



THE ELUSIVE LIBERAL CATEGORY OF "TOTALITARIANISM"

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Among the philosophical-political categories that enjoy the greatest success in the order of neoliberal discourse, both Right and Left, is that of "Totalitarianism," especially in the sense conceptualized by Hannah Arendt in her work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Through this category, the entire history of the "short century" is reinterpreted teratomorphically as a succession of despotic and genocidal governments, red and black, enemies of the open society advocated by Popper. The horror of the short century would be determined, however, by the capitalist happy ending of the End of History (patented by Fukuyama) and the triumph of universal freedom (translated in real terms as that of the planetary free market). All of human history would thus unfold in the neoliberal order, assumed in a way that is anything but ideologically neutral, as the end (final) and as the end (finality) of history as such—according to the double meaning of the Greek motto τέλος.

The high ideological content of this narrative emerges from whatever perspective it is observed. First of all, the entire twentieth century, which—as Badiou reminds us—was the "century of political passion," resolves itself entirely in the gloomy reign of terror and genocide, of the gulags and the barbed wire of the extermination camps; horrors that were very much present, ça va sans dire, but that certainly cannot lead to ignoring all that was different and better produced during the "short century." Thanks to the far from neutral identification between Novecento and Totalitarianism, there is in fact no trace left of the utopian passion for the overcoming of the prose of capitalism, nor of the social conquests of the working classes, nor even of the achievements in terms of democratic rights and practices obtained, thanks to the framework of sovereign nation-states. According to the "advertising" theorem of the nouveaux philosophes—themselves celebrated in their time as a commercial product of the culture industry—the Gulag becomes the truth of any authentically socialist aspiration. And, synergistically, the barbed-wire netting of Auschwitz becomes the truth of all defense of the national state, of sovereignty and of tradition.

In addition to mortgaging the utopian dimension open to the projection of better futures, anti-totalitarian rhetoric fulfills an apologetic function with respect to the present itself. In fact, it suggests that, although replete with contradictions and injustices, the neoliberal order remains preferable to the red and black totalitarian horrors that traversed the "short century." In this way, the reified present ceases to be fought against because of the contradictions that innervate it (exploitation and misery, inequality and the constant hemorrhaging of rights); on the contrary, it is defended against the possible return of fascism and communism.

The victory of the capitalist power relation (Berlin, 1989) can thus be ideologically elevated to a

definitive fact of Weltgeschichte. The latter, after the "immense power of the negative," carried out its own autotelic process of implementing the free circulation of commodities and marketized persons. Anyone who unthinkingly fails to recognize the identification between freedom and the free market, between democracy and capitalism, perhaps even trying to bring back to life the waking dream of better freedoms and of an exodus from the steel cage of non-border techno-capital, will for that very reason be ostracized and vilified as "totalitarian," as "anti-democratic" and as "illiberal;" or, Popper would say, as the "enemy of the open society" which, by the way, is among the most closed societies in history, considering the degree of socio-economic exclusion, in terms of fundamental rights and basic goods, to which an increasing number of human beings are condemned.

The anti-totalitarian rhetoric works at full capacity, thanks to its symmetrical activation from the liberal Right and the champagne Left. The former accuses the Left—in all its degrees and in any of its colors—of being in collusion with the "red totalitarian madness" of Maoism and Stalinism. And thus it ensures that it remains tied to neoliberal dogma, without possible openings to greater political control of the market and possible extensions of social rights; practices that in themselves are immediately pointed out as a return to red totalitarianism. In analogous terms, the champagne Left accuses the liberalish Right of being permanently tempted by the "black or black totalitarian madness," Mussolinian or Hitlerian. And thus it ensures that the liberal neo-right remains at all times equally tied to the neo-liberal creed, immediately delegitimizing as "fascism" any attempt to re-sovereignize the national state, to resist market globalization and to protect the cultural and traditional identities of peoples. This reveals, once again, how Right and Left have introjected the core of neoliberal fundamentalism, according to which—with von Hayek's syntax—any political attempt to counteract free competition and the deregulated market leads inexorably to the "road to serfdom."

By virtue of this logic-illogic of reciprocal neoliberal vigilance (reconfirming the function deployed today by the right-left cleavage as a mere ideological simulacrum for the benefit of the ruling class), the liberal Right and the champagne Left mutually guarantee their own stable permanence within the perimeters of the Politically Correct Unique Thought of the liberal matrix. This focuses the supreme enemy on the Keynesian sovereign state and regulator of the economy, automatically identifying it with red and black totalitarianism or, not infrequently, with the ens imaginationis of "red and black totalitarianism." And as a result of the entire process, capitalism itself re-emerges again, more and more ennobled and ideologically legitimized: In fact, today it is presented—both from the Right and from the Left—as the kingdom of freedom, as the best of all possible worlds; or, in any case, as the only possible one in the time of disenchantment that remains after the red and black totalitarian atrocities.

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Featured: *Don Quixote de la Left*, by Jordan Henderson; painted in 2022.
