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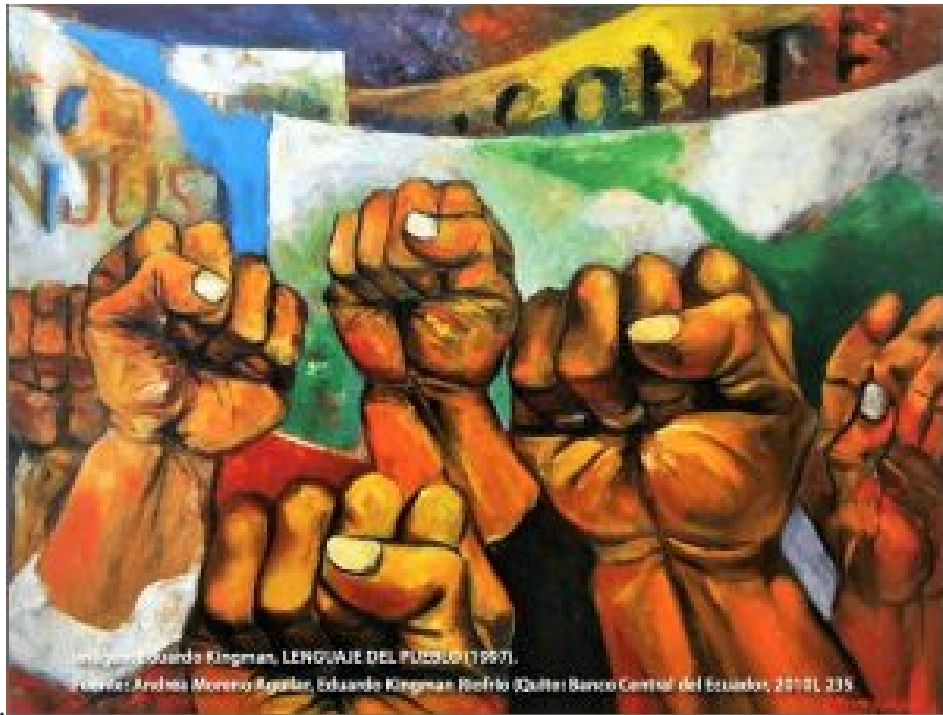
Freedom, social justice and social change

It unites the need to wage, at the same time, the permanent struggle for a culture focused on social justice. Challenges at conceptual levels are posed. Historical reasons are pointed out.

With the title *Freedom and Social Justice for Social Change*, under the coordination and edition of [Pablo Guadarrama González](#) and [Lucia Picarella](#), two books of a philosophical and historical nature have just been published: [one, focused on Theory and concepts and another on Perspectives and problems](#). They bring together various articles by leading thinkers, who reflect on these three dimensions of crucial importance for the historical present: the concept of freedom and how it is understood for effective social justice, which are also presented as challenges for the social change so awaited in the world and particularly in Latin America.

In the article I present, I start from a general consideration: in everyday life and, above all, in the political life of Latin America, the term *freedom* is used for the most varied purposes. Anti-vaxxers say they preserve their freedom, although states promote the obligation to vaccinate in the face of the global Coronavirus pandemic that has spread irrepressibly since 2020. Entrepreneurs demand freedom for their investments in the face of a state that, according to them, strangles the possibilities of development and modernization. Every political party, in any country in the region, proposes freedom as a right and, in addition, as a system that aspires to build and strengthen for the benefit of the people, although the content given to the concept varies in the different senses that each one defines. U.S. interventionism in the region has always been justified as acts aimed at

recovering the freedom of societies subjected to any type of government considered illegitimate or inconvenient to democracy in the Americas. And in our days, [a party like Vox, in Spain](#) as well as historians linked to the vision of the ultra-right, who suddenly raise the media fame, raise the idea that the Spanish conquerors of the sixteenth century were "liberators" of the aboriginal peoples subjected tightly by Aztecs and Incas. Thus, "freedom" serves for a diversity of environments and can reach the levels set by its



managers.

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From a macro-historical perspective, freedom is linked to three moments: the first is the process of Latin American independence, during the first decades of the nineteenth century. There are configured fundamental concepts such as self-government, autonomy,

representation of peoples, democracy and, above all, independence from colonialism. They are the terms to achieve the dream freedom, which since its inception is associated with liberation from an oppressive system. The second moment is linked to the rise of liberalism, in struggle against conservatism, which is characteristic of the nineteenth century. Latin American liberals and radicals mobilized the concept of freedom as well as linking it to liberation from the conditions of backwardness and exploitation maintained by conservative regimes. The third moment, characteristic of the twentieth century, is related to the social ascent and particularly to the popular struggles of urban and rural workers, whose interests have tried to be expressed by different political forces, such as the left parties, but also by governments, ranging from the classic Latin American "populisms", to the cycle of the "progressives", during the first three decades of the twenty-first century, which was followed by a conservative return and then a second progressive cycle, but weakened, if compared to the first. It is, in short, a long-term process in which freedom is again linked to the social liberation from the conditions of oppression and exploitation determined by the oligarchic system, at the beginning of the twentieth century and by the business and neoliberal models since the end of that same century, which endure or revive in the twenty-first century.



Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty leading the people* or *The 28th of July*, oil on canvas, 260 x 325 cm, 1830, Louvre Museum, Paris.

In the current Latin American conditions, not only does the confrontation between two models of economy continue: the neoliberal-business, on the one hand, and the social, on the other; but the search for social justice has become more complex and dangerous, as the elites of the economic and political power of the region have learned to combat and stop any attempt to build social economies and popular-democratic governments, which affect their interests.

As several of the thinkers warn in the works I comment, the conservative and right-wing reaction in Latin America gives shape, increasingly open and radical, to processes of control of the States to establish the exclusive power of the richest layers. This affects the paths of democracy, destroys historically conquered freedoms and represses struggles for social liberation. The danger of constituting fascist states is a reality present in Latin American life, so that struggles for freedom, which imply liberation against the exploitation of regional capitalism, entail the need for the rethinking of popular organization and the accumulation and understanding of the forces that can represent them. Undoubtedly, there is the need to wage, at the same time, the permanent struggle for a culture focused on social justice. Challenges at conceptual levels are posed. Historical reasons are pointed out.

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