

Review of: "Neoliberalism, Strong State and Democracy"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The article is a very interesting approach to the political and economic debates surrounding neoliberalism and its conceptual definition. The author starts from two very penetrating ideas. The first is that neoliberalism is a political-economic doctrine that distances itself from neoclassical economic theory and, in fact, is formulated in opposition to it. The key to this opposition lies in the role given to the State: far from the idea of a "Minimal State", the theoretical status that the theoreticians of neoliberalism would have given the State is that of a "strong State", whose strength lies in its dislocation from social interests, in this case, those of social groups other than the political and economic elite. The utopia, in this sense, would be that of an "apolitical" State -following the pretension of Friedrich Hayek and, in a different tone, of thinkers such as Carl Schmitt. This would result in a political proposal, a sort of political regime typical of the neoliberal stage, which the author calls "authoritarian liberalism". In this sense, neoliberalism would not imply a "Minimal State" or a historical situation of "less State", following a usual formula in this type of discussions; it would not even imply a "market fundamentalism". Rather, it would involve another State, one not only in opposition to the post-war welfare State, but one which, persisting in its power of determination over society, would result in the autonomization of State entities. A sort of state (or state power) fundamentalism which, consequently, would constitute neoliberalism, historically and theoretically speaking, in a form of political domination and economic deployment based on the autonomization of the economy and politics with respect to democracy.

Although the article is very well done, it is worth making some comments that could improve it, based on the author's own emphases.

The first point is that it is possible to further develop the theoretical and historical consequences of this definition of neoliberalism. Indeed, the author warns that the discussion on neoliberalism is a discussion on the quality and future of democracy. The minimum in neoliberalism is precisely democracy, this restriction being the support of the "strong State". Democracy, in this sense, should not be taken as a procedure, but as the capacity for self-determination of society itself with respect to its future. This is how it has been understood by those who today debate the "crisis of democracy", in the sense of a crisis of politics itself, as a human activity, to provide a solution to collective problems. If the economy and politics become autonomous from popular determination (democracy), the latter will not only find it difficult to consider popular problems but will be seen in the eyes of the population as useless.

The second point has to do with a greater use of the indications made about Latin America and the case of Chile, as models of application of the neoliberal doctrine. Chile, following the author's concern, is not only a case of application of the neoliberal program under authoritarian conditions (authoritarian liberalism), but also a case in which the idea of

autonomization of State entities is manifested in a profound way, even under democratic conditions. By way of example, its central bank, as early as the end of the 1980s, subscribes to the autonomy of objectives and goals. But, in addition, and this seems to me to be central, Latin America is a region that clearly exemplifies that neoliberalism not only implies a "strong State", but also a clear "State dependence". In other words, neoliberalism, whether in its installation or in its reproduction over the years, does not survive without the State. Here again Chile is the paradigmatic example, since it is the Latin American country in which the neoliberal program has been carried out in the most stable manner, without political or social crises, where the form adopted by capitalist accumulation takes the form of an expansion subsidized by the State in a broad spectrum, to the point that one has spoken of a "public services capitalism" (*capitalism de servicio público*), due to the form adopted by the expansion of social services from the dictatorship onwards, and with particular force during the years of democracy.

A third and final point is that the idea of "depoliticization of politics" should be made more precise. This is because, if we follow the author's own argument regarding democracy, the depoliticization of politics should not be seen only as a loss of effective power of institutional politics or a social emptying of it, but above all as a feature, typical of neoliberalism, of opposition to any form of collective action.

Suggested bibliography.

For discussions on the crisis of democracy in this perspective, I suggest the following texts:

-Pierre Rosanvallon. *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

-Adam Przeworski. *Crises of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

For the Latin American discussion on the erosion of politics and the fundamental role of the state in neoliberalism in Latin America:

-Carlos Ruiz. *La política en el neoliberalismo. Experiencias latinoamericanas* Santiago de Chile: Lom, 2019.

For an interpretation of neoliberal thought as opposition to any form of collective action:

- Perry Anderson. *Spectrum: From Right to Left in the World of Ideas* Verso, 2007.