

**Uses and abuses about the concept of Nazism: how political ignorance leads us to think that this phenomenon may be left-wing.**

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Attention: before reading the text watch the video ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=vD7cU7KFBow](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vD7cU7KFBow)). There is no doubt that Nazism, or in the words of Robert Paxton, the Fascism, still arouse curiosities of the most varied in the present time. Virtually, since the end of World War II, there has not been a magazine or even a periodical that does not have information, analysis or opinion on the subject. In fact, we all know, or at least think we know, something fundamental about such traumatic event that profoundly marked the history of what Francisco Carlos Teixeira da Silva called a "gloomy century."

Today, April 2, 2019, the current president of the Republic of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro managed to make the terms Nazism and Holocaust among the most cited in social networks for saying at his press conference that it was clear "that Nazism was left". This misconception, said during the visit to Yad Vashem, is part of a set of controversies that begins with a statement by the current Foreign Minister, Ernesto Araújo, a few weeks ago. Of course, the statements of Araújo and Bolsonaro were strongly encouraged by Olavo de Carvalho's discourse on the internet, heavily based on the North American TV video The Nazis were leftists, which lasts about five minutes. In this show, an interviewer brings up a question about a controversial subject and an intellectual to discuss it (we can call it pseudo-intellectual, after all we are talking about a country that turns public servant into philosopher, see the story of Francis Fukuyama. Well, our country is not behind either! Some people think that Olavo de Carvalho and Ernesto Araújo think!). In one of these videos, the central question revolved around why National-Socialism and Fascism are presented by the "media" as a right-wing phenomenon.

The video has a sole purpose: to return to the old, outdated, misleading, not to say ignorant, discussion of the interpretation that fascism, or Nazism and communism are one (in which case, proves they did not read the American historiography that since the 1960s works with the concept of fascism). Quickly, when we watch the video, we find information that is not solid, unfounded, based on a banal, not to say uninformed, superficiality about one of the most harsh and cruel phenomena in human history. I have here to agree with my dear Israeli professor, historian emeritus of Yad Vashem in Israel,

who has taught me so much, Yehuda Bauer, that when we speak of Nazism and its actions we are talking about a unique phenomenon, unprecedented in history. What the video presents is a reversal of values. An inversion of the classic Marxist thesis of Nicos Poulanzas in the outstanding book of the 1970s, *Dictatorship and Fascism*, where the rise of Nazism was linked to a "big capital" project. The video deconstructs the thesis of this renowned Marxist, showing in simplicity that there is no such relationship, and that, in truth, Nazism is a socialism. This thesis has long been out of date and historians of great international renown such as Ian Kershaw, Hans Mommsen, Wolfgang Benz, Martin Broszat, have done so for at least 40 years. In this case, it would be necessary to make some explanations, even if brief, to better problematize the question.

Nazism was based more on "social romanticism" than on a concrete political vision. Several historians, among them the greatest authority of the subject in Latin America, professor Francisco Carlos Teixeira (UFRJ / ECEME), understand that we can not even speak of ideology when we speak of Nazism, considering that we are not dealing with a body of organized, uniform ideas. There is in the video a clear confusion between a normative principle of the Third Reich – the *Volksgemeinschaft*, community of the people – which did not have the same precepts of the idea of community in socialism. In the case of Nazism, the community of the people was instituted with the intention of generating a sense of belonging and not as a structured rational thought. It was a forged sentiment that intended to give the Germans the feeling that no country's political regime had ever achieved: the idea that civil society could actively participate in the political life of the country, no longer as supporting actors but as protagonists.

I want to show that even the thesis of Marxism being wrong and the great capital not being a founding part to explaining the arrival of Nazism to power (note I did not speak of Hitler, but Nazism) it does not give the possibility of connecting it to communism. In 1932, the old and tired War Marshal Hindenburg, then president of the Reich, received a correspondence from representatives of the banks and industries advising him to appoint Adolf Hitler to the post of Chancellor. They hoped that the policies of Hitler's party, NSDAP, would give new impetus to the country's economy. This information gave to several historians the false impression that the great capital forced the entrance of Nazism in the power. Shall we deconstruct it! The great capital did not finance neither the party, nor Hitler.

The first followers of the party were upper-middle-class, but only two major industrialists had been supporting the movement from the outset: Fritz Thyssen (all

Brazilians have already gotten inside an elevator with this brand) and Ernst von Borsig (owner of the powerful engineering company Borsig, from 1837). Apart from the contribution of a few affiliates and of these two personalities, until the end of the 1920s the party was financed without external aid, only with collections and its' affiliates revenue.

It was only after the 1930 elections that a few industrialists began to pass on contributions to the party. However, even so, the resources of Hitler's party, amounting to the sum of all party donations in Germany, did not exceed 10%, which represented very little compared to several others. The so-called "German bourgeois right" continued to be the main beneficiary of the country's industrial capital. The greatest contributions were made by Mr. Thyssen in 1933 and by the Anglo-Dutch consortium Shell, with the aim that Nazism should fight strongly against communism. Even so, the finances of the Nazi party continued to be fed, in the vast majority, by the quota of members and by the collection in acts and campaigns. Only after Nazism was in power did the Krupp family campaign for the contribution of the German economy to Adolf Hitler by raising more than 700 million marks until 1945.

Another unfounded thesis, raised by the video, is to equate these same historical phenomena by calling them "totalitarians." All of us, historians of the so-called history of the present time, know of the impossibility of reading a historical phenomenon without using what was called in the German philosophy of *Entfremdung* – estrangement – that is, leaving the comfort zone and being able to produce a critical analysis of the historical processes. We all know that this assertion that links these two phenomena to the theoretical principle of "totalitarianism" was a construction of the important theoretical Hannah Arendt and that her goal was tied to the Cold War itself. Remember that she wrote and published the book in the USA, where she was exiled. This is so explicit in her work that her interpretation of Italian Fascism is softer and does not take into account harsh and repressive aspects of the Mussolini system, such as the concentration camps, and removes Italy from the totalitarian category. This matter was long debated by historiography and names like Franz Neumann, Guy Hermet, Pascal Orly and many others dedicated themselves to revise this concept, already in disuse.

The video is full of generalizations. It cannot see the difference between political movement and political regime, nor is it able to escape from poor approaches such as: Nazism and Communism are "collectivist philosophies". As I mentioned earlier, the "people's community" forged an idea of unity, but it in fact and in law never existed in

Nazism, especially since Nazism was a phenomenon of radicalization of progressive political action. This does not make the two regimes equal. I do not want to argue what the Soviet experience was here. That would require a book chapter, a whole book, and we have no room for it now. I want to show you that a simple understanding of what Nazism was can make it clear that it was a unique phenomenon. Nazism represented the only moment in contemporary history where antagonistic forces, capitalism and socialism, came together for a common enemy. Nazism was the proof that classical political science is unable to account for explaining all the experiences and different forms of political action in history. Nazism was proof that theory is an extract from experience in time. Nazism was the proof that transcendence is a category that transcends the boundary of the philosophical and becomes capable of entering the world of political science or, as I like to say, the art of politics. Nazism is the hardest and most radical form of the transcendence of being. From the transmutation to a banal, bureaucratic individual, where the highest point of his nature lies in the inability to feel or even recognize the other. Nazism may even be the banality of evil, but this video is undoubtedly the hubris of evil (and here I echo the words of the El País columnist, Eliane Brum). Compare the incomparable, with no method nor theory. It builds certainties into horizons of unsurpassed theoretical conflicts. To return to the right and left binomial, also problematized in the past by Norberto Bobbio's deep argument, does not explain the nature of the problem, nor could he handle all the complexity that the subject demands. I have no doubt that it is no longer possible to speak of this binomial in an ideological way for since the end of the Cold War we are more concerned with political behavior on the right or left than with right or left ideology.

The truth is that these were concepts, and excuse the poetic license of expression, "prostituted" by the uses and abuses of politics, so we lost the ability to understand how they have transformed over the years. This is so clear that only the unwary continue pursuing that right title. What they are advocating now is a return to Edmund Burke's classic theory and of the French Revolution: conservatism.

They are still linking the term to the concept of freedom with the assertion that being conservative is fighting for freedom and even more; They say that there is no movement more nationalistic than this. By this, they indicate again that there is no opposing mind capable of undoing or rethinking such fragile theoretical connections, connections of the world of political thought capable of being discarded as a simple piece of cotton candy in the mouth. Ladies and Gentlemen, do not be deceived by something

so banal. All this thought is a reading of Roger Scruton. There is nothing new. This speech is nothing more than the best band of the last times of the last week. More of the same! The philosopher, a critic of aesthetics and know-it-all of contemporary conservative thought, the English Scruton, tried to understand law and liberty from the standpoint of conservatism (you will even think it is persecution, but we are yet talking about another pseudo-intellectual who has no academic credibility and is deeply involved with corruption cases). We are all conservative in some way. We are conservatives of the certainty that surrounds us, of the one we build and by which we are built. In that sense, and I apologize again, we have another point out of orbit. If the left connected the whole liberal right-wing ideology, and this is a misconception, the thought that the conservative is the vanguard of this new society just because it is in the Top 10 bestsellers books in Brazil is a mistake. Besides, I regret to inform you, but to believe that his speech represents a voice silenced from the end of the dictatorship is another misapprehension.

Once the British intellectual eradicated in the USA, Tony Judt, said that the function of the historian is to help people in the "disillusionment of the world". Illusion is like a metaphor: a being, not being. It is based on the principle of nourishing hope through very insubstantial mechanisms. It is a unique phenomenon: it manages to die before its creator, reversing the natural order of the universe. But who said there is a natural order? The North American TV video and the speech of Bolsonaro and Araújo are, in fact, an illusion. They are builders of an abstract world, of theories that do not work, in a world where they cannot dwell. For this reason, they resemble a metaphor of the book of Lourenço Mutarelli: stillbirths.

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