Tomás Ibáñez
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April 20th, 2025

https://autonomies.org/2025/04/tomas-ibanez-neo-fascism-novel-totalitarianism-and-the-illusion-of-the-ballot-box/
Original text in Spanish:
https://redeslibertarias.com/2025/03/17/el-neofascismo-el-totalitarismo-de-nuevo-cuno-y-el-espejismo-de-las-urnas/

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Contents

Of course, any action we can think of to fight *neo-fascism*, including *active abstention*, can only achieve a certain effectiveness if it is forged, and if it is exercised, from and as a *collective endeavour*. And that means that resistance against *neo-fascism* requires the creation and encouragement of *libertarian spaces of confluence and joint action*.

Finally, I do not want to leave out one aspect that worries me. I am convinced that *neo-fascism* will not take long to proclaim the *expiry of the current democratic system*, replacing it with other forms of governmentality that will undoubtedly be based on digital technologies.

And I have the intuition that *Artificial Intelligence* could be put to use for this purpose. Not to design new forms of governance, although that is possible, but to form part of these new forms itself.

To the extent that *post-democracy* is already underway, I wonder, not without some *discomfort*, whether advocating, as I am doing, for the dismantling of the belief that elections are what confer legitimacy on power might not mean *rowing in the same direction as neo-fascism…* An uncomfortable question, which I end with here!

We share below a recent talk given by Tomás Ibáñez at the Ateneo Libertario La Idea*, Madrid, on the 27th of February. The importance and urgency of its subject matter requires no introduction.*

I shall begin with a note that is merely conceptual, or perhaps simply terminological.

I – *Fascism and Neo-fascism*

It is well known that *fascism* proper, *classical fascism*, is a *historically situated* phenomenon which, despite their differences, usually encompasses both *Mussolini's fascism* and *Hitler's National Socialism*. We also know that this term has been *extrapolated* to designate both *regimes* that bear a certain resemblance to those that prevailed in the 1920s and 1930s, and to qualify political positions and movements that claim to be based on the *ideologies* of those regimes, with a few minor updates, if any.

Although it is historically dated, I believe that the extrapolation of this term retains a certain usefulness because *fascist ideology* continues to be claimed today by different groups, and continues to permeate certain behaviours, both individual and collective. Therefore, I would not *dream* of denying that *fascism* is still present in our societies and that it is not limited to being a mere object of the past, confined to the museum of history. We must therefore continue to fight it radically and with all our might.

However, alongside this *fascism*, which, incidentally, *I am not going to discuss here*, a *new phenomenon* is developing on a macro-social level, which is just as *execrable* as the fascism of the last century, and which could even raise *that barbarity* to still greater heights.

It is about this phenomenon that I intend to speak today and I believe that describing it as *fascism*, as is so often the

case, does not help us to understand its nature, but rather contributes *to distorting* our understanding of it.

Well, I prefer to use the term *neo-fascism* to describe the current *extreme right-wing* movements and policies that are proliferating all over the world, even though I know that, like *fascism*, it is also a historically dated word because it was used to describe the extreme right-wing political formations that took over from *classical fascism* in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in Italy.

If I nevertheless resort to the term *neo-fascism*, it is because it evokes the unmistakable *family resemblance* that today's extreme right shares with *classical fascism*, but at the same time it also points to a certain *difference*.

As far as *similarities* are concerned, I believe that the aforementioned family resemblance between the two phenomena is beyond doubt. For example, we find in *neo-fascism*, as in *fascism*, both racism and xenophobia, as well as the exaltation of force and the cult of authority, and contempt for human rights. And, of course, one could add many more commonalities between the two.

Turning now to the *differences*, I will mention just a couple of them.

For example, *neo-fascism* no longer needs to promote practices of snitching and mutual surveillance among neighbours, or co-workers, or even family members, in order to create a climate of *distrust and fear* that someone will report us to the authorities. Practices which, by the way, also abounded, as we well know, in other equally *ultra-authoritarian* regimes such as those that prevailed in the Soviet Union and its satellites.

If *neo-fascism* can calmly dispense with such practices, it is simply because, through *digital technologies*, surveillance, information and denunciation are, so to speak, *built into contemporary society by default*.

Nor is it essential to prohibit and repress the publication of subversive writings, because the impact of any alternative

ble break the balance between competing options, introducing a *systemic bias* in favour of *neo-fascism*.

On the other hand, the latest numerical technologies confer *exorbitant powers* on leaders once elections have installed them in office.

Consequently, now stripped of any justification, this belief in the *legitimising power of the ballot box* is transformed into a mere *artifice* that enables *neo-fascism* to come to power.

In short, in order for *neo-fascism* to gain access to power and use it as it pleases, without provoking a backlash that endangers the social order, it is *essential* that elections *be perceived as giving the victors unquestionable legitimacy* to govern.

It is therefore this apparatus for *legitimising the exercise of power* that should be *dismantled*, or weakened, by *deserting the ballot box* and refusing to take part in elections which, *whether we like it or not*, will be used by *neo-fascism to legitimise its exercise of power*.

IV – *Elements of a Conclusion*

Well, it is obvious that analysing *neo-fascism* is not going to tell us what we should *do* to counter it. However, if there is one thing I am convinced of, it is that, in order to try *to defuse* one of the greatest dangers that threatens us, we need now *to spread* a *keen awareness of the imminence and nature of this new type of totalitarianism* that the generalised *computerisation of the world and of life* has in store for us, while at the same time *dismantling the illusion that neo-fascism can be defeated at the ballot box*.

The illusion that neo-fascism can be defeated by going to the ballot box must be dismantled, because what we are really doing by putting a ballot paper in the ballot box when neo-fascism is emerging as a possible winner *is helping to legitimise its way to power, and thus giving it carte blanche to act as it pleases.*

Our victory at the ballot box creates the *false sensation* of having won the game against *neo-fascism*, at least momentarily, and this encourages us *to persevere in the electoral struggle* in order to continue to reap *illusory victories*, while the monster continues on its way hand in hand with whoever has won the elections.

Secondly, it must also be borne in mind that *neo-fascism* has cleverly chosen to dress itself in *the garb of democracy*, and is trying to gain *legitimacy* by accepting rules that involve *playing the electoral card without hesitation, and gaining access to power through the ballot box of parliamentary democracy.*

It is precisely the *legitimisation by the ballot box* that allows it to gain acceptance among the population, and, as Donald Trump has understood very well, it is what enables it to *after* exercise a *totally excessive* power by declaring it to be the fruit of the *popular will*. This allows it to take measures that would eventually be disapproved of even by its own voters, and which could provoke street uprisings if they were taken outside the *legitimacy conferred by the ballot box.*

It is the belief, *deeply ingrained in the population* and repeated by the institutions, *that elections are the legitimate procedure for democratic access to positions of power*, which allows *neo-fascism* to use them to seize political power.

However, this belief, which could still find *glimpses of justification* when the means of influencing the electorate maintained a certain balance between the opposing options, and when the instruments of power in the hands of the victors remained below a certain threshold of potency, no longer holds. The belief in the *legitimacy conferred by the ballot box* has become *totally untenable* from the moment when, as is happening today, the first stirrings of the *new computer-assisted totalitarianism* are emerging.

Indeed, it turns out that, *on the one hand*, the control of digital platforms and the *type of communication* they make possi-

media is reduced *to the strictest insignificance* in the face of the enormous volume of comments disseminated by *social networks*; and when, moreover, these networks are fed by those who control the *large digital platforms*, they already fulfil the task of *disinformation* and neutralisation of subversive discourse, without it being necessary to impose, as in the past, strict limitations on freedom of expression.

However, beyond the similarities and differences between *classical fascism* and *neo-fascism*, what is clear is that the latter is experiencing an *extraordinary upsurge* in various parts of the world.

So much so that one might think that the *neo-fascists* have finally read and assimilated *Gramsci*'s work and have launched themselves into the global conquest of *ideological and cultural hegemony*.

But in reality, *it matters little* whether they have read it or not, because the rise of *neo-fascism* is the result of factors that *are not primarily the result of ideological and cultural action*, even if this also plays an important role.

II – *The Causes*

In fact, among the different *causes* of such growth, *which is really what I want to discuss here today*, there are two main sets of causal elements.

The first set includes factors which are, I don't quite know what to call them, but let's say they are *psychosocial* effects resulting from certain *socio-structural* characteristics. I will explain this in a moment.

While *the second set* refers to the effects of *computer technologies*, and that is why another name for *neo-fascism*, which seems to me to be quite appropriate, could be *techno-fascism.*

The *first set of causal factors* includes *insecurity and fears* that predispose us *to seek refuge* in that which claims *to be*

strong enough *to protect* us, guaranteeing order and stability. This *insecurity* and these *fears*, which have become truly *endemic* in large sections of the population, stem from *two main sources*.

The *first* is the increasing *complexity* of today's world and *its accelerating pace of change*. These are two *socio-structural* factors that generate very high levels of *uncertainty* about what the more or less immediate *future* holds. Thus, *unpredictability* about what tomorrow will bring has become a *defining characteristic of the present itself*.

The *second* source of *insecurity* lies in the various *global risks* that mark the contemporary horizon. Prominent among these *global risks* are *biological risks*, such as deadly *pandemics* whose rapid spread is driven by *socio-structural* factors such as the *speed, volume and frequency of the incessant movement of people around the globe*, as well as the *increasing density* of ever-growing *urban populations*.

Alongside these worrying *biological risks*, there are also, as we know, the major *environmental risks*, which include, among other problems, for example, progressive *global warming* with its tremendous effects.

And although they are not properly classified as *global risks*, because they do not involve any objective danger, it nevertheless turns out that *large-scale migratory flows*, *both intranational and international*, are *perceived as such risks* by a large part of the populations of the most favoured, or to be more precise, the least disadvantaged areas of the planet.

Wherever these flows, which *will continue to increase sharply* in the coming years, are directed and where they end up, there is a growing *fear of the loss of cultural and/or religious identity references*, and a *fear* of *deteriorating working conditions and falling living standards*. All of which leads to outbreaks of xenophobia and racism, which are perfectly in line with *neo-fascist* discourses.

tion, that is, the immigrant population, women, LGTBIQ+ and some others.

And the *third* is when the possibility arises of an *accession to power*, no longer of the right wing supported by *neo-fascism*, but of *neo-fascism* itself. *Vox*, for example. If that happens, the most appropriate attitude, in my opinion, is *to practice and defend abstention to the letter*. Not the dogmatic abstention that is applied because that is what the anarchist tradition and its principles establish, but the *contingent abstention* that arises from the *circumstantial characteristics* of a given situation.

Let us see what these *circumstantial characteristics* are, and on what *arguments* I support a position which, I am aware, clashes head-on with the belief that it is precisely when *neo-fascism* caresses the possibility of *winning at the ballot box* that it becomes more imperative *to abandon abstention and turn out to vote*.

Firstly, when *neo-fascism* threatens to win, it is worth bearing in mind that one of the effects of the slogan "watch out, the wolf is coming, let's go to the polls en masse so it doesn't devour us" is to have a *masking effect*.

It disguises the fact that the *source* of *neo-fascism* is not so much in the *political/ideological* sphere, but in what is *external* to that sphere. That is, it lies *primarily* in conditions that are not of the ideological/political kind that can be settled in the confrontation of certain electoral choices, but rather it responds to certain *social and technological factors*, as I have tried to argue above.

Consequently, in the face of the *neo-fascist* threat, what we are going to stop by going to the polls is not the *wolf*, but only one of its manifestations. The relief at having stopped that manifestation with our vote, or at least at having tried to do so, *masks* the fact that, in reality, if we had succeeded in stopping anything, *it could not in any case be neo-fascism*, because it is mainly along other paths that the wolf is advancing.

ical and contextualised, and therefore *conditioned*, character of our own principles and values.

This means that, caught in the *dilemma between voting or abstaining*, it cannot be argued that *abstention* should be privileged in all circumstances, because from the anarchist point of view, at least as I understand it, there are no *absolute principles* that would forever override the diversity of situations and the concrete terrain of struggles.

Anarchist action cannot *land* from on high, from the heights of theory, onto the *context* in which it intervenes, but must be formed in the *concreteness of each context* and in the practices of struggle against domination that develop in these contexts.

The need for our action to result from the *interaction* between our values, let us say, to simplify, between "*the Idea*" and the concrete characteristics of the *contexts* in which we intervene, means that we have to analyse the latter with sufficient finesse so that the interaction between *the context and the Idea* does not remain a pure declaration of intentions.

This is why I will allow myself to distinguish briefly, here, between *three* main types of electoral situations.

The *first* is when the contest is, as is quite common, between the left and the right, with a minimal presence of *neo-fascist* parties. I consider, in full agreement with Malatesta, that in this situation *abstention, active abstention*, represents the *most coherent* anarchist attitude.

The *second* is when the balance of power excludes *neo-fascism* from winning, but gives it good enough results to push the right towards even more right-wing policies.

I think that in these cases the most appropriate thing to do is *to set aside abstention and go to the polls* to try to avoid the negative, and sometimes even *dramatic*, *repercussions* that an electoral outcome with a strong *neo-fascist* presence would have on the most precarious or discriminated sectors of the popula-

Also, what fuels the fire of *fears* experienced by some sectors of the population are the *certainly commendable*, though still insufficient, advances achieved by *feminist struggles and by the LGTBIQ+ movement*, advances that make-up a not small part, by the way, of the *male population's* fear of the loss of the infamous privileges granted to them by systemic *hetero-androcracy*.

Finally, in this first set of causes that propel *neo-fascism*, the *neo-fascist appropriation* of a vocabulary that seemed to be the heritage of progressive currents is also quite striking, and with the *hijacking of the word freedom* standing out in particular.

The continuous reference to *freedom* is by no means accidental, because, paradoxical though it may seem, *neo-fascism* exploits the feeling of the *harassment of freedom* experienced by part of the population, especially among the young, in the face of the social expansion of *political correctness* and *wokism*, i.e., the surveillance of behaviour, verbal and non-verbal, of what is said and done, which is considered *politically incorrect*. *Cancellation* practices obviously have their pros and cons.

This *pressure towards political correctness* is experienced by some as an attempt *to impose* a *single way of thinking*, albeit a left-wing way of thinking, and is seen as an attempt to establish a kind of *policing of thought and behaviour*.

And as usually happens when we have the impression that an *imposition restricts our freedom*, a *healthy* phenomenon of *reactance* is produced that leads us to reject what has been imposed, and to desire even more that which has been repressed. In this case, however, this *healthy reaction unfortunately* leads us to reject the values we hold dear on the libertarian side, and to tune in to the *neo-fascist* discourse.

It is in this *breeding ground of insecurity, fear, growing complexity, uncertainty, unpredictability and vulnerability to global risks*, and also a certain *resentment* at the repeatedly unfulfilled political promises and the precariousness of living conditions, that *neo-fascism* sinks its roots and draws its energies – much

more than in the speeches of the Abascals and company; a breeding ground which is fostered by the way of life established by capitalism.

Let us not deceive ourselves, it is difficult to eradicate *neo-fascism* if these roots are not attacked; either it is cut at the roots, or it will inevitably resurface episodically.

But to cut it at the roots poses the colossal, the difficult, the uncertain task, of *exiting capitalism*, without, for the time being, anyone knowing very well how to do this at the global level.

It is true that *fascism* proper, *classical fascism*, also drew on some of the elements I have just mentioned. However, *neo-fascism* adds *an extremely important differentiating element that is decisive in characterising it.* This differentiating element is called *information technology.*

Indeed, the *second* major set of *causal factors* of *neo-fascism* refers to the widespread *computerisation of the planet.* This rampant computerisation is establishing a *new kind of totalitarianism* that far exceeds any form of *social control and thought-shaping* that *classical fascism* could have dreamed of.

For example, a novel and extremely powerful way of *creating* and thus *manipulating* opinion, of formatting a *single way of thinking*, and of inhibiting *critical thought*, has been articulated through the major *digital platforms.*

Indeed, the implementation of digital technologies has changed not only the *medium* through which communication takes place, but also its *format and content. Neo-fascism* has managed to create a discourse that is perfectly adapted to digital technologies, which is not intended to argue, to persuade, much less to provoke reflection, but rather *to capture attention* in the most striking way possible, with extremely simple and brief messages that are aimed at *affectivity* rather than the *intellect*, and which minimise the *cognitive effort* required to understand them.

These two macro-causes, or *major causes*, are *not independent* of each other, but rather mutually reinforce each other in a kind of *synergistic* relationship.

Undoubtedly, it is Donald Trump, victorious in the US and blessed by the *great tenors of the world's computerisation*, who best illustrates the nature of *neo-fascism* and its relationship with the *new totalitarianism* fostered by the digitalisation of the world. The regime set up by Donald Trump is today the *laboratory* where *neo-fascism* is being experimented and developed, and represents the *model* from which neo-fascist movements and parties in the rest of the world draw their inspiration and the mirror in which they see themselves.

III – *The Electoral Dilemma*

This being the case, the rise of the extreme right in the *electoral contests* of many countries has led many anarchists to consider the *dilemma* of whether *to go to the polls* or to maintain the classic *abstentionist position* defended, as we well know, at the beginning of the last century by Errico Malatesta in his polemic with Saverio Merlino, and which has since become a widely accepted *principle* in anarchist ranks.

In my view, Malatesta was *absolutely right* when he pointed out the *incongruity*, in the ambit of anarchism, of going to a ballot box set up and controlled by the political managers of the instituted society. To do so, as Malatesta said, although not in the same words, only serves to legitimise and reinforce one of the main mechanisms that ensure *the maintenance of the very system we are fighting against.*

However, I would also like to point out, and I think *this is important*, that resorting to abstention as a *matter of principle* is no longer acceptable for those of us anarchists who have incorporated the contributions of *contemporary critical thought* into our conceptual framework, and who have assumed the *histor-*

A race that, by the way, Heidegger diagnosed very aptly when he reflected on "the being of technology" and its progressive appropriation of the world.

No doubt, I can be labelled a *dystopian*, but today, I believe that *not to be dystopian* is to be very, very naïve. However, this technophobia of mine, which stems from the conviction that "the being of technology" is leading us towards a *dystopian future*, should not push us to flee from today's society and take refuge in an idyllic *primitivism à la* John Zerzan. The war is being waged on the *battlefield of digitalised society*, and we must know and use its weapons to try to counter and eventually destroy it.

While I am sensitive, *and very sensitive*, to the argument of the late Augustín Garcia Calvo, that *the enemy is inscribed in the very form of its weapons*, my particular technophobia does not mean a renunciation of using and knowing computer technology. Which, by the way, leads me to feel a special sympathy for hackers, of course for hackers who fight against the system, and not those who serve it.

But, if it's all right with you, I suggest we do not touch on this issue now. So I close the *digression* to return to the question of *neo-fascism*, insisting, once again, on what, in my view, *causes and characterises it.*

As I have already said, it is, on the one hand, the growing *uncertainty* about the immediate future. An uncertainty that is due to the fact that the *complexity* of the world and its *accelerated pace of change* are constantly increasing, with the consequent *feeling of insecurity* that this generates, inciting us *to seek protection* in what appears to be strength, power and *authority*.

This *insecurity* is also fuelled by the multiplication of *global risks*, many of which originate in the way of life that capitalism offers us.

It is also the accelerated advance of a *new kind of totalitarianism* brought about by the *generalised computerisation of the world and of life.*

These "flash" messages, which often combine image and word, produce an *effect of truth* by the simple fact of circulating on the networks, without having to undergo further verification. Moreover, the very use of computers, mobile phones or tablets means that each individual receives messages within the *isolation of a communication bubble*, thereby becoming a sort of *repeater antenna* that exponentially multiplies their dissemination, without the slightest concern for the plausibility or interest of the content, but basically for their *spectacular nature and their power to have an impact.*

Furthermore, the digitalisation of most of the operations we carry out in our daily lives has made us *completely transparent* in the eyes of the institutions, the corporations and the platforms that govern, whether in the political, economic or repressive fields. As is already well known, this *transparency* not only helps to keep us under constant *surveillance*, but also transforms us into *permanent sources of data* that serve as *raw material* to produce capitalist profits, and to feed the devices for the *normalisation* of behaviour and thought.

But the *new totalitarianism* is not limited to *extreme surveillance* and widespread *data mining* for various purposes. It also *represses* in a way that subverts the *entire legal framework of law* that had been established in the Modern era.

For example, through the use of *armed drones* and the huge and sophisticated computer equipment they need to be effective, which is located in large *logistical centres* thousands of kilometres away from where the drones operate, the fundamental principle of the *criminal law* system, the *presumption of innocence* until proven guilty, has been *wiped off the map.*

Suspects are executed, regardless of whether or not they are guilty, or even whether or not there is a well-founded suspicion; it is enough that they fit a *risk profile* drawn up by sophisticated algorithms.

But it is not only the field of *law* that is drastically affected by the new repressive technologies; it is everything to do with

police operations. The *techno-police* do not work exclusively in offices and laboratories, but also intervene in the maintenance of so-called *public order*, making the control and repression of popular protests reach an unparalleled level of sophistication and forcefulness.

As if that were not enough, information technology provides the new totalitarianism with *biotechnological instruments* that allow it to put *biological matter* itself at the mercy of its interventions. Whereas in the past, the characteristics of human beings were gradually transformed as an *unintended consequence* of some of their own activities, today they are in a position to *deliberately, voluntarily* influence their own evolution.

The use of new *genetic engineering resources*, developed through computer and nanotechnologies, is beginning to make it possible to *voluntarily* modify human characteristics. This opens the way to the era, intensely longed for by the likes of Elon Musk, of *transhumanism*, as a prelude to *post-humanism*.

In short, it turns out that *digital capitalism and digital governmentality* come together in perfect harmony to plot the *new type of totalitarianism* that is taking the world by storm. It is this *new kind of totalitarianism* that we can properly describe as *neo-fascism*, without it needing to make Hitler-like proclamations or raise its arm in the air to merit this appellation.

And this very close interpenetration between *digital capitalism* and *digital governmentality* is evident in the figures of Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Larry Page and Jeff Bezos, who, along with other billionaires, are at the crest of digital capitalism and at the forefront of *digital technologies*.

Of course, we must not let ourselves be *fascinated* by the *immaterial* aspect of the internet, of what circulates on the networks and what we see on the screens; we must look away and look at the *guts* of the electronic device, or to use another metaphor, we must probe the enormous *submerged part of the electronic iceberg*.

And there we will find such un-virtual and densely material things as huge undersea cables, satellites and rockets, paraffin for rockets, indispensable rare metals, huge server farms, etc. and all this, worth *untold fortunes*, has *owners*, owners eager to make a return on their investments.

Let's not fool ourselves, *digital capitalism* not only makes data *work*, which of course it does, *and a lot*, but it also owns and exploits *colossal material resources*.

However, this *neo-fascism*, which is characterised by *spearheading* the use and promotion of the new totalitarianism's IT tools, is nourished by *all* of the political parties and formations that occupy and direct institutions, *whatever their political colour*. Whether they are right-wing, centre or left-wing, they *all* promote and use the technological tools born of the *computer revolution* in similar proportions, thus helping, *wittingly or unwittingly*, in the construction of the new totalitarianism.

And in this endeavour, both those who, like Elon Musk, explicitly profess *extreme right-wing* ideologies, and those who, like some Silicon Valley *accelerationists*, may profess more or less progressive or even *libertarian* ideologies, coincide. The latter believe that, by promoting technological development and removing the *legal obstacles* that seek to limit it, they are working *for the salvation of humanity and planet Earth*, taking for granted that only *the accelerated progress of technologies* can prevent the catastrophes towards which the current march of society is rapidly leading.

At this point, *I will digress* to clarify that, if I am asked whether I am a *technophobe*, the answer is that I was not until I reflected on the effects of the information revolution. However, that reflection has changed me, and the answer is that, since then, *I have been a technophobe*. And I will remain so as long as we do not find a way to reverse the mad race of technology that is leading us towards the precipice.