

A further exchange with Brazilian historian Mário Maestri on Trotskyism and the American Revolution

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24 September 2026

Brazilian historian Mário Maestri has sent a reply to our article “Once again in defense of the American Revolution: A reply to a Brazilian historian,” published August 17, 2026, in which he further develops his position on the character of the American Revolution and Brazilian independence. We publish our response below, followed by his full letter.

Let me begin by stating that the “nano-biography” included in our article was not written with the aim of poisoning the discussion. To be clear, this is not a dispute over your dedication to the cause of the socialist revolution, nor over the courageous struggle you and your generation waged against the military dictatorships, facing persecution, exile and all personal risks that political militancy entailed.

The purpose of those lines was to explain the political dimension of your intellectual activity, which strikes us as being as publicly notable as the academic. Faced with the challenge of presenting it briefly, we chose to indicate the principal political organizations you have taken part in over the last half century.

It is significant that, although you narrated this trajectory in richer and more detailed terms than we did, nothing in what you wrote refutes the associations we established: with the Morenoite *Convergência Socialista* and with the Mandelist *Democracia Socialista*—both of which, as we had noted, subsequently entered the PT; with the PSOL, in whose first provisional national leadership you took part; and with the PCB. However much this “jumble of acronyms” strikes you as “fanciful, grotesque, and hilarious,” it is not the veracity of these associations you dispute. What you specifically dispute is your description as a “veteran of the Pabloite movement.” And it is precisely here that we have, in fact, a difference in conception.

On the historical split with Pabloism

For us, the term “Pabloism” is not used as an epithet. It is the designation of an objective division in the history of the Trotskyist movement—a division that dates to the 1953 split in the Fourth International. In presenting you as a veteran of the Pabloite movement, we are not passing judgment on your character; we are describing a political affiliation that is historically verifiable, and one that you yourself, in your reply, confirmed by adding further party acronyms—all directly tied to the Pabloite United Secretariat—through which you passed over the course of your militancy.

Allow me to briefly retrace this history. The 1953 rupture pitted the International Committee—founded in defense of the program of the Fourth International and the building of its sections as independent revolutionary parties oriented toward leading the working class in the struggle for political power—against the liquidationist tendency headed by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. For the Pabloites, this construction was no longer necessary: Trotskyist parties should dissolve themselves, in each country, into the mass organizations led by Stalinist, Social Democratic,

and bourgeois nationalist bureaucracies, to which they attributed, under the pressure of “objective forces” and their supposed leftward shifts, the role of carrying out the tasks of the socialist revolution.

A decade later, this political division was deepened by the turn toward an unprincipled reunification with the Pabloites carried out by the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP)—and its supporters in Latin America and Asia—which gave rise to the United Secretariat in 1963. This maneuver, which threatened the continuity of Trotskyism, was courageously fought by the British leadership of the ICFI, the Socialist Labour League (SLL) led by Gerry Healy, supported by the French Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI).

At the heart of the struggle against the unprincipled reunification lay developments in Latin America and, above all, the interpretation of the Cuban Revolution. The SWP and its Latin American supporters characterized Cuba as a “workers’ state,” proclaimed that a “new epoch in the history of the world revolution” had begun with the rise to power of the petty-bourgeois nationalist movement led by Fidel Castro, and assigned Trotskyism the servile role of “strengthening and enriching the international current of Castroism.” On the basis of this program, proclaimed at the founding of the Pabloite United Secretariat, its organizations pursued the liquidationist policy of political regroupment with the “forces liberated by the Cuban Revolution.”

Healy and the SLL opposed this characterization and perspective head-on: Cuba was not a workers’ state, since no dictatorship of the proletariat existed there in any form; Castro’s nationalizations did not alter the capitalist character of the state; and the Cuban Revolution in fact constituted a negative confirmation of the Theory of Permanent Revolution—where, when the working class fails to lead the peasant masses and destroy capitalist state power, the bourgeoisie resolves the problems of the “democratic revolution” in its own way. Above all, however, the SLL opposed the conception that Castroism had proven that class forces other than the proletariat, and political leaderships other than conscious Marxist parties — that is, the Fourth International—could carry forward the socialist revolution in the present epoch.

It is important to note that the International Committee did not oppose, in principle, a discussion of reunification with the Pabloites. What the ICFI demanded was that such a discussion be grounded in an assessment of the causes of the 1953 split and its continuing political relevance a decade later. These demands were rejected. The reunification was consummated precisely on the basis of deepening of Pabloite politics—empiricism, objectivism, capitulation to non-proletarian leaderships, and the liquidation of the Fourth International. The response to these principled demands was not debate, but virulent and slanderous attacks: the ICFI was branded “ultra-left sectarians,” a libel presented by Joseph Hansen in “Cuba: The Acid Test.”

The case of the Chilean Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) is the most concrete expression of the Pabloite regroupment politics. The MIR was not a formation that arose in parallel with the Trotskyist movement in Chile, but a product of its deliberate liquidation. Influenced by the perspectives animating the 1963 Pabloite reunification, the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) was dissolved into an amalgam of petty-bourgeois political tendencies. Luis Vitale—an Argentinian dispatched to Chile by Nahuel Moreno, who led this operation—called in 1961 on Latin American Trotskyists to “gather all those forces, regardless of their specific origins, willing to take the Cuban experience as a starting point for the revolutionary struggles in their own countries.” The result was exactly what the SLL had warned of: an organization oriented toward guerrillaism and armed adventure, at the expense of building the revolutionary party of the working class and the struggle for state power on the basis of the independent mobilization of the workers.

We register, in this regard, your declared opposition to Guevarism within the MIR starting in 1971. But, at that point, the political conditions for such opposition had already been significantly impacted by the political deviations produced by Pabloism, whose supporters, including Vitale, had already been expelled from the MIR. Absent a profound political reckoning with the 1963 reunification and its opportunist perspectives, the success of that fight was impossible. In the defeat of the Chilean working class, with the rise of Pinochet’s brutal dictatorship in 1973, and throughout Latin America more broadly, the political price of Pabloite liquidationism was paid in the blood of thousands of young people, workers, and peasants, driven into disastrous guerrilla struggles or victimized by the defeats they produced.

Faced with these catastrophic results, the United Secretariat made political turns and split internally into mutually hostile tendencies. But the perspectives that produced these defeats, and that had been systematically fought by the ICFI, were never subjected to a serious reckoning. On the contrary: the slanders and attacks against the International Committee only intensified.

In September 1976, virtually every leader of the Pabloite movement—tendencies that had spent years fighting one another—united to denounce the ICFI’s “Security and the Fourth International” investigation into the assassination of Trotsky and the infiltration of the Trotskyist movement by Stalinist and capitalist-state agents. Having declared the investigation a “frame-up” without having submitted its evidence to any examination, these tendencies joined in January 1977 in London, on a Platform of Shame, to denounce the ICFI in hysterical terms, denying Gerry Healy the right to speak in his own defense. The substance of their opposition to the ICFI was unconditional defense of Joseph Hansen, Sylvia Franklin, and Robert Sheldon Harte—all of whom were subsequently proven to be GPU agents infiltrated into the Trotskyist movement (and also of the FBI, in the case of Hansen). Your own account of having actively participated from 1974 to 1977 in the Ligue Révolutionnaire des Travailleurs—Ernest Mandel’s own section—seems to us, far from contradicting our characterization, to confirm it. These were precisely the years in which Pabloite opposition to the ICFI reached its most virulent point.

That said, we are not seeking to implicate you personally in these attacks on the ICFI. This opposition to the investigation into Stalinist infiltration of the Trotskyist movement, however, was not an isolated episode. It flowed from the orientation, running through the entire history of Pabloism, towards accommodation with, and rehabilitation of, the Soviet bureaucracy, to which the exposure of its role as an agency of imperialism within the world workers’ movement posed a direct threat. This orientation would find its logical culmination in the complete capitulation of Mandel and his faction, at the head of the United Secretariat, to Gorbachev. While the ICFI denounced Gorbachev’s reforms as the Stalinist bureaucracy’s preparations to liquidate the Soviet

workers’ state, Mandel wrote that “it would be absurd to impute to him and his team a desire to restore capitalism in the USSR,” that “under present circumstances it would be irresponsible to advocate the weakening of Gorbachev,” and that “this enlightened absolutism... remains the only alternative to an ominous dictatorship.”

In the political biography that you present, you speak parenthetically of your recent membership, prompted by the invitation of “veteran communists,” in the PCB. In your 2020 book, *Domenico Losurdo, um farsante na terra dos papagaios: ensaios sobre o Estalinismo e Neo-Estalinismo no Brasil* [Domenico Losurdo, a Fraud in the Land of Parrots: Essays on Stalinism and Neo-Stalinism in Brazil], you had narrated this same episode in rather different terms:

In November 2017, my partner and I joined, for eight months, the PCB-RS’s Internationalist Cell (...). Our decision to join stemmed from our assessment of the possibilities and opportunities the PCB then presented—a party for which we had, and have, great sympathy, following its decision to embrace the socialist program. (...) In June 2019, we left the Internationalist Cell, and our dear comrades, with whom we remain in contact. The reasons were multiple and simple: the futility of militancy in a regional branch dominated by “identitarian” youth, bitten by unrestrained electoralism and, above all, little inclined toward discussion, with us having practically no contact with the party’s national bodies.

Here you declare your “great sympathy” for the PCB—which you yourself acknowledge, in the same book, to be infested with fervent apologists of Stalin—and attribute your departure to a conjunction of “simple reasons,” entirely unrelated to fundamental historical and political issues. The denunciations you make of the crimes of Stalinism and of its contemporary apologists—to which we are not unsympathetic—don’t change your basic orientation to the historic party of Brazilian Stalinism. This relativization of the definitive historic division between Trotskyism—the only genuine continuation of revolutionary Marxism—and counterrevolutionary Stalinism is objectively embedded in the tradition of Pabloism, whether you yourself acknowledge it or not.

The struggle against the 1619 Project and racism

We come now to the historical questions that gave rise to this exchange. You write that you were struck by our “professorial rebuke”—that is, by our observation that you ignored what we have published in defense of the 1776 American Revolution. You explain that each one looks in the publications he reads for what interests him, and that what interests you in the WSWS is its coverage of the American workers’ struggles.

But you did not write to us to praise our coverage of the class struggle in the United States. You wrote to object to our so-called “insistence on characterizing the U.S. independence movement as something more than an unfinished bourgeois-national revolution.” A criticism of that kind cannot be advanced in ignorance of what is being criticized. Our demand was not pedantry: it was that you take up the body of work in which our position was elaborated. Your reply proceeds, once again, as though that work did not exist.

The clearest demonstration is your treatment of the 1619 Project, which you set aside as “a project with which I am completely unfamiliar.” The struggle against the 1619 Project is not an incidental theme of our writing on 1776; it is the political context in which it was undertaken. We did not characterize you as “an apologist for ‘American liberalism’ and ‘imperialist war propaganda.’” What we asserted was a convergence of your position with the *New York Times*, and your reply strengthens that assessment rather than weakening it.

You write that “US independence freed the slave-holding South from the growing pressure exerted by England—beginning in the early 19th century—to end the transatlantic slave trade.” This is precisely what Nikole Hannah-Jones asserted in the essay that opened the 1619 Project, claiming that the 1776 Revolution was, in essence, a counterrevolution in defense of slavery. That claim was exposed as a fraud. The WSWS conducted a

systematic campaign against it in collaboration with leading historians of the period, which forced the *Times* to alter the passage without acknowledging why.

Your political conclusion is likewise the Project's: that the descendants of the enslaved and the dispossessed "have nothing to celebrate regarding 1776" and must be freed from "patriotic phantasmagorias." And when you explain the 184 years that followed by invoking "tens of thousands of lynchings" that were "in large part, perpetrated by white workers," you adopt its central category — a supra-historical white identity whose defining attribute is racism, into which the American working class is dissolved. The historical falsity of the attribution of racist violence to "white workers" has been thoroughly exposed in our answer to the 1619 Project which we, again, urge you to read.

On the revolutionary character of 1776

[] this brings us to the substance. In your first letter you had called American independence "an unfinished bourgeois-national revolution." In your reply the formulation has quietly disappeared, and what remains is this: "It makes no sense to gloss over the restrictive, non-revolutionary social character of 1776 by framing the Civil War—which occurred 84 years later—as a 'Second American Revolution.'"

Whether or not you are aware, that attack is not directed at the WWSW alone. It is directed against an interpretation of the American Revolution that originates with Marx himself. In 1864, in the name of the International Working Men's Association, he wrote that "as the American War of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American Antislavery War will do for the working classes."

The revolutionary character of 1776 was also powerfully evoked by Lenin. In August 1918, as the Soviet republic fought for its existence against the combined armies of the czarist reaction and the imperialist powers, Lenin addressed himself to the workers in the United States:

The history of modern, civilised America opened with one of those great, really liberating, really revolutionary wars of which there have been so few.... That was the war the American people waged against the British robbers who oppressed America and held her in colonial slavery.

Lenin did not counterpose that tradition to the fight against American imperialism. He appealed to the first in order to arm the second. Summoning American workers to join the "civil war against the bourgeoisie," he continued:

The American people have a revolutionary tradition which has been adopted by the best representatives of the American proletariat, who have repeatedly expressed their complete solidarity with us Bolsheviks. That tradition is the war of liberation against the British in the eighteenth century and the Civil War in the nineteenth century.

The Trotskyist movement carried this forward. James P. Cannon, founder of the American Trotskyist movement, wrote in 1951, in "From Karl Marx to the Fourth of July," arguing that the workers' revolutionary movement is "the legitimate heir of the men of 1776," and set out the formulation you find senseless: the men of 1776 secured the nation's independence; the Civil War, "the Second American Revolution," smashed chattel slavery and unified the country; the Third American Revolution must take industry out of the hands of "a parasitical clique."

You write that "as much as it may pain U.S. nationalists, we cannot forget that the Patriot party won with the backing of monarchist and absolutist France." Lenin answered this slander, significantly, as he traced a parallel to defend Brest-Litovsk against those who accused the Bolsheviks of collaborating with German imperialism:

The American people resorted to these tactics long ago to the advantage of their revolution. When they waged their great war of liberation against the British oppressors, they had also against them the French and the Spanish oppressors who owned a part of what is now the United States of North America. In their arduous war for freedom, the American people also entered into "agreements" with some oppressors against others for

the purpose of weakening the oppressors and strengthening those who were fighting in a revolutionary manner against oppression...

Your reply returns more than once to what appear to be insinuations that we are "U.S. nationalists," that we commit "jingoistic slips," etc. None of this is accompanied by political analysis. Do you extend such claims to the writings of Marx, Lenin, and Cannon too?

Speaking in my own name—as a Brazilian Trotskyist and member of the Socialist Equality Group (GSI)—I have to say that I felt particularly bothered by your observation that "it may surprise Tom Mackaman that this event has ["understandably", according to you] sparked little interest in Brazil." There and in your claim that the American Revolution is "a topic quite far removed from my current concerns" I cannot help but detect a type of "anti-Americanism" which has long circulated in Latin America as a counterfeit substitute for genuine anti-imperialism. Its function has been to promote various forms of petty-bourgeois nationalism—from Castroism to Chavismo—which stand exposed today as completely rotten. This politics represents the deadliest trap for the Brazilian and Latin American working class: it chains the workers to the bankrupt national bourgeoisies and prevents them from waging a real struggle against American imperialism—a struggle that depends on building an invincible collaboration with the workers of the United States.

The Bahian Conspiracy of 1798

Your reply contains a series of elementary factual errors regarding the history of the United States, the predictable result of writing about a history which you state holds little interest for you. But your gravest error is in Brazilian history, contained in the passage in which you set out to ridicule us. You write:

My critics indulge in fantasies regarding the Bahian Conspiracy of 1789, claiming it was the work of "artisans, soldiers, and free men of color inspired by the Haitian Revolution"—an event that would only break out in 1791, two years after the Bahian movement!

The Bahian Conspiracy took place in 1798, as our article had correctly stated. It happened seven years *after* the outbreak of the slave revolution in Saint-Domingue, the island that would become known as Haiti, not two years before it.

The influence of the Haitian uprising on the political processes unfolding in Bahia at the end of the 1790s — an influence that was also economic, since the disruption of sugar production on the Antillean island drove a resurgence of the Bahian sugar economy with profound and explosive social implications — is a solid historiographical fact. As Patrícia Valim, a specialist on the Bahian Conspiracy, writes:

Besides the news of the French Revolution and of the Independence of the Thirteen Colonies, it should be remembered that in the year 1798 the revolt of the slaves of the French colony of Saint-Domingue was under way, which left the authorities in a state of alarm. (...) Considering that orality was the means by which people learned what was happening in the world, it does not seem excessive to suggest that the captives interpreted the news, conferring their own meanings upon it and instrumentalizing, to some degree, the libertarian ideas then in circulation.[1]

The reduction of the Bahian Conspiracy — or Revolt of the Tailors, as it is more commonly known — to nothing more than a "plot by the Bahian ruling classes" that "never proposed the abolition of slavery" is a historical falsification.

In *História da Sedição Intentada na Bahia em 1798*, the most paradigmatic study of the subject, Luís Henrique Dias Tavares traces the beginning of conspiratorial discussions to 1793-94, "among a small group of 'men of consideration,' Brazilians who repudiated colonial exploitation and felt drawn to the France of bourgeois-democratic ideas." These ideas, however, found a genuine dissemination among the popular layers of Salvador, then a city of 60,000 inhabitants undergoing a deepening social polarization: the agrarian-export expansion that was enriching the great proprietors and merchants had driven up the prices of

food and basic goods dramatically. In that context, Tavares writes, “Free men, but socially discriminated against, mulattos, soldiers, artisans, former slaves and descendants of slaves conceived the idea of a republic that would guarantee equality. It is they who are speaking of an uprising in 1798.”

On the morning of August 12, 1798, Salvador awoke to find 11 handwritten bulletins posted at different points across the city, summoning the people of Bahia to revolution. More than two centuries later, the revolutionary content of these documents still reverberates powerfully in the present. One of the bulletins, confiscated by the police, reads:

Men, the time has come for your resurrection, yes, for you to rise again from the abyss of slavery, to raise the Sacred Banner of Liberty. Liberty consists in the happy state, in the state free of abasement: liberty is the sweetness of life, the repose of man in equal parallel one with another; in short, Liberty is the repose and blessedness of the world. France grows more exalted with each day, Germany has already bent the knee to her, Castile aspires only to her alliance, Rome already lives annexed, the Pontiff is abandoned and exiled: the king of Prussia is held prisoner by his own people: all the nations of the world have their eyes fixed on France, liberty is agreeable to all: it is time, people, people the time has come for you to defend your Liberty; the day of our revolution, of our Liberty and of our happiness is at hand, take heart, for you shall be happy forever.

A meeting held on August 25 to plan an armed uprising was betrayed to the authorities, setting off a wave of arrests that led to the indictment of 33 people. Among them were “11 slaves, five tailors, six soldiers of the paid troop, three military officers, one merchant, two goldsmiths, one embroiderer, one mason, one surgeon, one carpenter and one schoolteacher.”[2] Four men, all of them sons or grandsons of slaves, were condemned to death for leading a conspiracy against the Portuguese Crown: Luís Gonzaga das Virgens e Veiga, soldier; Lucas Dantas de Amorim Torres, soldier and joiner; João de Deus do Nascimento, master tailor; and Manuel Faustino dos Santos Lira, tailor’s apprentice. They were hanged, and their severed heads and limbs were displayed at strategic points of the city by way of example.

The history of the Bahian revolutionary movement is reconstructed from the fragments that have been preserved, above all from the records of the criminal proceedings. These indicate that Manuel Faustino played the most active role in mobilizing slaves for the uprising, and they reveal his methods. One of the slaves interrogated, Inácio Pires, declared that the tailor’s apprentice had invited him to “an uprising” intended to establish “a government of Equality, with captivity abolished.” In the confrontation between the two men, Faustino himself confirmed the invitation to “an uprising” that was to establish a government of “equality and liberty for all slaves.”[3]

I am not a historian, and I do not approach this subject as a specialist. On the contrary: the WSWS is eager to collaborate and discuss with historians investigating this and other extraordinarily significant episodes of Brazilian history. What is more troubling in your careless treatment of the Bahian Conspiracy—as with the American Revolution—is that it breeds contempt for that revolutionary past.

What has moved the ICFI to wage an intransigent struggle in defense of the revolutionary tradition of the First and Second American Revolutions is the understanding that the bourgeoisie’s effort to liquidate that history — to present it as a “phantasmagoria” that is better to be forgotten—is an essential component of its counterrevolutionary strategy: to disorient the working class and to delegitimize in advance the coming socialist

revolution.

Faternally,

Tomas Castanheira

[1] Valim also holds that the relation between the two episodes was subsequently exaggerated in a pejorative sense by nineteenth-century historiography, the historian Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen having characterized the Bahian revolt as a “Socialist Conspiracy, an imitation of the Revolution in Saint-Domingue carried out by men of ‘the lowest quality.’” VALIM, Patrícia. *Corporação dos enteados: tensão, contestação e negociação política na Conjuração Baiana de 1798*. FFLCH-USP. São Paulo, 2012.

[2] TAVARES, Luís Henrique Dias. *História da Sedição Intentada na Bahia em 1798*. Salvador: EDUFBA, 2016.

[3] TAVARES, Luís Henrique Dias. *Da Sedição de 1798 à Revolta de 1824 na Bahia: estudos*. Salvador/São Paulo: EDUFBA/Editora UNESP, 2003.

The Non-Revolutionary Character of US Independence

Mário Maestri

I am responding to the lengthy rebuttal—authored by historian Tom Mackaman and Tomas Castanheira (WSWS, August 24, 2026)—of my brief questioning of the revolutionary character of US independence in 1776. Before clarifying my position, I offer a few brief thoughts on the “method of discussion” required for a constructive debate and outline, in telegraphic style, my understanding of “revolution” in history.

1. For a Healthy Discussion

The opening eight lines of the response addressed to me—regarding my past as a revolutionary Marxist militant over the last 60 years—came as a surprise. That nano-biography, a jumble of acronyms, is fanciful, grotesque, and hilarious. I prefer to believe it was not included to discredit me before my arguments were even addressed, but rather was written hastily and carelessly.

Labeling me a “Morenist” and a “Pablist” must have my political friends—and those who are not my friends—rolling with laughter. I am therefore compelled to write a description of my revolutionary Marxist activism since 1967—spanning Brazil, Chile, and Belgium—which is appended to this reply.[1]

I was also struck by the professorial rebuke for claiming to be a regular WSWS reader while allegedly failing to read the publication’s various articles defending 1776 as a revolution. We look for the information that interests us in the various publications we read. In the excellent WSWS, I primarily follow the superb coverage of workers’ struggles in the USA.

The USA’s Late Arrival in Brazil

US independence in 1776 is a topic quite far removed from my current concerns. It may surprise Tom Mackaman that this event has sparked little interest in Brazil, where it is celebrated mainly by US consulates in a Trumpist style.

This lack of interest is understandable. Contrary to what is suggested by certain jingoistic slips in my critics' texts, the United States exerted little influence on Brazil's history and politics until the early 20th century. Following independence in 1822, it was England—particularly regarding the economy and diplomacy—and France—regarding culture—that wielded enormous influence over Brazil. American English only began to be taught in private schools and language courses in the 1960s.

Because I deny the revolutionary character of American independence from a Marxist perspective, I am also accused of essentially embracing the stance of the *New York Times*' "1619 Project"—a project with which I am completely unfamiliar. Thus, in addition to being a "Morenist" and a "Pablist," I am supposedly an apologist for "American liberalism" and "imperialist war propaganda."

I am also accused of "disparaging" the "American Revolution" because I stated—and continue to state—that it "did not destroy the slave-holding order," brought about "no class transformation," and did not alter "internal relations of exploitation," essentially transferring political power to "capitalists and slave owners." However, I do not "disparage" 1776 or any other historical event, as moral judgments are alien to historical materialism.

2. On Revolution in History

In Marxist epistemology, when the expansion of productive forces is obstructed by social relations of production, the action of rising classes triggers a revolutionary crisis; if successful, this crisis gives way to new relations of production and new political, ideological, and cultural institutions. According to Marxism, this revolutionary movement is essentially determined within the sphere of production.

This is a reality inherent to all of humanity's class-based modes of production, shaped by both their general and specific determinants. The transition from classical slave-based production to feudalism—a centuries-long process—was driven by the struggles of enslaved people, paving the way for the emergence of feudal production.

The transitions from feudalism to capitalism, and from the latter to socialism, occurred more rapidly but were still driven by the exploited classes. As we have seen, these revolutionary transitions were predominantly determined by the sphere of production—that is, at the level of the infrastructure (productive forces, relations of production, etc.)—rather than at the level of the superstructure (culture, ideology, etc.), as my critics often seem to suggest.

3. 1776: Non-revolutionary historical advances

Driven by the exploited classes, history does not advance solely through revolutionary leaps. European social democracy achieved enormous gains—stemming from workers' struggles and the shadow of the 1917 Revolution—without arising from a social revolution. The same occurred in 1776 in what would become the United States, and even—to a lesser extent—in 1822 with Brazil's independence; these were non-revolutionary movements.

Those who dispute my views point to multiple advances resulting from U.S. independence: the abolition of primogeniture and the hereditary holding of public office; the elimination of royal landholdings; the removal of vestiges of aristocratic-feudal property rights; and so on. These were consequences and remnants of the British colonial and royal order.

From a metropolis that had undergone its bourgeois revolution in 1642, yet allowed for the subordinate survival of the old aristocratic order.

I agree with the proposition that the break with the metropolis paved the way for the "rapid development of capitalist relations"—relations that pre-existed and were already dominant in the Northern colonies, rather than emerging from political independence. In fact, 1776 also facilitated the development and consolidation of Southern slave-based production.

US independence freed the slave-holding South from the growing pressure exerted by England—beginning in the early 19th century to end the transatlantic slave trade, a move driven by British interest in African raw materials and penetration into the African continent. Under the protection of the US flag, ships continued to cross the Atlantic, financed primarily by capitalists from New York and Rhode Island.

Slave-Holding Constitutions

With Independence in 1776, the constitutions of the US states and the nation itself did not reflect "demands for popular sovereignty"—unless one defines "the people," as was common at the time, merely as free men who owned property.

It was not until the 1850s—more than seventy years after the War of Independence—that property-based voting restrictions were fully abolished in the USA... for free men. Native Americans did not formally gain the right to vote until 1920, some 140 years after 1776.

Even after 1865, a defining characteristic of the USA—across the North, East, and South—was severe racial discrimination with profound economic consequences; this was a far cry from the progressive claim that 1776 had unleashed a "mass democratic culture." Unless, of course, we consider "democracy" in the Athenian sense of the term—with voting rights reserved exclusively for free-born citizens!

Furthermore, the alleged "mass democratic culture" said to have emerged from Independence did not transform "slavery into a political issue for the first time in modern history," as has been claimed. A full 84 years elapsed between 1776 and the Civil War without a clear program ever being adopted!

A Republic Without Democracy

And, throughout those more than 80 years, the U.S. legislature never truly debated the abolition of slavery. It took no less than 184 years—and tens of thousands of lynchings—to pass a comprehensive federal civil rights law for the population of African descent! Lynchings that were, in large part, perpetrated by white workers.

In 1776, in the Northern and Central colonies, the dominant mode of production was mercantile-capitalist—manufacturing, maritime trade, peasant agriculture, and so forth—relying primarily on free labor. In the South, the colonial slave mode of production prevailed, based on enslaved labor and supported by the white population, which constituted the majority.

With Independence in 1776, these dominant relations of production underwent no fundamental changes. The former colonies severed their dependence on the metropole without completing their "bourgeois revolution" through the abolition of slavery—a process mirrored in many other nations of the so-called New World. They did not even carry out a democratic revolution rooted in the masses.

Independence Without the Support of the Exploited

The so-called American Revolution lacked the purported “mass character.” It was a movement led by large, medium, and small property owners. Native peoples—still numerous at the time—saw the situation clearly and chose to fight primarily alongside the British. The same was true for thousands of enslaved workers who pinned their hopes on the promise of freedom for those who fought for George III.

As much as it may pain U.S. nationalists, we cannot forget that the Patriot party won with the backing of monarchist and absolutist France, which sent vast resources—including weaponry, troops, warships, and more. Many historians suggest that the revolt might well have been defeated without French support.

The abolition of slavery in the Northern states was driven by the anachronistic nature of that exploitative relationship within societies increasingly dominated by capitalist production. Yet, this did not guarantee effective citizenship rights for the formerly enslaved; even legally, they remained second-class citizens. In New York, free Black men formally gained the right to vote only in 1870.

It makes no sense to gloss over the restrictive, non-revolutionary social character of 1776 by framing the Civil War—which occurred 84 years later—as a “Second American Revolution.” That would be akin to seeking the roots of the 1917 Russian Revolution in 1833, or those of the 1789 French Revolution in 1705, during the reign of Louis XIV.

The End of Slavery

This is not the place to discuss the nature of the Civil War, the abolition of slavery, and the expansion of capitalist market relations into the South—accompanied by the persistence of semi-servile domination through Apartheid, all while the Northern ruling classes remained silent.

It is a complex subject involving the complementary coexistence of two dominant modes of production—the slave-based mercantile system in the South and the capitalist mercantile system in the North—along with their respective social formations within a single state, until their objective coexistence became impossible.

However, it is worth remembering that the war was initiated by the slave states and that Lincoln did everything in his power to keep them in the Union; furthermore, slavery was abolished on January 1, 1863, only in the Confederate states. For two years, African Americans remained legally enslaved in the Union states. It was only with the conclusion of the war—specifically on January 31, 1865—that the end of bondage in the USA was decreed.

Our story and theirs

A revolutionary, democratic, and popular genesis for US independence would be a boon for the American Left, serving as a powerful counterpoint to the elitist narrative surrounding the Founding Fathers—who were, by and large, major slaveholders. Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, held some 600 people in bondage over the course of his life. George Washington, the first US president, owned more than 300 enslaved people at the time of his death. And so it goes.

The worst path for the revolutionary Left is to reconstruct the past according to its own desires, thereby obliterating historical reality. Worse

still is believing in its own fantasies. The past—as it actually unfolded, rather than how one might wish it had—is the best tool for understanding the present and for transforming it through revolution.

“Class-in-itself” to a “class-for-itself”

The elitist, limited, and conservative nature of 1776 meant that US independence did not constitute a genuine popular-democratic or bourgeois revolution. It was a movement led by an alliance of mercantile-capitalist ruling classes.

The present-day descendants of enslaved workers, Native Americans, propertyless manual laborers (both rural and urban), and indentured servants have nothing to celebrate regarding 1776; on the contrary, they must move beyond the patriotic phantasmagorias—whether of the Right or the Left, however well-intentioned—surrounding those events.

The failure to achieve a popular-democratic revolution in 1776 weighed heavily on the future of the United States, contributing to the restricted nature of its democracy and to the arduous transition—still ongoing—of its powerful working class from a “class-in-itself” to a “class-for-itself.”

4. On the Independence of Brazil

In the final part of the article, my detractors address the independence of Brazil—a topic I touch upon only briefly. Their argument relies on a reading of the past centered on great national figures—Dom João, Pedro I, José Bonifácio, and so forth—repeating the patriotic tropes of traditional positivist historiography while ignoring the advances made by Marxist interpretations.

The independence movements in the USA and Brazil secured state control for their respective ruling classes. The major difference lies in the fact that the northern English colonies were dominated by merchant-capitalist production and the southern ones by colonial slavery; meanwhile, Brazil—which had already transcended colonial status in 1808 when Rio de Janeiro became the capital of the Portuguese Empire—was dominated exclusively by the colonial slave mode of production.

Since the colonial period, Brazil had been organized into captaincies—and later provinces—that imported enslaved people from Africa and manufactured goods from Europe, while exporting primary products to Europe, all without interregional ties or a unified domestic market. By the early nineteenth century, Rio de Janeiro had replaced Lisbon as the capital of the Empire and as the hub of the regional economies.

The Major Problem

Despite powerful provincial centrifugal forces, Brazil emerged from independence as a unitary state without a nation, owing to the hegemonic ruling classes’ preoccupation with maintaining slave-based production and keeping the enslaved population in submission.

Even prior to the colonial crisis, factions within the ruling classes had launched movements for the independence of their specific regions—unconcerned with the others—such as in São Paulo (1641), Maranhão (1684), Minas Gerais (1707), Pernambuco (1710–1711), and

Minas Gerais (1789). The factions of the Portuguese ruling class that relocated to Rio de Janeiro with the royal family in 1808 did not intend to return to Portugal; instead, they aimed to establish the seat of a new Portuguese empire there, fearing the very independence movements arising in what was then Portugal's major source of wealth.

Brazil was the offspring of slavery

It was not Dom João, Dom Pedro, José Bonifácio, or—much less—“revolutionary currents drawn to the principles of the American Revolution” that drove Brazil's unified independence; rather, that movement ran counter to the interests of provincial ruling classes who dreamed of full independence for their own regions.

The unitary nature of the Brazilian State was not driven, to any significant extent—as was the case in the USA—by a fear of British retaliation. Portugal lacked the strength to retain or reconquer its former possessions. In fact, it soon sought to maintain control only over Bahia and the North.

The primary concern was that an inter-provincial conflict over borders would threaten the slave-based order, and that small Brazilian nations would be unable to withstand British pressure to end the slave trade. The ruling classes of the major slave-holding provinces—Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul, and Pernambuco—imposed an independence centered on the heir apparent upon the federalist and separatist forces of the peripheral provinces; this arrangement offered various advantages, though listing them all would unduly lengthen this rejoinder.

Conservative Independence

By enthroning the heir to the metropolitan crown, Brazil's independence became the most conservative in the Americas. Nevertheless, it secured both the power of the hegemonic slave-holding classes and the country's political independence. The “Brazilian State” was not a continuation of the “absolutist structure of the Portuguese empire.” Nor could it have been.

In Brazil, the slave-based order reigned supreme. In Portugal, individual liberty had prevailed for over a thousand years, ever since the abolition of serfdom beginning around the year 1000. Beneath the surface, diverse modes of production give rise to diverse forms of domination.

At the organizational level, the Brazilian monarchy rejected hereditary aristocracy and absolutist governance; it placed military power in the hands of the National Guard—which had a provincial structure—and maintained a liberal-slaveholding order throughout the Second Reign, among other features. As in the USA, independence did not come about through the intervention of subordinate and exploited classes—groups that had played a limited role in Brazil's past political disputes due to the sheer demographic weight of the enslaved population.

A conspiracy of the ruling classes

My critics indulge in fantasies regarding the Bahian Conspiracy of 1789, claiming it was the work of “artisans, soldiers, and free men of color

inspired by the Haitian Revolution”—an event that would only break out in 1791, two years after the Bahian movement! In reality, the Bahian Conspiracy was a plot by the Bahian ruling classes; spurred by the French Revolution, it drew in subordinate free men of color, who constituted the majority of the population.

Members of the aforementioned elites involved in the conspiracy backed away when the movement escalated. Given the turbulent international climate of the time, they went unpunished. Despite being the movement with the broadest popular base, it never proposed the abolition of slavery—much like other similar conspiracies.

My detractors argue that “none of these regional movements”—whether nativist or Regency-era—“were capable of transcending their local boundaries and assuming a national character.” They failed to do so because they were historically prevented from it; as we have seen, a nation did not yet exist. The process of establishing Brazil as a nation-state began with the onset of industrialization in Brazil's Center-South region during the early 20th century, accelerating after 1930 and 1937.

Dissident movements

Independence in 1822, as well as movements led by dominant regional factions, did not involve the participation of acculturated natives, freed people, or enslaved workers. Whenever these sectors intervened in regional autonomist and federalist movements, the movements' separatist or federalist liberal leaderships would withdraw, fearing the advance of the so-called “infamous classes”—as happened notably during the *Balaiada* in Maranhão and Piauí, and the *Cabanagem* in Pará.

The struggle and resistance of enslaved communities had their own specific characteristics—much like in the USA—including escapes, acts of retributive justice, *quilombos* (maroon communities), and insurrections. Following Abolition and the proclamation of the Republic, the free rural subaltern classes launched magnificent messianic movements rooted in social issues; notable examples include the peasant war at Belo Monte (*Canudos*) in Bahia and the *Contestado* conflict in Santa Catarina and Paraná.

Brazil's independence and the First and Second Reigns were governed by a preoccupation with maintaining the reproduction and subjugation of the enslaved workforce. Pedro I was deposed for refusing to submit to the dominant pro-slavery factions. His son was a disciplined interpreter of the needs of slavery and was sent into exile months after the institution ended, having become utterly anachronistic.

The USA: A Beacon of Slavery

The victory of the 1776 anti-colonial revolt did not spark anti-slavery sentiments across the Americas; quite the opposite. Brazil's conservative and radical liberals drew inspiration from the US Constitution—rather than the French one—precisely because it proposed a federalist liberalism that comfortably accommodated slavery without qualms. Until 1865, the USA served as an inspiration and a pillar of support for Brazilian slaveholders, not as a beacon of liberty.

As in the former English colonies of North America, Brazil's independence in 1822 secured significant—though not revolutionary—gains by maintaining, rather than altering, the relations of production. Independence put an end to the parasitic nature of Portuguese trade and strengthened Brazil's ports, most notably Rio de Janeiro.

Independence lowered the cost of imports, ended the privilege held by native-born Portuguese regarding public office, kept tax revenues within the country that had previously been sent to Portugal, and retained state institutions in Rio de Janeiro that had formerly been based in the metropole.

Abolition: Brazil's Only Social Revolution

Following the separation from Portugal, Church administration was placed under state control, and the Portuguese land-grant system (*sesmarias*) was abolished, effectively establishing a land-tenure regime that favored large landowners. The *morgado* (entailed estate) system was abolished after the ousting of Dom Pedro.

The abolition of slavery in Brazil—the country's only true revolution—ended the slave-based order and extinguished the dominant modes of production; it was not in the least inspired or determined by the end of the institution in the USA more than 20 years earlier. The end of the era of slavery in Brazil in 1888 was due, on the one hand, to the cessation of the slave trade in 1850 under pressure from England; this led to a concentration of enslaved workers in the coffee-growing center-south—amidst a declining enslaved population—thereby creating areas of the country free from slavery. The final blow to the institution came with the mass abandonment of coffee plantations by enslaved people—particularly in São Paulo—in late 1887 and early 1888.

[1]In 1968, I was a member of the tiny, short-lived Revolutionary Trotskyist Group (GTR). In November 1970, I went into exile in Chile, where I was active in the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) while opposing the leadership's pro-Fidel stance (1972–1974) guerrilla mentality. After a brief attempt at military resistance against the coup, I sought refuge in Belgium in 1974; there, together with a Chilean comrade, I founded the Dissident Faction of the MIR—a Trotskyist group advocating for working-class centrality. Operating under the name *Izquierda Socialista* (Socialist Left), the group remained active in Chile for many years. In Belgium, I was a member of the Revolutionary Workers' League (LRT)—a section of the then-United Secretariat of the Fourth International—though I disagreed with the Mandel-aligned line regarding Latin America. Upon returning to Brazil in November 1977, I joined *Convergência Socialista* (Socialist Convergence), a section of the United Secretariat. I opposed "Morenist" revisionism and played a leadership role in the anti-Morenist split of 1980. The resulting new organization—which was already fragmenting—merged with *Democracia Socialista* (Socialist Democracy); I subsequently left that group in 1982 due to the electoralist bias it had adopted. From 1984 to 1988, I worked as an international correspondent for a daily newspaper in the South. Back in Brazil, as a communist without a party affiliation, I dedicated myself to promoting revolutionary Marxism within academia and the mainstream media through books, articles, lectures, and more. In 1990, I founded the Center for Marxist Studies Group (RS), which proved to be a long-lasting initiative. In 2004, I was invited to join the first provisional leadership of the PSOL and organized the "May 1st" faction to oppose the party's drift toward electoralism—a stance from which I soon distanced myself. Since 2000, I have collaborated extensively with the MST (Landless Workers' Movement), teaching courses, writing publications, and so forth. In 2018, at the invitation of veteran communists, my partner and I participated for eight months in the PCB's internationalist cell—which was kept isolated by the regional leadership amidst a state of massive, widespread disarray.



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