

ARTICLE

Social Work and Projects of Society in Brazil

Trabajo Social y Proyectos Societarios en Brasil

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Abstract

In this article we discuss the main projects of society disputed on the Brazilian scene. This analysis allows us to draw conclusions about the whole of Latin America and the world situation, discussing the expressions of social work, its challenges and conditions for the defence of the ethical-political project built by the Brazilian Social Service after the Virada Congress of 1979, forty-one years ago. At that time, we bravely held legitimate collective elections, which today are challenged by these times of reactionary tones, but also marked by struggles, resistance and contradictions. The strong winds that blow in several Latin American countries, especially in Chile, show us that “everything changes”; as the beautiful music of Julio Numhauser says, immortalized in the voice of the

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Argentine Mercedes Sosa. That is to say, nothing is and should not seem impossible to change. Therefore, we will focus on a more generalized characterization of these social projects, seeking to carry out some mediations with our professional project.

Resumen

En este artículo buscamos discutir cuáles son los principales proyectos de sociedad disputados en la escena brasileña. Este análisis permite sacar conclusiones sobre el conjunto de América Latina y la situación mundial, discutiendo las expresiones del trabajo social, sus desafíos y condiciones para la defensa del proyecto ético-político que fue construido por el servicio social brasileño luego del Congreso Virada de 1979, hace cuarenta y un años. En aquel momento hicimos con valentía elecciones colectivas legítimas, que hoy son desafiadas por estos tiempos de tonos reaccionarios, pero también marcados por luchas, resistencias y contradicciones. Los fuertes vientos que soplan en varios países de Latinoamérica, especialmente en Chile, nos muestran que "todo cambia", como dice la bella música de Julio Numhauser, inmortalizada en la voz de la argentina Mercedes Sosa. Es decir, nada es ni debería parecer imposible de cambiar. Por tanto, nos centraremos en una caracterización más generalizada de estos proyectos de sociedad, buscando realizar algunas meditaciones con nuestro proyecto profesional.

Palabras clave:
trabajo social;
neofascismo;
proyecto
ético-político;
Brasil

Some characteristics of the professional ethical-political project in Brazil

At a conference that we held in 2016, the Brazilian Congress of Social Workers in Recife, we affirmed that in the face of capitalism in crisis and decline, and a new type of coup which led the government of Brazil to usurpers and predators -the government of Temer-, a situation in which the shielding of democracy, social inequality and violence is intensifying, and in the face of the greatest attack on work and rights since the neoliberal hegemony was established in Brazil, still there are pillars that allow Brazilian social work to remain in the field of strategic engagement with workers, the side we chose in 1979. Since then, we have not permitted the professional category -understood here as a means of professional practice and field of knowledge- to be captured by the ultra-conservative winds in a socially favourable environment for them. We are talking here about the pillars of the collective construction of Brazilian social work of the last forty years, which have also helped us to face the traps of Cardoso's neoliberal counter-reform, neoliberal co-optation (Cislighi, 2020) and class conciliation, marks of the period prior to the new coup in 2016. We have maintained political autonomy of professional organizations and a critical attitude.



One of these pillars is the strength to analyse both the materiality and the spirit of the times in which we live, which has allowed us to identify the diverse projects of society we are currently experiencing, their material base and socio-political movement. We refer to critical theory, especially the fruitful dialogue in the Marxist tradition, which nurtures the production of knowledge, professional work and political praxis, and which has allowed us to closely follow the movement of reality, economic and political circumstances and the formulation of professional strategies. There was a clear and growing process of maturation of the theoretical and methodological categories of this tradition, breaking with the initial “positivist invasions” and with a schematic and impoverished Marxism which Coutinho (2010) called “miserable reason”.

We also have the experience of the political-professional leaderships in the political organizations of Brazilian social work - the Federal Council of Social Service (CFESS), the Regional Council of Social Service (CRESS), the Brazilian Association of Teaching and Research in Social Service (ABEPSS) and the National Executive of Social Service Students (ENESSO) – which have strong legitimacy being rooted in decision-making procedures and in the definition of a broad agenda of professional struggle, linked to the demands of Brazilian society. Neither the erosion caused by the ultra-conservative project -which already existed, but has gained strength since 2016- nor the transformation of segments of the left during the years of class coalition governments, could cause the loss of political autonomy and the leadership of national political organizations in the category. However, these demanding times require attention, always in search of the best strategies either in the battle of ideas or regulatory processes and, above all, in alliance with broad sectors of social activists who share the same agenda to prevent the overthrow of political leadership and the main guiding values of the profession. The good news is that there are new generations of social workers imbued with this project, and with important experiences of professional and social and political struggle. But there are also disturbing elements in Brazilian social work, although a minority: the presence of references to the past of a confessional social service and even adherence to neoliberal and ultra-conservative theses, which appears especially, but not exclusively, in virtual social networks, as an example; parliamentary initiatives to deregulate the professions defended by these sectors; the attack on the quality of professional training through the rupture of the relationship between teaching, research and extension; the open search and with inconsistent arguments and disqualified by "cultural Marxism", with implications for research and pedagogical projects in our field, among others.

This neoconservative presence surprises some people, but it shouldn't. We have to understand it as an element of reality: history determines us and in the face of the social growth of conservatism we are not obviously isolated. We never were. A professional



category is necessarily plural, crossed by corporate projects that dialogue with professional projects, as we learned from Netto (1999). And there are new conditions in the dispute for hegemony, both in society and in the area of professional knowledge, reflected in the general environment of Brazil, Latin America and the world. Hegemony is not a simple majority, but an intellectual and moral direction. Thus, if there are socially unfavourable conditions for the decisions we have made since 1979, it is not the first time that we are facing a regressive environment. The ethical-political project of the Brazilian social work was constituted in the resistance to the civic-military dictatorship in Brazil and in the Latin American continent. In the redemocratisation process, we confronted the neoliberal policies of Fernando Collor and Fernando Henrique Cardoso. We made no concessions to the transformism of the Workers' Party (PT), which did not break with the neoliberal fiscal adjustment environment. We safeguard political independence, while acknowledging some important social achievements -but meagre compared to expectations- in the period between 2003 and 2015. But today, in fact, we have unprecedented conditions caused by the new type of coup of 2016 and its consequences in the 2018 elections, with the electoral victory of the extreme right that governs the country, as we will discuss later.

There is also a third pillar of the Brazilian professional project: the agenda of struggle that we have been consolidating in these four decades against conservatism in all its forms, including that of the current neo-fascism and ultra-liberalism - inseparable partners. From the deleterious fiscal adjustment program, through the living and working conditions of the majority, it is that a strong and violent State has been required, which criminalizes protests and dissent, in addition to the deployment of ideological and political mechanisms for part of the apparatus of private hegemony, which justify such socialization of the costs of the crisis of capitalism. We have designed this agenda: defend public social security, social and labor rights, democratic freedoms, agrarian reforms, fight against all forms of discrimination and prejudice, against structural racism and LGBTQ+ phobia, for the rights of women and indigenous peoples, against social inequality, etc., all in conjunction with political subjects present in Brazilian society.

In essence, it is an anti-capitalist and socialist agenda, since contemporary capitalism, mature, decadent and in structural crisis (Mandel, 1982, 1990; Mészáros, 2002), does not include it; on the contrary, it blocks it, emptied of democratic pipelines. In 2016, at the CBAS, we pointed out that despite the great difficulties that were already there, we had instruments to face them, not with a guarantee of victory, because social struggle is always risky and without a predetermined end, and history presents a haemorrhage of senses (Bensaid, 1999). We made an ethical-political choice in Brazil, to stand alongside the workers and recognize ourselves as workers registered in the social and



technical division of labour, as analysed by Yamamoto (1982). If we have an aggressive attack from the right, we have to ally ourselves in a united front strategy of the workers, “with the unrepentant social subjects who feed and maintain a theoretical-political and professional culture of the left in Brazil” (Mota, 2016 , p.40), fighting decisively for the values that guide the professional ethical-political project of Brazilian social work, inscribed in the Code of Ethics of Social Workers (1993), in the Law of Regulation of the Profession and in the Curricular Guidelines of the Brazilian Association for Social Work Teaching and Research.

Is there "news on the front line"?

As Arcary (2018, p.1) says, "he who does not know who he is fighting against, cannot win"². Let's see, in general terms, which are the current projects of society that seek expression in Brazilian social work.

The far-right project flirts with social work, although it goes against the ethical-political commitments present in the main governing documents of the profession in the country. We are facing a devastating society project and it is necessary to go beyond its superficial expressions to understand its meaning and defeat it on the streets, at the polls, in institutions, in families, in communities, in tribes, in social networks, in all spaces. Such a project is more than a nightmare, which will only happen when (and if) the working class wakes up and new elections are held in the country "restoring civility". This is the solution that some sectors of the left seem to be waiting for - contrasting civilization and barbarism, not socialism and barbarism as in the well-known formulation of Rosa Luxemburg. This perspective is limited to institutional-parliamentary politics and seems to face each daily shock in a timely manner. Part of the explanation for the crude silence of segments of the union and popular movement in the face of the social security counter-reform approved in Brazil in 2019 may lie in this reading of reality. Another part certainly resides in the new morphology of the world of work (Antunes, 2018) that hinders the political organization of workers, as well as in the real bureaucratization of certain union leaders.

Another strategy has been to harass and erode the current government and some of its most damaging heralds. At the same time, there was a strong commitment to the fight for Lula Livre, as the only counterweight and without any self-criticism of the recent past, where several of these elements of barbarization of life were already underway,

² <https://revistaforum.com.br/politica/integra-do-discurso-historico-de-valerio-arcary-quem-nao-sabe-contr-quem-luta-nao-pode-vencer/>
Consulted in August 2020.

without great and consistent combat. It is worth clarifying that we were totally in favour and advocated the freedom of Lula, so that he would leave a prison that had exclusively coup and anti-democratic motivations with an unjust and flawed judicial process. Furthermore, we believe that systematically eroding this government / project, which clearly has “feet of clay”, and building short-term political and electoral alternatives is also fundamental. Right now, in the second half of 2020, municipal elections are underway and will be a test of strength in Brazil. But we emphatically note that this reading and strategy is insufficient and weak, such is the urgency to stop the devastation. It is necessary to deepen the fissures and contradictions of this project and widen them much more to sustain the current course of events, which acquired dramatic, incendiary and genocidal contours in the COVID-19 2020 pandemic³. The streets should speak much louder than they have already done in Brazil, following the example of our Latin American brothers, especially in Chile and Argentina.

Bolsonarism expresses in Brazil a corporate project of the extreme right with traces of fascism. A project that has articulations with Steve Bannon and heralds of the extreme right around the world, in a planetary movement, according to Michael Löwy (2019). For Löwy, the crisis of capital leads to a kind of "identity panic", which refers to patriotic, xenophobic and fundamentalist discourses. The text is very interesting, as it shows the differences of this project in Europe and Latin America. But we will stop at the “Brazil above all” of the Bolsonaro government, which is leaving indelible and deepening traces of destruction, as time passes and its measures are implemented. These are promoted by tweeters, live streamings and others, which encourage the worst in Brazilian society, increasing all kinds of violence, as if to tell the monsters who were supposedly asleep in their resentment (Kelh, 2004) that they can now do whatever they want: buy firearms to supposedly protect the family, set fire to forests, invade indigenous lands, quilombolas and small producers, kill women and LGBTTTQ+, whip young blacks who steal chocolates, impose the power of the milicias and narcomilicias in the favelas, kill one person every two days in Rio de Janeiro (Jornal O Globo, 09/01 / 2019), carry out “death caravans”, fight against the necessary social isolation in the pandemic (Behring, 2020). These people who die from a bullet or from Covid, have colour and it is black, because “the cheapest meat on the market is black meat,” sings Elza Soares in the music of Abebe Bikila / Jonas Ribeiro. After all, as Goya said between the 18th and 19th centuries, "the dream of reason produces monsters".

Meanwhile, the ultra-neoliberal economic agenda and the offensive intellectual and moral counter-reform are advancing, with a view to solidifying the bases of legitimacy of this social project that is based on the most deeply rooted individualism, the

secularization of the State and a wide menu of devaluations that up to now have been a smokescreen for ultra-neoliberal economic measures, but with them they form the whole in motion. Such devaluations are not bizarre excesses: there is no rude government that suffers from verbal and political incontinence on Twitter and another that "works", according to the newspaper *O Globo*, the same vehicle that defends its economic measures, especially the counter-reform of social security and the Draconian spending ceiling of Constitutional Amendment 95, approved in 2016 under bombardments in Brasília.

Are we facing a fascist project? It is necessary not to trivialize the use of this term. That it is a far-right project that attacks rights and places itself at the service of capital - with an emphasis on US imperialism - there seems to be no doubt. The point is the characterization of fascism and other variants, such as proto-fascism or neofascism, given the difficulties of fitting the current Brazilian reality into a synthetic term that expresses previous historical processes and that has certain characteristics, mediated by national particularities where fascism was constituted as a social process and became a political regime (Italy and Germany). It seems certain that we are not facing a fascist regime. The signs of an anti-democratic recrudescence possibly bring us closer to an "armoured democracy that does not dispense with battleships" within the framework of semi-Bonapartism (Demier, 2019), but which can unfold into an open dictatorship (and Bonapartist or fascist), if the dynamics of social struggles do not stop it.

It seems to be a consensus that the term fascism comes from the *fascio littorio*, a bundle of sticks, a symbol of the power to punish in the Etruscan tradition and of authority and power in Roman culture, and that it was incorporated into the government of Mussolini as of 1922 in Italy. Fascism is a totalitarian political regime, of a single party, with a hypertrophy of the police apparatus, marked by "nationalist exaltation", "anti-liberalism" and "anti-communism", with the defence of the State as "leader of the national economy", characteristics that the current Brazilian government would take away from the idea of fascism, given its visceral ultra-neoliberalism. However, the search for a precise characterization is complex, since political regimes and governments are not presented as ideal types. It is necessary to extract its movement, its features from reality. If fascism was initially marked by the fight against financial "predatory capitalism" (which would be responsible for the 1929/32 crisis), the sequence was one of association with large economic groups, at the same time that corporatism with workers was instituted there in the 20s and 30s. Here, then, we have another feature that differentiates the fascism of yesterday from the current one, given that it is not a question of co-opting collective bodies of the working class, but of instituting a possessive, meritocratic individualism, which is combined with the precariousness of work. There was a strong entrenchment of fascism in the urban



middle classes, unhappy with the economic crisis of the interwar period and with the political tensions between liberals, social democrats and socialists. This element is present in what we have been living with at the peak of the long wave of stagnation (Mandel, 1982), expressed in the breakup of Lehman Brothers in 2008, despite the fact that the socialist movement today does not have the strength of a recent revolution (October 1917) and with real possibilities of spreading as in that historical moment. Thus, to justify the attacks on democratic freedoms, it is necessary to choose other scapegoats: terrorism, Nicolás Maduro, Cuba and the Workers' Party (PT), in the name of corruption.

Fascism can be approached as a movement or as a regime, which results from the former, but should not be confused with it, and whose outbreak comes from the crisis of capitalism between the two world wars. Fascism can also be characterized as an open dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, exercised without the mediation of the institutions of parliamentary democracy, in a bourgeois counterrevolution that mobilizes petty-bourgeois layers, against a strong workers and popular movement (which today we do not have, but there are scapegoats, as noted above). These layers are driven by a kind of resentment and by fictitious goals and rewards that are more symbolic than material. Elements of irrationalism, voluntarism, anti-capitalism and anti-socialism converge here, when fascism is expressed as a revolt movement of the petty bourgeoisie, an element that we can clearly identify in recent Brazil, after the capture of the large mobilizations of June 2013 due to the discourse of corruption (Demier, 2017). At this time of open dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, without being directly led by it, fascism and Bonapartism are processes that converge, the latter being a kind of temporary transfer of political power to a force that has relative autonomy in relation to the central nucleus of ruling classes and seeks to resolve the class struggle with technocratic and repressive solutions.

A Marxist interpretation of fascism can be found in Ernest Mandel (1976), commenting in a long presentation on the well-known text by Leon Trotsky - *On Fascism* (1931/1932). For him, despite a diffuse verbiage, as we saw previously, fascist regimes throughout the history of the 20th century were far from questioning the immanent laws that govern the capitalist system, so that materialist, historical and dialectical analysis must seek to expose what these regimes really do or have done, let alone what they say. The autonomy of fascist governments and regimes, in short, from political power in relation to the ruling classes and economic contradictions, is very relative. Its highest expression is militarism, which is far from being, or is today, the opposite of monopoly capitalism. Therefore, for Mandel, fascism denotes the irrationality of capitalism as a whole in its mature and decadent phase, which explodes in particular political conditions, having a “very real and rational origin” (1976, p.27). If the petty-bourgeois



and fascist mass movements mobilize hatred and aggression, it is not because that is part of some kind of sleeping human nature, or for purely psychological reasons. For Mandel, this need for terror and violence had, in Italy and especially in Germany, a deep relationship with monopoly capitalism and its demands for reproduction after the debacle of 1929/32, and with imperialism, before the resumption of profit. In other words, "what is really essential is private property and the possibility of accumulating capital and extracting added value" (Mandel, 1976, p.27). At this point, the rise of fascism was (and is) an expression of the grave crisis of mature and decadent capitalism, a crisis of reproduction of capital. In this sense, "the seizure of power by fascism is the alteration by force and violence, in favour of the decisive groups of monopoly capital, of the conditions for the reproduction of capital" (1976, p.29). If fascism is not the desirable and "normal" form of bourgeois domination, there is no doubt in using it in certain conditions -of crisis-, mobilizing the enraged petty-bourgeois faction to crush the popular workers' organizations, even in the form of phalanxes and paramilitary squads. For Mandel, as also for Trotsky (1976) before him, the answer to fascism lies in the united front of the workers, that is, a front that brings together the group of class organizations for resistance and self-defence against the "crushing of classes". The workers, the destruction of their organizations and the suppression of political freedoms at a time when the capitalists are incapable of governing and dominating with the help of democratic mechanics, are "putting the petty bourgeoisie" at the disposal of their worst enemies" (Trotsky 1976, p.117).

Based on these considerations, without evidently trying to exhaust such a complex and controversial issue, we can summarize that there are clear elements of fascism in what Bolsonarism as a whole is doing to and unleashing on Brazilian society in a context of structural crisis of capitalism, although he has not established a fascist regime - an open dictatorship. This is a hypothesis that unfortunately cannot and should not be ruled out. Conversing with Arcary (2018), even considering that the majority of [Bolsonaro's] voters were not fascists, we are facing neofascism (Mattos, 2020), which is not and cannot be an exact copy of the fascism of the past. We are facing a combination of tragedy and farce, paraphrasing Marx. The tragedy is the devastation that this project promotes. The farce is a simulacrum, where "nationalism" is associated with the delivery of public goods for the enjoyment of imperialism (which refers to Mandel's previous words); where "fighting corruption" means equipping institutions for shady interests; where the general elections are contaminated by the arrest of the main adversary and the fake news in association with companies like Cambridge Analytics, denounced by the impressive documentary *Privacy Hacked* (2019). In fact, current neo-fascism, in Brazil and elsewhere, is a political requisition for the process of economic reproduction in times of capital crisis, which depends on the public fund and intense processes of expropriation of workers (Fontes, 2010; Boschetti, 2018).



Therefore, the bourgeois business project uses this path, without shame.

A devastating project

Let's look at some elements of this totality that moves in a perverse and neo-fascist direction, in favour of big capital. The devastation is materialized in the criminal fires in the Brazilian Amazon and the Pantanal, which increased dramatically between July and September 2020, compared to previous years, as shown by data from the Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais - INPE (questioned by the government). Spurious initiatives such as the "Day of Fire" in 2019, built by WhatsApp by the homonyms "good men" - businessmen, farmers, merchants and their friends grileiros (land grabbers by falsifying documents) - in the south of Pará, are undoubtedly signs of the climate of impunity that has been installed in the country since the beginning of the extreme right-wing government. Land grabbing is nothing new in the country and it has not found the necessary brakes before. Yet the intensity and wickedness are unprecedented, even casting a cloud of soot over South America's largest city, São Paulo, in a ghoulish metaphor for the bad omens lurking in Brazil. And along with that, threats came to indigenous peoples due to the international movement of leaders and activists committed to defending the environment. These threats were widely denounced in marches in Brasilia and in countless articles in the press. But the devastation is not only of nature, it is also human, since the role of the world's largest tropical forest in containing global warming, that Ricardo Salles (Minister of the Environment) and his accomplices want to minimize and even deny, is central. On the other hand, it is important to say: global warming is the responsibility of the big monopolies and imperialist countries, of the emission of carbon dioxide (which the US and China lead), and of a predatory relationship with natural resources. The same people who cry out for the Brazilian care of the Amazon are those who send garbage containers to Brazil. In other words, planet Earth is heating up because capitalism in crisis, mature and decaying exhausts it. And he finds in the Brazilian government, with its indulgence and complicity with the arsonists, the best of all worlds. If the Amazon is a strategic concern, we cannot forget the devastation that occurred in the form of environmental disasters in Mariana, Rio Doce and Brumadinho, before the current government. These were the announced tragedies produced by the predatory and productivist development model of raw materials, adopted in Brazil and in many Latin American countries.

More precisely, the materialization of the devastation that we saw in the dramatic images of the burning forest is the product of a certain relationship between man and nature - the capitalist form of production and social reproduction - that puts both at risk and constitutes, in the present, a bleak future. The man-nature relationship is historical



and social, that is, it is about decisions, especially of those who own the means of production, the bourgeois proprietors, and those who, in the immediate and insatiable desire for loss of profit, suffer an abominable presentism. Precisely because of his passionate selfishness, which, unlike the Smithian utopia of the 18th century, did not and will not lead to well-being and the general attention to human needs, the predatory productivism of capital in its mature and decadent phase is a true destroying machine of men, women, nature. And therein lies the essence of the Amazon problem, fierce in the reactionary environment produced by neo-fascist Bolsonarism.

More directly devastating for Brazilian men and women are the measures implemented by the ultra-liberal economic program in Brazil, since the coup in 2016. Today we know that the coup plotters wanted much more than the measures that Dilma and Joaquim Levy began to take. They wanted Constitutional Amendment 95⁴, the labour counter-reform (2017) and another pension counter-reform (2019). The aim of the measures was to create a good "business environment" to extract added value and make the biggest possible cuts to the public fund. The public fund, as an assumption of the expanded reproduction of capital in times of crisis, is currently highly disputed (Behring, 2010 and 2012). This was one of the important meanings of the Coup d'Etat of 2016, which paved the way for the electoral victory of this project in 2018.

The approval of Constitutional Amendment 95, still in Temer's government, was a central element of the ultraliberal New Tax Regime, the consequences of which are in the Draconian counter-reform of the recently approved pension plan and in the recent attacks on educational and social policies under the Presidential speech that "there is no money for nothing" -as if it were a force of nature to which the government must surrender and the workers must accept. In the case of education, such attacks are part of the State's counter-reform agenda, combining its economic face with the intellectual and moral offensive, in the sense of making the country more dependent and heteronomous, emptying the investigation, and in the same step, suffocating the social criticism that occurs in public universities, with a view -by force- to forge adherence to the *Future-se* project. The latter, proposed by the truculent former minister Weintraub, brought the great novelty (SIC) of Social Organizations (OS) -public-private alliances- in the management of universities, which has been in force since the State Reform Master Plan of 1995 but now is accompanied by the destructive insinuations of the present: alienate public assets to establish a financing fund, for example. Regarding OS, there are already numerous studies in the health area that show that these are true pipelines of public resources for the private sector, without necessarily improving the efficiency of services (Cislaghi, 2015). At the same time that the government made this

⁴ That practically freezes the primary spending of the federal government for twenty years, while preserving the payment of interests, charges and amortizations of the public debt.

proposal, the 2020 budget promised to halve the resources of the Coordination of Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal do Ensino Superior (CAPES - institution responsible for postgraduate studies in Brazil) and equalize the budgets of the Federal Institutions of Higher Education, without taking into account their abysmal differences. It is worth saying that the banks are happy with the direction of education, not only because of the movement in the Stock Market of the "sharks" of education -conglomerates such as Cogna Educação- given the strengthening of the private sector, but also because of the supply of credit, an educational opportunity for graduate students to do their studies at low interest rates that will leave them in debt like Chileans! Although there seem to be no resources at all and the fault lies with pension rights and other social and public policies, the problem of public debt remains intact and financial institutions smoothly drill into public funds every year (Behring, 2017; Salvador, 2017; Behring, 2020). And that is how the ultra-neoliberal elements of the ongoing program are justified: the sale of 17 state-owned companies, the participation of foreign capital in the auctions of the pre-salt oil fields, the counter-reform of the social security system or *Future-se*.

Who are the big beneficiaries? US imperialism that seeks to value niches at a time when a new endemic and global crisis is being announced, including the offer to carry out a joint "environmental policy" with that country in the Amazon, with the participation of North American companies. National and international financial institutions, lenders of Brazilian public debt securities, especially domestic debt, since pension funds, which seek to favour the pension counter-reform, are the main creditors here. There is a Brazilian bourgeoisie whose anti-national, anti-public and anti-democratic character -according to the analysis of thinkers such as Florestan Fernandes, Octavio Ianni and Ruy Mauro Marini - is even more evident. Just look at the latest statements and movements from the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo (FIESP), which describe these ongoing processes.

The results of this resurgence, since then, of the environment of permanent fiscal adjustment that marks the Brazilian redemocratisation, as I have argued in some academic works (Behring, 2019a and 2019b), are destructive: data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE- show that, as an effect of the Temer labour counter-reform, in 2019 there were around 36 million workers living in precarious working conditions and with low incomes, since the average income of Brazilian workers fell from R\$ 2,311 per month to R\$ 2,286 per month⁵. Precariousness and informality mark a world of work without rights. This absence of rights tends to increase when a pension counter-reform is approved, which increases the time of contribution and work to receive a retirement pension under the low ceiling of the

⁵ USD\$ 442 to USD\$ 438.

public pension. And what is the meaning of the constitution of this world of precarious work and without rights? It is the *modus operandi* of capital in its passionate search for value, the accumulation of which depends on the subsumption of labour. It is capitalism in its purest form, depleting the labour force as a way to rebuild its rates of profit, which corroborates the earlier debate on the main function of fascism.

We are facing a marked impoverishment of the population, the explanation of which refers to the general law of accumulation according to Marx (1982). Its effects on sociability are heart-breaking: the growth of the street population, the generalized violence on the streets as a desperate survival strategy, the growth of organized crime by trafficking and by militias and *narcomilicias* that "employ" young people without perspective and discouragement. These same young people are encouraged to individually go out into a labour and consumer market that is not open to everyone. The other side has been a brutal growth of the criminal face of the State, with the use of excessive and deliberate violence against poor and segregated populations, especially young people and blacks, reproducing Brazilian structural racism. Also, the increase in the number of deaths by the police, of deaths in general in the context of endemic violence and growing incarceration -between 1990 and 2017 there was an increase of more than 700% of the Brazilian prison population-, which today is the third largest in the world (Simas, 2020). Apart from the "stray bullets", we have the pointless loss of life produced by the public security policies, a product of the neo-fascist common sense spread by the project underway in the country, in which "the good criminal is the dead criminal". Such "violence from above" and "acts of public security", recalling Loic Wacquant (2007), promote a brutal daily confrontation, with the right to helicopter fire on marginal neighbourhoods. This makes life in entire communities on the outskirts of large cities a true hell, from which the new apostles of salvation take great advantage, who make everything an individual matter, of behaviour, of contrition. Since life on Earth is hell, let's find a passport to heaven. The sealed document for salvation is evidently expensive and the signs of enrichment of these merchants of faith are numerous and they have not encountered consistent restrictions in recent decades. The result is that Bolsonarism is based in this space of the working poor. Workers who fight every day for their most immediate survival, mostly disorganized and with whom it is decisive to talk to turn the game around. Social workers can contribute to this dialogue!

We could list other devastating elements: censorship in the field of art (cinema, theatre); machismo as a central component, in addition to the aforementioned structural racism; the accelerated militarization of institutions; the dismantling of democratic control structures; intervention in institutions, schools and universities, lack of respect for the democratic elections of rectors, directors, officials.

The key is to be clear that Bolsonarism is presented as a horrendous face of the bourgeois offensive in a time of capitalist crisis, which expresses a radicalization of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, recalling Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2016), is more than an ideology and more than an economic policy: it is more than capitalism equal to itself. Neoliberalism transforms the crisis into a mode of government, in a close look at what Mota (1995) characterized as a culture of crisis, as if the crisis was the responsibility of everyone equally, and its costs should also be socialized. Neoliberalism disables the democratic game. There is a kind of neoliberal subjectivation that operates in the sense of social egoism as a social norm of possessive individualism. And above all, neoliberalism is the materialization and ethos of the bourgeois reaction to this moment of capitalism in structural crisis, a product of the law of value as capitalism's social organizing relation. Contemporary capitalism under the aegis of the neoliberal social project and in today's Brazil, ultra-neoliberal, produces an immense offensive on the workers in search of the best conditions for their exploitation, in the "passionate search for value" in the very current terms of Marx: those unemployed, precarious, impoverished and disorganized; the most heterogeneous working class, put in reserve, deprived and destroyed.

To face the new condition of the world of labour, ultra-neoliberal capitalism draws up a social policy in its image and likeness to face the expressions of the social question: focused on absolute poverty - with programs to combat poverty increased with the support of the Bank World Poverty Report 1990 - selective, inducer of activation for work (workfare) or "productive inclusion", articulating in general benefits with conditionalities that point to insertion in the labour market through qualification courses, which expresses an interpretation of structural unemployment as individual responsibility and demerit, although there is no job offer for everyone and the reserve army is a condition for the process of exploitation of workers "free as birds", as Marx said. Now it is about expanding capacities, as a condition to exercise freedom in the market, as Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize in Economics, whose main inspiration is Adam Smith, informs us. The buzzword is empowering workers to care for themselves and their families in the context of free competition in a market for the few, in the midst of the era of Keynesian full employment and corresponding politics and social rights, when we have the intensification of expropriations.

From this general condition derived from changes in the world of labour and from the state's misery for social policies, the state of misery that Wacquant speaks of is generated, in times of permanent fiscal adjustment. It is bad social policy for those who cannot pay, with services disrupted and the precariousness of the workers who operate these services, which includes social workers. This process also includes directly induced privatization mechanisms: dismantling to privatize. But there are also



processes of appropriation of the public fund through public-private alliances, in its various formats. In the Brazilian case, we have the perennial strategy of the State Reform Master Plan (1995), of the constitution of a non-state public sector, which involves health, education, social assistance and environment policies: from there they are deployed as the new legal entities of the counter-reform of the State, social organizations, public foundations of private law. These are processes that question the pattern of rights outlined in the processes of political emancipation, where the most consolidated experiences in the universalization of rights have arrived.

Projects that oppose ultra-neoliberal neo-fascism

There is a second project of society, today with less force after years of neoliberalism, that does not break with the logic of capital, but rather seeks to manage it in the expectation of capitalism with a human face, in an attempt to regulate and control its most destructive impulses. It is a project that was born out of the international socialist movement at the end of the 19th century when the left discussed the strategy of reform or revolution to reach socialism and was divided between social democrats and communists. This field emerged from the great crisis of capitalism of 1929/32 and from the two world wars that tragically exposed the meaning of leaving market forces to their fate. And this project was encouraged by his disastrous participation in the defeat of the German revolution in 1918 and 1919, which culminated in the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg, among others. It was also consolidated due to the tragic trajectories of the socialist experience in Eastern Europe, it must be recognized.

But the most important impulse that catalyses the possibility of social democratic hegemony in the so-called post-war glory years came from the defeat of Nazi-fascism, from war as a perverse process of accumulation and from the third technological revolution arising from the war and applied to the durable goods and the spread of the “American way of life”, conditions to enter into a long wave with an expansive tone of capitalism between 1945 and the late 1960s. With the Keynesian-Fordist social-democratic approach, which raised the welfare state in some parts of the world, this project sailed in the longest period of growth of capitalism under very determined conditions, that allowed improvements in the living conditions of the workers in a geopolitical situated way, and most importantly: the Americanist / Fordist ideological counterpoint that Gramsci already identified in his classic text, in the context of the “cold” war, in a world polarized. This is the world of the Beveridge Report, the world that Ken Loach portrayed so well in his film *The Spirit of 45*. A world that begins to unravel in the late 1960s, when young people realize that full employment is coming to an end, that this working class is white men and there is no stable place for women and blacks. And when a new crisis of capitalism arises, with neoliberalism and its antisocial



austerity measures, a bourgeois reaction that has lasted 40 years in the world and more than 20 years in Brazil, the social democracy is also in crisis. In Brazil, there are segments that demand regulation for a more humane capitalism that is not commanded by its most perverse and predatory sectors, generally the rentier traders on the stock market. Would the regulation project be enough to contain the fear of extracting value in times of structural crisis of capitalism? The social democratic project found its limits with the passage to a long wave with a depressing tone, as reported in the basic study of Mandel (1982): economic limits with the end of full employment and the expansion of precarious work and intellectual and moral limits, when the Social democratic governments, in alliance with the Eurocommunist parties, capitulate to the neoliberal agenda, sometimes under the argument of governability, yielding more and more to the pressure of the bourgeois reaction. Perry Anderson (1995), an obligatory reference to debate neoliberal hegemony in the world, shows the renegade movement of social democracy in relation to its original left reformism, and its turn towards the so-called third liberal social path, that is, a counter-reformist and neoliberal turn. This shows the strong hegemony of the capitalist project, which occurs in proportion to the exhaustion and defeat of the projects coming from the left, both social democratic and bureaucratic-Stalinist.

This defeat, whether expressed by the agenda actually implemented by social democratic governments in Western Europe since the mid-1980s, or by the fall of the Berlin Wall and capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe, is the basis for thinking today about the condition of affirmation of a third project, the socialist societal project, with which we think our professional ethical-political project has a greater identity; although social democracy which has been renewed and overheated and ultra-conservatism / neo-fascism also compete for the hegemony among us.

This is a moment for the reconstruction of a project of the socialist left, according to its time. With social democrats it is possible and sometimes necessary to form tactical alliances in defence of rights and against expropriations, maintaining a critical distance from their positions. On the other hand, to advance a project of the left today, it is necessary to make all the criticism of Stalinism and its variants, without concessions. A socialist project for the 21st century does not have gags, Kafkaesque processes and conspiracies to physically eliminate those who disagree. It has in democratization an inescapable element: it defends the power of the majority over the minority. It is not guided by destructive and anti-ecological productivism: it is eco-socialist. It is feminist and anti-racist, and acts against homophobia and all forms of oppression and persecution of behaviour. A socialism that respects the ancestral knowledge of the native peoples and their lands and customs. To prosper and gain material and political strength, this project needs to learn from history. We remember the precise words of



Daniel Bensaïd when he says:

The misery of the world is more unbearable and unacceptable than ever. Another world is needed. But the dead past weighs heavily on the present. Stalinism discredited the revolution, social democracy and reforms [...] After the great social and moral defeats of the 20th century, we have the right (and the duty) to start anew, to rearticulate the broken threads of emancipation, to change the world before it [definitively] plunges into social and ecological catastrophe (1999, p.125).

Therefore, to contain an offensive on so many interlocking fronts, a response that involves economics, politics, culture, exploitation and oppression is urgent. It is essential to continue questioning the neo-fascist project to lead it into a free fall, deepening its cracks and contradictions. The fight agenda cannot go back and bet on a purely electoral future. It needs to be present and forceful here and now, on the streets, in virtual media, in universities, in debates. Each space of dispute becomes central, as an educational space for the construction of a counter-hegemony, resistance and self-defence. And we, social workers and students, are part of this process of widening cracks and contradictions, based on social struggles.

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We need an anti-capitalist left at the height of the demands of this time of crisis and decadence, of this form of organization of life that leads us to death, the “necropolitics” (Mbembe, 2018) associated with the State of Exception (Agamben, 2004): mature and decadent capitalism. Nothing is more emblematic of necropolitics than the Brazilian government's attitude to the Covid-19 pandemic, which involved denial, genocidal naturalization and programmed ineptitude, causing more than 150,000 deaths. A left capable of making a united front to fight against setbacks, against the mortgage of the future. A left that can unleash a broad campaign of popular mobilization demonstrating the ongoing devastation that only the streets can contain, since the institutions of armoured democracy (Demier, 2017) seem incapable of taking action to curb barbarism. The overcoming, with greatness and courage, of the fragmentation in the field of the working class and its instruments and organizations, for a forceful and not exclusively electoral confrontation of devastation, is of the greatest urgency. We speak of the formation of a united workers' front to defeat Bolsonaro on the streets. In this same tone, it is urgent to affirm an alternative as a whole, of a program of transition to socialism, since capitalism, in its essential movement, has only been able to offer the destruction of the many for the benefit of the very few. The Brazilian Social Service



elections, since 1979, accredit us, free from all voluntarism and messianism (Iamamoto, 1982), to be part of this collective construction.

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