

## Are the United States of America a Dictatorship?

por Rômulo Cristaldo<sup>i</sup>

Eight years ago, we warned that Donald Trump was an aspiring dictator, fascistoid, displaying unmistakable signs of megalomaniac narcissism.

A *sinthome* of a diseased nation, Trump resonates as the legacy of a social experiment that dared to turn citizenship into consumerism. In the early days of U.S. hegemony, it may have seemed brilliant to orient an entire country towards unrestrained consumerism. Enormous profits were made, indeed. But at the cost of something precious to social stability: critical thinking, understanding of the world, and a sense of collective commitment.

Many Americans appear to live inside a bubble of mediocrity—a continuous present with no past or future—where the only form of expression is to buy, and the only thing that matters is the individual. In that process, even the most delicate social relations seem to be replaced by commodities. People choose partners, lovers, and politicians as if they were products on a shelf—with disregard, immediacy, and superficiality.

The signs of collective illness were already screaming decades ago. School shootings were never acts of “lone wolves,” but expressions of a culture built on symbolic humiliation and hyper-competitiveness—one that drives the worker to the limits of self-exploitation, leaving behind a trail of insanity and imbalance; all this while firearms lie scattered about like candy at a newsstand.

Racism—which, truth be told, white America inherited from Europe—is institutionalized under the hypocritical defense of “free speech” and through repressive apparatuses trained to see Black skin as an enemy. It borders on delirium to imagine that someone could, from a podium or pulpit, proclaim loudly and proudly the vile, deceitful, and stupid presumption of racial superiority.

The many cults of personality—around athletes, pop stars, actors, billionaires—reveal the incapacity of exaggerated individualism to grasp the formative context as a decisive factor in success. Thus, it became possible to build brands and consumption patterns tied to modern idolatry, while shifting the blame for social, professional, material, and symbolic failure onto the individual worker. After all, the

logic goes, “if they could make it through hard work, so could I”—and therefore, “if I didn’t, it must be my fault.”

It is upon this sense of guilt that so-called churches (I prefer “mafias”) gorge themselves. Packaged Christianity, as a consumable experience, sinks its claws right there. Confronted with growing guilt over personal failure, neo-Pentecostal churches have mastered the art of linking the Christian gospel and prosperity as interdependent. The existential emptiness of consumerism and shallow relationships is filled by religious experience.

In those dens built for deceit, people find the bonds they had lost—not genuine ones, of course, but shallow simulacra—along with promises of deliverance from misfortune. These relationships are false, sustained by the expectation of material support for the church structure through money and “voluntary” labor; anyone who disagrees is deemed worldly, distant from “God,” and destined for hell. And if prosperity never comes, it is because faith was insufficient—or because tithes, offerings, and hard work were not enough.

The consumer of faith mysteriously becomes a commodity, drained by the very church that exploits them—stripped of intellectual autonomy, wholly devoted and alienated from themselves. There, they are trained to focus only on what is simple, ephemeral, and shallow; nothing may be complex. Hollowed-out individuals, oppressed even by their own selves, devoted to consumerism without reflection, conditioned by churches that replace critical sense with blind obedience.

It is no coincidence that national politics has become a spectacle. It must appear superficial to be absorbed; it must contain naive narrative elements to hold the viewer’s attention—a plot twist here, an easily uncovered secret there, an apotheosis, sometimes even a triumphant return. Politics becomes soap opera, where performance and appearance outweigh the essence of projects, interests, and commitments. It is no accident that the President is a character—a buffoon—where perfidy and farce converge to express and exploit the pure, latent hatred within society.

Of course, this applies to the limited sphere of collective choice. The fact that politicians are selected for their superficial personas does not mean that their private decisions and alignments are not complex. The spectacle of politics does not erase the material interests that operate, as always, in the concrete corridors of traditional power. Behind the scenes, the traditional forces of American politics treat everything as business as usual.

Big Tech, Wall Street, the military-industrial complex, and other sectors strategically align to extract the utmost from both workers and the state—while deploying the most formidable military power in history to enforce their interests across the globe. The old imperial arrogance, the certainty of their certainties, is also the instrument of racist intolerance that treats peripheral countries as mere backyards to be looted at will.

Trump stands as the perfect representative of a decayed and hateful elite. Unsurprisingly, he moves slowly and inexorably toward authoritarianism—laced with violence, racial hatred, and nonsense.

All the signs were there: lies, corruption, symbolic harassment, institutional blackmail, racism... The warnings fell on deaf ears, and now the United States finds itself under the tightening grip of a lunatic. Worse yet, a lunatic who embodies his people—whose ranting verbosity, unhinged threats, chaotic behavior, and logical delirium mirror exactly what much of the population is, thinks, intends, and desires. The true American dream.

One could say that, today, the U.S. is an autocratic dictatorship—with all that such a regime has to offer(?): political police (ICE), manipulated data and information, imaginary enemies (immigrants), offshore concentration camps to strip victims of legal protections (El Salvador), book purges and attacks on universities, outsourced genocide (Gaza), and an authoritarian megalomaniac (Trump) carrying a guilt that in truth belongs to the oligarchs and to portions of a population suspended between shock and anesthesia.

Does anyone still doubt what the next steps will be?

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