trotsky² explains the following:

The genuine basis of fascism is the petty bourgeoisie. In Italy, it has a very large base - the petty bourgeoisie of the cities and towns, and of the peasantry. In Germany, too, there is a broad base for fascism. In England, this base is smaller, since the workers are the vast majority of the population; and the peasant or rural stratum is an insignificant sector.²⁽¹⁸⁾

Attention to the question of social classes is a central point for Trotsky because, faced with a context marked by imperialism² in the interwar period, of crises, wars and revolutions, and faced with the concrete experience of the Russian revolution of October 1917, the international bourgeoisie felt the strength of the proletariat in the constitution of a new sociability. It should be noted that the First World War caused damage to the imperialist configuration through the territorial partition of the African continent and the degradation of the living conditions of the masses. The insurgency of the fascist movement in Europe also took place in the midst of revolutionary processes in countries like Italy and Germany, which, having been defeated, had the autocratic bourgeois reaction united to maintain capitalist sociability. In this sense, faced with this situation of revolutionary influxes and the capitalist crisis, Trotsky² argues that it is necessary to analyze the correlation of forces between the three fundamental classes of the capitalist mode of production at the time: the **big** bourgeoisie led by financial capital, the **petty** bourgeoisie that lives

in the oscillation between the big bourgeoisie and the third fundamental class: the **proletariat**. He interprets that the big bourgeoisie cannot maintain its domination without the support of the urban and agrarian petty bourgeoisie, as well as the reactionary sediments and the new middle classes formed by the State bureaucracy and liberal professionals.

When analyzing the German context of the rise of Nazism, Trotsky² warned that the growth of National Socialism (Nazism) was the expression of two main factors: i) the profound social crisis that threw the petty bourgeois masses into a position of proletarianization; and ii) the absence of a revolutionary party that would present itself as a revolutionary guide to a mode of sociability marked by the real needs of individuals and the extinction of social classes and exploitation of labour, in his words he states the following: “if the Communist Party is a Party of hope, fascism, as a mass movement, is then a party of counter-revolutionary despair.”²⁽³²⁾

In Germany, the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* - KPD, especially its leaders, thought that fascism had arrived late on German soil, which would lead to defeats in the electoral field. In the midst of this mistaken interpretation, the petty bourgeoisie decided not to bet their chips on the KPD, because they didn't see any measures in this direction that could improve their fortunes. The stagnation in the face of the fascist rise in Germany was indeed a real danger and for Trotsky² it was the acute expression of a situation in which the bourgeois regime had no way out, while at the same time revealing the fractures in the Social Democratic position in relation to this regime and the weakness of the KPD in destroying the capitalist regime. However, even after the analyses and warnings of the rise of fascism and how to confront it in a proletarian united front with class independence, the theory of social fascism, coming from the Third International already bureaucratized by Stalinism, was embraced by the KPD:

The condition for success therefore lies in the abandonment of the theory and practice of 'social fascism', the harmfulness of which becomes dangerous in present conditions [...] It will inevitably be necessary to make agreements against fascism with the various social democratic organizations and fractions, presenting, before the masses, precise conditions to their leaders.²⁽⁴⁸⁾

The single front policy would be the tactical key that Trotsky saw as the weapon to defeat Nazism. The Nazis would be defeated if the KPD united the working classes in such a way as to turn it into a rallying point for the oppressed masses. However, under Stalinist influence, the party reinforced a sectarian and blind position with the theory of social fascism, rapprochement with chauvinism, and even by imitating fascism as a means of competing with that movement. Faced with the Communist International's inertia and fomenting of defeats with social fascism, Trotsky

warned of the scorched earth scenario for the proletariat with the catastrophe that was looming in the period:

The seizure of power by the 'National Socialists' will have as its effect, first of all, the extermination of the elite of the German proletariat, the destruction of its organizations; it will strip it of all faith in itself and in its future [...] the infernal work of Italian fascism will probably appear insignificant; it would be an almost humanitarian experience compared to what German National Socialism could do. Retreat, you say! You, who yesterday were the prophets of the 'third period'! Leaders and institutions can retreat. Some individuals can hide. But the working class, faced with a fascist power, will have no shelter, will not know how to hide [...].²⁽⁶³⁾

This prophetic tone was not the fruit of an idealistic analysis, but of the dialectical method inspired by Marxian and Leninist construction of the concrete analysis of the concrete situation. During the period in which these reflections were written, Trotsky² argued that the fascists' main strength lay in their numerical content (an abundance of votes in elections), and that they were nothing more than a dustbowl of humanity. For this reason, the historical function of fascism was not to foster a new sociability, but to violently deepen the bourgeois regime of domination. Fascism puts the social classes antagonistic to the working class on their feet, militarily and with the auspices of financial capital shielded under the epidermis of an official State that is guided by the destruction of working-class organizations, from the revolutionary to the moderate:

Fascism is a particular State system, based on the extermination of all elements of proletarian democracy in bourgeois society. The tasks of fascism are not only to destroy the proletarian vanguard, but also to keep the entire class in a state of forced fragmentation. For this, the physical extermination of the most revolutionary working-class layer is insufficient. It is necessary to destroy all the points of support of the proletariat and exterminate the results of the work of three quarters of a century of social democracy and trade unions.²⁽⁶⁴⁾

If in a historiographical assessment we put Trotsky's analyses to the test of concrete facts, without revisionism and Stalinist manipulation, we will realize that his analyses were correct, especially regarding the Nazi seizure of power in Germany with Hitler and the scale of horror that was carried out until the Second World War with the widespread extermination of revolutionary ranks and the working classes.

CLARA ZETKIN AND THE NEED TO DESTROY FASCISM

Clara Zetkin (1857-1933) was a German marxist revolutionary. A feminist activist, she was the driving force behind the first International Women's Day in 1911. In 1920, she built a united

front against the rise of fascism in Germany. For her, fascism viewed the working classes as enemies and was therefore the direct offensive of the international bourgeoisie:

[...] fascism presents itself much more as a punishment for the fact that the proletariat has not sustained and deepened the revolution that was started in Russia. And the basis of fascism does not rest on a small caste, but on broad social layers, large masses, even reaching the proletariat.³⁽³⁴⁾

In her interpretation, this movement was the expression of the decadence and crisis of the capitalist mode of production and the bourgeois State. With the First World War, the world economy was destroyed, leading to an increase in the plight of the working classes and the impoverishment of the petty bourgeoisie. This scorched-earth scenario, with vast social layers looking for new ways to survive, with low and medium-level State employees, low-ranking military officers who after the First World War found no jobs or professional training, ended up being the fuel for the rise of the fascist movement. However, it wasn't just the material-concrete factor of survival and quality of life that affected the subjectivity of these masses, the other was the betrayal by the reformist leaderships of the international revolutionary workers' movement. The reformist hope that a global change towards socialism would come from reforms in capitalism was frustrated by the very dynamics of capital, which does not support long-lasting reforms:

Those bourgeois disappointed with socialism were joined by proletarian forces. All the disillusioned - whether of bourgeois or proletarian origin - nevertheless abandon a precious intellectual force that would allow them to glimpse a future of hope and light beyond the gloomy present.³⁽⁴⁰⁾

The masses who looked to reformist leaderships that did everything but have class independence to free them from the shackles of capitalist exploitation, and the intermediate classes afraid of proletarianization and pauperization, looked to the right and saw fascism as a way out of their class nightmares:

The masses flocked to fascism in their thousands. It became an asylum for all the politically homeless, the socially uprooted, the destitute and disillusioned. And what the masses no longer expected from the revolutionary proletarian class and socialism, they now expect to be achieved by the capable, strong, determined and impetuous elements of all classes. All these forces should unite in a community. And that community, for the fascists, is the nation. They mistakenly imagine that a sincere willingness to create a new and better social reality is powerful enough to overcome all class antagonisms.³⁽⁴¹⁾

This turn towards fascism has a simulacrum in a strong, authoritarian State that is elevated above the various political parties and social classes. A State that could change society based on the fascist ideology and program. If we take a closer look at the class composition of classical

fascism, we will see, in agreement with Zetkin,³ that in a certain sense it is comfortable for the big bourgeoisie to have a watchdog like fascism. This bourgeoisie opportunely saw the fascist packs that, fueled by violence, defended their interests. This bourgeoisie aimed to maintain its class domination through the exploitation of capital over labor. However, in isolation it was unable to develop and maintain its hegemony, especially in a context where the impacts of capitalist sociability showed concrete signs of weakness with the rise of the proletariat and the degradation of the living conditions of this class and the petty bourgeoisie.

But isn't this class oppression already being carried out by the capitalist State? In part, yes, but Zetkin³ shows us that, over time, even this capitalist State loses its capacity to manage social upheavals. It loses the financial and moral capacity to carry out class control, so the big bourgeoisie needs mechanisms other than those it regularly uses:

The bourgeoisie can no longer rely on the regular means of force of its state to guarantee its domination. For this, it needs an extralegal and paramilitary instrument of force. This was offered by the heterogeneous agglomeration that constitutes the fascist mob. This is why the bourgeoisie offers its hand for the fascist kiss, allowing them complete freedom of action, contrary to everything that is or is not written in the laws. It goes further. It nurtures fascism, supports it and promotes its development with all the means at its disposal in terms of political power and well-guarded reserves of money.³⁽⁴³⁾

The author also shows that fascism, due to these factors, has at least two fundamental traits: i) a fraudulent revolutionary program that makes demagogic use of the subjectivity and needs of the masses; and ii) the brutal use of violence. As a plebeian movement of the starving and the suffering with no prospects for the future, it must be fought by taking action towards the social strata that are moving towards it. This journey is the result of a search for an escape from the suffering caused by capitalist sociability itself, not restricted only to the needs of the stomach, but also to the yearning for ideas and values that offer a sense that life is worth living. For this reason, Zetkin³ argues that in the ranks of the masses that make up fascism, not everyone would be violent, mercenary, there would be energetic social layers that must be reached through conviction and understanding of the concrete situation that led them to fascism. In her interpretation, this work should show that the solution to the problems of capitalist sociability can only be found in another form of sociability, in the direction of communism.

This action against the violent terror that fascist packs promote against the self-defense of each worker must be fought with violence materialized in the strength of the working class, and not in coup acts. This defense involves the formation of a united front, as indicated by Trotsky's

reflections.² This is why Zektin³ emphasizes that the fight against fascism requires the formation of a workers' united front.

FASCISM AND THE IMPERIALIST DYNAMIC FOR GRAMSCI

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was a revolutionary Sardinian Marxist, founder and leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). He carried out militant activities and contributed to the development of Marxism by elaborating on the categories of the integral State; hegemony; organic intellectuals; private apparatuses of hegemony; the southern question and organic crisis.^{4,5}

This intellectual understood how, in the midst of an Italian movement of revolutionary advance in 1919 and 1920, through factory occupations, there was a weakening in this movement followed by the rise of fascism. This reflection involves understanding the rise of fascism as the result of a process inherent to the dynamics of the imperialist phase of the capitalist mode of production. In Italy, this process took on contours of hopelessness among the petty bourgeoisie and the subalterns, in view of the country's participation in the First World War and the meager laurels received by those who had fought in it.

Gramsci's thought reflects on fascism on three levels: a) an ideology that eliminates social conflict through the hypostasis of the nation; b) as a form of domination for managing the finished social and anthropological transformation from peasant-industrial society to mass industrial society; and c) as the product of an entire historical phase opened up by the **organic crisis of capitalism**.⁶ Gramsci's investigation into the origins of fascism is associated with the collapse of Giovanni Giolitti's political bloc, in which Mussolini appeared as an obstacle to the absorption of the effects of universal suffrage in Italy in 1913. Gramsci⁷ made the distinction between the ruling class and the ruled class, in which Gramsci formulated the perspective of passive revolution (revolution without revolution, carried out from above and without the participation of the working classes and subaltern groups). Regarding fascism, he points out the following:

Wouldn't fascism be precisely the form of "passive revolution" typical of the 20th century as liberalism is of the 19th century? [...] (It can be conceived like this: the passive revolution would occur in the fact of transforming the economic structure "reformistically" from individualist to economy according to a plan (direct economy) and the advent of a "middle economy" between pure individualism and that according to a plan in the integral sense, would allow the passage to the most progressive political and cultural forms without radical and destructive cataclysms in an exterminating way. "Corporatism" could be or become, as it develops, this average economic form of a 'passive' nature). This conception

could be similar to what in politics can be called the war of position “as opposed to the war of movement. Thus, in the historical cycle prior to the French Revolution it would have been a “war of movement” and the liberal era of the 19th century a long war of position.”⁷⁽¹⁰⁸⁸⁾

In this way of modernizing the structures of Italian capitalism from above, fascism is also linked to an integral type of nationalism, although from a concrete point of view it does not manage to overcome the propagandistic nature of the relationship between cosmopolitanism and nation, given that Italy could not overcome a condition of economic and cultural subalternity in relation to other European nations.⁶

Gramsci aimed to overcome positivist political science, making an effort to understand that social classes, political parties, interests and consciousness cannot be seen separately.^{8,9} For this reason, fascism would be seen as a technique for managing “the new forms of social conflict, an expression of the autonomy of politics in relation to the economy”.¹⁰⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ It is also interesting to note that, similarly to Zetkin and Trotsky, Gramsci rejected the Stalinist elaboration of social fascism, which placed social democracy as a wing of fascism, making it impossible to form a united front against fascist violence.⁶

His internationalist vision evaluates fascism not just as an Italian case, but as an international historical phase associated with the transition from the sedimentary structures of the emergence of capitalism to the pattern of accumulation inaugurated by Americanism-Fordism.⁹ This pattern would also lead to destructive organic crises, similar to what happens in the transition from feudalism to the capitalist mode of production, and due to the economic acceleration that took place with the First World War, space was opened up for the separation of the masses and the traditional parties. The crisis of the liberal State was part of this larger process that reclassified international relations of production, in which Europe lost ground to the United States, the Soviet Union and Japan.⁶

In this way, Gramsci¹⁰ asserts that in the face of the crisis scenario and the impossibility of capital controlling the productive forces, there is an economic and political struggle of the great masses that would have made it imperative for the capitalist forces to attack the labor pole. This process of attack led to the bourgeois State itself becoming more reactionary, so that it intervened directly and violently in the class struggle, repressing proletarian attempts to achieve political and economic emancipation.¹⁰ This phenomenon, however, was not specific to Italy, but to the rest of

the world, since capitalism had, in Gramsci's view, become incapable of controlling the productive forces:

[...] capitalism has become incapable of mastering the productive forces. The phenomenon of “fascism” is not only Italian, just as the formation of the Communist Party is not only Italian. “Fascism” is the predatory phase of the restoration of the State, in other words, an intensification of capitalist reaction, a sharpening of the capitalist struggle against the most vital demands of the proletarian class. Fascism is the illegality of capitalist violence, while the restoration of the State is the legalization of this violence: it is a well-known historical law that custom precedes law.¹⁰⁽⁴²⁹⁾

Seen from an international angle, Gramsci sees fascism as a way of solving the problems associated with capitalism's social relations of production through the use of violence. Against a backdrop of the dilapidation and ruination of these productive forces by the First World War, international ties between the bourgeoisies were broken and markets corrupted, relations between countryside and city, metropolises and colonies were subverted, simultaneously creating national crises:

A unity and simultaneity of national crises has been created, which makes the general crisis extremely acute and unavoidable - the petty and middle bourgeoisie - which considers it possible to solve these gigantic problems with machine guns and pistols. And it is this stratum that feeds fascism, that provides its numbers.¹¹⁽⁴⁷⁾

This point about the petty bourgeoisie is central to Gramsci's reflections on fascism, especially since in January 1921 he went so far as to call fascism “the last representation offered by the urban petty bourgeoisie in the theater of national political life”.¹¹⁽³⁰⁾ The degradation of this class would represent its total loss of importance on the stage of the material production of life, in other words, in the face of the rise of big industry and financial capital, the Italian petty bourgeoisie lost strength in the productive sphere, becoming a specialized class in the intricacies of parliamentarianism. Its sedimentation in the Italian parliament turned this institution into a business bazaar for the petty bourgeoisie, losing prestige among the popular masses:

After having corrupted and ruined the parliamentary institution, the petty bourgeoisie also corrupted and ruined the other institutions, the fundamental supports of the State: the army, the police, the judiciary. Corruption and ruin carried out in vain, without any precise purpose (the only precise purpose should be the creation of a State: but the “people” of the apes is characterized precisely by its organic incapacity to create a law for itself, to found a State).¹¹⁽³²⁾

The above citation gives us a dimension of how this petty bourgeoisie, despite appearing on the political scene as an entity that corrupts the institutions of the Italian liberal State, was

incapable of carrying out an autonomous class project due to its own material position in the social relations of production. Months before the march on Rome, Gramsci had understood that this class was subjectively and objectively associated with big capital,¹² even if its acts of violence against the working class appeared to be acts against order:

The petty bourgeoisie, even in this latest political incarnation which is 'fascism', has definitively revealed its true nature as a servant of capitalism and agrarian property, as an agent of the counter-revolution. But it has also revealed that it is fundamentally incapable of carrying out any historical task [...].¹⁰⁽³³⁻³⁴⁾

Gramsci points out that the development of Italian fascism took place with the birth of the *Fasci di combattimento*, a paramilitary grouping that originated shortly after the First World War. Of a petty bourgeois nature, this organization brought together different associations of ex-combatants, and due to its anti-socialist character, obtained the support of big business and the State authorities. This establishment was established at a time when the Italian landowners needed armed forces to combat the growing workers' organization:

Fascism had its greatest development in the agrarian zones (Emilia, Tuscany, Umbria), achieving - with the financial support of the capitalists and the protection of the State's civil and military authorities - limitless power. If, on the one hand, the merciless offensive against the class organizations of the proletariat served the capitalists, who in the course of a year saw the entire apparatus of struggle of the socialist trade unions crumble and lose any effectiveness, it is undeniable, however, that on the other hand, the violence, by degenerating, ended up arousing a widespread feeling of hostility towards fascism among the middle and popular classes.¹¹⁽⁸¹⁾

This rise, with the connivance of the institutions of the Italian bourgeois State (the judiciary, for example),¹³ led to a series of murders of workers, union leaders, the violent destruction of workers' newspapers, crimes that went unpunished by the bourgeois institutions, as well as Gramsci's own imprisonment in 1926.¹⁴ And as if the creator, faced with the strength of his creature, could no longer suppress its strength and control: "Fascism is the name of the profound decomposition of Italian society, which could not fail to be accompanied by the profound decomposition of the State".¹¹⁽⁵⁶⁻⁵⁷⁾ Gramsci^{11,12} warned against the reformist policies of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), which in the face of class conciliation and reformist impetus, which soon after the defeats of the postal, telephone and bus workers' strikes in Turin, abandoned the workers in the face of fascist violence.^{11,12} This movement of revolution and counter-revolution was one of the dynamos of the rise of the fascist movement, which in 1921 had already formed the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* - PNF.

In our interpretation, based on our reading of Gramsci, we understand that Italian fascism was a class phenomenon. This phenomenon was born out of endogenous and exogenous processes in Italy's economic and social formation, especially at the dawn of the First World War and in its interstice until the Second World War. Although fascism had its **iron** fist in the petty bourgeoisie, the big bourgeoisie gave its seal of approval to violent actions. These actions were embodied in a counter-revolution to the revolutionary rise of the Italian working class in the *biennio rosso* between 1919 and 1920, in which workers self-organized through factory councils.¹¹ Faced with this experience that directly threatened bourgeois domination, there were repressions through the connivance of Italian State institutions that allowed the escalation of violence, as well as the rise of Mussolini and the fascists to State power. While it is true that Gramsci demonstrated the internal contradictions of fascism, he did not take a passive stance, going so far as to criticize the Stalinist theory of social fascism, looking for ways to warn of the need for class independence and the defense of workers.

THE CONTEMPORANEITY OF THE ISSUE

Today is marked by a period of crises and wars. Since 2008,¹⁵ with the global capitalist crisis, the context has been marked by the rise of movements that have sought to question the current capitalist order: *Occupy Wall Street*; yellow vests in France; the Arab Spring; the June 2013 protests in Brazil; *Black Lives Matter*, etc. Even though many of these demonstrations succeeded in demonstrating the strength of the working classes, the precarious black, poor and peripheral youth, the absence of revolutionary parties from an internationalist perspective meant that the spontaneity of the masses was unable to overcome the existing capitalist order.¹⁵ At the same time as this process is taking place, in each economic-social formation we will see the dynamos of this crisis impacting on the maintenance of liberal-democratic regimes through the rise on the political scene of far-right parties. Despite the distinctions between each region, we see an increase in the presence of neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups, as the French case shows with the march of 600 neo-Nazis in Paris in mid-2023, who freely traveled through the Parisian capital, under the tutelage of the local repression forces.¹⁶

In the Brazilian case, this perspective is no different: since Lula's victory in 2022 through the formation of a broad polyclassist front, and the non-recognition of this process by ex-president Bolsonaro, Bolsonarism has remained alive. Although we consider the Bolsonaro government to

be pre-Bonapartist based on Trotsky's reading^{17,18} due to its military character and its claim to rise above the classes in a conflict with the judiciary, we cannot deny that Bolsonarism goes beyond Bolsonaro and the experience of his government, involving a heterogeneous set of nuclei and social classes, united by different traits ranging from militarism; olavism; petty-bourgeoisie impacted by the 2008 economic crisis; right-wing Christian sectors; agrarian bourgeoisie.^{19,20} The strength of this polyclassist set of Bolsonarism was expressed in the invasion of the Brazilian Congress in January 2023, when Bolsonarist hordes plundered the buildings of the three branches of government in a movement similar to that which took place in the United States in January 2021.²¹⁻

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From this perspective, we can see that in the Brazilian case, the current issue of the class struggle is present, requiring tactical arrangements that go beyond the formalism of the pluriclassist broad front and face reality as it is, demanding class independence from left-wing party organizations to confront Bolsonarism, an issue that presents itself in different terms worldwide, but which requires an effective class response, beyond the electoral level.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Returning to the classics of Marxism to think about the phenomenon of Nazifascism between the wars allows us to shed light on the current debate, marked by the rise of far-right parties on the political scene. We have been able to observe that Nazifascism is a class phenomenon, which emerged in a period of crises, wars and revolutions characterized not only as a counter-offensive to the international workers' movement, but the combination of the dissatisfaction of the masses with capitalist sociability, the ineffectiveness of the leaderships of the communist and socialist parties of the period, and the Stalinist influence on the theory of social fascism. These experiences show us that the only way to overcome fascism, or fascist expressions as we have seen today, is through the political independence of the working classes on an international level, the effective advancement of workers' agendas, and the overthrow of capitalism as a mode of sociability.

Without falling into mimicry, we believe that the rise of the far right today represents a response to the international capitalist crisis, the decline in the capitalist rate of profit and the hegemony of the rentier fractions. This scenario has shaped geopolitical arrangements on the international stage that show the presence of the United States and China in a trade war for new

spaces for capitalist accumulation and the development of productive forces. In this sense, in every economic and social formation, it is necessary to systematically study this extremist rise, and to reopen the debate from the perspective of the internationalist revolution as a path to overcoming capitalist prehistory and defeating fascist expressions.

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