

## **The Actions of Instituto Mises Brasil in Brazilian Higher Education**

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**ABSTRACT – The Actions of Instituto Mises Brasil in Brazilian Higher Education.** The paper aims to discuss neoliberal think tanks' role in higher education from the case study of the Mises Brasil Institute (IMB). In general, think tanks aim to cultivate and disseminate neoliberal thought. In the last fifteen years, they have been intensifying their performance in higher education and academia. The study mapped how these think tanks act in these fields, discussing the case of the Mises Brasil Institute. The IMB has been creating a research community around the Austrian School of Economics and trying to influence the teaching, research, and extension.  
**Keywords: Neoliberal Think Tanks. Higher Education. Privatization. Academy.**

**RESUMO – A Atuação do Instituto Mises Brasil no Ensino Superior Brasileiro.** Objetiva-se discutir a atuação das *think tanks* liberais (ou “fábrica de ideias”, em tradução livre) no campo do ensino superior e da academia a partir do estudo de caso do Instituto Mises Brasil (IMB). De forma geral, tais *think tanks* objetivam cultivar e disseminar o pensamento de matriz neoliberal. Principalmente nos últimos quinze anos, vêm intensificando sua atuação na arena na educação superior e na academia. O estudo mapeou como estas desenvolvem iniciativas direcionadas a estes campos, discutindo o caso do Instituto Mises Brasil. O IMB vem criando uma comunidade de pesquisa em torno da Escola Austríaca de Economia e tentando influenciar o ensino, pesquisa e extensão.  
**Palavras-chave: Think Tanks Liberais. Ensino Superior. Privatização. Academia.**

## Introduction

Especially in the last 10 years, with the strengthening of neoliberal and conservative agendas in the country, we have seen the growth of neoliberal think tanks organizations. As political actors who aim to dispute the “war of ideas” and directly and indirectly influence public policies, these organizations produce and disseminate diverse knowledge to defend ultra-liberal and conservative agendas and present anti-left activism. In the view of the neoliberal think tanks, they stand against mainstream Keynesianism and Marxism in culture, politics and economics, exemplified by the slogan “Less Marx, More Mises” observed in various anti-Brazilian Workers Party protests over the years (Rocha, 2018; Baggio, 2016). Nevertheless, one of the spaces listed as strategic for such organizations is higher education and academia, particularly universities.

In this context, the article aims to describe and debate the actions of Instituto Mises Brasil (IMB) in higher education and academia. Two questions guide the study: how and why have neoliberal think tanks been active in the field of higher education and academia in Brazil? How do these liberal organizations contribute to the process of commodification and privatization of these fields? Based on these two general questions, the article aims to present empirical elements related to the work of these organizations in Brazil, focusing on the IMB case.

The study was based on three methodological procedures: firstly, a literature review on the origin, expansion and activities of these types of organizations, focusing on their global epicenters (the United Kingdom and the United States of America) and on Brazil. This review sought to identify the arguments, visions, proposals, projects, initiatives and actions undertaken by neoliberal think tanks related to higher education and science. Secondly, the research undertook an empirical mapping of Brazilian liberal think tanks, tracing them back to the Rede Liberdade. This mapping made it possible to select organizations with a special focus on education and research. Also, it was possible to draw up a general overview of how the neoliberal think tanks have been acting in such realms, and then select a relevant case study. The third methodological step was to carry out the case study reported in this article. In addition to a general characterization of the IMB, the research looked for materials produced by the think tank (articles, videos, posts on social networks, among others) and by its experts on education, universities, science and related topics, intending to identify the organization’s vision/opinion on these issues. In addition, the IMB’s academic initiatives and projects were analyzed to discuss how and for what reasons IMB has sought to form an intelligentsia aligned with the Austrian School of Economics and its currents in Brazil.

The article has been divided into three sections, including the introduction and conclusion. The first section aims to contextualize and characterize, in general terms, what are liberal think tanks, with a focus on the Brazilian context. Subsequently, the article will present a

broader overview of the actions of Brazilian liberal think tanks in higher education and academia, given that students, teachers/researchers and HEIs are important target audiences. Finally, the article devotes a section to discussing the case of the Instituto Mises Brasil, a liberal think tank dedicated to producing and disseminating the so-called Austrian School of Economics in Brazil and which seeks to operate in the academic field. It should be noted that the focus of the study is precisely on the dialogue between these neoliberal organizations and the field of Brazilian higher education and academy. In this sense, it is necessary to center the debate on the liberal think tanks themselves, addressing a case study relevant to the study's questions, given that the IMB is one of the leaders of the Rede Liberdade<sup>1</sup>. In conclusion, in an exploratory way, the paper points out some reflections on the relationship between the context of strengthening conservatism and liberalism and the country's higher education field. The study reported in the paper raises a still incipient debate about how neoliberal organizations have been acting within higher education and science policy in the country.

### **Contextualizing the neoliberal think tanks**

The approach used in the study historically locates a particular “type” of think tank, namely neoliberal organizations<sup>2</sup>, whose historical trajectory falls within an organized intellectual movement with roots in the Lippertman Colloquium (1938) and Mont Pelerin Society (1947). Those movements were important milestones to revitalize and renew liberal thought (Plehwe; Slobodian; Mirowski, 2020; Mirowski; Plehwe, 2009; Dardot; Laval, 2016; Turner, 2008; Onofre, 2018). In Friedrich August von Hayek's argument, liberalism could not act effectively in the battle of ideas (Hayek, 2010). Moreover, the environments in which knowledge was produced and circulated were dominated by left-wing thinking, generally identified with “socialism” and “collectivism”. According to Butler and Hartwell (2012), co-founder of the British neoliberal think tank Adam Smith Institute (ASI), the intellectuals gathered at the first meeting of the MPS wanted to work on building a new intellectual and cultural environment that could undermine socialist projects. In a context of academic and political discredit – taking into account the strengthening of Welfare State policies, Keynesianism and socialism – academics, journalists and businesspeople began to organize themselves through the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS) to articulate, since 1947, a (non-homogeneous) body of theories, conceptions and ideas that could contribute to the defense of a free market social order within the values of individualism and competitiveness.

Two significant spaces for MPS were the media and higher education/academia. Neoliberal think tanks are involved in this process, constituting themselves as private research organizations, typically funded by businesspeople and conservative political parties/groups, aimed at disseminating neoliberal theoretical currents, training new intellectual and expert personnel, and proposing public policies (Casimiro, 2018;

Plehwe; Slobodian; Mirowski, 2020; Mirowski; Plehwe, 2009; Gros, 2008; Turner, 2008). It is worth noting that the set of neoliberal think tanks encompasses a complexity of theoretical perspectives (differing from one another), such as the Austrian School of Economics, Ordoliberalism, the Chicago and Virginia Schools, Public Choice Theory, views aligned with anarcho-capitalism and libertarianism, among others. Another characteristic of neoliberal think tanks is that they are part of global, regional, and national coordinated networks, primarily since the 1970s.

On a global scale, one of the most relevant think tanks is called Atlas Network, founded in 1981 in the United States by an entrepreneur named Antony Fisher, a member of the MPS, who had also been involved in the establishment of several other politically influential organizations, such as the Institute of Economic Affairs (1955) in the United Kingdom. Under the direct influence of Hayek, the entrepreneur created an organization to promote and support (through training and funding) the establishment of neoliberal think tanks worldwide. According to Djelic and Mousavi (2020), the Atlas Network played a crucial role in globalizing the model of neoliberal think tanks, supporting the spread of these types of organizations in all regions of the world. In 2020, the Atlas Network reached 502 officially affiliated partners, with the following geographical distribution, including 97 affiliated organizations in Latin America and 13 in Brazil. In the Latin American context, one can also mention the *Red Liberal de América Latina* (RELIAL), established in 2004. RELIAL organizes conferences and congresses in Latin America, maintains a library, engages in editorial activities, and coordinates efforts to promote neoliberal ideas at a regional level.

Indeed, the Brazilian landscape is directly connected to these networks (Gros, 2008; Vidal; Lopez; Brum, 2020; Rocha, 2018; 2019; Fischer; Plehwe, 2017; Baggio, 2016). On a national level, over the past 10 years, this type of organization has been expanding in line with the growth of the liberal and conservative groups' movements, sometimes referred to as the "New Right" in the country (Baggio, 2016; Ladi; Lazarou; Hauck, 2017; Cruz; Kaysel; Codas; Cruz, 2015; Barbosa, 2016; Casimiro, 2018; Cepêda, 2018; Santos; Tanscheit, 2019; Chaloub; Perlatto, 2016)<sup>3</sup>. In 2016, a national network called *Rede Liberdade* (Freedom Network) was established due to the intense collaboration among the significant Brazilian neoliberal think tanks. Its purpose is to coordinate and strengthen liberal and conservative activism in Brazil and propose privatization policies. Initially, the network focused on debating the privatization of postal services in Brazil and even organized academic article competitions on the topic.

Our empirical research has identified approximately 45 active neoliberal think tanks in Brazil (as of 2020). In terms of importance, taking a panoramic approach, some notable ones include: *Instituto Liberal do Rio de Janeiro* (1983), *Instituto de Estudos Empresariais* (1984), *Instituto Atlântico* (1992), *Instituto Liberdade* (2004), *Instituto Ordem Livre* (2007), *Instituto Millenium* (2006), *Instituto Mises Brasil* (2008), *Students For Liberty Brasil* (2012), *Instituto Liberal do Nordeste* (2013), *Instituto Lib-*

*eral de São Paulo* (2014), *Mackenzie Center for Economic Freedom* (2016), *Instituto Borborema* (2015), *Livres* (2016), *Instituto Tropeiros* (2016), *Burke Instituto Conservador* (2017), among others.

In summary, it can be said that liberal institutes in Brazil operate on two main fronts: they seek to ideologically influence “intellectual elites”, especially those segments that play a significant role in shaping public opinion and knowledge, such as universities (students and faculty), media (journalists, social media influencers), politicians (parties and movements), the military, judges, lawyers, and others, in addition to the business community. They also formulate liberal-oriented public policy proposals and produce content to influence public opinion in the media and social networks. These organizations are typically composed of entrepreneurs, politicians, “intellectuals” (philosophers, political scientists, economists), and various other professionals (journalists, lawyers, etc.). They obtain resources through donations and often declare themselves as non-profit entities. Their main activities include: Translation and dissemination of liberal works; Production of articles and studies related to liberal thought and contemporary economic and political issues; Engagement on various social media platforms, as well as in radio and television; Conducting courses and training sessions for educators and students within and outside of universities; Creation of journalism awards; Development of public policy proposals; Monthly publications of magazines, booklets, and brochures; Organization of events, conferences, and seminars; Various interactions with political parties, political groups, media outlets, and professional associations.

It is possible to affirm that Brazilian neoliberal think tanks have been seeking to expand their influence within HEIs in general and universities in particular. Firstly, they aim to acquire expertise and identify potential political leaders, especially among the student population. This is important to substantiate and legitimize their activities, politically speaking. For instance, in forming the Rede Liberdade network in Brazil, it was necessary to create and bring together a body of experts in fields such as economics, law, political science, history, philosophy, sociology, and more. Additionally, given the economic and political context, HEIs and public universities are subject to criticism and accusations. These criticisms range from allegations of excessive public spending on higher education and the subsequent need for privatization to the argument that universities are intellectually dominated by left-wing or Marxist thought.

From a historical perspective, the first Brazilian neoliberal think tank was created in 1983 in Rio de Janeiro, named *Instituto Liberal*. In the following years, the institute expanded through branches in other regions of the country, although many of them later closed over time (Gros, 2002). This initiative involved the participation of some Brazilian entrepreneurs who also acted as neoliberal activists and had direct connections with members of the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS), notably with the founder of the Atlas Network, Antony Fisher, who advised them in the founding process of IL (Gros, 2002; Casimiro, 2018; Onofre, 2018).

The initial idea was to create an organization similar to the British Institute of Economic Affairs in Brazil. The founders of the Instituto Liberal believed it was necessary to educate strategic segments of Brazilian society on the principles of a free-market society, including students and teachers, journalists, entrepreneurs, politicians, lawyers, and other groups considered opinion influencers.

The *Instituto Liberal* (IL) developed specific initiatives aimed at higher education and the academic community. According to Gros (2002), IL branches generally argued that Marxism and Keynesianism dominated education in Brazil, particularly the teaching of economics. They also claimed that education was outdated and did not adequately prepare professionals for the job market due to ideological biases. In the context of higher education, IL branches promoted courses and academic initiatives aligned with neoliberal thinking. They also collaborated with postgraduate programs that shared the institute's perspectives, organizing joint events (Gros, 2002). Additionally, the IL-RJ (*Instituto Liberal do Rio de Janeiro*) attempted to establish an academic journal in 1993, in collaboration with Foro Latino and the Fundación Francisco Marroquín, both based in Guatemala. Furthermore, the IL-RJ contributed to forming a Liberal Center with the Faculty of Economics at the State University of Rio de Janeiro.

On the other hand, the *Instituto Liberal de São Paulo* (IL-SP) prioritized its activities in the field of education in 1989. It developed programs to foster collaboration between universities and businesses, including lectures, partnerships, research initiatives, and essay contests. For example, the Alfred Marshall Prize - IL/Nestlé Essay Contest was sponsored by Nestlé and ran from 1989 to 1997. It awarded the top three essays written by university students on predefined topics related to liberal economics, with judging conducted by a panel of university professors. Gros (2002) also documented research partnerships between IL-SP and institutions such as the University of Campinas and the University of São Paulo. With the Mackenzie Presbyterian University, IL-SP initiated programs like *Empresa na Escola* (Business in the School) and *Escola na Empresa* (School in the Business), which involved organizing lectures by entrepreneurs at the university and taking students on visits to businesses. At PUC-SP (Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo), IL-SP developed the *Curso de Integração Empresa-Escola* (Integrated Business-School Course), taught by both university faculty and entrepreneurs.

Additionally, Casimiro (2018) and Gros (2002) highlight that the *Instituto Liberal* (IL) formulated some policy proposals related to education. In general, they argued that education in Brazil, which was perceived as lagging behind and overly bureaucratic, should undergo processes of privatization. In this regard, the authors mention that ILs criticized the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (LDB) of 1996, arguing that Brazil should not base its national education system on public schools. They also advocated that government investments should be directed toward elementary education while supporting the charging of tuition fees at public universities and privatization of the

sector. They advocated for the idea of school vouchers, wherein a specific amount is provided to families to use for basic education in privatized and competitive educational services. It's worth noting that this argument had already been advocated and promoted by multilateral organizations like the World Bank and IMF, reflecting the phenomenon of post-neoliberal commodification.

In addition to IL, the *Instituto de Estudos Empresariais* (IEE) and the *Instituto Liberdade* (founded in 2004 as an offshoot of IL-RS) also sought to establish closer relationships with the academic world (Casimiro, 2018; Gros, 2008). Both organizations located in Porto Alegre (RS) sought connections with PUC-RS (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul) and organized events in that space. Notably, the *Instituto Liberdade* relocated its headquarters to Tecnopuc (Science and Technology Park of PUC-RS) in 2008, initiating the Colloquium Instituto Liberdade 2008/2009 in collaboration with the Faculty of Administration, Accounting, Economics, Hospitality, and Tourism of PUC-RS. Furthermore, in the late 1990s, IEE organized the University-Enterprise Forum at PUC-RS to connect entrepreneurs and university students. Later, in 2004, IEE moved its flagship event, the *Fórum da Liberdade* (Freedom Forum), to the same university.

## **Neoliberal Think Tanks in the field of Higher Education and Academia in Brazil**

From the Liberdade Network and its partner organizations, a series of initiatives and projects by liberal think tanks aimed specifically at the academic audience have been identified, seeking to influence the fields of teaching, research, extension, and university policy.

In this context, two projects were created to bring lectures and seminars dedicated to the discussion of economics, politics, and entrepreneurship, especially to the student audience, to all regions of Brazil (Ferreira, 2018; Rocha, 2018): the *Liberdade na Estrada* (Freedom on the Road) project, created in 2009 by the think tank *Instituto Ordem Livre* (Order of Freedom); and the project called *IMIL na Sala de Aula* (IMIL in the Classroom), created by the *Instituto Millenium* in 2011. The dynamics of both initiatives are similar: liberal organizations send their experts to HEIs to organize events and lectures dedicated to disseminating neoliberal thought, primarily to undergraduate students. According to Rocha (2018), these projects also serve as a link between students, professors, and members of think tanks who identify with the theoretical and ideological perspectives of neoliberalism. In many cases, the connections facilitated by these meetings stimulate the creation of study groups among students. The literature consulted estimates that the "*Liberdade na Estrada*" project reached approximately 50 higher education institutions in Brazil in its early years, and the "*IMIL na Sala de Aula*" project recorded the organization of 147 academic events by 2018. These initiatives include both public and private higher education institutions in all country regions. It is worth noting that the Instituto

Millenium has always targeted the academic audience in its events (Casimiro, 2018). In terms of the courses covered by the project, areas are predominant such as Economics, Administration (public and private), Accounting, International Relations and Law, Engineering, Marketing, among others.

Moving forward, a liberal think tank with institutional ties to a private university was identified: the Centro Mackenzie de Liberdade Econômica (Mackenzie Center for Economic Freedom). Established in 2016 and affiliated with the Mackenzie Presbyterian University, the institute describes itself as “A Center for Applied Economic Research and a classical Brazilian liberal think tank dedicated to the debate on the role of the market and the characteristics and consequences of different types of intervention and regulation in the Brazilian economy” (CMLE, 2023), operating in education, research, and extension. Unlike the previously mentioned projects, the CMLE conducts institutionalized activities in the fields of teaching, research, and extension. The CMLE is also affiliated with the Atlas Network and is one of the main partners of the Instituto Mises Brasil. In this sense, the think tank seeks to work on various perspectives of liberalism, especially the Austrian School, Institutional Economics, and the Chicago School. The center is composed of researchers affiliated with Mackenzie University, primarily with postgraduate degrees (academic and professional, including master’s and doctoral degrees), with expertise mainly in the areas of economics, finance, administration, and business. Notably, the CMLE attempts to carry out projects called “economic freedom indices.” Furthermore, the CMLE has been trying to influence public policies.

Another significant example is Students For Liberty Brasil (SFLB). Founded in 2012 with the support of existing liberal think tanks such as the *Instituto Liberal*, *Instituto Millenium*, *Instituto de Estudos Empresariais*, and *Instituto Liberdade* (Casimiro, 2018), the organization serves as a branch of the American think tank Students For Liberty, importing its modus operandi to Brazil. The American organization was founded in 2008 by university students, with support from mega-businessmen in the oil industry, such as the Koch Brothers, according to Gamber-Thompson (2016). In brief, Students For Liberty is an organization that provides material support and training to students, primarily undergraduates, to form study groups and liberal activism within HEIs. This leadership training works in two ways: students selected to participate in the organization can access basic training on various aspects and themes related to liberalism and libertarianism, and, more significantly, they can undergo training in management, communication, and leadership skills.

In this regard, SFLB emulates the actions of its American counterpart: the Brazilian organization develops programs for training student leaders at the national, regional, and local levels; hosts various events such as congresses, lectures, and seminars; establishes liberal study groups at HEIs; maintains blogs and social media accounts with posts on liberalism and the harmful effects of state intervention, among other



activities. According to Rocha (2018), since the founding of SFLB, more than 650 events have been held at public and private higher education institutions, and around 200 liberal study groups have been created among undergraduate students. Thus, starting from the central leaders of SFLB, the neoliberal think tank branches out throughout the country through its coordinators, who bring SFLB activities to HEIs across Brazil. SFLB has been operating as one of the main neoliberal think tanks in Brazil, serving as a bridge between the Liberdade Network, Atlas Network, SFL, and higher education in Brazil. It is worth noting that SFLB was linked to the origin and training of the Free Brazil Movement (Movimento Brasil Livre) itself (Rocha, 2018; Baggio, 2016; Davis; Straubhaar, 2020; Casimiro, 2018).

Finally, it is worth mentioning a series of movements that aim to engage in university politics is worth mentioning. In 2018, the Free Brazil Movement (Movimento Brasil Livre, MBL) created a project called *MBL Estudantil* (MBL Student), intending to combat what they see as “left-wing indoctrination” in education and, in the field of higher education, provide support to students running for student union elections and questioning the legitimacy of the National Union of Students at the national level. Thus, *MBL Estudantil* was created to offer political education to students who want to form activist groups in educational institutions, offering courses and educational materials for this purpose. In addition to these training programs, a platform was created where students can report professors who, in their view, are practicing “left-wing indoctrination” in schools and universities. Similarly, the *Movimento Universidades Livres* (Free Universities Movement, *UniLivres*), created in 2017 as a non-profit civil society organization, aims to challenge the National Union of Students and claims to offer an alternative to student politics that fosters true freedom of ideas. They start from the diagnosis that education is a space dominated by left-wing thinking. In our view, MBL and *UniLivres* have amplified a recurring phenomenon in Brazil: the persecution of teachers at all levels of education, accused of spreading “cultural Marxism” and reinforcing agendas such as the *Escola Sem Partido* (School Without Party).

## **The Academic activities of the Mises Brasil Institute**

The emphasis on the Instituto Mises Brasil (Mises Brazil Institute, acronym IMB) is due to the diverse range of activities developed by the institute, its leadership role within the Liberal Network, and the volume of experts and members gathered and employed by the organization. The IMB stands out for its engagement in building an academic teaching, research, and extension agenda that takes the Austrian School of Economics as its theoretical cornerstone. According to the institute’s leaders, one of its main objectives is to create the “*Universidade Mises Brasil*” (University Mises Brazil), a national and international academic reference center for Austrian-style liberal thought. To achieve this, they seek to influence students and educators, bringing them together to create training and research structures.

The IMB was officially founded in 2007 in the city of São Paulo, located in a commercial building. The founding partners and main founders are Hélio Coutinho Beltrão, Ubiratan Jorge Iorio de Souza, Fernando Fiori Chiocca, and Cristiano Fiori Chiocca. Of these, only the first two continued with the IMB, serving as the institute's two main leaders; the other two, after conflicts and disagreements about the organization's direction in the mid-2010s, eventually left and founded the Instituto Rothbard Brasil. Another important figure at the time of the institute's founding and its early years was Rodrigo Constantino, a former journalist for *Veja* magazine and currently the president of the Instituto Liberal (Dal Pai, 2018). The institute's stated goal is to (free translation)

In its actions, the IMB seeks to: I - Promote the teachings of the economic school known as the Austrian School; II - Restore the crucial role of theory in both economics and the social sciences, in contrast to empiricism; III - Advocate for the free market, private property, and peace in interpersonal relationships, while opposing state interventions in markets and society. The IMB believes that our vision of a free society should be achieved through respect for private property, voluntary exchanges among individuals, and the natural order of markets, without government interference. Therefore, we hope that our actions will influence public opinion and academic circles in such a way that these principles become more widely accepted (IMB, 2023).

As is evident, the IMB values the production and dissemination of ideas and theories that advocate for the free market within the institute's political-ideological framework, aiming to introduce them into political debate, public opinion, and academia.

To achieve this, the IMB currently engages in a wide range of activities considered both academic and non-academic: the publication of opinion articles written by experts affiliated with the institute or not; maintaining a blog and producing the Mises Brasil Podcast, in which they conduct interviews, particularly with actors from the conservative and liberal fields in the country; active presence on various social media platforms, promoting Austrian economic thought and criticizing what they perceive as collectivist/leftist thinking; and in their more academic wing, the institute is involved in publishing activities, organizing conferences, seminars, courses, publishing an academic journal, and offering a postgraduate course in Austrian Economics. Naturally, the IMB also engages in political activities, primarily through the *Rede Liberdade*<sup>4</sup>, where it plays a leadership role (Dal Pai, 2018). Among foreign organizations, it's worth noting the American Mises Institute, considered by IMB as its main reference. Therefore, the institute operates on three fronts, combining an academic aspect with activism, within the following strategic triad: content dissemination and promotion; political and intellectual networking; and editorial/academic activities. To carry out these activities, the institute has a team of 34 experts and a

roster of 450 authors who have already published articles on the IMB's website.

In organizational terms, IMB is presided over by Hélio Coutinho Beltrão (founder and president of the institute since then). As mentioned by Dal Pai (2018), in addition to the presidency, IMB has directorial and vice-directorial positions related to editing and academia. It also has translators and individuals responsible for carrying out the institute's projects. To finance these projects, the institute claims to rely on donations and also operates a membership program. In general, the majority of the main experts at IMB have an academic background, often affiliated with public or private higher education institutions, as well as professionals in various fields. In terms of expertise, there are political scientists, lawyers, and economists.

An analysis of the intellectual activities (articles, texts, lectures, etc.) of these IMB members reveals a wide range of topics covered, including principles, history, and fundamentals of the Austrian school of economics, debates on economic cycles, epistemology and philosophy of science (applied to the Austrian school), as well as more "applied" subjects like the Brazilian economy, public policies, deregulation and privatization, the national political landscape, urban mobility, education, discussions about Bitcoin, and many others. Through this expertise, these experts act both individually and on behalf of IMB within the New Right movement, primarily by conducting lectures, courses, writing for newspapers and magazines (for instance, Hélio Beltrão currently contributes as a columnist for *Folha de São Paulo*), and other activities.

Regarding its historical background, it's worth highlighting a few points. As mentioned by Casimiro (2018) mentioned that the Instituto Mises Brasil was publicly launched in 2010 at the XXIII Fórum da Liberdade. Contextually, as pointed out by Dal Pai (2018) and Rocha (2018), two factors provided the stimulus for the organization's creation: the need to oppose the government of the Workers' Party, considered collectivist and socialist, and the backdrop of the global economic crisis that emerged in 2008, necessitating involvement in the "war of ideas" to propose even more liberalizing solutions. Additionally, there was a strengthening of right-wing and far-right groups on a global scale, some of which think tanks like IMB can be classified within (Casimiro, 2018; Dal Pai, 2018). Moreover, the growing liberal movement then sought to construct the idea that true liberalism had never been effectively implemented in Brazil. In this sense, both the founders of IMB and other liberal think tanks positioned themselves as a "liberal resistance" against the prevailing interventionist and socialist status quo in Brazil and Latin America. They aimed their critiques at progressive governments and disseminated alternatives that called for a significant reduction in the role of the state in the economy (Baggio, 2016; Ladi; Lazarou; Hauck, 2018; Kaysel; Codas; Cruz, 2015; Barbosa, 2016; Casimiro, 2018; Cepêda, 2018).

Finally, it's interesting to note an important episode in IMB's history: the split among some of its founders, which occurred in 2015, resulting in the expulsion of Cristiano and Fernando Chiocca from IMB

(Dal Pai, 2018). Among the various points of disagreement between the founders, two can be highlighted: the accusation, by the Chiocca brothers, that IMB was deviating from the orthodoxy of Austrian-style liberalism and, related to this, was becoming too closely aligned with political groups (such as the Novo Party) and academia. In a note from the founder of the Brazilian Rothbard Institute (Chiocca, 2015, p.1):

The IMB cannot, should not, and will not be affiliated with any business group or business institutions. The IMB will not have any connections with student entities of any kind; The IMB will not have any ties to political parties of any ideological orientation; The IMB is not an academic institution, and our scope of action is much broader, not fitting within the limitations of institutions of that nature [...] He [Hélio Beltrão] insisted on creating the Mises Magazine with the goal of being part of the academic world and trying to influence it (free translation).

As can be seen, one of the disagreements among the founders of the IMB revolved around the institute's involvement in academia. Firstly, engaging with academia would represent a deviation from the true currents of austro-libertarianism, which is recognized as being sparsely present in academic knowledge production worldwide and in Brazil. Additionally, getting closer to academia could hinder the free action of the institute as an organization aimed at cultivating a specific pure doctrine that, according to the founders of the Rothbard Institute, was increasingly expanding its questioning of the mainstream (whether it be political, academic, cultural, etc.) and could not be "contaminated" by it.

Ultimately, from 2015 onwards, the IMB began to strengthen its projects aimed at "academizing" the production of knowledge in Austrian Economics, by publishing an academic journal, organizing conferences, seminars, courses, as well as working in higher education institutions (HEIs) with a view to influencing their research, teaching, and outreach agendas. Through these projects, the organization primarily targets the academic community, including undergraduate and graduate students, researchers, and faculty in the humanities and social sciences. In the view of IMB leadership, getting closer to academia serves two fundamental purposes: to build and renew its pool of specialists, form qualified human resources to carry out its more ambitious projects and, on the other hand, to establish niches of operation within HEIs themselves, influencing their teaching, research, and outreach activities in the dissemination of Austrian Economics within the academic sphere, especially through the activities of its members and its connections with other liberal think tanks, such as CMLE, SFLB, and the Northeast Institute of Liberalism. Ultimately, the institute believes that by approaching academia, it gains more credibility and legitimacy in its actions and in the proposal of public policies.

## **The academic projects of IMB**

Since its foundation, the IMB has undertaken projects in the field of publishing and has organized events self-described as academic. The institute offers a study guide on the Austrian School through a series of translated and made-available books. In the IMB's collection, you can find topics related to liberal theory, the state, the fight against socialism, and an exposition of the principles of the Austrian School. Among the published authors, prominent figures include Bastiat, Ludwig von Mises, and Friedrich A. Hayek. Other names include Hans Hermann Hoppe, a German philosopher and economist, senior fellow at the Mises Institute; Ron Paul, an American conservative-liberal politician; Jesús Huerta de Soto, an economist at the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos de Madrid and member of the Mont Pelerin Society; and Murray N. Rothbard, one of the greatest intellectual proponents of libertarianism and anarcho-capitalism. The collection also includes authors from the IMB itself or other Brazilian or foreign liberal think tanks. It's worth noting that some of these books are available for free download (a total of 54 works). Additionally, the institute provides and promotes a collection of academic papers that have used the conceptual framework of the Austrian School.

Furthermore, Hélio Beltrão and Alex Catharino (a member of the IMB) spearheaded the creation of a publishing house called *Liberdade, Valores e Mercado* (LVM Editora), founded in 2017, which is dedicated to publishing liberal and conservative authors. The IMB leadership identified demands related to more specific debates on law, philosophy, and politics, primarily related to conservative thought. It's worth mentioning that the IMB's publishing house joins the editorial market of the New Right in Brazil, which has expanded its publications with a conservative and liberal focus in recent years (Silva, 2018).

In addition to its publishing activities, the IMB has been seeking to engage with the academic field through events and courses. For example, one of the early notable initiatives was an extension course, lasting sixty class hours, called the Austrian School Initiation Course, held in 2011 at the Faculty of Economics of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). The event announcement on the IMB's website stated that the course's main objective was to introduce the principles of the Austrian School in a theoretical and systematic manner. However, the IMB also often hosts academic conferences to debate the "state of the art" of the Austrian School of Economics and contemporary political and economic topics. These events were initially called Austrian School Seminars (2010 and 2011), but from 2012 onwards, they were renamed Austrian School Conferences, taking place every two years. Until 2019, six events were held in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019. In summary, these conferences, with the support of other liberal organizations and sponsorship from companies (such as Standard Bank, UBS Bank, Localiza, and Gerdau), are characterized by the gathering of a series of specialists and intellectuals of reference in the Austrian School, both national and foreign, with a highlight on the participation of members

of the Mises Institute and the IMB itself. During these conferences, works and books are also launched, article contests are held, among other activities.

In addition to events, the IMB intends to create a ‘community’ of libertarian research, encouraging the publication of studies in this ideological vein. To achieve this, the MISES: Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy, Law, and Economics was created, an academic journal of the Instituto Mises Brasil, initiated in 2013, managed by the IMB itself and with the support of the Atlas Network. The institute strives to promote the journal to a wide audience, with its channels and social media profiles. Currently, the MISES Journal has the following objectives:

Its purpose is to ensure the intellectual publication of professors and researchers, Brazilian and from other countries, scholars of the Austrian School of Economics and related topics. The journal is published in English, Spanish and Portuguese. [...]. Goals and Editorial Policy (Mises, 2022):

- Stimulate the interest of students, professionals, and researchers in the Austrian Economics School;
- Enable the exchange of information between educational institutions, institutes and think-tanks;
- Promote the dissemination of Austrian Economics interdisciplinary approaches;
- Serve as a vehicle for continuing and permanent education in principles of free market and of a free society.

It is evident that the journal is positioned as a tool for the defense of the “free market and a free society” by promoting “continuous and permanent education” within the doctrine. Through this journal, an effective channel for communication and intellectual stimulation in Austrian School thought in Brazil is created. In effect, it aims to establish a means of communication and intellectual stimulation for the academic production of Austrian School thought in Brazil. Another notable aspect is the bridge or “exchange” that the journal intends to facilitate between think tanks and academia, serving as a kind of mediating link between liberal organizations and universities. It is worth noting that the Mises Journal seeks to operate within the rules governing Brazilian academic journals, particularly those established by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), including peer review (ad hoc, blind evaluation) and indexing in academic databases (Diadorim, PKP Index, Google Scholar, DOAJ – Directory of Open Access Journals, OASIS). Like the other academic activities of the IMB, the journal has attempted to establish a range of topics in the fields of economics, law, political science, and philosophy. These publications include approximately 15 texts by Ludwig von Mises, 13 texts by Murray Rothbard, 7 texts by Hayek, as well as articles by Carl Menger, Hermann-Hoppe, and Jesús Huerta de Soto. The journal publishes research articles, essays and insights, book reviews, and summaries of theses and dissertations. It is noteworthy that many of the published articles are authored by members of the IMB and the Mises Institute themselves.

Finally, we can revisit another academic project of IMB, the Postgraduate Program in Austrian School (PGEA). Established in 2016, it is a face-to-face specialization course, in the Lato Sensu modality. It is held at Uniñtalo, in the city of São Paulo (the educational institution, in partnership with IMB, hosts the course and assists in its management), with a duration of eighteen months and approximately 400 hours of classes. To enroll, candidates must go through a selection process that involves resume analysis and an interview. As supported by Dal Pai (2018), IMB's intention was to enhance the training of Austrian academic personnel, intellectually boosting the libertarian movement. According to the official PGEA website, justifying the importance of the postgraduate program (PGEA, 2019, n.p.):

The growth of the so-called Austrian School of Economics, whose central ideas are based on the defense of liberalism and the demonstration of its superiority over other political-economic systems, such as socialism and interventionism, has been increasingly significant worldwide. Although it is not yet part of the academic mainstream, the Austrian School is no longer completely unknown (free translation).

More specifically, the course consists of twenty disciplines (nineteen thematic disciplines and one discipline on scientific research methodology). These disciplines cover a wide range of content, addressing the origins and fundamentals of the Austrian School, methodology, debates on markets, capital, problems of socialism, interventionism, law and economics, liberalism, economic cycles, public policies, democracy, and freedom. Regarding the teaching staff of PGEA, it includes IMB's own specialists.

## **The vision of Mises Brazil Institute on Higher Education**

The IMB disseminates the idea that ideally, education and science should not be under the control of the State, whether in terms of the existence of public institutions or the regulation of the private sector. In other words, within the austro-libertarian thought, education and science cannot be considered rights or public goods but commodities because private property and the market process would better regulate educational and scientific services. State control, beyond inefficiency, also brings with it the problem of "ideological indoctrination", as public education would aim for curriculum standardization and thematic uniformity, as well as being linked, being state apparatuses, to "statist" ideologies or, in cases of cultural warfare, to Marxist and leftist ideologies. It is worth noting that IMB works with the idea that universities and intellectuals and academics have a high predisposition to "cultural Marxism", using the idea of left-wing indoctrination, as well as the notion, cultivated by the neoliberal movement, that intellectuals mostly lean towards socialism.

In other words, following the austro-liberalism current, the argument is made that education is not a social right but a commodity and, as such, will be better provided in terms of quality and resource efficiency if delivered by the private sector with minimal regulation. The problem with state education, on the other hand, lies in the coercive use of tax-derived resources (remember the slogan “taxation is theft”) to finance, always inefficiently, public education that, in the end, indoctrinates students mainly with statist and collectivist ideologies. In this sense, the IMB also argues that especially in higher education, courses and formations are not aligned with the real demands of the market.

This culminates, in broad terms, in two political proposals: the widespread privatization of the educational and scientific system, and the need to defend so-called “homeschooling” - that is, the “right” of families to choose not to submit to state education or conventional private education, as it is regulated by the state. In more pragmatic terms, recognizing the impossibility of fully achieving such proposals in the short and medium term, the IMB argues that education should be deregulated and privatized as much as possible - in the field of higher education, endorsing arguments for charging tuition fees at public higher education institutions, voucher programs, encouraging private financing, and university-industry partnerships, among others.

Beyond the privatization of public universities, it can be said that the IMB advocates for the privatization agenda of science itself. In an article published on the website of the Rothbard Institute entitled *Market-Funded Science vs. State Science* (Reisman, 2010), whose author is a professor emeritus of economics at Pepperdine University in the United States, the following argument is made:

In a free market, science originates in the mind of each individual scientist who has studied and contemplated the problems that interest them. By acting in this manner, these scientists can, from time to time, make new discoveries, which they delve into more deeply, continually verifying the results. During the course of their work and the dissemination of results, they often require additional funding, which they can obtain themselves. In this case, inspired by the value they see in their work, they turn to other individuals to try to obtain the necessary funds, persuading them to understand the essence of their work and its value. In a free market, the primary source of funding would be wealthy entrepreneurs and affluent heirs (Reisman, 2010, free translation).

In other words, the hypothetical free market advocated by the article would allow the truly creative scientist to thrive, connected with entrepreneurs interested in financing their research. This scientist should also develop the skills of persuasion and convincing to secure funding in the private sector. In essence, science is reduced to the “creative scientist” figure, ignoring the entire institutionalized discovery process that involves, in a capitalist society, the state, the private sector, public education and research organizations, among others. In con-



trast, state science is believed to stifle the supposed scientific ethos of creativity and innovation.

However, as the article sought to demonstrate, despite rejecting higher education as a public institution, liberal institutes, and the IMB in particular, attach great importance to their presence in higher education institutions and public universities. This is because they recognize the importance of concentrating significant intellectual resources that cannot be ignored regarding legitimacy (expertise, shaping public opinion, knowledge production, leadership and intellectual development, etc.). Additionally, the struggle for hegemony in these spaces aims to alter or mitigate a perceived balance of political and ideological forces that have led universities to be dominated by “leftism” and “cultural Marxism”.

## Conclusion

Throughout the article, we have seen how liberal think tanks, through organized networks, engage in the “war of ideas” by mobilizing their experts. In this context, engaging in higher education and academia becomes important. Firstly, it is essential to contest the intellectual environment, following Hayek’s thesis that, in the long term, the interventionist intellectual environment had dominated cultural, media, and knowledge production circuits. Secondly, it is necessary to recruit experts and expertise since academic legitimacy is important for some liberal think tanks. In Brazil, since the founding of the Instituto Liberal in 1983, these organizations have sought closer ties with the academic environment. By questioning the teaching and research conducted in higher education institutions regarding the validity of the knowledge produced for the market and the shift towards left-wing indoctrination, defending the privatization of public institutions and deregulation of the sector, tuition fees, and vouchers, liberal think tanks have been trying to articulate projects and initiatives specifically aimed at higher education and academia.

In the case of the Instituto Mises Brasil, it has been observed that the organization aims to establish an academic center of thought in the Austrian School in Brazil. To achieve this, it has been trying to strengthen its pool of experts and increase its presence in academic environments because it is believed that the credibility of the content produced by the organization requires scientific legitimacy. Thus, the IMB has been building its own training and knowledge production apparatus, articulating a research community in the Austrian School. It is worth noting that, along with Students For Liberty Brasil, the institute has been bridging the gap between the Rede Liberdade and the higher education sector. In aggregate, the efforts of liberal think tanks have been creating niches within various higher education institutions in the country. By reinforcing arguments for the privatization of education and endorsing the thesis of left-wing indoctrination in educational and scientific institutions, the IMB also contributes to strengthening agendas such as the “*Escola Sem Partido*” (School Without Party).

Assuming that, together with the New Right, liberal think tanks have been increasing their presence in higher education and academia, it is possible to argue that these organizations have become relevant actors in the historical processes of commodification and privatization of higher education and the university, considering the political context of the last decade. By influencing public opinion, significantly engaging in social networks, and seeking to influence public policies, these organizations directly contribute to the country's contestation of public higher education institutions through neoliberal ideologies. Additionally, they develop strategies for engagement in teaching, research, outreach, and university politics, aiming to contest the educational field.

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## Notes

- 1 Roughly speaking, think tanks can be characterized as organizations that mobilize academic (or so-called academic) knowledge to propose public policies or influence public opinion (Hauck, 2017; Medvetz, 2008; Pautz, 2012).
- 2 In this paper, we won't debate what it is neoliberalism. For more, see Fine; Saad-Filho (2017), Plehwe, Slobodian e Mirowski (2020), Dardot e Laval (2016), Harvey (2005) and Andrade (2019).
- 3 This term is used to denote, in a more pragmatic sense, a range of political actors classified within the right and far-right spectrum who have gained strength and political-ideological prominence over the past ten years. For more details, refer to Rocha (2018) and Casimiro (2018) – both of whom offer different readings and interpretations of these phenomena.
- 4 For example, it's worth mentioning that some of its members or former members hold positions in the federal executive and the national congress, such as the case of Geanluca Lorenzon, who assumed the Secretariat of Advocacy for Competition and Competitiveness at the Ministry of Economy in Jair Bolsonaro's government, under Paulo Guedes.

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