

The middle class, the partocracy and fascism

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The topic of *partocracy* has not been studied seriously by either academic sociology or the “anti-fascist” critique of modern parliamentarism, despite the fact that the crisis of the self-proclaimed democratic regimes has revealed its specific reality as an *authoritarian system with liberal appearances where the parties, and especially their leaderships, abrogate the representation of the popular will in order to legitimize their actions and their excesses in defense of their particular interests*. Nor should this fact be at all surprising, since the same thing happened in the party bureaucracy in the Stalinist and fascist regimes: the political class moulded by the *partocracy* exists to the extent that it conceals its existence as a class. As Debord pointed out, “the ideological lie at its origin can never be revealed”. Its existence as a class depends on the monopoly of ideology, Leninist or fascist in the one case, democratic in the other. While the bureaucratic class of State Capitalism dissimulated its exploitative class function by presenting itself as the “party of the proletariat” or the “party of the nation and the race”, the partocratic class of market capitalism does so by presenting itself as the “representative of millions of voters”, and thus, *if the bureaucratic dictatorship was “real socialism”, the partocratic usurpation of popular sovereignty is “real democracy”*. The former attempted to reinforce its position with an abundance of ritual spectacles and sacrifices; the latter has attempted to do so with an abundance of houses and the credit with which they can be bought. Both have failed.

In order to understand the phenomenon of *partocracy* we must take a look at its historical origins, when despotism ceased to be effective as a result of the reduction of the power of oligarchies to the benefit of the state. At a certain stage of capitalist development, the period when bureaucratization played a central role in history, party administration replaced the paternalism of the landowners. The aforesaid phenomenon must be situated *in the context of the extreme degeneration of parliamentarism, the concentration of capital, the degradation of the workers organizations, the expansion of the state, the total professionalization of politics and the formation of a clientage system based on the arbitrary use of public funds and jobs*, all of which were to be intensified in the postwar world. We should also mention the imperialist waves, the cold war, “eurocommunism”, the processes of technological modernization and the energy crisis, as so many other conditioning factors of the fusion of politics, the state and national capitalism. But *the patrimonialization of the state by a political class has not yet reached the peak of its trajectory and thus does not play a preponderant role, until the expansion of the self-governing economy is proclaimed as the sole goal of policy, that is, when economic nationalism is abandoned in favor of the global development of*

the market. Then the political class, based in an extensive network of clientage, becomes part of the ruling class. A new bourgeoisie, if you prefer. It must be noted that it is neither a subaltern class, nor is it entirely a ruling class (except in China); nor is it a national class. Precisely when it becomes international it also becomes a fundamental element in the relations of production imposed by financial globalization. The *partocracy* abolishes the contradiction between national interests and global interests by establishing the same political conditions everywhere, conditions that are optimal for fostering economic expansion; on the one hand, simultaneously creating an extensive network of patronage by means of the copious resources of the state; on the other, by de-activating the protests arising from civil society, integrating the non-parliamentary opposition, and contributing institutional violence where economic violence is insufficient. The economy does not function without order, and the partocracy is, if not exactly order, *is a disorder that functions to the benefit of the economy.* It is the established disorder.

Whereas in the one case we have an open and competitive system that uses electoral procedures and, in the other, a closed and rigidly hierarchical system where appointments do not require legitimization, *in our times it is not rare to see the comparison, and even the identification, of the partocracy with fascism. Both are authoritarian forms of government that emerged after the retreats and defeat of the proletariat, in the subsequent process of massification and declassment that would produce a new conformist and acquiescent middle class.* Both nationalize failed banks and both exhibit an initial “plebeian” stage that declares the “right to work” and “welfare”, whether by supporting existing trade union federations or by creating them from scratch in order to use them as interlocutors, a stage that comes to an end as soon as the working class is domesticated and dissolved. The transformation of the proletariat into passive foot soldiers of the institutionalized trade unions, without any class consciousness or desire for social change, is of fundamental importance. That is when the counter-reforms in labor policy are implemented and the middle classes are asked to make impoverishing sacrifices. Fascism and *partocracy* both strive to prevent the proletarianized civil society from establishing its own domain outside the system and both disputed its attempts to acquire its own space; the former, however, as an extremist defense of the economy, resorting to the brutalization of public life, while the latter, as a defense of modernization, preferentially employed consumerist seduction and corruption. These are costly responses to the capitalist crisis, as they require the maintenance of a growing unproductive population, and responses of this kind demand the acquisition, mobilization and diversion of resources on a scale beyond the capacities of the market. Whereas fascism is an archaic and harsh response, *partocracy* is a more all-embracing and rationalized response. They are forms of the political organization of big capital, different from the regimes formerly referred to as “bonapartist”—referring to the populist dictatorship established in France after the electoral victory of Louis Napoleon—like that of Marshall Petain, also in France, that of general Perón in Argentina or Chavismo. *Partocracy and fascism have a concrete social base, the petty bourgeoisie, civil service employees and the declassed proletariat in the latter, and the salaried middle class and the workers regimented in the trade unions, in the former.*

The collective psychosis generated by the absence of class ideals, demoralization and the fear of the crisis, cause this base to believe in the miracles that a savior-leadership promises it, and is prepared to submit, not without some grousing, to all kinds of restrictive measures. The disaster of globalization leads domination to demand a war economy. And here is where the differences begin to emerge: fascism takes place in a national framework, hence its autarchic plans, the mixed enterprises, the public works as a solution for unemployment and its expansionist nation-

alism. *The partocracy develops in a neoliberal context, which is why its national planning obeys the economic directives of international capital and its foreign policy is subordinated to the military-diplomatic strategy of the leading gendarme of capitalism, the United States of America.* Thus their infrastructure projects, the stimulus to build houses and the use of “welfare” as a discriminatory distribution of the favors of patronage. Unlike what took place under fascism, in *partocracy* the utilization of the bureaucratic apparatus for private ends is decentralized; it takes place at every level of administration and not only at the highest cabinet levels. The *partocracy* does not need to nationalize any means of production, although it could do so should it have to intervene in a financial crisis; it works more on behalf of international investment than to save domestic business or private property; it always operates in the sphere of interests that trump state and local interests, although they do not entirely annul them because they are the interests of their own turf. While it is true that *fear is used as an instrument of government, it is not used to impose a policy of terror, but a policy of resignation.* For the *partocracy*, the terrorists are the others, its violent or peaceful enemies who are trying to rebuild civil society by means of dissidence, and it is seriously engaged with these enemies, although under normal conditions it prefers to dissolve class antagonisms instead of criminalizing and repressing them, opting to buy leaders by way of cooptation rather than by the use of force, and chooses technological surveillance measures rather than prison camps for political offenders. Fascism does not allow any dissidence, while *partocracy* tolerates hostile minorities as long as their self-exclusion does not become problematic. The illusory community as defined by fascism, necessarily composed in part by race, or the nation and its living space, stands in contrast to the partocratic community, that of the citizenry or the voters, whence the possibility of partial self-marginalization arises. This is why the major problem that confronted the terrorist one-party dictatorships, war against neighboring nations, does not arise. Due to the international treaties that establish the free circulation of capital, the expansion of the national economy is not obstructed by customs duties or tariff barriers, and is able to expand and even relocate throughout the world without the need of wars, except for those required in order to control energy resources. As a result, the “defense” policies of the partocratic systems do not completely exhaust their national reserves in the manufacture of weapons, nor do they condemn their subject populations to starvation (as was the case, for example, in the USSR and is taking place even today in North Korea). Fascism and totalitarianism have almost always failed and have collapsed as victims of their own insoluble contradictions. They have often been replaced by more or less imperfect partocratic regimes, that is, regimes that are more or less dominated by mafias, depending on the existence and strength of regulatory mechanisms, and, on the other hand, on the strength or weakness of the personnel of the previous regime. Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom could be offered as examples of self-regulating partocracies, and Spain, Italy and Russia as examples of dysfunctional and corrupt partocracies. These reconversions took advantage of the definitive defeat of the revolutionary proletariat, which was never completely compensated for by the new advances that provided new stimulus for social discussion and debate and made possible the resurgence of a radical and independent workers movement.

We can accept the fact that *partocracy* is not fascism, although it resembles it in some aspects—especially in its two-party form—nor, however, is it democracy, not even a “sick democracy”: in *partocracy* there is no separation of powers, no public debate, no public control, and no majority based decision making. It is a modern type of developmentalist oligarchy that functions, although its crises, by sacrificing a significant number of its supporters, lead to a certain degree

of disaffection. *The partocracies are questioned by their social base because of their subordination to the financial system, but not to the point that their social base appeals to the partocracies for revolutionary policies, since its initiative does not transcend electoral reform and the regulation of banking and investment.* The discontented middle classes do not reject the partocratic system, they merely demand a party that acts more in accordance with their interests and a more Keynesian state that would solve the problem of unemployment and credit; as a result, its weapons are still limited to petitions, attending peaceful and relaxed delegate conferences, voting and using the resources of the legal system. They actually believe what the regime says about itself. Thus, *the middle classes (among whom we should include the unconscious, dispersed and demoralized proletariat) do not pursue a confrontation with the partocratic institutions, but a greater openness on the part of the latter to a bloc of third parties and groups. An outcome that has been baptized as “participative democracy”.* They want to be fairly represented in the regime, which is why they will never wage war against the regime, nor will they follow anyone who does. They spray water on the gunpowder so that it does not explode. However, when institutions cease to function because of an excess of indebtedness, the fruit of either corruption or simple long-term mismanagement, that circumstantial distancing will take place that, by isolating the political class—which, we must not forget, includes the workers bureaucracy—forces the *partocracy* to become more repressive and more like fascism, all the more so if it is affected by the fear of the existence of a real “anti-system” opposition. Then, however, punitive legislation and riot police are not enough: it will have to use the alternative parties and trade unions, electoral coalitions and civil society platforms, social movements and neighborhood groups, in order to pacify the discontent and divert it towards legalistic political and social channels. One can fall asleep at an assembly of “indignados” and wake up voting for the United Left or the Greens. And in the meanwhile, the political class, the real Party of the State, salvages its *modus vivendi* or, as that class calls it, “governability”, thanks to an ephemeral complication of the political map and a few doors left half-open to “transverse” participation.

The *partocracy* consolidated its power thanks to the support of the middle classes, who like to call themselves the “citizenry”, but it is not the rule by those classes; it is, to the contrary, the absolute rule of globalized capital. *Because of their excessive fragmentation, the middle classes are incapable of enunciating an independent policy and, in both good times and crises, accommodate themselves to the developmentalist policies that distinguish the leaders of the high level executive bourgeoisie.* They do, however, have something to say when their interests are thrown overboard. The protest typical of the civil society movement, of which vanguardist leftism is nothing but an old-fashioned version, is its way of manifesting its disenchantment with “politicians” and legislatures. *So no one should ever expect timeworn “democratic” demands to be transformed into socialist demands. Nor should anyone expect to find a demand for the defense of territory among the proposals of the ecologists.* Nothing but reforms are sought; *partocracy*, however, just like the developmentalism in which it is based, cannot be reformed, it can only be overthrown, and this is precisely what the middle classes will not dare to do. It is not in their nature. If sufficient historical forces are ever concentrated for the destruction of the *partocracy*, that is, if the social crisis is exacerbated to the breaking point, one part of the middle class will follow those forces, while the other will embrace the dictatorship or fascism and then it is all or nothing for revolutionary communism or socialism. Unfortunately, as is demonstrated by the absence of popular methods for self-organization, those forces do not exist.

Any serious analysis of *partocracy* must take into account the relations among the ruling class, which includes the political class, the middle classes and the movements against the system. *The ruling class must ensure its connection with the middle classes by means of the Party of the State, neutralizing any determined opposition that forms directly from social contestation.* If it does not succeed and protests become revolts, the ruling class will abandon peaceful and conservative methods in favor of tactics appropriate for civil war, squelching the complaints of the civil society movement and transforming the political class into the unified party of order. When the ruling class enters into conflict with formal parliamentary democracy it will try to resolve the problem by means of a declaration of emergency and a disguised state of war, as it has been doing. This is the real function of the political class and the workers bureaucracy in moments of acute crisis. The political class or the Party of the State is there to render unnecessary the constant risk of a military coup or fascism, since it has to be in a position to perform the role of the gendarme of world capital by upholding the minimal appearances of parliamentary legitimacy. In this context we should recall that *the middle classes do not exactly constitute a class, but a motley aggregate of social fragments, malleable and versatile, which is why they are condemned to remain a tool of capitalism until the end.* They cannot escape emergency alliances with the ruling class, since they need a “leadership” and there is no other class capable of providing it. Furthermore, *the middle classes are more afraid of popular anarchy, mass violence, anti-capitalism and the dismantling of the state, than they are of taxes, budget cuts or privatization.* They are annoyed by the politicians, the legislature and the government, but they still believe in the judges, in the press, in the officials and the NGOs, in public health and education, in science and progress. They are standing with each foot on a separate unstable foundation, but when faced with an all-too-definite alternative they cling to the civil society platitudes of order rather than dare to venture on the uncertain roads of the social revolution. This will be true in the majority of cases, but not in every case. At least at first, when the ruling class and the partocratic system still have the advantage. Its historical role is subaltern, never determinate. The subversive subject will not arise from the middle classes, it will not find its illusions and its existence in them. We have mentioned the possibility that from the full decomposition of capitalism a “dangerous” class could emerge, one that will be prepared to change society from top to bottom and eliminate the prevailing political regime. This negative class will have to reject the civil society ideology as well as the mystifying professional politics of the parties, since the precondition for its existence imposes upon it a strategy of dissolution and an independent and egalitarian procedure. If this were to take place, the problem of the middle class would be resolved without further complications.

It is very difficult to think strategically after a series of decisive defeats. The new rebels persist in ignoring the defeat of their predecessors, because the immense scale of the destruction of the working class milieu and the progress of domestication have resulted in an equally vast disorientation and inability to discern a new perspective. *Social history testifies to a large number of supplementary defeats as the result of an incorrect evaluation of the main defeat, in this case the defeat of the proletariat in the sixties and seventies, which was only made worse by the attempts to conceal or to ignore it.* Nor does it appear that they have influenced the transformations of capitalism provoked by globalization, the energy crisis or generalized urbanization. In the social war this kind of behavior leads to the annihilation of forces, to ephemeral commitment and to vanguardist and adventurist sectarianism. It is paradoxical that those who are the most vocal supporters of a complete historical memory should be the most forgetful. And that those who define themselves as the nightmare of the powerful should be nothing but an undisciplined and

extremist faction of the middle classes in disarray. Throughout history social crises have led to explosive situations, but in an atmosphere of confusion and *in the absence of clear consciousness, crises only aggravate the process of decomposition. The nihilist mentality and opportunism take the place of class consciousness, and militate against the formation of a revolutionary subject*, and furthermore foster in the oppressed masses feelings of frustration and indifference. In superficially oppositional milieus there is a lack of serious analysis that goes to the roots of the social question. The appalling contrast with the unchanging and miserable reality of the ridiculous workerist and insurrectionist tactical deviations, not to speak of the even more terrible ludic or esthetic farces, induces passivity rather than radicalization. *There can be no radicalization without consciousness, and there is no consciousness without a critical evaluation of the past.* One gets nowhere with just good intentions, rage and scenography. We are unfortunately only at the beginnings of a critical revision. Capitalism will continue to be victorious without meeting hardly any resistance. And the side of the defeated will continue to suffer the unexamined consequences of their defeats.

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