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EDITORIAL
AUTHORITARIAN LIBERALISMS

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LIBERALISMOS AUTORITARIOS

In recent years, there has been a significant reorientation of studies on neoliberalism which has reevaluated and modernized the concept of authoritarian liberalism. This term was coined by Hermann Heller in reference to a speech by Carl Schmitt in 1932 to the German employers' association, titled *Starker Staat und gesunde Wirtschaft*. Schmitt's controversial target was the Weimar Social Democracy, which he deemed a weak total state due to its subjection to democratic demands for redistribution. In fact, Weimar represented the failure of the depoliticization of the economy as conceived by liberalism, hence the success, albeit relative, of attempts to democratize the economy. In contrast, Schmitt advocated for a *strong total state*, capable of separating itself from the economy and governing the masses by increasingly technical means, differentiating between friend and foe.

Heller, with the notion of authoritarian liberalism, which he viewed as a creation of the German ruling classes against the proletariat, stigmatized the idea of a strong state opposed to democratic pluralism that renounced to exercise its authority in the eco-nomic sphere. By describing the content of authoritarian liberalism as the "retreat of the 'authoritarian' state from social policy, liberalisation (*Entstaatlichung*) of the economy

and dictatorial control by the state of politico-intellectual functions" (Heller, 2015, p. 300), Heller showed that the autonomization of political decision-making in economic matters essentially equated to counteracting democratic processes, i.e., society's intervention in the state.

Numerous studies have shown that during the same years, the ordoliberals adopted Schmitt's diagnosis to explain the economic crisis and embraced his reflection on the need for a strong state with an anti-pluralist and anti-democratic nature, capable of depoliticizing the economy and depriving society of political energy. According to Bonefeld, for example, it is by echoing Schmitt and the problem of mass interests taking over the state that Röpke envisions democracy only as a democracy of friends (Bonefeld, 2017, p. 49-51). This relationship, according to Chamayou, is also due to the fact that, in repudiating laissez-faire liberalism, Schmitt only repudiates an obsolete form of economic liberalism, but not the neoliberalism later known as ordoliberalism, which attributes the origin of the crisis not to transformations in capitalism, but to the weak total state, i.e., democracy, the working classes, and their struggles, against which Schmitt advocates an authoritarian state (Chamayou, 2020, p. 36).

Evidently, from a theoretical standpoint, the Schmittian and neoliberal positions are quite different, and it is forced (although interesting) to call Schmitt a liberal, or the Schmittians neoliberals (Audier 2022). After all, as Dardot et al. have noted, following Michel Foucault's analyses, the specificity of neoliberalism is not so much the withdrawal of the state from the economy, but the legal, economic, social, and political interventionism aimed at extending economic logic to the state and to social relations (Dardot et al., 2021, p. 290-291). What seems unequivocal, however, is neoliberalism's use of a Schmittian strategy for governing society: Schmitt and the neoliberals, as observed, converge on the necessity for capitalism of "uno spazio che la politica continuamente ripulisce da ogni ostacolo, da ciò che non è 'conforme'" (Galli, 2019, p. 52).

Paradoxically, the concept of *authoritarian liberalism* has today acquired such breadth that it serves as a framework for understanding heterogeneous institutional and political realities, from post-Weimar Germany to liberal dictatorships such as the Chilean one, from the neoliberal offensive against democracy in the 1970s to the European political-economic constitution or current regressive nationalisms. Arguably, its best conceptualization has been offered by Grégoire Chamayou, who understands it as a concept suitable for indicating not only cases of liberal dictatorships but all situations where the limitation of political space by economic imperatives is accompanied by the restriction of subordinate means of pressure, if not their outright repression (Chamayou, 2018, p. 225-243).

Certainly, by identifying such heterogeneous historical, institutional and political realities, the notion of authoritarian liberalism perhaps creates more problems than it solves. However, as well-founded as the doubts about the usefulness of this notion may be, as well as the critiques of its identification with neoliberalism (Dardot et al., 2021, p. 73-78 and p. 269-298), the discourse on authoritarian liberalism has undoubtedly had the merit of foregrounding the authoritarian side of neoliberalism politically and drawing attention to the crisis of Weimarian democracy and theories about its inability to contain the overload of demands on the state.

This issue of *Soft Power* aims to answer a question of the current relevance of the concept of authoritarian liberalism, offering tools to understand the strategic reality of this notion, against whom neoliberalism is authoritarian, what kind of power it makes intelligible today, and what social struggles it delegitimizes and fights.

It is not only due to the plurality of historical concretizations of authoritarian liberalism that this issue has sought to decline the concept in plural terms, but also due to the plurality of positions within the current debate, which is highly articulated both in theoretical references and interpretative frameworks underlying historical reconstructions.

Given the heated debate and exposure to numerous misunderstandings, it is worth reflecting on the reasons that led us to compile this issue, not without first clarifying what we did not intend to do.

In order to avoid troublesome historical and theoretical short-circuits, we deemed it necessary to start from the premise that by asserting that the Schmittian strategy Heller labels as authoritarian liberalism is not identified with neoliberal political rationality, but is related to it, we do not intend to identify Schmitt with neoliberalism, whose specificity remains, in our view, as outlined by Michel Foucault: the extension of the economic grid of intelligibility to institutions and life, the multiplication of the enterprise form within the social body (Foucault, 2004, p. 154); nor do we intend to say that neoliberalism is totalitarianism or an advanced form of fascism, and consequently identify current authoritarian neoliberalism with historical fascism. However, the existence of links and relationships between these elements is undeniable, and their history and reasons must be investigated.

With that said, rather than delving into the depths of the current debate's articulation, which many of the contributions in this volume do from different perspectives, we consider it necessary to reflect generally on some points of the debate that seem more prone to misunderstanding and misinterpretation than others, but which we consider crucial, even though in a forum like as this one we can only discuss them in a limited manner.

These issues revolve around the relationship that the current debate has with Foucauldian research on neoliberalism, a topic investigated from different perspectives by several contributions in this issue, which this editorial does not aim to represent or exhaust.

Specifically, we find it interesting to question the supposedly alternative nature of the readings of neoliberalism based on the concept of authoritarian liberalism with the Foucauldian reading of neoliberalism, the theoretical novelty that the former represents compared to the latter, and the relationship between authoritarian neoliberalism and fascism.

Let us begin with the issues of the supposed alternative nature of the readings of neoliberalism based on the concept of authoritarian liberalism with the Foucauldian reading of neoliberalism, and the apparent theoretical novelty that the former represents compared to the latter.

Although it may seem secondary, this is actually an important issue because it is precisely from this element of novelty that the risk arises of creating an alternative between Foucauldian readings of neoliberalism and those based on authoritarian liberalism, that is to say, between two interpretations that correspond roughly to soft power and hard power that do not communicate, whereas a simple historical analysis would reveal that every form of neoliberalism has always materialized, to a greater or lesser extent depending on historical and geopolitical contexts, a co-implication of hard power and soft power, in the various forms these can take.

A bias-free and practical ambition-free interpretation should avert this risk, which seems genuinely present in the debate, in favor of a complementarity of analyses, aimed at showing how neoliberalism was constituted through the practical and theoretical struggle it waged against its enemies.

However, some uses of the concept of authoritarian liberalism, which trace the birth of neoliberalism to the crisis of the Weimar Republic, have accused the Foucauldian perspective of neglecting the authoritarian side, in the political sense, of neoliberalism. While Foucault, as is well known, characterized neoliberalism as founded on an apparent phobia of the state, in overcoming a model of power exercise based on state verticality and in an environmental nature of government aimed at reproducing competition in life and institutions, the concept of authoritarian liberalism would, on the contrary, precisely show the authoritarian and statist side of neoliberalism, and this aspect Foucault would have ignored or underestimated, which the current debate, by tracing back to the crisis of the Weimar Republic, would bring to light. This is the position defended, for example, by Streeck:

> In anchoring ordoliberalism in the German state tradition and the politics of post-war and post-Nazi Germany, Foucault might have gone back further to Schmitt

> and Heller, where he would have found the basic figure of thought that informed and informs liberal ideas of the economic role of state authority under capitalism the idea, in the words of the title of a 1980s book on Margaret Thatcher, of the need of a 'free economy' for a 'strong state'. (2015, p. 364)

Or by Chamayou, who accuses Foucault of not delving into the corpus of neoliberal writings from the 1930s, where he could have found his apologia for the authoritarian state (Chamayou, 2020, p. 77-79). In summary, Foucault would have only grasped one side of neoliberalism, without seeing how political authoritarianism produces a competitive society.

Although this thesis contains a truth, some reflections need to be made in order to avoid misunderstandings or controversies, and above all, to consider the two readings of neoliberalism as complementary rather than alternative. Moreover, if Foucault did not extol the authoritarian nature of neoliberalism, we doubt that Chamayou himself intends to absolutize it -in *La société ingouvernable* he does an exemplary work, in clear Foucauldian style, on the political productivity of neoliberal political technologies, to the extent that they have redefined individual micro-evaluations by inciting everyone to "suivre ses inclinations les plus insociables" (Chamayou, 2018, p. 248-261). Additionally, they have produced such an institutional and social fragmentation that favors a neo-populism making redistribution strategies against the popular classes acceptable.

Of course, the accusation against Foucault of not addressing or underestimating the regressive and authoritarian nature of neoliberalism is justified. But on the one hand, we should not underestimate that the specificity of neoliberal governmental rationality remains the same despite its more or less authoritarian manifestations. On the other hand, we must emphasize that Foucault was aware of the ambiguous role played by the state in neoliberal thought, as well as the relationship between many neoliberal arguments and the crisis of the Weimar Republic.

Although he does not delve into the issue, Foucault points out what he calls an ambiguity of neoliberalism, namely the need for social integration that, in a society where enterprises have multiplied, must be satisfied through a "cadre politique et moral", in which the state stands above competing enterprises and ensures a non-disintegrated community and a natural rootedness of individuals (Foucault, 2004, 248). He also notes that the highly inflated critical cliché in which neoliberalism has legitimized itself—namely, the "phobie d'État" (Foucault, 2004, 194)—pre-dates World War II. This critical cliché, as is well known, is based on the idea that "l'État possède en lui-même, et par son dynamisme propre, une sorte de puissance d'expansion, une tendance intrinsèque

à croître, un impérialisme endogène" that leads it to take over civil society, as well as on the idea that it exists

> une parenté, une sorte de continuité génétique d'implication évolutive entre différentes formes d'État, l'État administratif, l'État-providence, l'État bureaucratique, l'État fasciste, l'État totalitaire, tout ceci étant, selon les analyses, peu importe, les rameaux successifs d'un seul et même arbre qui pousserait dans sa continuité et dans son unité et qui serait le grand arbre étatique. (Foucault 2004, p. 192-193)

It is this inflationary critique of the state that leads neoliberals to uniquely argue that totalitarianism originated from socialist tendencies, as in the case of Hayek, for whom "the rise of Fascism and Nazism was not a reaction against the socialist trends of the preceding period, but a necessary outcome of those tendencies" (Hayek, 2001, p. 4).

Now, it is true that when Foucault speaks of the use of these neoliberal arguments, he refers to the Beveridge plan, but immediately afterwards, although without making references, he argues that it is possible to find the neoliberal critique of the state and its tendency to take over the whole of civil society in 1939, 1933, and even earlier (Foucault, 2004, p. 196). Thus, it is possible to hypothesize, precisely in Schmitt's critique of Weimar social democracy, a total state of quantitative order that encompasses society and politicizes human existence as a whole, a state that, although it grows abnormally, remains weak because it is hostage to organized social interests.

If Foucault, therefore, did not delve deeply into or detect the elective affinity between neoliberalism and a strong state, and instead emphasized the anti-totalitarian justification with which neoliberalism has legitimized itself since the postwar period, it is perhaps because at the historical moment he was writing, that justification represented a strategically decisive argument in the intellectual and political field for redefining the modes of exercising power and the new techniques of governance. Hence, projecting the authoritarian traits of our present onto what Foucault said in 1979 to undermine its value does not seem to us to be a defensible theoretical position—as if, in hindsight, reading *The Birth of Biopolitics*, it was really possible to attribute to Foucault blindness to a trend of things that was impossible to foresee. From a historical point of view, moreover, even if he had been aware of neoliberal sympathies for fascism and Nazism, for authoritarianism and the strong state, perhaps these would not have been the characteristic elements of neoliberal governmentality that he deemed important to bring to light at the end of the 1970s.

In Foucauldian logic, it is not the various forms that authoritarianism of power can take that configure the specificity of a political rationality and the types of subjectivities

that correspond to it, but, among other things, the field of the positive technologies of power that produce the real and social normality and constitute the corresponding forms of subjectivity. This, *incidentally,* if it involved a theoretical critique of repressive theories of power, never implied a political disinterest in the repressive, coercive or authoritarian use of power (Tucci, 2015).

However, in the Foucauldian reading, neoliberal phobia of the state did not necessarily mean less state, or that neoliberalism was for Foucault truly anti-authoritarian, because it is the French philosopher himself who shows, on the contrary, that the state intervenes through a utilitarian and strategic use of law over society to constitute the conditions for the functioning of the market and extend the form of enterprise to society and individuals. Complementarily, the notion of authoritarian liberalism makes it clear that the neoliberal phobia towards the state is not a phobia towards the state as such, but only towards a totally interventionist state in the economy because it is the object of social demands, and therefore a phobia towards democracy. Consequently, it has been rightly asserted that neoliberalism is "intrinsèquement autoritaire en ce qu'il s'attaque à toute volonté démocratique de réguler l'économie de marché; c'est seulement dans les formes de l'usage de la force par l'État qu'il varie" (Dardot et al., 2021, p. 75).

We come to the issue of what is new in this debate

We introduced this editorial by arguing that the debate around authoritarian liberalism is recent. But this reorientation of studies on neoliberalism should not be understood as a novelty in radical contrast to the Foucauldian reading, as it is sometimes presented; rather, the opposite is true. In fact, the recent and new thing is not the issue of liberal authoritarianism, but only the wave of studies produced on the subject, resulting from the economic crisis, the reforms imposed by the EU on the member states and, above all, of the new regressive nationalisms.

Regarding the publication of *Naissance de la biopolitique*, which dates back to 2004, both the hellerian-schmittian issue of authoritarian liberalism and the debate around the relationship between political authoritarianism and economic liberalism date back much earlier, even after World War II, when an article by Hellwig sparked a controversy about the relationship between the Freiburg School's competition policy and its complementarity with Nazi authoritarianism (Hellwig, 1955), which of course did not imply that it shared the typical authoritarian and anti-democratic tendencies of Nazism.[1]

[1] On Hellwig's position and the debate it generated within neoliberal currents, see Köhler, Nientiedt (2017).

As for the debate on liberal authoritarianism, one must refer to the often-cited studies of Poulantzas (1978) and Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts (1978). Regarding the relationship between Schmitt and neoliberalism, suffice it to think of the writings of Cristi (1984; 1998) and Haselbach (1991) in the 1980s and 1990s, or in the early 2000s, the woks of Scheuerman (2002) on Schmitt and Hayek, of Ptak (2002) on the convergences between ordoliberalism, Schmitt and Nazism, or Somek (2003) on authoritarian constitutionalism. It is not often remembered that Harvey, in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, insisted a lot on the anti-democratic nature of neoliberalism and wrote, following in the wake of Polanyi, that there was no factual or legal incompatibility between neoliberalism and authoritarianism (Harvey, 2007). But it is undoubtedly after the 2008 crisis and with the rise of the current regressive movements that the literature explodes, and one struggles today to keep up. Just think of the works of Brown (2019), Briebricher (2020) or Wilkinson (2021a), the aforementioned works of Bonefeld, Chamayou, Streek, or Dardot et al., or the special issues on authoritarian liberalism of the *European Law Journal* (2015), *Globalization* (2019), or, more recently, the collective work edited by Grégoire and Miny (2022).

These are just a few examples, certainly among the most interesting, of a vast literature on the various forms of authoritarian liberalism. This literature does not include other works that have shown that the reality of neoliberalism was not so much less state as a different way of instrumentalizing the state. One need only consider Wacquant's analysis of the substitution of the welfare state with the penal state (Wacquant, 2009). Certainly, Wacquant can undoubtedly be counted among the researchers who, between the late 20th century and the early 2000s, highlighted the emergence of a "new penal common sense" which, in only apparent contradiction, characterizes Western neoliberal systems, from the United States to Europe. A new common sense that "rediscovers" the most authoritarian and repressive aspects of criminal law and grafts them onto post-Fordist neoliberal systems: zero tolerance and crime prevention through actuarial control practices aimed at defining risk, which arises from the potential, but not actual, dangerousness of individuals, defined based on their belonging to certain social groups, that 'exceed' the norm.

This reaffirmation of authoritarian neoliberalism is due not only to the progressive increase in social inequalities, precariousness and widespread social insecurity that the market dynamics have produced since the 1990s, but also to the economic and political crisis of the last two decades and the reactions to it. The neoliberal struggle against democratic influences in the economy has indeed produced what Robert Castel described as the return of precariousness and insecurity for the working classes. This return is

more intense in relation to the historical precariousness of these same classes because it follows a period of security and, therefore, is much more difficult to accept because state protection systems have been internalized by individuals, unlike when social insecurity was thought to be a common destiny and, therefore, an ineluctable characteristic of the popular condition (Castel, 2011).

The conviction of having been left out, exposed, and unable to control one's own future, explains the feeling of abandonment and resentment by those social groups and individuals who, once secure, now find themselves overexposed and weakened. But in the face of protest movements that have tried everywhere in the West to construct an opposition proposal, neoliberalism, in addition to riding on the cultural tensions linked to the depoliticization of society, has adopted blatantly authoritarian strategies aimed at manipulating the social anxiety of these groups and leading individuals to accept redistribution criteria contrary to their interests.

But let us return to the concern of avoiding a false opposition between Foucauldian readings of neoliberalism and those based on authoritarian liberalism. In the perspective of favoring their complementarity, it should be noted that Foucault perfectly understands that certain technologies of power can be recoded in an authoritarian or even totalitarian sense in a particularly strong crisis situation. Moreover, it is Foucault who writes that Nazism and Stalinism, despite their historical uniqueness, had "utilisé les idées et les procédés de notre rationalité politique" (Foucault, 2001c, p. 1043).

Foucault's intervention at a famous conference organized by Pierre Dommergues, Bernard Cassen and Michel Royer, held in March 1979 at the University Paris 8 Vincennes, *Le Nouvel Ordre intérieur*, in which the philosopher documents the establishment of a new social order that would characterize our lives for the next fifty years, and which other interventions interpret as a form of authoritarianism, is important from this perspective. Due to the oil crisis and the impossibility of continuing to live off the energy plundering of the rest of the world, Foucault argues, the state in the West no longer feels capable of functioning as a welfare state, managing the social and economic conflicts that this situation threatens to generate, that is, paying the economic and political cost of control. Therefore, he sees two possibilities. The first is fascism, which for Foucault represents party governmentality rather than state governmentality. But although he believes that fascism remains a possibility in the case of very severe tensions, he does not believe this to be the threat at that moment in history. The second possibility is that of a disinvestment by the state, actually only apparent, which corresponds to a change in the form and style of the internal order. It is through the withdrawal of the state from the economy, its disempowerment in relation to economic conflicts -in the sense that it

is up to the partners of the economic and social game to resolve their conflicts- that the apparent disinvestment of the state in the exercise of power is paid for. The latter is no longer characterized by an exhaustive and ubiquitous disciplinary power, but by a more subtle intervention with a greater margin of tolerance in relation to pluralism, irregularities or illegalities, consisting of the detection of zones of social danger through a control system linked to the development of information technologies and the profiling of individuals and populations, and in the control of consensus through the media, which significantly reduces the cost of exercising power, as it allows a kind of self-regulation of the social order (Foucault, 1979).

Economic non-interventionism corresponds to a new type of police interventionism in vulnerable/dangerous areas, as in the case of phenomena of political dissent or terrorism. This is what Foucault calls in other interventions of the time the *security state*, characterized by the preventive statistical calculation of risks, the exploitation of fear and "de la peur de la peur" (Foucault, 2001a, p. 390), to justify the intervention of power beyond the law. This was equivalent to instituting a justice that essentially had the function of protecting the state and "veiller sur une population plutôt que de respecter des sujets de droit" (Foucault, 2001b, p. 797).

It was not a new fascism that loomed on the horizon, nor was it authoritarianism in the classical sense, but a new form of power, if you will, differently authoritarian.

It was a form of "autoritarisme *new look*", as Dommergues explains, who echoing Foucault's analysis, writes: "Le nouvel ordre intérieur n'est pas synonyme de fascisme. Même si la voie fasciste n'est pas à exclure, la tendance est plutôt à la manière douce" (Dommergue, 1980, p. 10-11). Or as Julien explains, who argued that the new internal order after the crisis could not be conceived as a return to classic authoritarian regimes: "Une gauche qui sait que l'histoire ne se répète pas a cependant commis l'erreur de multiplier les appels à la vigilance contre on ne sait quelle renaissance du 'fascisme', monstrueux avatar d'un capitalisme en crise" (Julien, 1980, p. 15-16). Of course, as anticipated, many of the points highlighted by Foucault were seen as a new form of authoritarian statism (Poulantzsas 1980, 140), but even by those attending the conference who regarded neoliberalism as a new form of authoritarianism, there was a clear awareness that it was quite incorrect to expect the fate of Weimar to be repeated in the societies of the time (Gisselbrecht, 1980, p. 250).

In any case, we are now almost at the 50-year mark referred to by Foucault, and we must surely agree with his prediction: the governmentality in which we have lived and are living is not a fascist-type governmentality.

This is not, however, a reason not to fight against the fascist tendencies that are present and increasing in our time. Consider the current right-wing populisms, which on

the one hand are an effect of authoritarian liberalism (Wilkinson, 2021b), and therefore of the neoliberal struggle against democracy, but on the other hand, merely reproduce neoliberalism on a national scale. Here too, the literature is abundant, but consider contemporary Italy, which vividly represents a combination of forms of political authoritarianism and economic liberalism.

The current government, while opposing liberalism with various words, maintains the characteristics of neoliberal economic policy and interprets politics from an economic rationality. As it would have been said not long ago, it leaves power relations and modes of production intact; moreover, it tends to accentuate them. Regardless of any parameters established by the European Union, the current Italian Government has changed the name of the Ministry of Education, now called the Ministry of Education and Merit, abolished the basic income, is privatizing the Italian postal service, and intends to give an authoritarian turn to the Constitution through the premiership, etc. At the same time, it attempts to refound the identity of the people by insisting on identity polarizations, using criminal law to solve social problems, promoting identification with leaders and thus giving social unhappiness an imaginary compensation, allowing the penultimate to fight against the last ones. Although there is a widespread nostalgia for fascism, for a strong leader, for the normal/abnormal partition, and an attempt to refound Italian society on a mythical hyper-identity, the current government's practice has almost nothing of historical fascism. Enzo Traverso is not wrong when he states that:

> La meritocrazia formulata in termini neoliberali, cioè società di mercato e liberal-darwinismo, non rientra nel codice culturale del fascismo: statalista, autoritario, xenofobo, nazionalista e razzista anche nell'idea del Welfare. Oggi però il governo Meloni è l'espressione più vistosa di una tendenza verso il neo-liberalismo autoritario che permette la convergenza tra la democrazia liberale classica e il post-fascismo. (Traverso, 2022)

Such regressive positions also belong to those self-proclaimed anarcho-capitalist positions, which aim to abolish the state, its elites and the minorities protected by welfare systems. Just think of Hans-Hermann Hoppe, a disciple of Rothbard, who not only represents a reference for the Dark Enlightenment (Land, 2014), but is especially favored by the extreme wing of the Italian party Lega. In an attempt to provide a political strategy in dialogue with the American Alt-Right, Hoppe believes that libertarianism can only be based on social homogeneity, values and what is natural, on social bonds and institutions such as families, communities, ethnic groups and nations. He

postulates, therefore, that the only way to save liberalism is through a belligerent and aggressive populism based on the elimination of what he calls the "bad neighbor", in order to protect individuals now subjected to minorities of all kinds, namely white, heterosexual, Christian males, especially if they are married and have children. The creation of a private law society, that is, a society without politics that subjects all interpersonal relations and conflicts to private law and civil law procedures, entails the need to ostracize and physically eliminate through violence not only those who are alien to the cultural identity, but all socialists, communists, and democrats who virtually threaten private property. The Hayekian strategy of producing a liberal society from the top down, he argues, must be considered unrealistic, and a populist strategy appealing directly to the masses must be implemented (Hoppe, 2017). However, by postponing to the future an unachievable private law society for the time being, the real goal, in line with neoliberal policies, can only be the dismantling of any social policy and the preservation of the state's repressive functions. Libertarian populism de facto becomes regressive neoliberal populism.

These considerations lead us to a final aspect we wish to highlight to close this editorial, namely, the relationship between authoritarian liberalisms and fascism.

Certainly, there is abundant literature on neoliberal support for the liberal dictatorships of the 20th century, whose specificity, however, cannot be reduced to fascism. However, many studies have also been conducted on the relationship between neoliberalism with fascism, starting with Mises' judgment that

> Es kann nicht geleugnet werden, daß der Faszismus und alle ähnlichen Diktaturbestrebungen voll von den besten Absichten sind und daß ihr Eingreifen für den Augenblick die europäische Gesittung gerettet hat. Das Verdienst, das sich der Faszismus damit erworben hat, wird in der Geschichte ewig fortleben. (Mises, 1927, p. 45)

But to arrive to a more recent example, consider Rothbard's judgment, who, on the occasion of Berlusconi's first government, praised the economic policy of early Fascism and wrote: "The militant Fascist movement succeeded in saving Italy from two monstrous evils: revolutionary Communism and revolutionary anarcho-syndicalism. This preservation and defense were its great achievement" (Rothbard, 1994, p. 8).

Although it is a widely studied topic, this issue also requires a deeper analysis, not only concerning the use of the notion of fascism, understood in a broad or strict sense, but also concerning the relationship between authoritarian liberalism and historical fascism.

Just think of an often-undervalued author, not particularly present in the current debate, with some exceptions (Wilkinson, 2021a),[2] namely, Franz Neumann, who after experiencing the failure of his legal-political proposal, centered on a type of economic constitution opposed to both authoritarian liberalism and neoliberalism, interpreted the Weimar liberal authoritarianism of the 1920s and early 1930s as a path towards fascism (Brindisi, 2024). It is true that Neumann reads Schmitt's 1932 text retrospectively, after the victory of Nazism, and also misinterprets it, but he points out some important points that should be given more attention: the combination of political authoritarianism and economic liberalism proposed by Schmitt in *Starker Staat und gesunde Wirtschaft*, was functional to give a "legal expression to the unity between National Socialism and monopoly capitalism", and was indeed a path to fascism, not forward, but backward. Although this combination influenced Hitler's speech in the Reichstag on March 23, 1933, regarding the maximum promotion of private initiative and the recognition of property rights, it was not at all a novelty, as it merely reproduced what had been the first fascist economic policy influenced by Pareto (Neumann, 1942, p. 48 and Neumann 1986, p. 291-292).

If authoritarian liberalism was a path to fascism, it should not be overlooked that neoliberalism now coexists perfectly with the political, economic, identity and gender regression that has been sweeping through the West for many years, and that above all the transhistorical reflection of the late Neumann on political anxiety is capable of making perfectly intelligible (Neumann, 1957).

The governance of fear and political anxiety remains decisive in what Dardot et al. (2021) have called neoliberal strategies of civil war.

We hope that the arguments presented shows the futility of false theoretical oppositions and the need for an expansion of the debate in a plurality of directions, to which this issue intends to contribute through works aimed at deciphering authoritarian liberalisms from multiple perspectives.

The issue is divided into three problematizing cores intended, first of all, to define the current relevance of the problem, investigating the different modes of governance of contemporary authoritarian neoliberalisms (Dardot), the political strategies with which they try to impose themselves in a critical phase (Bazzicalupo), the problematic nature of authoritarian neoliberalism as a theoretical notion (Lazzarato), the relationship between neoliberalism and contemporary neo-fascisms (Arancibia Carrizo), European

[2] However, Wilkinson does not take into account the occasions when Neumann commented on Schmitt's *Starker Staat und gesunde Wirtschaft*.

authoritarian liberalism (Atzeni), authoritarian neoliberal governance and resistance to it (Giachetti). To make the transformations of the present intelligible, the issue offers a historiographical reconstruction of the notion of authoritarian liberalism and its neoliberal extensions, analyzing the relationship between Schmitt and Heller (Pomarici) and between Schmitt and Austrian neoliberalism (Jacobsen Gloeckner, Ferraro, Jobim do Amaral), the relationship between state and society in the neoliberal galaxy (Malatesta), Hayek's critique of Keynesian liberal democracy (Scanga) and, finally, the historical affirmation of neoliberal authoritarianism in political realities so far little considered (Ciolli). Finally, neoliberal authoritarianism becomes the object of study with regards to the relationship between freedom and security in Foucault and Marcuse (Del Vecchio) and between authoritarian statism and the decline of democracy in the reflection of Poulantzas (Pullano).

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