

To Confront Rising Neofascism, the Latin American Left Must Rediscover Itself

Originally published: Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research on August 13, 2024

Introduction

The new Latin American progressive wave has created great expectations among the left, not only on the continent but across the world. Though institutional victories over the far right in presidential elections are important, defeating neofascism is a long and arduous journey – even after an electoral victory. Beyond influencing governments, the ideology of the far right has permeated much of society in an organised way, drawing a significant part of the working class into its project of death.

This dossier provides an overview of the Latin American far right's political, economic, and cultural programmes based on the reflections, research, political activity, and lived experiences of the Latin America offices of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. The dossier discusses the advance of neoliberalism and its impact on the material conditions of the working class across the continent and examines the ideological and cultural mechanisms of this economic model, which convinces a significant part of the working class to support a project in which they themselves are the primary victims. The proximity between the right and the working class was forged not by the 'traditional' or 'moderate' right, which generally operate in spaces far removed from the working class, but during the most recent phase of neoliberalism in the form of a more radical and populist project known as neofascism.

Thus, we are living in a historical moment of paralysis between social forces and their primary political projects. Neither neoliberalism nor today's progressive wave – which in many ways lacks a revolutionary outlook – have been able to imagine a future for the working class that does not involve a return to the policies of the past three decades. For the theorist and former Bolivian Vice President Álvaro García Linera, we are living in a 'collective stupor, of a certain paralysis, in which time seems to be suspended'.¹

Rather than analyse the situation from a distance, this dossier explores concrete experiences of struggle within the current Latin American context in order to construct a regional perspective and contemplate a collective project to overcome the structural issues impacting the continent. As such, it is an invitation to create new spaces for debate, education, and continuous and integrated struggle.

Neoliberalism: From Institutional Politics to Ideology

The most recent electoral victories of progressive candidates in Latin America have been characterised as a 'second pink tide', generating certain expectations among the left.² However, in contrast to the 'first pink tide', which frontally challenged US imperialism by advancing Latin American integration and geopolitical sovereignty, this second wave of progressive electoral victories seems more fragile. Current progressive governments have emerged in an unfavourable international and domestic political context featuring an emboldened far right whose strength goes far beyond the institutional level. For example, the neofascist experience during the four years of Jair Bolsonaro's presidency in Brazil (2019–2022) compelled progressive forces to ally with the left's historical enemies in order to reduce far-right candidates' chances of winning. In attempting to define its political project, the second progressive wave, unable to apply the formulas of the past,

thus finds itself in a crisis. In this context, a number of factors have inhibited the advance of progressive forces, such as:

1. the worldwide financial and environmental crises, which have created divisions between countries in the region about which path to follow;
2. the United States' reassertion of control over the region, which it had lost as a result of the first progressive wave, in particular to challenge what the US sees as China's entry into Latin American markets. This includes the region's natural and labour resources;
3. the increasing uberisation of labour markets, which has created much more precarious lives for workers and negatively impacted the working class's capacity for mass organisation. This has resulted in a significant rolling back of workers' rights and has weakened working class power;
4. the reconfiguration of social reproduction, which has become centred around public disinvestment in social welfare policies, thereby placing the responsibility for care in the private sphere and primarily overburdening women;
5. the growth of US military power in the region as its main instrument of domination in response to its declining economic power;
6. the fact that China, which has emerged as Latin America's primary trading partner, has not sought to frontally challenge the US agenda to secure hegemony over the continent and that the region's governments have been unable to drive an agenda of sovereignty by taking advantage of China's economic influence and the opportunities it presents;³ and
7. divisions between progressive governments and the ascension of neofascism in the Americas, which impede the growth of a progressive regional agenda, including policies for continental integration akin to those proposed during the first progressive wave.

Within this context, neofascism emerges as a political and social phenomenon that appears in a very specific form on the periphery of capitalism. As in the twentieth century, the current decline of the liberal order as a form of capitalist domination has given rise to the world's most recent manifestation of fascism and its accompanying unfathomable political, economic, and cultural regressions.

More than forty years of neoliberalism have resulted in low levels of economic growth, increased unemployment, an unstable labour market, the dismantling of public and social infrastructure, and increased income inequality, with a powerful few amassing huge fortunes.⁴ The neoliberal development model is antagonistic to human life, creating a permanent climate of unhappiness and suffering. It is no coincidence that the rates of psychosomatic illness and use of antidepressants have risen exponentially – a clear symptom of a society that incentivises no-holds-barred competition among individuals at the cost of leisure, culture, liberatory education, and solidarity. Under neoliberalism, the ideas of the corporate world are imposed on all spheres of life, shaping individuals' subjectivity. Life is now structured around the parameters of the private realm, emphasising individualism, consumption, and the market as the primary characteristics of human relations.

Neoliberal ideology in Latin America and the Caribbean took advantage of a state that had proven itself to be permanently incapable and ineffective in meeting the needs of the majority, as evidenced by the maintenance of historic structures of inequality. In the 1980s, Latin American countries underwent profound fiscal crises and uncontrollable inflation. Thus, the idea of the 'inefficient state' and the 'wasteful state' (or the *estado elefántico* – 'elephantine state' – as they say in Argentina) began to win

hearts and minds in Latin American societies. Then, in the 1990s, a series of neoliberal projects began to be implemented. The most common measures included privatisation; trade, financial, and labour deregulation; and economic policies that prioritised balanced public budgets over social investments. However, it was from the 2007–2008 financial crisis onwards that neoliberal discourse was radicalised and was able to win over a significant part of the masses.

During the long-term economic crisis that began in 2007, a series of coups⁵ and other concerted efforts took place that sought to undermine left and progressive governments that were committed to advancing social policies.⁶ These coups were carried out by national elites and international capital – with the participation of the US government – and were supported by the national corporate media. After the economic crisis, with less to go around, finance capital no longer considered it feasible for progressive governments to remain in power and implement their social policies. Although a few countries were able to maintain social cohesion and utilise the state to support those most in need, the general order of the day was the further intensification of neoliberalism and super-exploitation of labour, such as through labour and pension reforms and the adoption of ultraliberal economic policies.

The undermining and toppling of progressive governments and the rise of the Latin American far right did not always take place in exactly the same way or at the same time. It is important to examine the circumstances of each country in order to more fully understand the broader changes taking place in the region. However, these changes are all related to the crisis of neoliberal capitalism and finance capital's response, geared toward preserving the mechanisms of accumulation. Political representation and the various forms of political activity within a given society are key factors in achieving these goals. Examples of these processes include the coups against Manuel Zelaya in Honduras in 2009, Fernando Lugo in Paraguay in 2012, Dilma Rousseff in Brazil in 2016, and Evo Morales in Bolivia in 2019; the imprisonment of Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva in Brazil in 2018; and the political persecution of and assassination attempt against Cristina Kirchner in Argentina in 2022.

The broad reorganisation of the Latin American right featured many common techniques, such as a combination of legal and illegal means, and the centrality of the battle of ideas – or 'culture war' – within its political strategy. However, this process unfolded differently in each country and even within the same country at different moments in time. In Brazil, for example, the 'moderate' right radicalised its discourse and tactics – especially as the right began to take hold following the 2016 coup against then President Dilma Rousseff of the Workers' Party. After losing the 2014 presidential election to Rousseff, the traditional-right candidate Aécio Neves contested the result and requested a vote recount, causing political instability and opening the door for Rousseff's impeachment two years later. In other words, the traditional right planned the 2016 coup after being defeated in four consecutive presidential elections, opening a space for neofascism to take power with the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. The consequences were devastating, and institutional progressive forces have since had to pursue a defensive agenda, managing neoliberal policies instead of building a comprehensive left project for the country.

All the while, the neofascist monster continues to roam across Brazil. It is present in all spaces, from the environmental debate, with its measures and positions that deny climate change, to the educational arena, with the discourse of Escola sem Partido ('schools without political parties'),⁷ to the church and the everyday life of the people. In these spaces, the far right constructs a model of life and moral values that exalt individualism, property, the market, and the 'traditional family'. The poorest sectors of the population – especially Black people, women, and LGBTQIA+ people – continue to be the primary victims of their policies. All of these ideas, which were already present in Brazilian society, were spread on an unprecedented scale through (dis)information made possible (and encouraged) by big tech companies.⁸

In Argentina, the right deepened its use of the judicial branch to persecute political opponents, especially Cristina Kirchner, following the electoral victory of former President Mauricio Macri in 2015. The 'moderate' right did the dirty work of radicalising the political environment with lies and used the state apparatus under their control to attack progressive governments. Nevertheless, over time, this more traditional right was delegitimised in the elections since its policies lacked any connection to social demands. The moderate right then receded into the background of the political scene, opening the door for far-right figures presenting themselves as anti-establishment and champions of social change.

One of these figures, Javier Milei, assumed the presidency at the end of 2023. Milei proclaims that he will remake Argentina with the stated goal of 'ending populism'. Along these lines, his government's initiatives seek to end labour and social rights for the majority, 'deregulate markets' to favour large companies – especially large foreign corporations – and reduce the state's overall role in the economy by privatising public entities and dismantling virtually all social and cultural development programmes. At the same time, as in other countries, the discourse of hate is being promoted by the state apparatus as well as spokespeople who have a long history of disseminating fake news. These techniques are used to attack organisations that defend social rights and delegitimise the very ideas of social change, such as the concepts of economic redistribution and social justice. Furthermore, the idea of placing one's faith in a 'saviour' over a 'standard politician' has won over a significant segment of the population. In this way, neofascism achieves the classic fascist goal of securing the masses' fealty to a project that is against their own interests.

This massive backing of a project that works against the interests of the people is part of an economic strategy and a product of the crisis that began in 2007–2008. In general, Latin American governments were not able to expand their social investments as they had in preceding years. Even though the absence of regulations and the lack of a basic level of state control were among the main factors contributing to the crisis, the narrative that won the day was that the state and the interventionist policies of progressive governments were the principal causes of social ills.

In Brazil, this ideology spread widely throughout society, including among the most oppressed sectors of the population, opening the space for a new round of neoliberal reforms. In 2017, the Perseu Abramo Foundation published a study about the moral values of residents living in São Paulo's poorest neighbourhoods that concluded that, though these residents did not oppose social policies, the neoliberal ideology had gained a strong foothold amongst this segment of the population. For example, for the majority of those interviewed, the primary conflict in society is between individuals and the state, and not between the rich and the poor.⁹

In Brazil, for instance, the government of Michel Temer, which assumed power following the 2016 coup against Rousseff, approved labour reform laws that rolled back workers' rights, using the rationale that reducing labour costs would result in job growth. Then, in 2019, the Bolsonaro government approved pension reform laws that increased the minimum retirement age and reduced the benefit amount that retirees would receive. Yet, this rolling back of social rights did not result in a level of unrest that would have paved the way for broad mobilisations against the reforms.

This complacency stems from a variety of successful strategies that the neoliberal project has developed to convince the public of its efficacy. For instance, as the Perseu Abramo Foundation study showed, many residents of poor neighbourhoods aspire to be entrepreneurs due to the 'benefits' of no longer having a boss, having more flexibility, increasing their income, and being able to leave an inheritance for their family. This vision opens political space for neoliberal governments to restructure the world of work, primarily by rolling back social rights, without much opposition from the working class.

What we are seeing today is the modern manifestation of twentieth-century fascism, though with some important distinctions, which takes different forms and goes by different names such as right-wing populism, the new right, the far right, and the ultra right. Neofascism in Latin America can thus be defined as a new political, economic, and cultural movement based on four main elements:

the successful implantation of a neoliberal ideology, including in a frustrated and resentful middle class that bases its worldview on the ideas of the elites and has not created its own class project;
an anti-intellectualism among elites who promote a cult of action for action's sake, reject reason, are opposed to the pillars of the Enlightenment (scientific denialism), and rely on 'common sense' explanations for the most diverse and complex questions facing society as a whole;
the production of a national identity based on a single figure – that of the upstanding citizen – that provides simplistic explanations for any situation; attempts to omit, ignore, or negate contradictions; and avoids critical analysis in favour of a monolithic line of reasoning expressed in punitive, militarist, denialist, racist, and misogynistic discourse; and
the mobilisation of anti-communist ideology, which, supported by religious fundamentalism, fuses social conservatism and political moralism.

Latin American Progressivism and the Awakening of a Monster

These new elements of Latin American neofascism are connected to transformations in the world of work, itself part of the broader neoliberal programme to restructure the relations of production. They lay a foundation for fundamental changes in the forms of working-class organisation and action, fragmenting and isolating workers whose physical separation from the workplace and labour unions impedes them from developing a class consciousness. This breaks up spaces of debate and political formation, further hindering the development of a class-based identity that could lead to a collective worldview capable of challenging neoliberal ideals.¹⁰ As described below, Silicon Valley plays a strategic role in this process, providing the ideological content and technological apparatuses necessary for the mass distribution of messages. This strategy separates people into communication bubbles and uses digital surveillance to categorise them and their behaviours. As a result of these shifts, concrete examples of organisation and collective activity become less common; the prospect for change, when it appears, seems opaque and vague for most people. In this context, progressive forces, which still rely largely on historic forms of struggle that do not fully respond to the material conditions of the present and yet must face workers' fragmented sense of identity, have found it difficult to create new forms of collective organisation. Demands, such as for shorter work shifts, no longer resonate with workers in a system where, for many, the more hours they work, the more they are paid. In other words, many workers' rights movements have not yet analysed the new world of work, insisting instead on outdated tactics. The insistence on grassroots work is fundamental, but it must take into account concrete information about who the current worker is, as well as his/her subjective and objective demands, and make use of new communication technologies.

Meanwhile, the Latin American governments of the second progressive wave have not been able to properly confront the neofascist monster. The balance of forces in the world has not allowed these states to advance structural policies that further the interests of countries in the capitalist periphery, a weakness that has hindered large-scale projects and programmes that directly seek to transcend the capitalist system.¹¹ The tempo of the class struggle in societies in the periphery does not favour the working class and the peasantry, which is why progressive forces are unable to drive a proper agenda when they come to power.

The transition from a neoliberal or neofascist to a progressive government capable of advancing structural transformation is not possible without a broad base of working-class support. At this time,

the conjuncture does not favour broad structural transformation. For that reason, progressive electoral projects have had a difficult time building strong popular support for their limited programmes. The difficulty of building a political project of the left that can overcome the day-to-day problems of working-class existence has unmoored many of these progressive electoral projects from mass needs. This condition of being unmoored has led sections of the working class and peasantry to seek refuge under the banner of neofascism.

The drift of sections of the working class to neofascism is related to the role of drugs and drug mafias in their communities. The grip of drug mafias has brought fear and violence into these communities, which have begun to determine the reality of everyday life. South America is a central part of the chain of production, distribution, and consumption and is a laboratory of policies that criminalise the poor and poverty.¹² The primary South American drug-producing countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru) are integrated into a system with the distributing countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) in an accelerating cycle of failed policies centred on imprisonment, policing, and the fragmentation of urban neighbourhoods.¹³ This violent social Darwinist approach interweaves Latin America with the globalisation of contemporary capitalism through the criminal economy since drug trafficking is linked to the arms market, weapons manufacturers, and the financial system.

To counter the rise of drug barons, many governments in Latin America have, by and large, adopted the US War on Drugs mentality, which means using armed force to exercise control over working-class neighbourhoods. With few exceptions, Latin American progressive governments have adhered to the War on Drugs' directives and policies as a response to growing violence in urban areas marked by increasing inequality. These governments lack a programme to counteract the War on Drugs and ensure public safety, a main weak point that neofascists – such as the governments of Nayib Bukele in El Salvador and Daniel Noboa in Ecuador – have seized upon to politicise and expand their base. Here we find the inevitable overlap of neoliberalism with an essential component of neofascism: militarism.

In the case of Brazil, the permeability of the state and business class has allowed criminal organisations and militias to consolidate and expand throughout official structures, making use of political parties and neofascists such as the Bolsonaro family, which continues to lead the country's neofascist movement known as *bolsonarismo*. According to the Brazilian Forum on Public Safety (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública), there are currently more than seventy large-scale criminal organisations operating within the country, some with international reach, working within a worldwide network of mafia organisations. In the past decade, organisations acting as militias, most of whose members are directly or indirectly linked to public safety institutions or the armed forces, have further infiltrated the state. These organisations are also connected with small and medium-sized private businesses that secure public contracts to provide basic services.¹⁴ The War on Drugs has produced armed 'governments' that control vast urban territories – environments within which the working class survives and is socialised. Managed by the aforementioned criminal organisations, these armed 'governments' control and profit from economic activity and regulate how conflicts are resolved. Especially in the case of the militias, these entities have also increasingly secured electoral support for neofascism in these areas. Roughly 80% of the state of Rio de Janeiro alone is controlled by these armed 'governments'.¹⁵

While the right has an authoritative and punitive position on public safety and against drug trafficking, progressive parties have become hostages of electoral messaging, going along with the right's discourse of incarceration and severe punishment because it is increasingly popular with voters. From an ideological perspective, poverty – and, primarily, the poor – have become ever more associated with the image of an enemy to be combatted: the young drug trafficker from the poorest neighbourhoods. Every day, news stories bombard the country with portrayals of the 'good guy' and the 'perpetrator', legitimising this concept of 'the enemy'. Anyone who resembles this constructed profile (young, Black,

and poor) can be eliminated without serious repercussions, yet there are no effective social policies for the people that fit this image. On a practical level, this means that the police have a license to exterminate them.

The Neofascist International?

Another subject of debate is whether neofascist organisation and activity is coordinated at the international level. In contrast to Europe, where these groups are organised through the structures of older fascist parties, in Latin America neofascism is organised through think tanks and backed by similar organisations in the US and Spain. In Brazil, for instance, Eduardo Bolsonaro, a member of the Chamber of Deputies¹⁶ and one of Jair Bolsonaro's children, created a Brazilian version of the US Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) and has organised five meetings with forty-three Latin American and eighty-two US neofascist leaders since his father's 2022 electoral defeat.¹⁷

The anti-communist tradition and reactivation of old international networks have contributed to the rise of neofascism, unifying far-right actors across multiple countries around an ideological discourse used to mobilise and develop a political programme.

Silicon Valley plays a key role in manufacturing consent for neofascism, as in the case of Elon Musk, tech baron and one of the world's richest people. Over the past decade, social media has become a powerful tool in the battle over hearts and minds. It is now possible to collect individualised data on the feelings and perceptions of a large part of the population – above all the working class – concerning a broad range of issues. Brazil, for instance, is the largest consumer of social media in the Americas and the third largest in the world.¹⁸ In this sphere, where the business model favours a discourse of hate, social media content largely reinforces a neoliberal ideology, making use of religious fundamentalism, the theology of prosperity, and punitivism. Social media is a key battleground in a culture war spurred on by neofascism and site for efforts to bring together diverse neofascist groups from across the world. This culture war is not the spontaneous outcome of resentment and outrage from neoliberalism's victims: it is organised, centralised, and extremely well-funded.

Neofascism and 'Cultural Marxism'

Though the language of neofascism may be more refined and the culture war techniques more sophisticated than those of traditional fascism, the objective remains the same: to fragment the working class and demobilise the class struggle. The battle of ideas and emotions is waged in everyday life through the creation of values that resonate with the people in concrete ways. Despite numerous institutional victories for progressive forces in Latin America, neofascism has been able to capitalise on the uncertain future of the working class, securing it a prominent role in the public debate.

Without a doubt, religion has been a key arena in the battle to win over the hearts and minds of the working class. If in the past religion was the driving force behind Latin American liberatory movements, today, in its conservative garb, it has become an indispensable weapon in the right's efforts to reach the working class in everyday life. The neoliberal project has used Christian religious fundamentalism to entrench itself throughout Latin America, occupying institutional spaces and building a presence in the day-to-day life of the population. While religious narratives fill the world with the theology of prosperity, in which wealth and well-being are the fruits of individual and rational faith (replacing social justice with personal success), the Latin American right promotes the same vision, also offering entrepreneurship as the only escape from the problems that exist in the world of work. Individual entrepreneurship is associated with the vision that only the strong survive, sacrifice is the means to achieve a dignified life, and social rights are not rights but perks given to a parasitic group. In this economic, sociocultural, and political context, large corporations like the multinational transportation

company Uber and the Brazilian food delivery company iFood find fertile ground for recruiting workers to their digital platforms, where labour rights are largely absent and pay is based exclusively on results.

Neofascism uses religion in several ways, such as to attack sexual and reproductive rights through the discursive war that condemns all that is not heterosexual and promotes a heteronormative concept of family. Any questioning of this limited way of existing in the world is framed as 'gender ideology', provoking moral panic. Neofascists attack, condemn, and criticise as abnormal diverse models of the family. These actors promote a discourse of hate and call on society to rectify what they consider to be deviant attitudes, resulting in escalating violence against the LGBTQIA+ population. In one such example, a man set fire to a Buenos Aires hotel room where four lesbians were living together while they were inside and stopped them from escaping in a hate-motivated attack in May 2024. Three of them died.

Defending the model of the traditional heterosexual family also perpetuates the prevailing public policy in which women are reduced to procreators, primary caregivers, and those responsible for children, the sick, and the elderly. In other words, care continues to be a responsibility within the private realm of women while they are sentenced to the fires of condemnation, blamed for the violence they suffer, and deprived of the right to decide what to do about an undesired pregnancy, for example.¹⁹

In March 2024, a Datafolha survey announced alarming statistics about how Brazilian society views abortion rights, which are a fundamental issue for the feminist movements in Latin America. Only 6% of the Brazilian population supports the legalisation of abortion in any situation (this percentage is also very low among women, at 7%), and more than half of the population (52%) believes that women who abort, under any circumstance, should be jailed.²⁰ Most women have either already had an abortion or know another woman close to them who has. In other words, despite being intimately familiar with the specific situations of women who chose to interrupt their pregnancy, a significant portion of women support the criminalisation of abortion. In this context, the role of religion, by promoting a limited, cis-heteronormative view of the family, plays a significant role in transforming diverse family models into a crime while challenging the secular state.

Another new trend in recent decades has been the right organising massive street demonstrations around so-called 'moral issues' in some countries, such as Peru or Brazil, thereby occupying a traditional mobilisation space of the left.²¹ Provoking moral panic has been used as a campaign strategy in elections, such as associating the defence of abortion with support for murder while ignoring the profound and complex questions of race, class, and gender that the issue encompasses. Religious groups, together with Latin American elite conservatism, have developed shared strategies against the legalisation of abortion. The alliance between religious and political conservatives utilises the same discourse and aesthetic in various countries, creating organised movements on social media, in churches, and in the streets that primarily attract young people and women. The intervention of religious fundamentalists in legislative debates has often put a stop to important and widely discussed progressive proposals that challenge the system of patriarchy.

The 'Don't Mess with My Kids' (Con mis hijos no te metas) campaign, a movement to stop the lure of 'gender ideology' in schools, took place not just in the streets, but also in the debate over school curricula, beginning in Peru and spreading its message across Latin America, Europe, and elsewhere. Though evangelicals have carried out the most conservative actions, fundamentalist Catholics have also taken legal actions. In Venezuela, Catholics are the main social force opposing abortion rights. In Ecuador, diverse religious currents participated in street protests that presented themselves as secular while nonetheless adhering to the fundamentalist playbook in their arguments and discourse. The 'defence of life' against the legalisation of abortion is also prevalent within academic circles across various

countries in Latin America, using the supposed scientific ‘data’ to assert when a fetus should be classified as a life.²²

Neofascism also uses religion in its constant mobilisation against a conjured ‘enemy’. This method is complementary to the attack on sexual and reproductive rights described above. The concept of the enemy is central to fundamentalist discourses, such as dominion theology,²³ and is closely linked to the idea of ‘spiritual battle’ (the struggle against an ever-present enemy). In this discourse, the historical enemy of the continent’s right wing, which continues to be arbitrarily used, is communism. Anti-communism assumes various forms, reflecting its pluralistic, fantastical, and multifaceted nature. Different periods and contexts have seen the rise of right-wing political and social fronts unified in opposition to communism as a common enemy. Their demands revolve around the absolute reverence of private property, family cohesion – based on a unitary family model – and the order and defence of a worldview centred on Christian principles.

In Brazil, these forces have associated the Workers’ Party (PT) with communism, even though the PT has always been a moderate, progressive party more focused on conciliation than on radical breaks with the prevailing political and/or economic systems. A study published in March 2023 by Intelligence in Research and Strategic Consulting (Inteligência em Pesquisa e Consultoria Estratégica, or IPEC), a public opinion research institute, noted that 44% of those polled agree completely (31%) or in part (13%) with the statement that Brazil could become a communist country with Lula in the presidency.²⁴ In recent years, anti-communism and anti-Workers’ Party sentiment in the country have become increasingly interconnected, largely spurred by Christian fundamentalist sectors. These efforts have created the fantasy that having the Workers’ Party in power will mean an attack on Christian churches, on morality, and on the notion of respectable behaviour.

The debate over social rights and any sign of a strengthened state also fuels this anti-communist imaginary. There is a vision, greatly influenced by the United States, that state involvement in strengthening social rights is part of a communist agenda and, consequently, the state as the guarantor of rights is an enemy to be fought.

The construction of the ‘enemy’ is by no means a new phenomenon. Across the continent, Latin America underwent arduous years of dictatorships in the second half of the twentieth century that left a profound mark on its history. This period left open wounds that often continue to bleed. One of these struggles was the fight for freedom in a context in which books were burned, songs were censored, and silence was often the only possible defence against persecution and death. The neofascist clamour for what they call freedom of expression today obscures a bloody past. In this context, the word ‘freedom’ has become a cornerstone of the right’s jargon, centred around ideas such as ‘God, Country, Family’. This appropriation of the concept of freedom makes for a painful irony given the continent’s history of repression and allows crimes to be committed with impunity, aided by social media under the control of big tech companies. Yet, neofascists persist in their claims that the left is the enemy of freedom and accuse it of being authoritarian for curtailing one’s freedom to speak their mind. In so doing, the Latin American conservative and reactionary camp shamelessly co-opt a fundamental concept of the people’s struggle for justice in order to justify its atrocities.

Antifascism and a New Utopian Future

Even in countries where Latin American governments act with the support of a progressive or moderate majority and neofascists make up a noisy minority, the far right is still strongly present in multiple arenas such as legislatures, political parties, and civil society groups. Defeating the right will not be an easy task, nor will it be confined to the electoral sphere. The actions of organised social movements, whose collective values of solidarity oppose neoliberal ideology, and of governments that

prioritise the strengthening of rights and policies that advance the people's well-being, are critical to winning this struggle.

Part of what must be done is to reconnect politics with the people's needs, pains, and desires. But, above all, in order to challenge the violence and criminality of the right-wing groups spreading across the continent, it is necessary to take back our streets and our neighbourhoods through mobilisations and social organisation, which are currently in a weakened state. Miguel Stédile, coordinator of the Tricontinental office in Brazil, warns that 'to confront the monsters of fascism, the left needs to rediscover itself. In the face of today's structural problems – the climate catastrophe, the migration catastrophe, armed conflicts – the left must dare to propose equally structural solutions. Moderation and crisis management [...] is not enough to make real changes'.²⁵ Sharpening the connection between theory and workers' concrete realities through creativity and the collective construction of new utopias is an urgent task that must be undertaken every day.

Notes

1. Tricontinental, *What Can We Expect*, 18, our translation.
2. Tricontinental, *What Can We Expect*.
3. For more on how China's economic investment and geopolitical power could open up new possibilities for Latin America and the Caribbean and a new type of regional integration, see Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Looking Towards China*.
4. In 2018, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a study demonstrating that the median income of the richest 10% of the population in OECD member countries was around 9.5 times greater than the income of the poorest 10%. At the beginning of the 1990s, the top incomes were only 7 times greater, meaning that this income disparity increased by 35% over 25 years. See OECD, *A Broken Social Elevator?*, 3.
5. In the early 2000s, coups began to deviate from the pattern of the classic military coups of the twentieth century. The new 'hybrid' coup takes a multidimensional form – incorporating political, legal, military, economic, psychological, and mass communication elements – and includes a strategy of social mobilisation.
6. For more on the crisis, see Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *The World in Economic Depression*.
7. Translator's note: *Escola sem partido* is a far-right social and political movement founded in 2004 by Miguel Nagib. The movement aims at implementing a socially conservative and economically neoliberal curriculum under the guise of 'removing' politics from education.
8. Tricontinental, *What Can We Expect*.
9. Perseu Abramo Foundation, 'Percepções e valores'.
10. For more on these transformations in the world of work and their impact on working-class organisation and action, see: Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *In the Ruins of the Present*.
11. Tricontinental, *What Can We Expect*.
12. It is important to note the expansion of the production of raw materials for the drug market to Central and North America, with coca plantations now in Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala (OCCRP, 'Cocaine Everywhere'). See Jonny Wrate et al., 'Cocaine Everywhere All at Once' and Tricontinental, *Adictos al imperialismo*.
13. Shahadeh and André, 'Guerra às drogas'.
14. Zylbercan, 'Justiça'.
15. Fogo Cruzado and GENI, 'Mapa histórico', 28.
16. Translator's note: A *deputado federal* (federal deputy) is an elected member of the lower chamber of Brazil's federal legislative body, the *Câmara dos Deputados* or Chamber of Deputies. Federal deputies serve four-year terms.
17. Maciel et. al, 'Eduardo Bolsonaro'.

18. Jimenez, 'Brasil é o terceiro'.
19. For more on care work, see: Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, Uncovering the Crisis.
20. Damasceno, 'Números de Datafolha'.
21. Tricontinental, What Can We Expect.
22. Faúndes and Defago, 'Una mirada regional'.
23. Dominion theology is a fundamentalist ideology developed in the US during the 1970s with the goal of establishing a theocracy in contemporary society to fulfil Christians' predetermined positions in world leadership by occupying presidencies, ministries, parliaments, state, and municipal governments, as well as the highest courts. Its aim is to shape public affairs by achieving Christian dominance in the political sphere.
24. Perseu Abramo Foundation, 'A "ameaça"'.
25. Stédile, 'Como vivem', our translation.

Featured

Blood remembers

Death by incarceration: The U.S. prison system is slowly killing its political prisoners

Monthly Review Essays

Whether Bird Flu Is on the March Misses the Point

Rob Wallace

| Eyes | MR Online

The New England Journal of Medicine reported the case of a Texan farmworker infected with HPAI H5N1. He suffered the hemorrhaging in the eye the cows he tended expressed.

Lost & Found

On The Rewriting of History

Eds.

| Encyclopedia Britannica Print Gallery | MR Online

[Britannica's revisionist] distortions of the history of the Vietnamese struggle are just as radical and just as misleading [as those about the Soviet Union]. Here we may draw some valuable lessons about the hidden content of form: how apparently neutral principles of organization may shape meaning.

Daraja Pre