

Neoliberalism Is a Form of Fascism. President of Belgian Magistrates

Neoliberalism is a species of fascism

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Featured image: Manuela Cadelli, President of the Magistrates' Union of Belgium (Source: [@ManuelaCadelli / Twitter](#))

The time for rhetorical reservations is over. Things have to be called by their name to make it possible for a co-ordinated democratic reaction to be initiated, above all in the public services.

Liberalism was a doctrine derived from the philosophy of Enlightenment, at once political and economic, which aimed at imposing on the state the necessary distance for ensuring respect for liberties and the coming of democratic emancipation. It was the motor for the arrival, and the continuing progress, of Western democracies.

Neoliberalism is a form of economism in our day that strikes at every moment at every sector of our community. It is a form of extremism.

Fascism may be defined as the subordination of every part of the State to a totalitarian and nihilistic ideology.

I argue that neoliberalism is a species of fascism because the economy has brought under subjection not only the government of democratic countries but also every aspect of our thought.

The state is now at the disposal of the economy and of finance, which treat it as a subordinate and lord over it to an extent that puts the common good in jeopardy.

The austerity that is demanded by the financial milieu has become a supreme value, replacing politics. Saving money precludes pursuing any other public objective. It is reaching the point where claims are being made that the principle of budgetary orthodoxy should be included in state constitutions. A mockery is being made of the notion of public service.

The nihilism that results from this makes possible the dismissal of universalism and the most evident humanistic values: solidarity, fraternity, integration and respect for all and for differences.

There is no place any more even for classical economic theory: work was formerly an element in demand, and to that extent there was respect for workers; international finance has made of it a mere adjustment variable.

Every totalitarianism starts as distortion of language, as in the novel by **George Orwell**. Neoliberalism has its Newspeak and strategies of communication that enable it to deform reality. In this spirit, every budgetary cut is represented as an instance of modernization of the sectors concerned. If some of the most deprived are no longer reimbursed for medical expenses and so stop visiting the dentist, this is modernization of social security in action!

Abstraction predominates in public discussion so as to occlude the implications for human beings.

Thus, in relation to migrants, it is imperative that the need for hosting them does not lead to public appeals that our finances could not accommodate. Is it in the same way that other individuals qualify for assistance out of considerations of national solidarity?

The cult of evaluation

Social Darwinism predominates, assigning the most stringent performance requirements to everyone and everything: to be weak is to fail. The foundations of our culture are overturned: every humanist premise is disqualified or demonetized because neoliberalism has the monopoly of rationality and realism. **Margaret Thatcher** said it in 1985: "There is no alternative." Everything else is utopianism, unreason and regression. The virtue of debate and conflicting perspectives are discredited because history is ruled by necessity.

This subculture harbours an existential threat of its own: shortcomings of performance condemn one to disappearance while at the same time everyone is charged with inefficiency and obliged to justify everything. Trust is broken. Evaluation reigns, and with it the bureaucracy which imposes definition and research of a plethora of targets, and indicators with which one must comply. Creativity and the critical spirit are stifled by management. And everyone is beating his breast about the wastage and inertia of which he is guilty.

The neglect of justice

The neoliberal ideology generates a normativity that competes with the laws of parliament. The democratic power of law is compromised. Given that they represent a concrete embodiment of liberty and emancipation, and given the potential to prevent abuse that they impose, laws and procedures have begun to look like obstacles.

The power of the judiciary, which has the ability to oppose the will of the ruling circles, must also be checkmated. The Belgian judicial system is in any case underfunded. In 2015 it came last in a European ranking that included all states located between the Atlantic and the Urals. In two years the government has managed to take away the independence given to it under the Constitution so that it can play the counterbalancing role citizens expect of it. The aim of this undertaking is clearly that there should no longer be justice in Belgium.

A caste above the Many

But the dominant class doesn't prescribe for itself the same medicine it wants to see ordinary citizens taking: well-ordered austerity begins with others. The economist **Thomas Piketty** has perfectly described this in his study of inequality and capitalism in the twenty-first century (French edition, Seuil, 2013).

In spite of the crisis of 2008 and the hand-wringing that followed, nothing was done to police

the financial community and submit them to the requirements of the common good. Who paid? Ordinary people, you and me.

And while the Belgian State consented to 7 billion-euro ten-year tax breaks for multinationals, ordinary litigants have seen surcharges imposed on access to justice (increased court fees, 21% taxation on legal fees). From now on, to obtain redress the victims of injustice are going to have to be rich.

All this in a state where the number of public representatives breaks all international records. In this particular area, no evaluation and no costs studies are reporting profit. One example: thirty years after the introduction of the federal system, the provincial institutions survive. Nobody can say what purpose they serve. Streamlining and the managerial ideology have conveniently stopped at the gates of the political world.

The security ideal

Terrorism, this other nihilism that exposes our weakness in affirming our values, is likely to aggravate the process by soon making it possible for all violations of our liberties, all violations of our rights, to circumvent the powerless qualified judges, further reducing social protection for the poor, who will be sacrificed to “the security ideal”.

Salvation in commitment

These developments certainly threaten the foundations of our democracy, but do they condemn us to discouragement and despair?

Certainly not. 500 years ago, at the height of the defeats that brought down most Italian states with the imposition of foreign occupation for more than three centuries, **Niccolo Machiavelli** urged virtuous men to defy fate and stand up against the adversity of the times, to prefer action and daring to caution. The more tragic the situation, the more it necessitates action and the refusal to “give up” (The Prince, Chapters XXV and XXVI).

This is a teaching that is clearly required today. The determination of citizens attached to the radical of democratic values is an invaluable resource which has not yet revealed, at least in Belgium, its driving potential and power to change what is presented as inevitable. Through social networking and the power of the written word, everyone can now become involved, particularly when it comes to public services, universities, the student world, the judiciary and the Bar, in bringing the common good and social justice into the heart of public debate and the administration of the state and the community.

Neoliberalism is a species of fascism. It must be fought and humanism fully restored.

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*Translated from French by **Wayne Hall***

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