

THE NECESSARY LEFT: NOTES OF POST-LIBERAL PROGRESSIVISM

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In memory of Milada Horakova, a martyr of the anti-totalitarian resistance

The conservative wave -i don't mean the right or left, but conservative- that invades the world, simplifies, in an interested and crude form, our ideological codes and pathways. It affects the way we think about the role of the individual, the place of the market, the function of the State, the scope of the community. At the center of the *realpolitik* discussion and populism of every form, the progressive confluence that houses contemporary democracy is under attack. The complex legacies of democratic liberalism and socialism, sheltered under the vast notion - and something more vague- of this progressivism, are both victims of a constant threatening siege.

Together, democratic liberals and socialists have been the preferred target of authoritarian regimes. In the Czechoslovak Republic of 1918-1948, the prey of Nazis and Stalinists, Milada Horakova, was a tragic example. At the time of this writing, it is the 69th anniversary of her assassination at the hands of tormentors answering to Klement Gottwald. Founder of the Socialist Party, fighter for the rights of women

and a driving force of social policies, Milada incorporates the best causes of liberty and justice against totalitarianism of any ideological symbol. In Latin America, the defenders of Human Rights -synthesizers of the fights for liberty and justice- have been incarcerated by the police bodies of Pinochet and Castro, have been made to disappear by the paramilitaries of Videla and Maduro. On their behalf, the solid work of intellectuals such as Tony Judt and Norberto Bobbio, to mention two examples, deconstructs the fundamentalist logic that will compare liberalism with possessive individualism and socialism with the Leninist regime and the authoritarian planned economy.

The antiquated left, at the head of those movements and states conceived under the influence of the so-called *Marxism-Leninism*, has demonstrated itself to be completely incapable of processing pluralism and autonomy, the key principles for any democratic policies and societies during this century. None of the post-revolutionary regimes whose official ideologies were designed as *counter hegemonic* from Lenin's USSR, to Mao's China, to Jomeini's Iran- fostered conditions for the free coexistence of ideas, essential for an academic space or institution capable of criticizing and influencing the society that welcomes them. In '68, Lomonosov University did not transform into a proletariat Berkeley, no oriental Marcuse surged in Beijing. Today in UNAM, it's possible to choose between various forms of being a Marxist -and also not being one- while Cuban universities only issue philosophy degrees with the title *Marxism-Leninism*. Because the *counter hegemonic* is always something relational: it is conducted against someone incidentally dom-

inant. It is not an immutable attribute per sé of a political subject or project. Much less of the one that insists on being it, thus cancelling otherness.

I concur with the intellectual socialist Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca in that the left has spread out sectarianism -for its incapacity for dialogue, a stiff doctrine -the powerhouse of dogmatism- and to voluntarism based on fast and violent imposition of its programs- against adversaries and colleagues.² It is because, as the Spanish thinker acknowledges, “Where it has been made with power, communism has caused suffering that is hardly imaginable, ruling with an iron fist to any resistance.” In this way, the legacy of that authoritarian left- by consecrating the authoritarian and personalized state, the official undisputed history and the militarized society- ends with a post-communist conservatism.

Faced with this sinister legacy, we need to redefine the categories that seek to give an account of the diverse and changing realities of today’s Latin America. “Progressiveness” is one of them. In a recent historical sense, the concept has been understood within regional academia as a more or less vague political orientation that, in contrast to the neoliberal project pushed by the Washington Consensus, recovers the active role of the State as an economic agent, boosts social policies, promotes participative democracy and advocates for a foreign policy drawn

to multilateralism, the condemnation of global capitalism and the actions of major powers- particularly the US- and proposes different regional integration schemes. Thinking in this lenient and impressive way under the influence of recent history and geopolitics, the traces of this progressivism are located in the drive of center left governments that, from 2000 until now, were closer to the model of representative democracy and a market economy -Brazil and Uruguay- as much as others of more radical theory and praxis, such as the cases of Bolivia and Venezuela. The same ones that now seem, in such a wave, counter-balanced by a new liberal-conservative configuration in the region.

The main defect that progressivism has in its radical version, of longstanding populist roots, is the decreasing efficiency of its performances; joined with an inversion of the founding equation of the original pact between the leader and the masses. If in its original formulation the first was considered a temporary and legitimate resource that prepared the growing conscious participation of the latter in political life, over time the power of the leader becomes increasingly autonomous in the absence of institutional counterweights and autonomous citizenship-, consequently, controlling its bases and its original commitment becomes the mere rhetoric of legitimacy that conceals its growing authoritarianism.

Thus, the former leader, the representative of a people whose mandate he must implement, becomes a constituent whose guidelines execute, with little space for dissent, the atomized masses. Faced with

the dominant vision of democracy- which reduces it to mere public management by “effective” technocrats and to the simple representation of individual interests in representative institutions, this Schmittian approach to politics conceives it as a fated civil war developed through a combination of civil and violent resources, where the power of a State is detrimental to the different actors -dominant or subordinate- of society. Progressivism thus thought of as a mixture of populism, nationalism, and radical statism, ends up annihilating its fundamental emancipatory foundations, building alienating and oppressive power devices.

But there is another variant of progressivism. Social democracy is, as Sánchez-Cuenca points out, the project capable of achieving the balance between irreproachable moral motives -a more just society with freer individuals- and an agenda of realistic and compatible changes, compatible with fundamental rights. A project where democracy through the institution of voting, capable of processing ideological diversity in collective decision- allows the permanent (re) definition of social democratic (or inclusive socialist) goals, with a renewed community of solidarity and sustained public policies and accessories supported by progressive taxation, basic income, and the activated mobilization of the diverse types of outcasts. A model where economic development debates harmonizing with the protection of ecosystems brought to the brink of destruction in this rampant Anthropocene. A project that seeks a generalized welfare that guarantees autonomy and self-fulfillment. The best antidote against the dystopia of the wild market and redeeming tyrants. The viable hope for a better humanity.

The cause of progressivism scares conservatives today and is distorted and tampered by populist politicians. To bet on democratic progressivism is to recognize the identical importance of rights and policies that promote -individually and collectively- equality and freedom, against a state and private despotisms. Liberals and democratic socialists come together in that. In Latin America we can renounce, in unison, the Washington Consensus and the Sao Paulo Forum. Because the first holds the expansion of rights, the daughter of democratic transitions, to the logic of neoliberal accumulation. And the second justifies, under the mantra of Creole anti-imperialism, the anti-democratic policies of the Cuban regime and model as well as its continental puppies. Without repudiating both dominant perspectives, there will be no integral and enduring citizenship in Latin America. Nor a worthy Left.

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2 See Sánchez-Cuenca, I. (2018). *La superioridad moral de la izquierda*. Madrid, Lengua de Trapo.