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Opinion – I am Science: Bolsonaro and Orbán, allies in the war against universities

By Robert

Bolsonaro's visit to Russia has aroused interest due to a possible political or even military alignment with Putin, which is far from real, given the close ties of the Brazilian armed forces with the US and Bolsonaro's own support base being Americanophile, like the Statues of Liberty fakes in Havan stores, icons of Bolsonarism. The trip to Russia is, above all, commercial, focused on pesticides (but let us also remember that this is the country of Telegram – which houses the largest Bolsonarista digital network and which is in the sights of the STE –, a specialist in cyber attacks and who worked with trolls and fakenews for Trump's 2016 victory). The most "political" trip was on the second stop, in Hungary and Poland. After the fall of Donald Trump, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is one of the most important and influential leaders of the global far-right and one of Bolsonaro's godfathers, who calls him "brother in affinity".

Orbán was one of the few foreign leaders present at Bolsonaro's inauguration. At the time, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ernesto Araújo, stated on Twitter that "Brazil and Hungary share values ??and worldviews", to which Orbán replied "the most adequate definition of modern Christian democracy can be seen in Brazil, not in Europe". Orbán and Bolsonaro are political partners and share authoritarian, militaristic, xenophobic, fundamentalist and racist views on the world and the role of their countries, including attacks on science, university autonomy and freedom of thought.

The institutional situation in Brazil, despite the coup attempts by Bolsonaro and supporters, has not yet reached the same point as the Hungarian "regime", which Orbán himself calls an "illiberal regime" – that's right, with "i". In Brazil, democratic institutions, even under tension, have functioned and imposed limits on the creation of an extreme right-wing regime. Public universities are a fundamental link in guaranteeing democracy, freedom of thought and science against denialism and, for this very reason, they have been particularly attacked.

In addition to being strangled in the budget, federal funding agencies have cut scholarships and research funds, as we have already commented in another article by SoU_Ciência, and since 2019, deans of 21 Federal Universities have been illegitimately appointed by the president, disrespecting the wishes of academic communities . Professors, researchers and deans have also been threatened and even silenced, with coercive conduct, empty denunciations in an attempt to open administrative processes and even a term of conduct adjustment preventing criticism of the government. In July 2020, journalist Rubens Valente revealed that André Mendonça, then Minister of Justice, had secret investigation teams monitoring more than 500 opposition civil servants, including anti-fascist police officers and university professors.

In Hungary, Orbán, in power since 2010, managed to do even more damage in the battle against public universities and research institutes, inserting interveners, exiling scientists and intellectuals and even inducing an entire university to leave the country. The "eviction" of the Central European University (CEU) from Budapest to Vienna, after parliament passed a law in 2017 that declared it illegal, showed internationally that universities and science in Hungary were under attack.

CEU is the most prestigious university in the country, founded by Hungarian financier and Holocaust survivor George Soros – accused of being a globalist and even a leftist. It was conceived during the fall of the communist regime, with a liberal profile to plan the country's new future as an 'open society' – but not even its market-oriented profile guaranteed a peaceful existence for the university under the Orbán regime. .

After street protests with tens of thousands of protesters and letters of solidarity supported by 17 Nobel Prize winners, CEU signed an agreement with the Austrian government to move most courses to Vienna. European Union (EU) judges called the Hungarian prime minister's action "arbitrary discrimination" not compatible with the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights.

In addition to the emblematic case of the CEU, universities and research centers are losing autonomy in relation to the government and intellectuals and scientists are leaving the country. The "illiberal regime" publishes weekly lists of enemies, including dozens of academics, accused of being mercenaries. According to Franklin Foer, "Hungary once had some of the best universities in post-Communist Europe. But Orbán's government systematically crushed them. Its officials invaded public universities, tightly controlling them.

Research funding, once determined by an independent body of academics, is now provided primarily by an Orbán loyalist. In 2019, the Hungarian premier led the 'takeover' of the renowned Hungarian Research Academy, which brings together 15 research institutes and more than 3,000 researchers, controlling funding and researchers in key posts – supposedly to

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expedite patenting and reduce research costs.

As professor and researcher at SoU_Ciência Rogério Schelegel has already reported, more than two dozen public universities have been or are being transferred to foundations controlled by Orbán's allies, reaching 70% of university students in the country.

This model, not by chance, is what was intended in Brazil with the project future, in 2019, which would progressively transfer Brazilian public universities to the management of Social Organizations (OS) or Foundations In the project, new professors and technicians (or former ones by voluntary membership) would no longer be public servants to be CLT workers and the property assets of the universities would be managed by investment funds. The "modernizing" discourse of supposed market efficiency to serve public interests is not only fallacious, but also covers up the direct attack on the autonomy of universities and freedom of thought, professorship and research.

This attack, in Brazil and Hungary, must be understood in a broader context of the empowerment of the global ultra-right as an activist of culture wars in their countries, in the definition of values, behaviors, ideas and policies. Despite still mobilizing a conspiratorial imaginary to confront communism, this is not the focus of the post-Cold War culture war, but the definition of what the extreme rightist Pat Buchanan called in the 1990s the struggle for the "soul of the nation" – what requires battles in the field of education, culture, media, religion, customs, laws, etc. And definition of enemies, above all, internal ones.

Both the far-right governments in Brazil and Hungary, (as in the US, Poland and other countries, are supported by fundamentalist religious bases. These groups attack cultural, ethnic and sexual orientation diversity, the open, progressive and cosmopolitan environment of universities and scientific production more generally in the name of the "nation", "tradition" and "Christian values" – or, in the fascist slogan repeated by Bolsonaro and Orbán at their meeting: "God, homeland, family".

In Brazil specifically, given the political and cultural advances of the last two decades, especially with the new black, popular, feminist, LGBTQIA+, indigenous protagonism, there is a moralistic, white, racist, patriarchal, denialist and revisionist reaction. The society's response against all this, fortunately, is being intense and imposing limits, bringing down popularity, recognizing the importance of reliable information and science in defining public policies and guaranteeing the right to life.

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