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Editorial

Capitalist Crisis, Rightists, Rebellions and Ongoing Social Struggles

Paula Vidal M. y Gonzalo Durán S.

The historical times we live through indicate the structural crisis of Capital, which has expressions at the local level. At the same time, we are witnessing the emergence of the ultra-right in governments, where figures such as Donald Trump (United States), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), Giorgia Meloni (Italy), Nayib Bukele (El Salvador), Benjamin Netanyahu (Israel), Volodymyr Zelensky (Ukraine), Daniel Noboa (Ecuador), Javier Milei (Argentina), among others, have promoted a series of policies that undermine human rights understood as economic, social, political, cultural and environmental rights, weakening liberal democracies. In parallel, ultra-right actions have been expressed in the genocide that the Palestinian people have experienced at the hands of the State of Israel, where civil technology has become a weapon of war, demonstrating the barbarity of these times.

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The flip side of this trend is the processes of social struggles and rebellions in some countries – beginning in the 21st century – which have not only shown the exhaustion of capitalist social relations but have also given rise to experiences from below that have managed to contain this trend and install more progressive governments, such as those of Gustavo Petro (Colombia), Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (Brazil) and Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Mexico).

Within this framework, we have received papers from Latin America and Europe presenting theoretical discussions and research results or testimonies/interviews on topics related to the following axes: 1) Capitalist crisis and its contemporary expressions. 2) Capitalist crisis and the rise of the right and ultra-right. 3) Capitalist crisis, rebellions, resistances and struggles. 4) Social work in times of right-wing and social struggles

Some guiding questions were: What is the nature of the crisis? Can we speak of a structural crisis in the capital? How can we characterise the right-wing governments and

their public policies? What are their implications? Why have the experiences of revolt in Chile and other countries not consolidated emancipatory projects? What challenges and proposals arise in this context for Social Work and the social sciences?

This issue is organised by the Núcleo de Relaciones Socioeconómicas y Luchas Sociales (NURELS) and is directed by Dr. Paula Vidal and Dr. Gonzalo Durán. The dossier covers two lines of reflection. Firstly, a theoretical-conceptual line; and secondly, a line of concrete studies on the phenomenon.

The article by Natalia Perdomo dos Santos analyses the constitutive foundations of neoliberalism as a strategy for the reproduction of late capitalism and as an expression of its irrationality. She criticises the mystifying thinking of Dardot and Laval, whose theses have been echoed in Brazilian social work.

Sara Granemann's article assesses the importance of public funds operated by capitalist states in dealing with the constant crises of capitalist modes of production. She characterises the state at this stage as "pure capitalism", from which she approaches social policies.

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Paulo Wesley Maia Pinheiro's article, drawing on the contributions of Marx and Lukács, demonstrates that advancing the unity between ultra-neoliberals and conservatives/ reactionaries is a political realisation of the exploitation-oppression unity. The following articles are specific, case-based studies.

The article by Lawrence Estivalet de Mello, Alexandra Maciel Veiga and Loyana Araujo Saraiva Matos reflects – based on the authors' participation – on the 2024 federal education strike in Brazil, analysing two ways of understanding trade unionism: combative and negotiating.

The article by Luis Felipe González Gutiérrez and Eva Marxen takes up the advantages of art as a form of resistance against patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism. It applies to demonstrations during the social upheaval in Chile.

Luciano Santander's article provides crucial information for understanding the process of discursive articulation of the Chilean right. The paper argues that this articulation is based on the defence of the main ideological legacy of the dictatorship: the authoritarian neoliberalism represented by trade unionism.

Agustín Ezequiel Zuccaro's article identifies five main ideas about social welfare that have characterised right-wing governments. Zuccaro analyses the period between 1955 and 2023.

Fernanda Kilduff's article addresses the prison management of Jair Bolsonaro's government in Brazil in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In her work, Kilduff shows that despite the initiatives undertaken by social movements, the far-right government ratified the policies of mass incarceration.

The review by Rafael Elías Rojas entitled "Allende para el Siglo XXI" (Allende for the 21st Century) deals with the relevant aspects of the book "Allende and Popular Unity: the Road to Democratic Socialism" by the authors Paula Vidal and Ximena Odekerken, published in 2024 by the prestigious Routledge publishing house, and invites us to find the validity of the socialist project expressed in the Unidad Popular through its discourses.

The dossier closes with two interviews conducted by Paula Vidal and Gonzalo Durán with two of the most prominent recent Marxist intellectuals. The first interview is with the Argentinean economist Claudio Katz, in which he explores in depth the relationship between the right and the left today, addressing the strategies that the latter have had and must have to be able to realise the needs, demands and rights of the people. The second interview is with British economist Michael Roberts, who reflects on the relevance of understanding Marxist economics today, including areas such as inflation, which have traditionally been left to the domain of the mainstream. In this interview, Michael Roberts also gives his impressions on the validity of the class struggle and the relevance of the working class in pushing for transformations in the face of the rise of the right. We hope that readers, especially from the field of social work, will find elements, categories, questions, and analyses in this dossier that help them understand the right-wing phenomenon and overcome it.

October 2024

ARTICLE

The irrationalism of decadent capitalism

El irracionalismo del capitalismo decadente

O irracionalismo do capitalismo decadente

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Abstract:

Based on the tradition inaugurated by Marxian work, this article analyses the constitutive foundations of neoliberalism that configure it as a strategy for the reproduction of late capitalism. Emerging in the process of the maturing of bourgeois society, neoliberalism reformulates the action of the state to adapt it to the needs imposed by the new forms of management of accumulation, which, in the face of the hegemony of interest-bearing capital, can only guarantee the valorisation of value with uncontrollable destructive power. This movement reveals the barbarism that constitutes bourgeois society, mainly manifesting in the dependent countries. The result of this stage is the reconfiguration of social relations and social beings as a whole, whose new mode of being shows the irrationalism of decadent capitalism. This conception underlies the critique of the enigmatic thought of Dardot and Laval, set out in the book 'The New Reason of the World'. Their theses, which have been echoed in Brazilian social work, propose criticisms of neo-liberalism. Still, by safeguarding the structural logic of the society that makes it emerge, they limit themselves to the epidermis of the problem, representing the typical ideological deformations of the current stage.

Keywords:
Neo-liberalism;
Marxism; Dardot
and Laval; Social
Service

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Intoduction

The following article results from an analytical review of the foundations that constitute neoliberalism. This study, based on a critical review of the literature dealing with its emergence and the movement of this long stage, allows us to characterise it as a strategy for the reproduction of late capitalism, which in its movement reveals the irrationalism not only of decadent capitalism but also of bourgeois social formation.

This synthesis was simultaneous with the work of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, responsible for investigating the coup acts that, on 8 January 2023, sought to give continuity in Brazil to the neo-fascist government of the disqualified former president Jair Bolsonaro at a juncture that suggested the supposed defeat of the ultra-right. However, according to Gramsci (2010), history teaches even if it lacks students. It shows that enthusiastic aspirations are limited to electoral victories and conceal the intrinsic relationship between the preservation of bourgeois relations and violence, which in the current stage is exacerbated by the ruin of social policies.

An analysis, following the “category of totality as the cornerstone of social gnosis” (Netto, 1981, p.41), is proposed, beyond national borders, of the advance of neoliberalism, whose viability increasingly depends on neo-fascist expressions (Boito, 2020), even if they materialise on the margins of democratic regimes. Above all, it is essential to show that it is impossible to halt this advance if we renounce the struggle to overcome class society.

In this sense, a critique will be made of the mysterious thought formulated by the French Foucauldians Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, expounded in *The New Reason of the World* (2023). The book, which identifies immediate manifestations of actuality and sets out to combat neoliberalism, has gained relevance, even in the Brazilian social service, despite denying the anti-capitalist struggle. This aspect will also be considered in this debate

The long neoliberal phase and violence in late capitalism

Bolsonaro’s electoral defeat was the light at the end of another long tunnel in Brazilian history. The attempted coup in Brasilia repeated Donald Trump’s failure on Capitol Hill, and subsequent investigations multiply daily scandals and demonstrate – for those who insist they do not know – that the defunct government

was a scheme of plunder and super-exploitation (Marini, 2022) unprecedented in recent history. The news seems to many to be “compensatory”, given the supposed imminence of justice being done. However, the legacy of destruction left by the “Chicago boys” is perpetuated in different dimensions of our sociability, such as in the subordination of the state to interest-bearing capital. The permanent condition of fiscal adjustment (Behring, 2018) was maintained in the new Lula government, and the draining of public funds was done to pay endless and unaudited debts. The relief, however, is not gratuitous, as the more than 700,000 – and under-reported – deaths from COVID-19 until 2022 did not result only from the reproductive movement of viral RNA but from an irrationalist government, whose extermination project found support for its task in the fight against science, vaccines and social isolation.

However, we must pay attention: irrationalism is not a characteristic of a specific government but a long stage of development of bourgeois society in which the categories forged by Modernity succumb. For liberal thought, there is no room for humanism, concrete historicism, dialectics and reason (Coutinho, 2010). And suppose the virulent reactionaries that expressed themselves politically, economically and ideologically in Bolsonaro will not be buried with him. In that case, neither is the advance of neo-fascism a national particularity that can be considered defeated. On the same channels that report on the smuggling of Saudi jewellery in the name of the Bolsonaro family, we see our Argentine neighbours heading towards the abyss into which we fell less than five years ago.

Indeed, the victory in the electoral primaries of the crude figure of Javier Milei is not sustained by the eccentricities of a candidate so ultra(neoliberal) that he goes so far as to defend the commercialisation of organs to compensate for the stripping of rights. Political projects that radicalise their *modus operandi*, placing themselves to the right of classical liberals, reflect the “spirit of the age”, even if they bear different, variable traits, depending on the terrain on which they emerge. They may be openly xenophobic in Europe, as they could not be in Brazil; they reveal an explicit militaristic weight here, as would not be accepted in Argentina. They may even call themselves anarcho-capitalists, like Milei, but, ultimately, they always converge on the same destiny: the violent radicalisation of neoliberalism. To this end, they can admit a neo-fascist character, according to Boito (2020). So it was with Milei, who, in the worst and most likely scenario, will be the next Argentine president.

Although this brief commentary is not an analysis of the situation, it supports the debate because it expresses the trajectory of the society in which it is articulated. Instead, we are analysing the movement of the irrational logic of bourgeois society, exacerbated by the late capitalism phase by Mandel (1982), which adds contradictions that go beyond the Leninist notion of classical imperialism (Netto, 2011). These contradictions intensified with the societal transformations that erupted in the 1970s, although they had previously germinated in the metabolic process of the commodity society. Neoliberalism, which in 1973 rehearsed its rise and hegemony in Pinochet's military coup, is an expression of the urgency to accelerate the processes of capital rotation in the course of the inevitable downward trend of the average profit rate, which becomes more acute at this stage. However, the factors that counteract capital (Marx, 2017) can create upward waves in certain historical intervals, as shown in the graph by Roberts (2021).

La tasa de lucro mundial basada en 14 países clave durante el período 1869-2007



Source: MAITO 2018 as cited in ROBERTS, 2021.

The violence characterising capitalism is strengthened in this process of maturation and decomposition of typically bourgeois relations. It imposes the reformulation of the economy and the state's action, which creates the necessary cultural breeding ground for the constitution of a new social being, individualised, atomised, and adapted to the new demands of production and social reproduction of late capitalism.



These transformations under the hegemony of interest-bearing capital take place within the framework of an unsustainable incompatibility between the financial transactions of immaterial wealth and that which can be put into pockets, which not even the war industry and the wars necessary for the realisation of its commodities are capable of balancing.

This scenario leads to a constant search for new niches of accumulation that allow the capture of real values, capable of redressing, albeit temporarily, the imbalance between fiction and the real socially produced value. Hence, the commodification of everything and the conversion of the public fund formed by labour into essential capital for the extended process of capitalist reproduction (Behring, 2021).

The realisation of this “task” imposes the general subordination of the whole of society. It is necessary to turn natural goods into commodities and wage earners into individual entrepreneurs who turn to interest-bearing capital to open or save their businesses. Rights become privileges; employees become collaborators, and solidarity becomes a competition. Decadent values are presented as new, which is only possible through a profound alteration in the morphology of work (Antunes, 2013), transforming the class itself, which, fragmented, is conditioned to an individualised and sterile praxis. To carry out this process, a state is constituted despite the ideology of minimalism, which is stronger than ever. A state that is the maximum for capital (Netto, 2011) and which, only for labour, reserves the minimum state.

This is why new manifestations of neo-fascism, even if they decline in one nation, rise in others, whether through a mandate or the extermination of a people, without violence ceasing to be indispensable if we consider the complex process of totalisation (Lukács, 2003) that characterises bourgeois society internationally. Multifaceted violence is the main driving force behind the permanence of commodity society, be it concrete or intangible, even if its brutality operates within the margins of democratic regimes. If concessions to the working class are no longer allowed, the answer is to harden force.

Thus, we find a common thread that connects not only the features of bourgeois barbarism, which in the 1970s created new and deeper modes of being, with contemporary barbarism. The autocracies, once used by the countries of dependent capitalism to contain rising revolutionary action, were necessary assumptions for the new neoliberal wave, as they managed to eradicate labour organisations and their opponents and the spaces of sociability that nurtured the new generations of fighters. They allowed capital to gain the time it needed to reorganise itself.

In this journey, democratic regimes became regimes sufficient for developing neoliberal violence in all its essence. Neo-fascism, as a new phenomenon (Boito, 2020), does not emerge as a response to a revolutionary threat to be overthrown but as a means to guarantee the advance of capitalist accumulation beyond the barriers of super-exploitation, eliminating the reminiscences of the old social democracy.

Neoliberalism is consolidated as a fundamental strategy for the preservation of bourgeois society, without which it would not be possible to guarantee the increasingly unstable equilibrium of the process of value valorisation and neutralise the revolt, even depoliticised, disorganised and fragmented, that will be expressed in the face of a mode of production and social reproduction that has exhausted its civilising capacities (Mészáros, 2002). This is not necessarily because of its effectiveness but because of the lack of alternatives, given the inability to reverse a crisis that admits a structural character (Mészáros, 2009).

However, this statement does not suggest that the social phenomena typical of contemporary neoliberalism are as they were in the 1970s. On the contrary, in the face of ever deeper and more prolonged crises, facing not only falling rates of profit but also mass profits, as was the case in the 2008 subprime crisis, capital is forced to reinvent itself. And it certainly has all the capabilities to do so, even if it thus reveals its destructive essence.

Like any social product, neoliberalism is transformed in its development. Still, it can only be understood and confronted based on its ontological foundations, not the discourses produced about itself. This is the opposite theoretical-methodological path followed by romantic critique, which denies the existence of class society and modern reason and which, blinded by the immediate, cannot extract the essence of reality but is determined by its movement.

Dardot, Laval and French irrationality

The French Foucauldians Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval's *The New Reason for the World*, published in France in 2009, arrived in Brazil at the time of a coup of a new kind (Demier, 2017), in a country whose idea of nationhood was forged based on successive coups d'état. However, in 2016, we witnessed the renewing capacity of "our traditions" when the removal of a democratically elected government was sustained not on cannons but on the very foundations of the democratic regime. Dilma Rousseff's second term in office was brought to an end under misogynist attacks. The sequence of Petista governments was interrupted, the already meagre gains of that period deteriorated, and

the historic and insufficient rights that preceded it were destroyed. In this scenario, Dardot and Laval's theses find a considerable echo in the critical field of the bourgeoisie's turn, which takes over the management of the state through its direct representatives. They are particularly influenced by the need to think about the transformations of neoliberalism in a context of generalised insecurity and a dizzying deterioration of living conditions.

The French essay proposes to analyse the transformations of neoliberalism from the naturalisation of the theories constituted by the classical liberals of the 18th century. It proposes that the worsening of *laissez-faire* would have been interrupted by what the authors call the "crisis of governability of liberalism", split from the emergence of the "social question". This crisis of legitimacy would have forced a theoretical and interventionist readjustment of the state's role, which needed to provide political responses to confront the dispute processes that, especially since the Paris Commune of 1871, threatened the reproduction of bourgeois society.

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However, the authors do not only declare their intentions to reflect on neoliberalism. They are first and foremost concerned with the critique of Marxists, as already stated in the introduction to the book. At this early stage, they announce their intention to confront what would characterise a misdiagnosis of neoliberalism, according to them.

Dardot and Laval continue to be astonished by the longevity of neoliberalism by identifying its permanence, even amid the 2008 crisis, when famous neoliberals such as Joseph Stiglitz were prematurely announcing the fall of the project they defended. Thus, they pose with undeniable truism the question that never ceases to be asked: how is it possible that, despite the perverse consequences of neoliberal policies, they continue to exist without encountering significant resistance worldwide?

The key to answering this question does not take long to appear in *The New Reason for the World*. It lies precisely in Foucault's biopolitics, which emphasises the influence of power on bodies, which are both targets and agents of these power relations, generating a state of the subjection of individuals to each other and themselves, independently of the state's action. Dardot and Laval discuss neoliberalism through reflection on the mode of government and its strategies, addressing not only what they call the negative aspects, such as the rights it destroys, but also what it is capable of creating in the realm of social relations and which will determine a form of existence, a specific subjectivity produced by the "admirable new world" that is its subject.

It is from the framework of the problem of governability, developed by Foucault in the course *Security, territory, population*, presented at the Collège de France (1977-1978) that Dardot and Laval believe they draw the correct diagnosis of neoliberalism, deconstructing "the limits of Marxism"; or what the pair think they have understood of the currents – multiple, distinct and often divergent – that derive from Marxian thought, but which, like potatoes, are placed by them in the same bag.

Thus, they propose that Marxists are locked into the conception that the 'logic of capital' is an automatic motor of history and that they reduce history to repeating the same scripts. The French also claim that the tendency towards the centralisation of capital set out in *Capital* would characterise a natural law, and they find in Marxism the alleged and overheated determinism of "final ruin" and socialism as the inevitable final destiny of history. In short, according to the authors themselves, it would not be possible to be content with Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg to unravel the mysteries of contemporaneity since it would be insufficient for "the Marxist interpretation, however current it may be" (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.21). The French also affirm that the tendency towards the centralisation of capital set out in *Capital* would characterise a natural law, and they find in Marxism the alleged and overheated determinism of "final ruin" and of socialism as the inevitable final destiny of history. Although they seek an



original position, supposedly standing out from mainstream thought and the Marxist tradition, the authors' "unorthodox" position eclectically combines quite different theoretical and methodological matrices. Regardless of the approaches they derive from them, it is clear that the defence of their thesis is preceded by a critique of Marx, albeit with liberal superficiality. Thus, they incur the same vulnerability used since the 19th century to falsify Marxian theory and, in this way, justify the capital order. And they do so, even if they do not declare themselves defenders of bourgeois society, by considering that this is no longer the central point or by dismissing any horizon that goes beyond it, as is expressed in the fatalism that guides the work.

The state and neoliberalism

The French argue that, contrary to the simplistic view that the markets have conquered the state and, from there, dominated its policy, it was precisely through the state that the universalisation of the entrepreneurial model in the economy took place. They are thus engaging in a discussion similar to the old question of whether the chicken or the egg came first when it has been known for a long time that chickens cannot precede the existence of eggs.

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However, seeking agreement with the authors themselves, who correctly recover the conception that the market cannot act alone, the state being the not-so-invisible hand that guarantees its mobility, we can affirm that neither would the state act as a floating entity above the classes and endowed with its interests. History shows us – and we cannot do without this – that the dispute of societal projects and the correlation of forces established in each particular time and space are the determinants not only of the type of government but also of the type of regime and in specific situations, for the kind of state that will be instituted.

Certainly, we must emphasise the decisive role of the state in the “globalisation of capital” (Chesnais, 1996). Still, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the constitution of surplus-producing societies precedes the state as a social organisation. It should also be noted that the state is not a thing – as Marx (2014) rightly said about capital – nor is it a monolithic entity. According to Harvey (2006), it must be understood as a social relation in process, which materialises historically through a set of forces and institutions that determine and regulate elements of sociability

States do not themselves assume or dictate political or economic guidelines in conflict with those that become dominant in social life. In the presence of the FIESP, it would not be possible to legislate on the socialisation of the means of production, as the

Soviets did, since the state is a historical product inserted in the societal development, which acts on the conflicts of particular class interests, with the premise of protecting those who constituted themselves as dominant. The feudal state thus guaranteed the dominance of the landowners and delayed the development of a mercantile bourgeoisie in several nations. For it to work for the universalisation of the “logic of competition and the business model” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.19), the direction of the state had to be taken over by the bourgeoisie through a revolution. This revolution inaugurated the existence of relative autonomy of the state in the face of new societal dynamics, whose functions, as Mandel (1982, p.333) showed, could not be “purely superstructural”.

In capitalism, economics and politics first appear as separate spheres through the depoliticisation of social life, mediated by the erosion of the old feudalities (Marx, 2017). However, this conformation occurs through separating the juridical-political form and the societal content. The modern state institutes an abstract universality expressed in “equal rights”. The suppression of the legally determined particularism of the estates in feudal slave societies politically emancipated the bourgeoisie. It maintained the concrete inequalities established in the social structure, which became increasingly complex.

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Mandel(1982)also showsthatthemodernstateistheorganisationalformofthebourgeoisie. The age of monopolies reinforces its structure insofar as the constitution of the proletariat as a class for itself (Marx, 2018) imposes the acceptance of new functions which, in addition to pure coercive action, are capable of generating consensus. This expansion also makes the state’s autonomy grow without suppressing its “relative” character.

The depoliticisation of society and the de-economisation of the state cannot, therefore, prevent politics from being the work of society or the economy from being the object of state intervention because this division of tasks conceals relations that intertwine in the totality of social life, even if such articulation is not manifest in the immediate appearance of the phenomena. This was well demonstrated by the wave of nationalisations operated by the US “minimal state” in 2008; despite the defence of non-interventionism, financial institutions such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were rescued from bankruptcy. The state in late capitalism is the state of a form of capital unconcerned with the creation of mass jobs that drive mass commodity consumption. It is the state of interest-bearing capital concerned with facilitating the international migration of capital, selling securities and “junk paper”, and converting the public fund created by labour into capital. However, Dardot and Laval incorporate in their discourse the divorce between form and content that particularises bourgeois society.

They also admit that confrontation with the bourgeoisie is not a contemporary problem since bodies have become companies that dominate themselves and constitute new powers. Here, the theoretical-methodological orientation of the authors is demonstrated, and they invoke Foucault in all his proto-postmodern essence (Rodrigues, 2006).

And what is neoliberalism for Dardot and Laval? For the French, “neoliberal rationality” would have developed from the 1980s onwards and would not be the result of the practical application of the elaborations of the 1930s. It would be focused on the management of a new technology of social control that, beyond the state, would produce what they call the “new subject” and the “rationalisation of desire” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.333). It is interesting to note how, in this synthesis, the authors deny the relevance of the Chilean experience, which, to the south of the world, qualified the rise of Reagan and Thatcher and opened the way to what Dardot and Laval (2023, p.17) call “the set of discourses, practices and devices that determine a new mode of government of men according to the universal principle of competition”. They further state that the *modus operandi* admitted “in this case” would have been a “particular method” of a particular situation (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.20).

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For the French argument, it is no longer necessary today to burn, in broad daylight, the living bodies of their adversaries, as the military patrol did in Chile with Rodrigo Rojas and Carmen Gloria Quintana in 1986. History has shown that, under certain conditions of dismantling working-class organisations, bourgeois democracy is a sufficient terrain for expanding neoliberalism. In dependent countries, even if the neoliberal advance can formally preserve political freedoms, it is not possible to avoid violence as a method for its realisation since the “burning”, not only of the opponents but of the whole set of capital surpluses is an indispensable element for the maintenance of the condition of dependence and the constitution of super-profits.

This movement has implications for natural resources, as shown, for example, by the disasters caused by global warming. It even affects steady capital, as evidenced by deindustrialisation in Brazil. However, the workers, especially those dressed in the fantasy of entrepreneurship, remain the most important kindling of the bonfire of capital. And this burning finds ideal conditions in the successive technological revolutions combined with the deregulation of labour.

The theses on post-work, which go hand in hand with those of Dardot and Laval, for whom classes no longer exist but only atomised subjects, are refuted by reality when,

in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the bourgeoisie implores workers to face death and save the economy. This shows that capitalism is incapable of producing wealth without labour and does so without ever dispensing with physical elimination. It operates whether by hunger, by COVID or by the shootings that, despite democracy, ended the life of Marielle Franco in 2018, as they do with those who, in the countryside, rise against the expansion of the latifundia or in the racial extermination that daily controls in the Brazilian favelas the way of being of the most impoverished workers.

For Dardot and Laval, the new neoliberal rationality developed from artifices aimed at the construction of the “man-business or entrepreneurial subject (...) completely immersed in global competition” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.322). The French even claim Marx asserts that subjection plays a major role in history, but for what? According to the authors, the movement for domination presents itself as a circuit that revolves around itself, in which all dominate and are dominated, without purpose or subjects.

However, we agree with the authors’ assertion that neoliberalism employs unprecedented techniques of power. Unprecedented, however, were also the techniques of classical imperialism, such as the conduct of the first Imperialist War (Lenin, 2005) in human history as a resource oriented to the dispute for markets. The transformations of neoliberalism identified by the French only indicate the gigantic plasticity of capitalism itself, which renews itself to continue to exist. While there is no doubt that the techniques elaborated in its operation could generate particular behaviours and subjectivities, we can also affirm that the capacity to transform the relations and behaviour of social beings is not a novelty inaugurated by neoliberalism.

Let us look at Fordism, which consolidated the era of monopolies at the beginning of the 20th century. The introduction of the assembly line was much more than a production technique. It forged the mass worker, stable, rigid, and fragmented by repetitive work. Workers, on the one hand, projected the American way of life into the fetishised ideology of the working classes and encouraged the mass consumption of commodities; on the other hand, they developed class solidarity through the union of joint and shared suffering in the big factories. It instituted a particular kind of sociability, an ethos that demanded: “a new system of reproduction of labour power, a new aesthetic, a new psychology, in short, a new kind of democratic, rationalised, modernist, populist society” (Harvey, 1992, p.121).

These terms became incompatible with the demands corresponding to the rise of interest-bearing capital. As Dardot and Laval nicely perceive, a new ethos is cultivated, deeply



linked to how labour develops in this new stage, as Marx and Engels (2007) showed us. And it is not by chance that the construction of this new subjectivity, which is the “strong point” of Dardot and Laval’s work, was preceded by profound modifications operated by the successive productive restructurings, the midwives of the various “modes of being of informality” (Antunes, 2013, p.14), which directly implied the way of being of the class. linked to how labour develops in this new stage, as Marx and Engels (2007) showed us. And it is not by chance that the construction of this new subjectivity, which is the “strong point” of Dardot and Laval’s work, was preceded by profound modifications operated by the successive productive restructurings, the midwives of the various “modes of being of informality” (Antunes, 2013, p.14), which directly implied the way of being of the class.

While it is true that the capacities and characteristics carried by neoliberalism today could not have been foreseen in the 1930s, since anticipating reality is not a skill of neoliberal non-theory, neither can it be denied that the state followed to the letter Hayek’s (1977) guidelines on the need to destroy the lobbying power of trade unions. From there on, and successively, it was possible to create new manifestations unimaginable for the pioneers.

Dardot and Laval state that “the originality of neoliberalism lies in the fact that it creates a new set of rules that define not only another regime of accumulation but also, more broadly, another society” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.24). Surely, the regime of capitalist accumulation admits different forms in the historical process, which will determine modes of regulation that consist precisely of the interchangeable gears that can guarantee the reproduction of the regime of accumulation. Throughout the book, Dardot and Laval alone could not explain what the “new society” they identified would be.

However, the new management of capital accumulation, which characterised the regime of flexible accumulation (Harvey, 1992), accelerated the contradictions of sociability that forges anti-social, unstable, ephemeral and fungible relations, which admit the forms of the commodity as it is presented at this stage; the sociability that is becoming precarious, like the multi-skilled, outsourced, subcontracted workers, depressed by the insecurity of tomorrow, increasingly unprotected, to the point of losing even the “status of wage-earner”. And “if the behaviour of individuals (...) is no longer completely describable and prescribable” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.342), this extreme individuation is split from the exhausting permanent quest for innovation, from the permanent instability of life, which has atomised the class, increasingly heterogeneous, fragmented and immersed in estrangement.

The elimination of the regulation of capital/labour relations, a task to which the neoliberal state is dedicated, catalyses the transformation of social beings into competing enterprises. This is the material basis of an ideological conviction that occurs through the internalisation of social deformations in the psyche of the being, demonstrating that “that which appears inverted in ideology is the expression of an inverted world” (Iasi, 2017, p.108). Only in this way was it possible to turn the working class into “entrepreneurs of themselves”, who are held responsible even for maintaining the means of production used to exploit themselves, operated through apps. The worker is conceived as the “owner of human capital” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.346). And so they continue as mere possessors of their labour power without even finding where to put it up for sale.

If the worker is no longer confined to the factory for 14 hours a day, as in former times, his life has been transformed into a permanent drive towards the work of his company/body. All this is because neither capitalism nor neoliberalism is simply a regime of accumulation but a set of social relations that advance reification and reproduce in the social being the characteristics necessary for the reproduction of decadent capitalism.

Dardot and Laval (2023, p.24) state that “neoliberal society is not a reflection of a logic of capital”. We agree once again. It is not a reflection, for it is the irrational logic of capital in times of social decay, that is, the organisational logic that allows mitigating the existing gap between the immaterial wealth negotiated by fictitious capital and the real socially produced wealth. This mitigation can only occur by capturing absolute values since interest-bearing capital produces nothing (Yamamoto, 2007). Fundamental resources to alleviate an unshakable liquidity crisis are to be found in the labour-based public fund.

The critic of Marxism that did not read Marx and its consequences for social work

Social work is a profession that, in its dual and contradictory practice, serves the interests of both capital and labour (Yamamoto, 1991). In Brazil, the renewal of social work allowed a break with the monopoly of conservatism and the defence of a societal project aligned with the historical interests of the working class to gain hegemony. This project materialised in the ethical-political project of Brazilian social work.

In this process, the adoption of the Marxian framework and the adherence to the struggles of rural and urban workers were crucial aspects of this turn, which has as its horizon the overcoming of capitalist relations and the emancipation of labour as a prerequisite for human emancipation. It is up to those who construct this project to combat illusory

criticism, such as that of Dardot and Laval, who, by limiting themselves to the phenomenal boundaries of social transformations, safeguard bourgeois society. Through a simplistic and mistaken (or misleading) reading of Marx, they feed the breeding ground of professional neo-conservatism, which denies the actuality of the class struggle, dialectics, and the possibility of overcoming bourgeois relations. In defence of the battle against exploitation and oppression, we defend Marx's method and its contemporary relevance.

In Defence of Marxism

One cannot expect from Marx a decoding of neoliberalism or sufficient subsidies for the analysis of contemporary relations as a whole. His work does not configure a total knowledge since epistemology is subordinated to the mode of being of the contradictory and dynamic object it investigates, which determines its ontological character. This methodological conception subordinates knowledge to the continuous investigation of reality, which, to be understood, requires permanent investigative efforts, given its transitory nature. To venture the hypothesis that Marx, Rosa, Lenin or Trotsky would be sufficient to read contemporary relations would be a mutilation of the Marxian method. To deny them is no minor error.

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It is in the very development of bourgeois society that history is consolidated as the indispensable guide to understanding the movement of human sociability over time. Dialectics and history form the backbone of the philosophy of praxis developed by Marx throughout his work. It is precisely materiality in movement that allowed the discovery of the law of value, which governs bourgeois society in all its phases. This sustains the revolutionary perspective that understood the mutability of reality, in which "men make their history, but they do not make it as they wish" (Marx, 1986, p.17). This results from a conception of the world, nature, history and the spirit as a process that is, as a world, subject to constant change, transformation and development (Engels, 1979, in Netto, 2010, np).

This conception runs through Marx's work, and the accusation that, in the eyes of Marxism, history could always look the same is surprisingly vulgar, for nothing could be less Marxist than such a claim. Dardot and Laval's reading of Marx and Marxism objectively drinks more from structuralism, which also influenced Foucault's critique, a reference hors concours of the authors, which prevents them from going beyond the classical detractors of Marxism, who point to Marx but fall into the Manichaeism derived from what Lefebvre (1979) called Stalinist materialist dialectical *dia-mato* Stalinism.



In his time, the logic of capital was not, for Marx, the motor of history; on the contrary, the logic of capital becomes an obstacle to the development of the productive forces, understood as a system that goes beyond the development of technology, encompassing both nature and humanity, in its objectivity and subjectivity. This obstacle will engender a state of crisis, hitherto impossible, which threatens the reproduction of bourgeois relations insofar as it threatens the preservation of human life itself.

This is what Rosa Luxemburg was addressing when she proclaimed “socialism or barbarism”. She was not demonstrating the existence of a teleological character of history in Marx, nor what our authors would call the determinism of “final ruin”. In no hypothesis is it a question of considering socialism as an inevitable destiny that will come someday, which would bring much comfort and rest to the fighters? It is simply a matter of historicising capital, which, like any product of humanity, cannot be eternal and which, if not socially overcome, will still collapse into the barbarism that characterises its civilising force.

We therefore agree with Barreto (2022, n.p.) and say the following: “If by running the monster catches you and by staying the monster eats you, kill the monster”. Whether we will be able to kill the greedy monster of the bourgeoisie, which the more it eats, the hungrier it gets, is another matter. In the meantime, Rosa’s synthesis proves to be true to reality, for, day after day, socialism does not come closer to us, but barbarism is revealed as the only remaining face of a society which, while continuing to exist, is rotting on its foundations.

The fact is that the motor of history would be, for Marx, a contradiction. More specifically, it is about classes in struggle. And what Dardot and Laval – who do not even consider courses – do not seem to understand is that capitalism and its neoliberal strategy are transformed precisely for this society to endure. And it is this transformation that conceals from the unsuspecting the conservative character it entails. A conservatism that has raised a society capable of creating the conditions for overcoming collective suffering but which does not do so since such an overcoming contradicts its very existence.

Unfortunately, when they try to be ironic, our authors get the reality right: the bourgeoisie, and not only for Marxism, is indeed a collective subject that lasts in time, even, we add, on its own. This does not mean that it is an eternal subject, any more than the Tsars were in Russia, a fact that did not prevent them from lasting much longer in time than the bourgeoisie will last as the dominant class, given the deterioration bequeathed to our future generations. For that reason, Marxism remains current, as the authors rightly observed in the introduction to *The New Reason for the World*. It



remains current and more relevant than ever, and whether Dardot and Laval like it or not, neoliberalism and its tragedies continue to be explained by the Law of Value.

The French claim that Marxists reduce “economics to the only dimension of neoliberalism” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.24). Now, the liberal critique of an alleged economism in Marx’s conception is not new and refrains from participating in the rich debate on the process of the formation of consciousness, which will be determined by the relations that are developed in the materiality of life by social beings, who, before satisfying the needs of fantasy, must satisfy the needs of the stomach, as Marx (2014) rightly demonstrated.

If Dardot and Laval had seriously delved into Marx’s work, they would have grasped not only the implications that the materiality of life has on the construction of subjectivity when substantial issues are at stake, such as the threat to the guarantee of biological reproduction of being. Also, they would have understood that “the ideas of the ruling class are, in every epoch, the dominant ideas, i.e. the class that is the dominant material force of society is, at the same time, its dominant spiritual force” (Marx and Engels, 2007, p.47). This means that if the consciousness of the app delivery man, who sees himself as a competitive entrepreneur, makes him nothing more than a reproducer of ideas which do not belong to him and which do not correspond to the materiality of a self-managed super-exploitation, he is nothing more than a reproducer of ideas which do not belong to him and which do not correspond to the materiality of a self-managed super-exploitation.

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Nor would “the strange faculty of neoliberalism to spread everywhere despite its crises and the revolts it provokes all over the world” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.21) seem so strange to them if they had carefully examined Marx’s work. Marx’s work revealed the eminently expansionist character of capitalism, which allowed its constitution to be universal. Neoliberalism is precisely the result and dynamiser of the process of globalisation of capital, as Chesnais (1996) argues.

Neoliberalism is also the most capable of making the state an ideal total capitalist (Mandel, 1982), which at any cost needs to create counter-counters to economic growth and create a new mode of being necessary for its maintenance. All this is only possible thanks to the ability of bourgeois society to spread everywhere, despite its crises and the revolts it has provoked worldwide since the People’s Spring of 1848.

Final considerations

Dardot and Laval believe that their research reveals the true face of neoliberalism and the artifices of power that result in the subjection of individuals, guiding individual behaviour, controlling their souls and bodies and imposing self-control on everyone. Competing individuals/companies, however, result from a “multiplicity of heterogeneous processes” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.34) that generate the so-called new rationality of the world, which the authors expose as a teleology-free process. They do not indicate who benefits or is harmed from such processes precisely because, according to them, there is no such thing as “orchestration”. The social process is simply the work of chaos, capable of providing multiple, random engagements independent of a superordinate class interest. Social development no longer carries any meaning and ends, admitting unknowable foundations.

Dardot and Laval, in their post-structuralist neo-idealism, can perceive and describe concrete features of neoliberal sociability and even genuine consequences of this process. They are strengthened, moreover, by the difficulty faced by Marxists, who, under the influence of the Third International, have developed few substantial studies on the movement of subjectivity during the contemporary historical process. However, their ultra-subjectivism does not reach the hardcore, whose response to the undeniable transformations operated in the social being, since they are limited to the epidermis and are oblivious to the causes of the problem on which they float.

The French do not perceive, above all, that the crisis of neoliberalism is nothing more than its inability to fulfil the task of restoring profit rates, even if the policy of the most diverse governments, of the most diverse countries, has as its main aim the guarantee of transferring the greatest possible *quantum* of real value to incarnate fictitious capitals, and that such a policy cannot be replaced, except by the destruction of this society. And, in this direction, whether to guarantee the appropriation of the public purse, to finance war or to plunder what still resists expropriation, neoliberal irrationality is the logic that expresses decadent capitalism, which only through the mediation of violence and the unrestricted restriction of the self can be maintained.

Suppose neoliberalism seems to them to be the new reason for the world, in which the exercise of power makes no sense, as Dardot and Laval summarise. In that case, such a construction is confused with the elements of irrationalism behind its authors. It is important to note that these, like the neoliberal state, constitute their work perfectly compatible with late capitalism, carrying a conservative content in their authors, even if they present themselves in a transgressive form.

Dardot and Laval discredit Marxism because they are not interested in breaking the margins of bourgeois society; hence, the fatalism that prevents them from identifying the construction of “a new reason in the world” committed to human-generic emancipation. After all, it is neoliberalism that bothers them and nothing else. Therefore, these allies of critique must be questioned: “Who is the enemy? Who are you?” (Russo, 1984, 1m40f). Or, what is the use of critique that does not help construct the complex struggles that must be waged to defeat not only the contemporary form that capital uses to endure but the totality of sociability for which profit is worth more than the chance to stay alive?

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ARTICLE

“Pure” Capitalism, State and Public Fund

Capitalismo “puro”, Estado y Fondo Público Capitalismo “puro”, Estado e fundo público

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Abstract:

The article aims to assess the importance of public funds operated by capitalist states. For a brief period in human history, a public fund was used – at least a part of it in Europe – to respond to the struggles of the working class for better living and working conditions. Responses – varying, depending on the latitude of the region – in the form of social policies to make social rights possible did not last long. Created in the post-1945 period, they began to be dismantled towards the end of the 1980s, allowing the working class in some European countries to live with more extensive rights for three decades. The constant crises of the capitalist mode of production and the collapse of “real socialism” were the main determinants of dismantling the so-called welfare state. The characterisation of the stage of capitalism of the last 45 (forty-five) years is taken from Husson (2008). The French economist gave the current phase of monopolies the analytical category of “pure capitalism”. Taking his theoretical critique as an analytical reference, we aim to discuss the crises of capital in the context of social policies and their monetised form of implementation. Social policies, on the one hand, are rights-mediating instruments; on the other hand, they are closely linked to capital accumulation when they metamorphise social policies into commodities. Once

Keywords:
“Pure” capitalism;
state; public fund

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the transmutation has occurred, the new commodities become advantageous investment spaces for capital in the crisis and beyond

Resumen

El artículo pretende evaluar la importancia del fondo público operado por el Estado capitalista. Fondo público que durante un breve período de la historia de la humanidad fue utilizado -al menos una parte de este en Europa- para responder a las luchas de la clase obrera por mejores condiciones de vida y de trabajo. Las respuestas -diversas, según la latitud del planeta- en forma de políticas sociales para hacer posibles los derechos sociales no duraron mucho. Creadas en el periodo posterior a 1945, empezaron a dismantelarse hacia finales de los años ochenta, lo que permitió a la clase trabajadora de algunos países europeos vivir con derechos más amplios durante unas tres décadas. Las constantes crisis del modo de producción capitalista y el colapso del "socialismo real" fueron los principales determinantes del dismantelamiento del llamado Estado de Bienestar. La caracterización de la etapa del capitalismo de los últimos 45 (cuarenta y cinco) años está tomada de Husson (2008). El economista francés denominó la fase actual de los monopolios con la categoría analítica de "*capitalismo puro*". Tomando su crítica teórica como referencia analítica, nuestro objetivo es discutir las crisis del capital en el contexto de las políticas sociales y su forma *monetizada* de ejecución. Las políticas sociales, por un lado, son instrumentos mediadores de derechos; por otro, están estrechamente vinculadas a la acumulación de capitales cuando este metamorfosea las políticas sociales en mercancías. Una vez realizada la transmutación, las nuevas mercancías se convierten en espacios de inversión ventajosos para el capital en la crisis y más allá de ella.

Palabras Clave:
Capitalismo puro;
estado; fondo
público

Introduction

"Pure" capitalism, the state and the public purse²

"Whether human thought can have objective truth is not theoretical, but practical. In praxis, man must demonstrate the truth, namely the effectiveness and potency, the externality of his thought. The dispute about the effectiveness or non-effectiveness of thought in isolation from praxis - is a purely scholastic question". (Karl Marx - Ad Feuerbach)

² The author is a Full Name Research and Productivity Fellow, CNPq, to whom she is grateful for support in the development of her research.



The text we submit to the journal would be an essay if it did not contain multiple bibliographical references. It is based on research we have carried out over more than three decades of teaching at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). The ideas presented here refer to a line of argument that finds support in reality and, we hope, in the critique of political economy.

From its genesis to the present day, the capitalist mode of production has developed and preserved its pillars of support. We will mention the three most important ones in the logic of this mode of production: 1) private property; 2) the extraction of *surplus labour*³ by capital; 3) the state as a bourgeois organism of social domination (Mandel, 1982, p.333). Essential features of its social dynamics have been added, deepened and altered to its fundamental nature, which, as they have matured, have become “pure”. Moreover, the new features and substantive changes affirm rather than refute the law of value, the foundation of the social life of the capitalist mode of production.

In our view, what was modified when the era of monopolies⁴ was consolidated and replaced the era of free competition will be deepened by the events of the late 1980s and 1991, which led to the collapse of the bloc of countries known as “real socialism”. For Husson (2008, p.13-14), the fullness of the capitalist mode of production, *pure* capitalism, has since been reached. Since then, even with significant uprisings, it has not been possible for the working class either to go beyond occasional victories or to avoid continuous defeats in most countries.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, critical economic-political mechanisms were put in place to resolve the capitalist crises, the most important of these being converting the so-called socialist countries and states to the capitalist mode of production.

The economic, political and cultural map created by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, when it collapsed, was reshaped by a series of wars and violence – which have continued to this day – the most visible elements of which are nationalism, racism and xenophobia. Such violence brought with it disputes over rich sources of energy, wars, agrarian wars and a vast capitalist market that was to be created and integrate millions of people into the consumption of commodities. As the midwife of capitalist accumulation, violence once again took centre stage in the changes, disputes and conflicts.

³ For this analytical category, see especially Marx (2017).

⁴ For an understanding of this transition to monopolies, see the learned and exhaustive analysis of Netto (1992).

Hobsbawm delimits the borders of the Eastern European countries articulated under the USSR⁵ by “real socialism” and observes:

In 1945, the borders of the region that broke away from world capitalism expanded dramatically. In Europe, they now included the entire area east of a line running roughly from the Elbe River in Germany to the Adriatic Sea and the whole Balkan peninsula, with the exception of Greece and the small part of Turkey that remained on the continent. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania were now in the socialist zone, as was part of Germany occupied by the Red Army after the war and transformed into the “German Democratic Republic” in 1954.

This was part of the world whose social systems at a certain point in the 1960s came to be called, in the terminology of Soviet ideology, countries of “really existing socialism” - an ambiguous term that implied, or suggested, that there might be other, better kinds of socialism, but that in practice this was the only one that really worked. It was also the region whose economic and social systems and political regimes completely collapsed in Europe as the 1980s gave way to the 1990s. (1995, p.364)⁶

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The disarticulation of the “real socialist” bloc economies succeeded in turning them into economies that were then absorbed by the capitalist social relations of production that opened up – to capitalism in crisis – an enormous space for its business.

As the geopolitical map of capitalism expanded, millions, perhaps billions, of human beings in these and many other territories around the globe were affected by its consequences. The scope of the changes brought about by the end of the USSR led Hobsbawm to consider 1991 the last year of the 20th century because, for him, nothing more shocking could have happened to the world in what he calls the “*short 20th century*”: capitalism had won⁷ and would impose on the world a severe economic restructuring, driven by its economic-political-cultural and war logic.

⁵ The bloc of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics which the historian refuses to call “really existing socialism”.

⁶ The Marxist historian Eric John Ernest Hobsbawm (9/06/1917-01/10/2012) published in 1994 (1995 in Brazil) his assessment of the 20th century, entitled *The Age of Extremes - The Brief Twentieth Century (1914-1991)*, prompted by events in Eastern Europe.

⁷ However, this does not mean that what is propagated in the mystifying discourses of the bourgeoisie and its state - by its theoreticians, its policies and culture and its multilateral organisations - is true, namely that the capitalist mode of production may be imperfect, but it is the only possibility open to humanity. This text affirms the opposite: a defeat - even of colossal proportions - does not have the prerogative to halt the course of history and eternalise it as the only possible sociability. The capitalist mode of production will not be transformed by the inertia of the passing of days, its ageing and subsequent demise. The social forces and contradictions present in this mode of production make the overcoming of capitalist social relations of production the only alternative to barbarism.



As it distanced itself from the aspirations of its formulators, “real socialism” became corrupt and collapsed. However, as long as it existed, it functioned as a possibility of overcoming bourgeois sociability, and, for this reason – for capital – it presented itself as a threat. The coexistence of such a reference of sociability different from capitalism – despite the deformations of real socialism – was one of the determinants for the construction of rights and social policies in the capitalist world. As long as “real socialism” existed – despite its missteps – it influenced the working class to fight for social rights and labour and to frighten significant capital with the “red danger”.

For Netto – following Marx – the possibility of new social relations is a project.

(...) whose viability presupposed the existence of objective conditions that would make possible the liberation of hundreds of millions of men from misery and exploitation, in the very process in which these masses would engage in a gigantic and fascinating social game of invention of new forms of life and coexistence - a game that would be unthinkable if, in the very genesis of the conditions of its emergence, the most profound democratic orders did not exist. (Netto, 1990, p.83 - italics in the original text)

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The big capitalist nations, eager to overcome the crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, saw in the “colonisation” of these economies: a) ways out of their crises by opening up the market; b) ways to reduce spending on social policies in capitalist states by turning social rights into commodities; c) reforming labour rights to free capital from the limits of exploitation of the working class; d) privatising public and state property through classical and non-classical forms of trade and giving significant capital new areas of investment

Alongside economic growth, a real ideopolitical and cultural war was waged for new sociability centred on the end of communist ideology, the end of labour, the end of trade unions and working-class *organisations* and the *end of workers'*, socialist and communist parties. It was perhaps the biggest offensive of capital against the working class on a world scale in the second half of the 20th century. The working class reacted with greater or lesser intensity, depending on its strength, its organisation and its tradition of struggle in the particular history of each social formation.

What we mean here is that the conversion of the “real socialist” countries into market economies greatly disseminated the social relations of the capitalist mode of production; the “success” of this onslaught has had several effects, the most important of which has been to consolidate and expand so-called *neo-liberalism* across the globe.

The onslaught of neo-liberalism, *pure* capitalism, disarticulated an essential part of the social class struggles all over the world; mystified forms of sociability such as individualism and entrepreneurship gained much strength and, in this process, we observe the return and growth of right-wing and ultra-right thinking, as well as the resurgence of fascism in many parts of the world, typical congeners of capitalist social relations.

Pure capitalism: an essential category for reflecting on social policies

In the period between the second half of the 1960s and the end of the 20th century, the complete maturity phase of monopoly capitalism was consolidated. For Husson (2008), “*pure capitalism*” is capitalism in its most developed and destructive phase for nature and humanity. For the author,

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(...) the legality of capitalism is deeply compromised. Its successes are directly proportional to the social regressions it imposes without compensation or counterpart. Even if the balance of power is in its favour, this must be clear: any project to regulate, discipline or humanise this system is, in the current context, pure utopia. Today, the only coherent attitude is, on the contrary, to oppose this “pure capitalism” with a “pure anti-capitalism” worthy of the threats it poses to the well-being of humanity (Husson, 2008, p.194). (Husson, 2008, p.194).

The development of contemporary “*pure capitalism*”, more so than in any previous period of human history,

(...) it tends towards pure functioning, progressively stripping itself of all the “rigidities” that might regulate or slow it down. It is not so much a return to previous historical forms as an adaptation to their concept. There are two major trends in this movement: the “commodification” of labour power and the tendency towards the formation of a world commodity market. On the one hand,

this is capitalism without adjectives, although the term neoliberal capitalism may be a convenient way of describing its current phase. On the other hand, we must reject partial theorisations that highlight a particular aspect [of the movement of this mode of production] and conceptualise it as globalised, financialised, patrimonial, shareholder or cognitive capital (Husson, 2008, p.9). (Husson, 2008, p.9).

To say that capitalism lives in its pure state, which can best be grasped by research, does not mean that its social relations remain “visible to the naked eye”. On the contrary, the more mature bourgeois society is, the more mystified and reified the everyday relations that constitute it. The *purser* capitalism is, the more intensely its critics and social movements working for social transformation are repressed.

In what follows, we will highlight the movements and the physiognomy imprinted by pure capital in the monopoly era on the State (Ianni, 1981; Mandel, 1982; Netto, 1992), on the Public Fund and social policies⁸

In our research, we have focused our analysis on Brazil. However, we know that the general laws of the capitalist mode of production and the formulations contained in the multilateral organisations of significant capital allow me to affirm the full validity of the Marxian warning “History is about you”. In other words, in the field of social policies, the prescriptions proposed in the texts, pamphlets and manifestos of significant capital were not formulated in the image and likeness of others *by coincidence*. It is worth asking why countries as diverse as Brazil and Italy, Argentina and Thailand, France and Chile, Peru and Portugal, Greece and Mexico are guided by social policies of identical content, even if in form, they retain a particular singularity in their implementation.

Under pure capitalism, in the last 50 (fifty) years, the public purse has been a central component – more than at any other time – in overcoming the crises⁹ of capital. By public fund, in a mediated way, we mean the totality of the wealth managed by the bourgeois state. On the surface of social life, this wealth is the product of social contributions from taxes levied on capital and labour and from the profitability of state-productive enterprises. Beyond the appearance, the public fund managed by the bourgeois state is part of the surplus value socially produced and appropriated by the bourgeois state.

⁸ For my doctoral thesis on social security policy (pensions), I worked on texts produced by the two most important multilateral organisations of big business. In particular, I read the texts of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund, which formulate the social policies implemented by states and nations all over the world. At the time, I was able to analyse some three thousand texts on the subject, and the “conclusions” of the research are collected in Granemann (2006).

⁹ See Nakatani (2006) and Salvador (2010).

What capital collects in taxes and social contributions originates from profit, which is the product of surplus labour, exploitation and the suction of surplus value from labour power. The working class makes its social contributions and pays its taxes from its wages, which corresponds to necessary labour to Marx (2013). To put it explicitly, what we call *public* funds is essential labour + surplus labour, the social product of surplus value. Suppose, in the appearance of social life, capital and labour contribute to the formation of the public purse and the support of the state. In that case, when the appearance is overcome, the public purse – present and past – is essentially produced by the expenditure of the energies of labour power while it works.

Social policies are not concessions of capital or its state to the working class, for two main reasons: 1) their origin is in the class struggle against the bourgeoisie and its state; 2) because the public purse is the product of human labour. Contradictorily, the social policies that exist in the welfare state¹⁰ are, on the one hand, the response of the bourgeois state to the struggles of the working class and, at the same time, mechanisms that guarantee capital possibilities of valorisation. To put it bluntly, capital also benefits from social policies (Netto, 1992).

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The imperative need to valorise monopoly capital leads it to metamorphose social rights, made possible by social policies, into commodities, as new spaces for capital investment; in other words: to open up new investment spaces for capitalist profit-making. As the frontiers of capital valorisation narrow, they need to seek new spaces to realise their permanent need to increase profits. As in Marx:

On the other hand, the concept of productive labour is narrowing. Capitalist production is not only the production of commodities, but essentially the production of surplus-value. The worker does not produce for himself but for capital. It is, therefore, not enough for him to create in general. He has to produce more value. A worker is only productive if he produces surplus value for the capitalist or serves the self-valorisation of capital. If we can choose an example outside the sphere of material production, we would say that a schoolteacher is a productive worker if he does not merely work on the children's heads, but demands work of himself to the point of exhaustion in order to enrich his employer. The fact that the latter has invested his capital in a teaching factory and not in a sausage factory does not change the relationship. Thus, the concept of the productive worker by no means implies only a relation between activity and useful effect, between worker and product of labour, but

¹⁰ State which, given its capitalist nature, can never be universal. Its experience was mostly concentrated in Western Europe and even there - in that part of the world - the achievements were not universal, because rights depended on nationality and place of birth and workers from African and South American "colonies" rarely had access to rights and social policies similar to those enjoyed by native workers in their own country.



also a specifically social relation of production, which has arisen historically and which labels the worker as a direct means of valorisation of capital. To be a productive worker is not luck but bad luck (2013, p.578 - our italics).

Thus, the areas in which the social policies of capitalist states operate – education, pensions, social welfare, and health care – have to become commodities like sausages, shoes and cars. To become commodities, the state must stop offering social policies. Rights are commodified, like supplementary pensions in Brazil and Pension Fund Administrators in Chile. Investments in areas of social life that used to be social policies become, by the disposition of the bourgeois state, instruments to solve capital crises. In analysing the crises from Karl Marx's Capital, Netto points out that they are the result of...

(...) of the contradictions inherent to the capitalist mode of production, which constitute an undeniable component of this mode of production dynamics. In its evolution, the capitalist mode of production is necessarily punctuated by crises that are functional. Marx stresses that crisis operates to promote the transitory overcoming of contradictions in the capitalist dynamic - for example, the contradiction between the development of the productive force of labour and the fall in the rate of profit "must constantly be overcome by means of crises". (Netto, 2020, p.375)

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Our argument considers social policies, metamorphosed into commodities, as one of the temporary solutions to the crises of capital (Granemann, 2006; 2012; 2013). There is a set of mediations for this metamorphosis to take place:

1) Social policies, such as those recommended for pensions by the World Bank Group in 1994, are typical ways in which significant monopoly capital produces the space for commodification by monetising what was once a right – free, state and public – into its instruments of capital accumulation.

2) If the state is forced by social struggles to develop a social policy, it will not implement it with institutions that carry out social policy for free and workers paid by the state in state spaces. In Friedman's (2023) formula, the transfer of money has been implemented for those who have nothing in order to realise, in the liberal maxim, the individual's right to choose the goods they wish to consume. Of course, monetised transfers that replace social policies have little value. There are also new ways of

distributing the public purse: the state creates the possibility of consuming low-quality education and social goods by providing minimal amounts of money for the most miserable fractions of the working class to satisfy their needs in the market.

Societies that built economies in the post-World War II era centred on employment (although they never did so thoroughly for the entire working class, as this is impossible under capitalism) did not initially implement *monetised* social policies. On the contrary, they made social policies with universal characteristics and linked to formal employment; monetisation corresponded to the remuneration of wage labour and social policies realised rights through the public provision of education, health, housing, transport and social security, all of which were free, of good quality and moderately universal.

It was during the capitalist crisis, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, when unemployment worsened, working class struggles re-emerged, and real socialism collapsed, that the monetisation of social rights also became an alternative for states in the centre of the world economy, especially in Europe. The first trials of this monetisation took place in England and southern Europe, especially in Portugal and Greece. There, too, it was capital's need to find investment and profit-seeking opportunities that led to the commodification of areas of social life that social policies implemented by the state had previously covered. Thus, a new form of social policy is imposed as a form of capital's crises: it does not matter whether its sales are from health or shoes, sausages or education, welfare or cars.

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In the absence of employment, the *monetised* form of social policy appears to be an essential economic and political "solution" for the working class. As it acts to contain struggles for better living conditions for workers, it is also politically crucial for capital. In this sense, it is a mysterious solution that economically serves the interests of capital.

Economic dimension: providing considerable sums to banking and financial institutions. The state transfers these sums of money to the banks so that they can pass them on to the users of the now welfare-oriented and monetised policies. Here, the institutions of social policy lose their importance to the banks, as the banking and financial capital will manage and appear as the instruments of social policy.

For bank-financial capital, the sums – even if individually small – constitute significant amounts that the banks can use as loan capital, interest-bearing capital, and bank credit.

In the 19th century, faced with this phenomenon of small sums mobilised by banks, the critic of political economy pointed out:

*With the development of the banking system, especially when the banks start paying interest on the money deposited, cash reserves and momentarily idle money flow into the coffers. Small sums, incapable on their own of functioning as monetary capital, merge into large masses and thus generate **monetary power**. This accumulation of small sums must be understood as a special result of the banking system and, therefore, distinguished from the intermediary role played by the banks between the real money capitalists and the lenders. Finally, only gradually consumed rents are deposited in the banks (Marx, 2017, p.455).*

The small individual sums paid for the “social policies carried out by the banks” become available assets and part of the banking-financial business, and by controlling them in the banks, these sums can drive large and profitable companies.

These sums are small for individual users and distributed to the poorest as a substitute for social policies. In Brazil, they only affect the strictly natural sphere so that the workforce can return to work every day. The result is the maintenance of the miserable living conditions of the working class.

Political dimension: by transferring money, even in small amounts, as if by magic, consumption and the illusion of access to the right to choose are transferred to unemployed workers. In reality, it is only a matter of a few “coins” that are converted into a few foodstuffs. Individual consumption does not allow policy users to see who the others are who also need these coins to survive.

In the context of a social policy institution, at least those who are equal can find a way to recognise themselves as bearers of the same sufferings and eventually cultivate political action. But, being segmented in bank accounts, often reached only by plastic money, in contact with a machine through a bank card, they cannot even realise that they belong to a social class, that there are many who are like them. The monetised form individualises and segments users and, at the same time, opens up an important avenue for the accumulation of bank capital.

Experiences with the construction of social rights (in the framework of the so-called welfare state) were possible under very particular conditions in post-war Europe. Their

dismantling was also subject to specific circumstances, such as the collapse of the Eastern regimes and the frequency of increasingly acute economic crises.

Such a situation, like the construction of “universal” social policies, was not determined by the natural course of the history of the iron evolution of the capitalist mode of production, nor was it the result of the generosity and concessions of the owners of capital. On the contrary, this conquest cannot be treated as something unilateral and easy for the working class; instead, it is the result of a very particular set of political and economic conditions which we must take into account: 1) the existence of the countries grouped in the former USSR as a possibility of an alternative social life to capitalism; 2) the enormous opportunities for investment and valorisation of the capital committed to the reconstruction of the countries destroyed by the long and intense war; 3) the destruction of millions of workers’ lives which capillarised the trade union, party and popular organisations in the daily life of the European countries and which were dismantled by the Second World War; 4) the permanence, after the war, of thousands of workers in arms¹¹ and with some condition to build embryos of social life of socialist orientation, alternative to the societies of the Soviet bloc, structured by Stalinism that undermined - according to the documented denunciations of militants and scholars¹² - the possibility of a development based on experiences of freedom in the direction of human emancipation.

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After the Second World War in Europe and Asia, these special conditions did not find the same weight and impact on the American continent. Here, their contours were characterised by the very conditions of the entire social formation of the American continent¹³ in relation to Europe. Nor was the construction of the welfare state on the American continent homogeneous and linear in the different countries where it was built; in Brazil, the classic *conditions* for constructing the social rights typical of the welfare state never existed.

Our complexity (like Latin America, like Brazil), which is not hierarchical in relation to previous social complexity (the realisation of the European welfare state), but rather diverse, is constituted in an unequal way not because of some arbitrariness, backwardness

¹¹ This consideration is very present in academic debates on the genesis and, equally, the collapse of the Welfare State and its related social policies in Portuguese and Italian universities. In this text, we only offer it as a hypothesis to be studied, since it is not included in the analytical arsenal of the subject in Brazil.

¹² Cultured - and novelised - accounts can be found in *El hombre que amaba a los perros*, by Cuban writer Leonardo Padura, published by Boitepo Editorial in 2013, and in the biography of Victor Serge entitled *Memorias de un revolucionario (1901-1941)*. Madrid: Veintisiete Letras, 2011 (available online). For an in-depth historical study of the period through the biography of *Leon Trotsky*, see Isaac Deutscher's trilogy (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, various editions.) See also Netto (1992) and Granemann (2013).

¹³ The American continent is characterised by distinct differences and different stages of development of the capitalist economy, in line with its particular historical and social development, marked by the violent European invasion of each of the countries that make up the subcontinents.



or similar characteristics: it is concretised within the same mode of production, yes, but the forms for realising the same content in another time and another space (we could also say historical period and social formation) are dissimilar. However, the different forms give it the same mode of being: it is one and unequal and unity in diversity!

By way of brief and inconclusive final considerations

Brazil's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 2023 was 10.9 (ten trillion and nine hundred billion reais). The Brazilian State Budget (at the federal level) in 2023 was recorded at 5.20 trillion reais (five trillion two hundred billion reais).

The Brazilian state, whose public funds are large enough to resolve the most severe inequalities, is a systematic cash box for significant capital needs, essential for the “always provisional resolution of its crises”. Without the Brazilian state, its public funds and the system of state and parastatal repression, the capitalist mode of production would not be as prosperous for capital as it is.

Capital produces constant demands that are made possible by the state through various means, of which at least four have been recurrent: 1) the regression of social rights which, in addition to the dimension of political defeat, has an inescapable economic requirement to push them towards the purchase of new “commodities”. These commodities refer to the purchase of “services”, formerly social services carried out as social policies, with public funds, examples of which are public health, social assistance, public housing and public education. 2) The increase in taxes on the consumption of the working class and, with it, a growing widening of the base of the composition of the public fund that absorbs it for the state. The public funds collected by the state are passed on to capital in various ways, the most scandalous of which, according to Nakatani (2006), is the remuneration of public debt at one of the highest interest rates on the planet. 3) The indebtedness of families through the use of credits authorised by the Brazilian state (known as “consigned credits”), deducted directly from salaries and pensions, without the labour force having the right not to pay back the money to the lender. Before the wage reaches the worker, the state and capital transfer portions of the salary to the creditors of the working class to pay their debt. 4) The continuity of a programme of privatisations, classic and *non-classic*, present in the different governments that have succeeded each other in the management of the state in the country since the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil.



Our argument was intended to show that the apologetic need to reduce the state, to make it minimal, was nothing more than a fierce and insistent argument to support and enable privatisations of all kinds. The greed and creativity of capital limit these types of appropriate wealth. In other words, both in times of growth and in times of crisis – albeit in different proportions each time – and under monopolies, capital increasingly faces barriers to the valorisation process. Therefore, finding new commodities (those which the working class cannot stop consuming, such as social security, education and health), new branches and sectors of investment in order to make profits becomes a condition of survival of capital and the capitalist mode of production. Thus, we find ourselves in a world which, crammed with commodities programmed for a short and abbreviated duration, is combined with a stimulus which constantly creates needs, generating an almost compulsive dependence on acquiring the latest model of the newest commodity market through the supply of consumer credits, associated, in turn, with wages.

These times of pure capitalism reveal profound levels of dehumanisation in the inverse measure that the valorisation of commodities corresponds to a brutal devalorisation of social beings. The desire for commodities confirms the permanence of the law of value: unsold commodities are unrealised surplus value.

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In order to respond to the demands of capital – which are complex and growing – its state must assume the role of withdrawing from the economy in order to maximise its intervention in the provision of the conditions for the reproduction of bourgeois society and to guarantee the validity and functioning of the law of value.

The chimaera of a *minimal* state has never been more than an illusion necessary to realise the interests of significant capital. More than at any other moment in the history of capitalism, *pure capitalism* is the ultimate realisation of the state of capital, only because it is a minimal state for labour.

Public fundraising for social policies is gaining prominence. The public fund must sponsor different forms of realisation of monetised rights. In this context, discrediting a social policy institution – be it a hospital or a school – not only mutilates its quality but also disfigures its budget and disqualifies its excellence in the provision of a social right. Moreover, it becomes necessary to devalue the workforce by paying low wages and so many other mechanisms that systematically become determinations to renounce the public and praise the private.

On the near horizon, the alternatives for overcoming capitalism seem impossible. Still, if we adjust our glasses, we can see more widely into space, and perhaps the experience of working-class failure with social policies will allow us to overcome provisional rights and private property.

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ARTICLE

Behind a Smokescreen: The Unity of Exploitation-Oppression and the Moralism of the Extreme Right in the Structural Crisis of Capital

Además de una cortina de humo: la unidad explotación-opresión y el moralismo de la extrema derecha en la crisis estructural del capital

Além de uma cortina de fumaça: unidade exploração-opressão e o moralismo da extrema direita na crise estrutural do capital

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Abstract

This essay articulates reflections on the structural issues of the capitalist mode of production and the contingent mediations of recent decades, demonstrating that the convergence between “(ultra)neoliberals” and neoconservatives/ reactionaries represents a political realisation of the unity of exploitation and oppression. Grounded in the debate on labour, social reproduction, and alienation in Marx and Lukács, we analyse the rise of the far right and demonstrate that the intensification of violence against historically oppressed subjects is not an exception but a necessity of the capitalist order. The particularity of this conjuncture, immersed in the structural crisis of capital, highlights the most imposing characteristics of the unity of exploitation and oppression. Understanding this dynamic reveals the urgent need for social struggles to reach the core of this structure, transcending the objectification of the exploitation of the working class and its subjectivation centred on the bourgeois ethos.

Keywords:
unity of
exploitation
and oppression;
bourgeois ethos;
ontology of social
being

Introduction

Este ensayo articula reflexiones sobre cuestiones estructurales del modo de producción capitalista y las mediaciones coyunturales de las últimas décadas, demostrando que el avance de la unidad entre “(ultra)neoliberales” y neoconservadores/reaccionarios es una realización política de la unidad explotación-opresión. Fundamentados en el debate sobre el trabajo, la reproducción social y la alienación en Marx y Lukács analizamos el avance de la extrema derecha y demostramos que la profundización de las violencias sobre los sujetos históricamente oprimidos no es una excepción, sino una necesidad del orden del capital. La particularidad de esta coyuntura, inmersa en la crisis estructural del capital, evidencia las características más imponentes de la unidad explotación-opresión. Comprender esta dinámica revela la urgente necesidad de que las luchas sociales alcancen el núcleo de esta estructura, superando la objetivación de la explotación de la clase trabajadora y su subjetivación centrada en el ethos burgués.

Palabras Clave:
unidad
explotación-
opresión;
ethos burgués;
ontología del ser
social



Introducción

The colonial roots and the metamorphosis of the processes of dependency promote a capitalist hegemony that exerts its repressive force on historically oppressed subjects and continues to guarantee the historical naturalisation of the politics of violence, imprisonment, pathologisation, moralisation and extermination of sectors of the working class in the most dehumanised dimensions of imperialist, racist and heteropatriarchal capitalism. These characteristics are sharpened, and their determinations are made explicit in the current conjuncture of capital in crisis. In this context, it is not uncommon to find reductionist analyses of the extreme right based on an anachronistic and romantic vision of bourgeois liberalism, suggesting a supposed incoherence with what is called an “(ultra)neoliberal” coalition with (neo)conservative and reactionary sectors. In these positions, some argue that the processes of exposure of intolerant and discriminatory racist, sexist, misogynist, lgbtphobic and xenophobic positions would be mere agitational tactics and moralistic propaganda to divert attention while deepening the exploitation of the labour force.

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Whether in these superficial conclusions of a supposed “smokescreen” to cover up reality or in the already known capitulation of liberal sectors to the banners of struggle against oppression, an opaque character persists in the face of the essence of the exploitation-oppression unity and its expressions within politics. A profound analysis requires the recovery of the Marxist and Lukacsian debate on the ontology of social being, the basis of labour and its incidence in the complexes of social reproduction, understanding the exploitation-oppression unit in its historical materiality, where the processes of alienation feed back dialectically (Pinheiro, 2022).

This essay aims to demonstrate that the deepening of violence against historically oppressed subjects is not a conjunctural exception but that, in addition to having its principles present in the original conditions of capitalism (Marx, 2013), it is currently carried out in compliance with its structural mediations and determinations for the realisation of the general law of capitalist accumulation, with metamorphosed dynamics and with peculiar characteristics in the face of the current needs of the order of capital in its structural crisis (Mèszarós, 2009).

Exploitation-oppression unity as alienated complexity: Notes on the socio-metabolism of bourgeois inequalities

The prominence of far-right groups, political parties and leaders who articulate a moralistic, intolerant and authoritarian discourse with an agenda of economic austerity is a phenomenon in the field of politics that expresses the complexification of the process of exploitation of labour power in the current state of globalisation of capital.

If appearance and essence do not coincide, searching for the ontology of expressions of prejudice and discrimination requires an analysis of the basis and social function of the bourgeois ethos. The political and economic complexity of the current conjuncture imposes on us the reflection on the challenges of the working class, seeking its totality, thinking about the impacts, mediations and determinations realised in the particularities of dependent capitalism. Understanding this dynamic reveals the need for social struggles to reach the core of this structure, overcoming the objectification of working-class exploitation and its subjectivation centred on the bourgeois ethos.

In contrast to the fragmented readings commonly present in theories committed to the naturalisation of liberalism, many Marxist elaborations, especially by women, Latin American and black anti-colonialist militants, have demonstrated such mediations over time. Demonstrating the historical foundation and material necessity of the exploitation-oppression unit for the order of capital is the basis for articulating the most consistent points of these analyses (Pinheiro, 2022). The expression of the foundation of alienation and its complexification in the history of capitalist society illuminates the core of the exploitation-oppression unit.

To understand what dehumanises us, unveiling the radical nature of what makes us human is necessary. That said, denaturalising social inequalities implies demonstrating exploitation-oppression unity by first highlighting the determinations that make human beings social beings, with labour as their founding category. This theoretical construct, presupposed by Marx and Engels, crosses several subjects of the Marxist tradition and has its most profound form in the mature work of Lukács (2018), developing the mediations and definitive determinations of this condition.

The construct developed by Marx and Engels² in their search for the core of bourgeois society and its possibilities of overcoming it laid the basis of the theoretical groundwork for the dimension of the ontology of social being. In his critical dialogue with Hegelian dialectics, the young Marx absorbed the contradictory dynamics of the movement of the real, putting it into materiality. Engels, by pointing out the critical and materialist grafts of classical political economy, turned analyses of the ontological priority of labour into an understanding of humanisation.

Lukács' intellectual enterprise resulted in a profound critique of neopositivism and existentialism, including analysis and dialogue with Hartmann and the contradictory processes of Hegelian ontology, to developing his argument on Marxian foundations, concentrating his focus on labour as a foundational category and elaborating decisive reflections on social reproduction, ideology and alienation (Lukács, 2018).

Such a synthesis provides an analysis capable of demonstrating the unprecedented character of the social being. The theoretical journey around the original search of the human being, avoiding sterile philosophical abstractions, reflects the historical and social essence with the clear objective of thinking societies, particularly the structural problems of the sociability of capital.

Lukács, therefore, develops formulations on the objectivities and subjectivities alienated by the logic of private ownership of the means of production and the centrality of the exploitation of labour power. By detailing the internal nexuses of the processes of human praxis in their various historical particularities, to uncover the most complex form of alienation in the sociability of capital, the author establishes a lens on the mediations of the capitalist totality in its structural basis and everyday life.

In this sense, we discover that just as labour is the founding category of social being, alienation is the ontological category of the exploitation-oppression unit, underlining that while the former is the constitutive source of the social potentiality to create the new, for the humanisation of the world and human diversity, alienation is the postulate for the de-affectation of being, the cosification, the dehumanised humanity and the social production of inequalities and their naturalisation (Pinheiro, 2022).

²In addition to the mature reflections on concrete and abstract labour in *Capital* (2013), this debate runs through Marxist formulations throughout his intellectual career, being essential to rescue the assumptions and constructions contained in texts such as *The Jewish Question* (2010a), and the debate on political emancipation and human emancipation, in addition to the reflections on ideology, alienation and questions of method in the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* (2010b), in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 2007), in the Prologue to the *Critique of Political Economy* and in the solid analyses developed in the *Grundrisse* (2011) on the questions of the individual and social reproduction, as well as the unity of production-circulation-consumption. In Engels, texts such as *The Role of Labour in the Transformation of the Ape into Man* (2004) and *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (2006).

Delving deeper into the productive and reproductive dimensions of alienation we see its historical particularities up to its most mature, sophisticated and complex form in capitalist sociability, materialising radically different contradictions, qualitatively more dehumanised relations, socially existing in the conjunction of the relations of production and the complexes of reproduction.

The understanding of the objectification of social class antagonism goes hand in hand with the naturalisation of a bourgeois social ethos that universalises a model of human being, namely the man who owns the means of production, white, European, heterosexual, family-oriented, potentially productive subject, defender of formal and abstract reason, Judeo-Christian values and individualism.

This moral, aesthetic and ideological abstraction is not a mere instrumental invention but a social construction that dehumanises working-class people daily, institutionally and structurally. It is a construction realised in the racist and heteropatriarchal historical process of the development of the structural conditions of class society, which forged its colonial and imperialist basis.

As the set of forms and means of exploitation of the working class becomes more complex and reaches its most acute manifestations in the territories of dependent capitalism, the framework of the bourgeois ethos is the value reference for society as a collectivity, being also the reference for the valuation of individuals in everyday life.

In this process, the interpersonal and subjective consequences are the apparent aspects of a fundamental process of devaluing the value of the labour-power of the oppressed subjects. After all, the measure of value imposed on the labour time socially necessary to produce the commodity labour power cuts across all complexes of social reproduction, affecting the organisation of everyday life.

Thus, by a historical construction, women, black, indigenous, and LGBTQIAPN+ people in the working class have their humanity expropriated and experience a structure under the optics of the dehumanised humanity of the bourgeois ethos. Due to the ontological necessity of constant reinvestment of capital at the expense of variable capital, a fundamental dimension of the general law of capitalist accumulation, the construction of the commodity labour power in the different layers of the working class has in alienation, manifested in oppression, a relentless resource of this process.

The passage we present takes a deep and critical look at the exploitation-oppression unit in the capitalist social structure, analysing how alienation is manifested in multiple dimensions: colonial, gender and class, among others. We emphasise that the



“manufacture” of the commodity labour power in the various layers of social reproduction does not occur homogeneously. The production of a male, white, European labour force, for example, receives a higher “social burden” in terms of collective investment compared to a female and racialised labour force, especially in Latin America.

This inequality is deeply rooted in the multiple alienations described by Marx, Lukács and Fanon, which are expressed in the historical process of colonisation, patriarchy and racism. The alienation of labour, described by Marx (2013), is seen here in articulation with sexual alienation (Lukács, 2018) and colonial alienation (Fanon, 2008), evidencing how the process of production of the commodity labour power is intrinsically linked to relations of power and oppression.

To highlight the different and dialectically affirmed use values and exchange values in the sphere of bourgeois subjectivation, which the centrality of abstract labour in capitalism realises, is to identify a feedback dynamic in the cycle of extended social reproduction, which does not appear in the political sphere as an authoritarian exceptionality in times of crisis of capital. Rather, it is the demonstration of emblematic mediations of conservative liberal unity, which since colonialism and since its maturity in the nineteenth century, exposes the symbiotic character of the set of alienations experienced in bourgeois society. The apogee of capitalism in its structural crisis of recent decades, rather than reviving these processes, constitutes new determinants for the maintenance of this mode of production.

The unity of exploitation and oppression in the current barbarism

The Inequality Map 2022 (Chancel et al., 2021) shows that the wealthiest 10% of the world’s population captured 78% of the wealth produced. In contrast, the study points out that more than half of the world’s population gets only 2%. The researchers also showed that the African continent is the most unequal, as opposed to Europe, where the inequality index is the lowest. In Latin America, the wealthiest 10 per cent take 55 per cent of the wealth.

The transformations of capitalism, its capacity for reinvention in the face of crises and its pillars of hegemony generate tendencies to maintain its universality: the exploitation of labour power. Today, there is unrelenting evidence of the constant presence of oppression in the deepening and maintenance of alienated sociability and the process of the destruction of capital.

The need to maintain the general law of accumulation, and its irremediable pillar of expanding profits, points to alternatives for deepening exploitation through the organic composition of capital, sophisticating the productive process in times of high technology by strengthening the destructive character of the globalised environment and the need for states to assume their most apparent tasks of coercion and consensus in order to maintain bourgeois hegemony.

The strengthening of an authoritarian, conservative, reactionary and proto-fascist political culture, Lowi (2019, pp. 1-2) synthesised:

Trump (US), Modi (India), Orbán (Hungary), Erdoğan (Turkey), ISIS (Islamic State), Duterte (Philippines), and now Bolsonaro (Brazil). In many other countries, we see governments aligned with this trend, although less defined: Russia (Putin), Israel (Netanyahu), Japan (Shinzo Abe), Austria, Poland, Burma, Colombia, etc. (...) In each country, this extreme right has its characteristics: in many countries (Europe, United States, India, Burma), the “enemy”, i.e. the scapegoat, is Muslims and immigrants; in certain Muslim-majority countries, it is religious minorities (Christians, Jews, Yazidis). In some cases, xenophobic nationalism and racism predominate; in others, religious fundamentalism or hatred of the left, feminism or homosexuals. Despite this diversity, there are some standard features in most, if not all of them: authoritarianism, all-embracing nationalism - “Deutschland über alles” and its local variants: “America First”, “Brazil above all”, etc. - religious or ethnic (racist) intolerance towards the “Other”, and the use of police/military violence as the only response to social problems and criminality.

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This authoritarian political culture, explicitly intolerant and committed to the interests of capital, is a globalised brand that has become more acute in recent years. The (ultra) neoliberal, moralistic and extremist right-wing sectors carry out a process of minimising the state for the rights of the working class, maximising a lens centred on the interests of capital, especially finance, for the repression of social struggles and the instrumentalisation of the state apparatus in favour of irrationalist, prejudiced and discriminatory discourses and practices.

The narrowing of the horizon of collective struggles allows the critical and opposition sectors to concentrate, for the most part, on the expansion of discourses centred on

inclusion via the market, on possibilist analyses and minimalist processes in the face of the situation naturalised by the manifestations of violence and the increase in inequalities. Superficial reformism is articulated with culturalist readings of the expressions of contemporary barbarism, in a political adherence to new discourses and reactive practices within the order, an action typical of an individualist, particularist and post-modern logic which

(...) operates by erasing the necessary clues to understand the contemporary world; at the same time, the supposed end of work and social classes erases the necessary reflection on the constitution of a historical subject capable of changing this society and pointing to a historical alternative. In the same way, the myth of the market economy and the liberal democratic state obscures the necessary paths for a political rupture that materialises this urgent and necessary societal change (Iasi, 2017, p.38). (Iasi, 2017, p.38).

In the Latin American particularity, the anti-emancipatory gap expresses all the mediations of the exploitation-oppression unity, tearing at the historical roots of the enslavement of the African peoples, the dilapidation of the territories and societies of the native peoples and the heteropatriarchal structuring that built a historical expropriation. This is fundamental for the maturation of bourgeois sociability, both in the appropriation of the means of production and in the appropriation of identities and the constitution of an alienated, universalising ethos centred on the “bourgeois human type”.

The context of the crisis of capital under these characteristics allows for the acceleration of the elements constituted in the articulation between regressive economic measures for the working class, conservative values and the weakening of democratic institutions.

The misery of reason (Coutinho, 2010) raises the most dehumanised dimension of ideological constructs to reproduce, under all the dimensions of bourgeois irrationalism, the promotion of any measure that keeps the social structure of exploitation in place, even in times of crisis.

In this sense, the “destruction of reason” is not the overcoming of bourgeois rationalism but its exhaustion in its supposedly civilising facet, being deepened in its most acute forms of alienation. Lukács (2010, p.68) synthesises theoretically that:

Irrationalism as a worldview fixes this emptying of the human soul of any social content, rigidly and exclusively contrasting it with the equally mystified emptying of the world of the intellect. Thus, irrationalism is not merely the philosophical expression of the barbarism that increasingly dominates man's sentimental life but directly promotes it. Parallel to the decadence of capitalism and the aggravation of class struggles due to its crisis, irrationalism appeals – ever more intensely – to the worst human instincts, the reserves of animality and bestiality that necessarily accumulate in man under the capitalist regime. If the lying demagogic formulas of fascism, invoking the “blood of the earth”, could find such a rapid diffusion among the petty-bourgeois masses seduced by fascism, a great responsibility lies objectively with the philosophy and literature of decadence, which evoke these instincts. In most cases, they did not think that fascism would use them, and often even condemned them with indignation.

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The resurgence of conservative (and reactionary) thinking and practices in the world, in various spheres of social life, has called into question the gains of the working class and historically oppressed sectors. This process is evident in legal, material and symbolic losses and threatening theoretical and political achievements in broadening collective reflections on the fight against oppression and the strengthening of human rights.

Understanding this phenomenon in a broader perspective, Iasi (2017, p.380) points out that:

Conservatism cannot be understood by itself; it is an expression of something more profound that determines it. We are convinced that it is an expression of the class struggle, i.e. that it manifests in its appearance the dynamic of a struggle between antagonistic interests that make up bourgeois sociability. In this direction it is important that we begin by outlining the scenario in which conservatism presents itself.

Thus, conservatism reveals an abysmal ideological construct that promotes the permanence of that which is fundamental to maintain the hegemony of the daily privileges of certain sectors of society, i.e., “conservatism is, and always will be, an indispensable food for the reproduction of capital, and that is why it never leaves the scene. In other words, it is a central nourishment for the preservation of capitalist society and will always be at its disposal” (Boschetti, 2015, p.639).

This process is materialised in the social inequality enacted by poverty and unemployment, as well as violence, both structural, cultural and social, that affects historically oppressed subjects, such as women, black people, the LGBTQIPN+ population. This set of measures broadens the possibilities of deepening the exploitation of the labour force of these subjects, corroborating with the focus on surplus value and revitalising the tendencies of dependent capitalism and its configuration vis-à-vis the possibilities of productivity and labour relations.

Attacks on living, working and consumption conditions are not mere moralism or isolated events. The logic of attacking rights, the extension of a repressive perspective through the state and the fatalistic affirmation of the living conditions of the working class are functional elements of the tasks imposed to maintain bourgeois hegemony. Thus, on the political and ideological level, the struggle against oppressions is confronted with the strengthening of the most conservative sectors in the economic, moral and formal political spheres, which seek to undermine any attempt to overcome either the contemporary consequences or the most archaic oppressions.

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Conservatism is not a cognitive or moral deviation, it is not the fruit of a bad education or of prejudices empty of meaning. Conservatism is one of the expressions of reified consciousness, in Lukács' terms, or of the so-called common sense, in Gramsci's words, that is, it is an expression of the immediate consciousness that prevails in a given society and that manifests, albeit in a disordered and strange way, the determining values that underlie the determining social relations. (Iasi, 2017, p.382).

In this way, the appeal of capital and the middle sectors to state administration through neoliberal, conservative and reactionary policies, attacking social rights and democratic freedoms, affects the daily lives of workers of particular colour, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, geographical origin and cultures. Articulating a reflection on the Brazilian and European conjuncture, Löwy (2015, pp. 662-663) affirms that:

What is comparable in the French and Brazilian extreme right are two themes of socio-cultural agitation of the most reactionary conservatism: I) Repressive ideology, the cult of police violence, the call to reinstate the death penalty; in Europe this is the case of the extreme right and, in Brazil, of the 'bancada de la bala', strongly represented in Congress. II) Intolerance towards sexual minorities, in particular homosexuals. This is an issue that has been agitated, with some success, by religious sectors of Catholic reference (Opus Dei, Civitas, etc.) in France and of Neo-Pentecostal Evangelical reference in Brazil.

It is not by chance that bourgeois ideology resorts to moralistic analyses to maintain profit rates and dampen the organisational process of popular resistance. Ideological decay and the exhaustion of possible manoeuvres within political emancipation meet with the limits of social struggles, circumscribed to immediate tactics and strategies hindered by the social order of capital.

In the context of the structural crisis of capital (Mészáros, 2009), the tendency towards the universalisation of fascist practices is consolidated in various territories. This reveals that the idea of an anti-democratic characteristic as an exception in capitalist society reproduces the dualistic view between democracy-dictatorship, coercion-consensus, when in reality, within history, the elastic process of political emancipation is articulated in a unity of opposites, in a continuity within discontinuity, and in a process of class pressure that stumbles against the structural limits of this society. The authoritarian dimension of the bourgeoisie is part of its political maturation derived from its consolidation with its project of society and its political hegemony.

Classical fascism, as a radicalisation of bourgeois state power and a violent, explicit and overt alternative to the crises of capital of the time – the first decades of the twentieth century – was articulated by a historical necessity that lost hegemony to Keynesian-Fordism. This latent possibility never disappeared, nor did its ideological elements die out, nor did it prevent authoritarianism and aggressiveness towards the oppressed from remaining in democratic countries in the post-war period, reviving new manifestations of its principles after the neoliberal boom.

Contemporary proto-neo-fascism reveals important nuances that manifest the sharpening of the role of the state for capitalism, consolidating actions for the minimisation of rights and social policies and the maximisation of repression of collective resistance, as well as the structuring of capital's profit, whether through direct financing with public funds or as a structured basis for the expansion of absolute and relative surplus value.



The force-consensus binomial is present in everyday life. It manifests itself in authorised violence against difference and dissent. The tragic limited form of representative democracy and the distortions fostered by the media, religious fundamentalism and the market sustain a consciousness that legitimises oppressions, suppresses rights and destroys social policies.

When the conjuncture presents risks to bourgeois hegemony, the state adopts more far-reaching measures to maintain order. Thus, the state complex can overstep democratic boundaries, in an authoritarian trajectory already foreshadowed in the mid-nineteenth century in Louis Bonaparte's 18th Brumaire (Marx, 2011b), although attenuated by the class struggle in the post-war rise of the European welfare state in the twentieth century. In the current conjuncture, the defence and propagation of its autocratic character does not go through classical structures, but through contemporary mechanisms of hegemony such as the media, the internet and other everyday elements.

'The hypertrophy of the coercive apparatuses of the state is also part of the contemporary protection of Brazilian liberal democracy, with the intensification of coercive and repressive actions that take shape in the criminalisation of social movements (criminalisation of working class demonstrations and organisations through repression, arbitrary imprisonment of leaders, illegalisation of struggles)' (Duriguetto & Demier, 2017, p. 15).

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This is not a return to the past, but a current necessity of capital. The state complex, far from being obsolete and much more strategic, builds its base on the ideological valorisation of the minimisation of social policies, the militarisation of life, the (neo-) conservative and reactionary proliferation as expressions of a project of survival of capital.

In this sense, since the crisis that began in the 1970s, the ideological character of neoliberalism has expanded, seeking to privilege the "culture of crisis" as a field of hegemonisation of the need to "reduce" the state; through regional particularities, dampening the organisational and reactive possibilities of the working class, promoting individualistic values and a violent social order. The contemporary capitalist state is consolidated in the dispute over the share of socially produced wealth, absorbed by the public purse for direct application to finance capital and the intensification of the exploitation of labour power.

The reproduction of diverse oppressions takes on a complex and capillary character that crosses from trivial aspects to the structural conditions of individuals' lives, materialising in different roles and different modes of relationship. It is not surprising that gender-sex and race-ethnicity divisions reveal important fissures within the same social classes, nor is it unknown that, even among the exploited and oppressed, discriminatory values and positions that reaffirm inequalities are reproduced.

Women workers, black workers, LGBTQIA+ people and migrants are at the forefront of the widening conditions of pauperisation of the class that lives from the sale of its labour power. This observation remains current, while there is also a progressive universalisation of precarious conditions of exploitation for all other wage-earning sectors, a common feature given the process of primitive accumulation of capital for those on the margins of the core countries of capitalism.

Rupturing margins forging seas: notes on social struggle and overcoming the dehumanised self

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In 1944, Friedrich Hayek wrote "The Road to Serfdom", where he already accused the deleterious results of state intervention in the world of capital, describing it as a threat to economic and political freedom, morally destroying any initiative of collective organisation that proposed the search for social rights. As well as being anti-revolutionary, Hayek, being a severe critic of reformism, conjured up his formulations full of reactionary adjectives in relation to the impoverished subjects and those who organised trade unions and party struggles.

In 1947, a period in which the welfare state in Europe was building its foundations, Hayek was trying to mature his ideas about the economy and its contemporary challenges by seeking allies who shared his ideals and principles. In this process, the liberals convened a meeting in Mont Pèlerin, Switzerland, which was attended by fierce critics of European interventionism and the American New Deal.

At that time, we have the cornerstone of neoliberalism: "The Mont Pèlerin Society", organised and dedicated, sought to argue and attack the defenders of Keynesianism, preparing the ground for the reproductive tasks of a capitalism in a more rigorous stage of its original principles, harsher and free of apparent rules, redirecting once again the state role towards individual interests, pushing the market for the resolution of what

was possible in the face of the inequality that is life in society (Pisón, 1998). For Hayek, the supposed egalitarianism produced by the welfare state would destroy the freedom of citizens and competition between markets, an essential factor for economic prosperity, and the struggle for equality, a violent artifice against human essence.

The antipathy of the “new liberals” to universal precepts of rights, including democratic freedoms as fundamental principles³, if these interfered with the expansion of profits, was a feature cushioned by the 1950s and 1960s, by the reformist conjuncture in part of Europe that drove the social state to its principles of progressive exhaustion in the last decades of the twentieth century. Increasingly, however, this ideological discourse, full of value judgements coupled to the aggressive economic project, would gain prominence in the regressivity of social rights, but also in its moral conduction that sought to dismantle any political construction centred on collective guidelines.

After decades of neoliberal deepening, Hayek’s theses are victorious for the hegemony of capital, but, besides being a defeat for humanity, they are also the end of the myth of the bourgeois individual as a romantic abstraction of being a promoter of freedom. The barbarisation of life in the capitalist world demonstrated that the false opposition between liberty and equality is empty of meaning, as the neoliberal project and its “(ultra) neoliberal” consistency, besides fulfilling its promise of not materialising the economic sin of equality, also promoted the distancing of freedom from the majority of human beings.

The moral burden of the formulators of neo-liberalism, which demonstrated its identity with conservatism, was a particular feature of an essence already revealed since the bourgeois reordering after the workers’ uprising in 1848 in Europe, in its Bonapartist construction in France in the 1850s and, above all, in the whole contradictory coexistence with slavery in the colonies of capitalism in the centuries of the development of the structures of capital. Today, the barbarism of capital proves once again that there is no freedom without equality, let alone diversity.

As we have shown, the deepening of alienation is a historical necessity of capital in contemporaneity. Its structural issues place a material abyss in the possibility of freedom of subjects, attacking even its formal abstraction in authoritarian times.

³ Democracy itself – as Hayek tirelessly explained – had never been a core value of neoliberalism. Freedom and democracy, Hayek explained, could easily become incompatible if the democratic majority decided to interfere with the unconditional rights of each economic agent to dispose of his income and property as he wished. In this sense, Friedman and Hayek could look with admiration at the Chilean experience, without any intellectual inconsistency or compromise with its principles” (Anderson, 1995, pp. 19-20).

The current crisis of capital has its structural character – in the terms of Mészáros (2009) – because the cycle of the expansion of capital is facing its productive and reproductive maturity, as evidenced in the globalisation of capital, in the high development of the productive forces and in the crumbling of the civilising legality of the classical bourgeois revolution. This imposes that the process of the expansion of profit rates is determinant in the exponential destructiveness of nature and in the decrease in the value of labour power on a global scale.

At the present stage, these determinations capitulate economic dependence and colonial roots to metamorphose capital-imperialism (Fontes, 2010) and direct the market and the state as imposing forces to guarantee the discipline of the exploited and oppressed, managing the obsolescence of the workforce, disciplining and penalising the working class and its subjects more distant from the bourgeois ethos. This task is put into practice while the public fund safeguards the mobility of financial capital for the management of the economic expressions of the crisis, taken on ever faster scales, demanding greater agility in state responses.

The indissolubilities of the unity of exploitation-oppression and social reproduction pose decisive challenges for social struggles in contemporary capitalism. The unmistakable subjective difficulties of an emancipatory consciousness of the working class contrast with the objective conditions of a high development of forces. Thus, while on the one hand there are the material conditions for the construction of an egalitarian production and socialisation of labour on the basis of a rupture of the mode of production and class sociability, on the other hand, processes of alienation are organised which run through the lives of individuals and groups who experience the harshness of capitalism and its destructive bias towards the realisation of barbarism.

If in “On the Jewish Question”, Marx (2010 a) presents us with the limits of the sphere of struggle in the field of political emancipation and the necessity of a rupture for an emancipatory process of all humanity, in the current societal stage and in the organisational conditions of the class with revolutionary potential, the question that intervenes revolves around the detours and supposed shortcuts of the social struggle against social rights and policies, in the losses and conquests, within the existing order.

In crises, and especially in structural crisis, the ideological flight of the bourgeoisie must necessarily land at the essential landing point of its essentially unequal and coexisting contradictions with authoritarianism and the barriers of human emancipation. Its

expansionist march widens the distance between the organicity of the diverse values of peoples and their complexity while universalising the dehumanised logic. It thus organises forms, means and contents for the expansion of exploitation and expropriation, marginalising what is not the norm under the universalism of the particularity of the bourgeois ethos.

Thus, within the social-liberal struggles and in the structuralist equivocations, the logic of protagonism is being produced, which stifles diversity and also allows the contradictions of its own processes to be overlooked. While reactionarism gains strength, liberal bets and postmodernism synthesise the ideological decadence of the bourgeoisie in its most acute expression in the field of politics, intertwined between the exploited and the oppressed.

Suppose, in today's society, alienation distances human beings from recognising the condition of other beings who experience different forms of oppression, appropriation, and exploitation. In that case, this is due to the extension of a structural formation based on the exploitation of the labour force, which stitches together relations, identities, bodies and subjectivities. If all this is enhanced by explicitly violent conjunctural political projects, such conditions are historically constructed. This is the logic that throws us into the pendulum limbo between bourgeois individualism and the fragmented (and ineffective) struggle of the universalised hegemonic being of this historical time characterised by the apogee of the bourgeois class.

Final considerations

The recognition of the unity of the diverse as a concrete dimension and the unveiling of different inequalities with a unitary connection are not merely interpretative tasks, but a fundamental condition for interested and intensified collective action in the social struggles of contemporary capitalism. Social struggle only makes sense if it is rooted in life, and theoretical discussion is only effective if it starts from reality to promote transformative action. Stifling reflection and the struggle against all forms of oppression under the excuse of the damage done by mechanistic, fragmented and instrumentalist positions is a theoretical, ethical and political mistake.

In the face of the exploitation-oppression unity, only a united struggle can overcome the complex alienated structure that suffocates humanity. With the smoke of the so-called

moralistic curtain widening in the present conjuncture, the form and the political content of the extreme right cannot be considered a mere tactical use of agitation and moralistic propaganda, after all the development of appropriation, in its original foundation and in its present and permanent realisation, make explicit an element of objectification of the alienation from the material conditions of life.

In this line, the universalisation, hegemonisation and complexification of this private logic takes over our objective relations and our subjective formation, objectifying everything, assuming an alienated (dehumanised/cosyphased) character and expressing values that are materialised in the field of interpersonal relations.

For all the theoretical determinations we have pointed out so far, it is clear that it is not the struggle of the working class that silences the need for the affirmation of diversity and the demands of the field of oppression, but the naturalisation of alienation at these levels of sociability, demeaning people, relations, bodies and identities, pushing an obtuse view of materiality and its complexity in the order of capital.

In the same vein, it is not identities and the affirmation of diversity that divide the world and social struggles; these are consequences of exploitation-oppression in its different stages. That is, it cannot be argued that feminism or anti-racism are structural dividers of the working class, but that the alienations manifested in racism, heteropatriarchy, masculinity, misogyny, and lgbtqiaphobia realise this dehumanisation.

If it is true that the liberal absorption of all these spaces of struggle functioned quite effectively in the last decades as spaces of immediate mobilisation, it is worth thinking about how we develop political mobilisation to overcome labour alienation, sexual alienation and colonial alienation, combating their expressions without losing sight of the radical rupture of their structures.

An emancipated society will not be formed by a set of accumulated, appropriated and compartmentalised rights for each group, but in a concreteness in which each diverse demand of the social being dispenses with the socially constructed condition for its effectiveness. Diversity and equality have ontological unity and will only be realised when we overcome the exploitation-oppression unity.

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ARTICLE

Tensions between combative unionism and virtual anti-unionism: lessons from the Brazilian Federal Education strike

Tensiones entre sindicalismo combativo y antisindicalismo virtual: lecciones de la huelga de la Educación Federal Brasileira

Tensões entre sindicalismo combativo e antissindicalismo virtual: lições da greve da educação federal brasileira

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Abstract

The article reflects on the federal education strike of 2024 in Brazil, based on two union conceptions: on the one hand, combative unionism, which carried out the most significant federal education strike in the history of Brazil; on the other, negotiating unionism, which has been transformed into a virtual anti-unionism, opposing the strike and the face-to-face assemblies of teachers to a policy of increasing use of digital information and communication technologies (TDICs). The first part presents the objective and subjective conditions of the strike mobilisation, with the persistence of the precariousness of work and life under the Lula government. The second part of the article assesses the concrete evidence of attacks on the rights of collective organisation and the rights of affiliates, primarily through the expanded and only apparently progressive use of online transmissions of spaces for collective organisation and mobilisation, with a particular impact on women, older people, the LGBTI+ collective and foreign teachers. A documentary survey, secondary data analysis, and bibliographic discussion were carried out to conduct the study.

Keywords:
federal education strike; economic and political struggles; virtual anti-unionism; combative unionism

Resumen

El artículo reflexiona sobre la huelga federal de educación de 2024 en Brasil, a partir de dos concepciones sindicales: por un lado, el sindicalismo combativo, que realizó la mayor huelga federal de educación de la historia de Brasil; por otro, el sindicalismo negociador, que se ha transformado en un *antisindicalismo* virtual, oponiendo la huelga y las asambleas presenciales de profesores a una política de uso creciente de las tecnologías digitales de la información y la comunicación (TDICs). En la primera parte se presentan las condiciones objetivas y subjetivas de la movilización huelguística, con la persistencia de la precariedad del trabajo y de la vida bajo el gobierno de Lula. En la segunda parte del artículo, se evalúan las evidencias concretas de ataques a los derechos de organización colectiva y a los derechos de los afiliados, especialmente a través del uso ampliado y solo aparentemente progresivo de las *transmisiones on line* de los espacios de organización y movilización colectiva, con especial impacto en las mujeres, las personas mayores, el colectivo LGBTI+ y los profesores extranjeros. Para realizar el análisis, fue hecho un levantamiento documental, análisis de datos secundarios y discusión bibliográfica.

Palabras Clave:
huelga federal de educación; luchas económicas y políticas; *antisindicalismo* virtual; sindicalismo combativo



Introduction

This article is written by striking teachers and students from the federal public education system who have been accompanying the mobilisations of their strike committees and collectively reflecting on the problems that arise in the heat of the moment, in assemblies and strike committee meetings or public debate activities. The Trabalho Vivo group has carried out the systematisation and discussion of these issues, linked to the Labour Transformations, Democracy and Social Protection group of the Law Faculty of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), in regular meetings and strike activities.

In this article, we problematise one of the main arguments anti-strike teachers and students put forward, namely that the social struggle and the strike strengthen the right. A recurrent theme in Brazilian social movements since the rise of the struggles registered in the mobilisations that preceded the June Days of 2013, the existence of progressive sectors opposed to popular mobilisation or that make a peculiar transposition between social struggles and the right, is discussed in the context of the federal education strike in two moments.

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The first part presents the objective and subjective conditions that sustain the strike mobilisation, with the continuation of the precariousness of work and life under the Lula government, to explain the meanings of mobilisation in economic and political struggles, such as the fundamental dispute over the public fund and its repercussions on the public budget in the context of the advance of the use of digital information and communication technologies (TDICs) in the world of work. In the second part of the article, concrete indications of the strengthening of the right by this anti-strike policy are shown, primarily through the expanded and only apparently progressive use of online transmissions of spaces for collective organisation and mobilisation, based on a documentary study and its examination.

As will be discussed, two union conceptions are in dispute: on the one hand, combative unionism, which organised the most significant federal education strike in Brazil's history; on the other, negotiating unionism, which has been transformed into virtual anti-unionism, opposing the strike and face-to-face teacher assemblies to a policy of increasing use of ICTs.

“The situation is serious; the solution is a strike² “: militant trade unionism and education struggles

Almost half of the federal public administration is concentrated in Education (Laurino, 2024) and was on strike in Brazil in 2024. There were 64 federal education institutions on strike, along with more than 500 campuses of federal institutes (FIs), technical schools, and military colleges, with technicians and teachers.³

Collapsing buildings with increasing water leaks in their structures, a reduced and overworked staff of outsourced workers, teachers and administrative technicians with salaries eroded by 40% due to inflation and more than a year at the negotiation table without an adequate response from the federal government: Brazilian federal education workers and students have every reason to fight and demand readjustment, budget restructuring, career restructuring and the repeal of the anti-democratic measures of recent governments (Sindicato Nacional dos Docentes das Instituições de Ensino Superior, Andes-SN, 2024; Druck and Filgueiras, 2024a).

As the education strike unified the technical and administrative sectors in Andes-SN, Sinasefe and Fasubra, the federal government somewhat improved its initial proposal. From the point of view of salaries, from the initial proposal of 9% in 2026, it went on to propose 9% in 2025 and 3.5% in 2026, which was an advance that demonstrated the strength of the mobilisation (Andes-SN, 2024). It would be inappropriate, however, to consider the strike as a movement only for salaries and civil service careers.

The absence of funds to restore the budget of the federal universities is a fallacy, as the Andes-SN strike report denounced. In Brazil, public funds are in dispute, not crisis or deficit. For its benefit, the National Congress has decided to allocate a record amount to parliamentary amendments, strengthening the discretionary use of the public budget, through which senators and deputies can allocate resources to their electoral bases: in 2022, the amount allocated to parliamentary amendments was R\$28.9 billion; in 2023, R\$37.3 billion; in 2024, it reached R\$53 billion (Andes-SN, 2024).

² Translator's note: Huelga, in Portuguese, is “greve”; therefore, the title plays with the sonority of the words “grave” and “greve” which, in Spanish, cannot be appreciated.

³ The educational strike began on 20 March, with the constitution of the National Strike Command by the administrative technicians (Federação de Sindicatos de Trabalhadores Técnico-administrativos em Instituições de Ensino Superior Públicas do Brasil - FASUBRA, 2024); the technicians and teachers represented by Sindicato Nacional dos Servidores Federais da Educação Básica Profissional, Sinasefe (2024) joined on 3 April; teachers represented by Andes-SN went on strike on 15 April. In some universities, students joined the striking workers, such as at the Federal University of Bahia, UFBA, where the student assembly convened by the Association of Graduate Students decided to go on strike on 8 May (Full name, APG UFBA, 2024).

The deterioration of the study and work structures of federal higher education institutions is directly related to a policy of disinvestment in Brazilian universities, which has been going on for a decade and is maintained in the Annual Budget Law of 2024 (Lei nº 14.822, 2024). The disinvestment accumulated losses of 2.5 billion reais between 2016 and 2024, considering nominal values, i.e. without considering the 50.7% inflation accumulated in eight years. If inflation is considered, the losses amount to R\$2.5 billion.

8.3 billion reais. Comparing the budget planning for the four years (2016-2019) with the multi-annual plan for 2020 to 2023, the allocation of public funds to higher education drops from 5% to 3% of the budget, with an annual deficit of approximately R\$5.8 billion (Coletivo Democracia e Luta, 2024).

In the case of the Federal University of Bahia, the budget accumulates losses of 87% in investment and capital funds, as exposed by the opposition collective of the teachers' union, based on a study by Diego Marques (Coletivo Democracia e Luta, 2024). This combines the underfunding of public universities, the high amounts earmarked for the private education sector and the increasing public education funding through parliamentary amendments. The amounts set aside for the private sector between 2024 and 2027 amounted to R\$11.6 billion, while the budget allocation for the public sector in the same period was R\$45.2 billion. The substitution of public sector spending by subsidising the private sector is a quarter of the amount foreseen in the Multiannual Plan (Rech, 2024).

Looking at discretionary spending on higher education in the Annual Budget Law, for expenses such as electricity, outsourced labour, etc., and investments such as building maintenance works, Rech (2024) notes a drop from R\$ 19.3 billion in 2016 to R\$ 13.1 billion in 2024, resulting in a loss of 32% in nominal values. When analysing the composition of these values, the share of parliamentary amendments increases from 5% in 2016 to 28% of total investments from 2022 onwards.

By contesting the public budget, the federal education strike allows for a rapprochement of economic and political struggles. It is no coincidence that the federal government rejected until the last minute the idea that the education strike had anything to do with the public budget and presented a denialist stance about the budget problems. As President Lula said in a statement on the strike, which was coming to an end: "It shows that the universities lack money and that the government has to find resources. A strike cannot be allowed to end by inaction" (Lula, 2024 in Tonet and Truffi, 2024).

Contrary to these assertions, it is possible to postulate a link between mobilisations for better working conditions, traditionally called economic strikes, and broader mobilisations for social reforms, i.e. the possible political implication of immediate strikes or the complementarity between economic and political strikes. Along these lines, Rosa Luxemburg (2010, p.286) deduces general points from the experiences, among which she emphasises: “(...) the economic struggle presents a continuity, it is the thread that unites the different political knots; the political struggle is a periodic fertilisation that prepares the ground for the economic struggles. Cause and effect follow one another, alternating incessantly (...)”.

The non-corporate strike mode finds particular relevance in growing strikes opposing the state and its bureaucratic mediations. Since the 2008 crisis, unprecedented strikes have occurred in Europe, demonstrating opposition to austerity agendas. These are often symbolic strikes, limited to one or two days, but with issues affecting the public sector and the regulation of collective bargaining (Nowak and Gallas, 2014, p.306).

In the case of the federal education strike, the expressions of this historical moment are revealed not only in the agenda of demands but also in the size of the mobilisation and the strength of union opposition to the policies of the Federação de Sindicatos de Professores e Professoras de Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior e de Ensino Básico Técnico e Tecnológico - Proifes/Federação⁴ in the Brazilian teachers' movement. A look at the Andes-SN data on the number of Federal Higher Education Institutions on strike in the last strikes helps us to size up the teachers' mobilisation in 2024: in 2001, 51 Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior- IFES; in 2005, 40 IFES; in 2008, 39 IFES; in 2012, 60 IFES; in 2015, 39 IFES; in 2016, 44 IFES (Andes-SN, 2022). In 2024, 64 IFES were on strike.

The year 2024, therefore, is the biggest in the Andes-SN historical series in terms of the number of IFES, comparable to the big strike of 2012 on the eve of June 2013. As in that period, the movement had a strong grassroots and oppositional trade union role. A common feature between 2012 and 2024 was the rejection by the Proifes grassroots unions of the agreements reached between the federal government and Proifes, with a significant dispute between the ruling sectors and the grassroots oppositions of the universities that have unions affiliated with Proifes.

Regarding union opposition, the education strike at the base of the Associação dos Professores Universitários da Bahia - Apub/Sindicato, then affiliated to Proifes/

⁴ For an analysis of the trade union concept of Proifes/Federação, its composition of phantom unions and its role as a support organisation for the federal government, see Mello and Dutra (2024a; 2024b).

Federação, deserves attention, in which the union leadership was defeated by the union opposition in all the assemblies teachers held during the strike. The actions of the leadership revealed a distorted conception of the union, as the notion of freedom of association claimed by the organisation is reduced to the politicisation of rules in a statute, in which certain rituals, such as board elections, are fulfilled for the board to acquire central political power. In a statement during an assembly of Apub teachers with more than 500 people with voting rights, a member of the Proifes board said that “no assembly in the country will decide what a legally constituted federation will do [in collective negotiations with the federal government, discussed by the assemblies]” (Castro Ramos, 2024), a repeated practice that reveals the prevalence of notarial power over the sovereign will of the category expressed in the assembly.

The rejection of face-to-face assemblies and the political practice of demonising, boycotting and stigmatising the debates and collective mobilisations engendered in this space reveal more than they claim. This is not just a policy against face-to-face assemblies but an attempt to put in their place something more “modern” and formally democratic from a “citizen’s” point of view.

In a symbolic text (Apub Sindicato, 2024c), the Apub leadership criticises the assembly because there was too much political violence, such as “shouting and booing” against those who affirm, in the assembly, that the position of the assembly has no legal or political value for the decisions of the federation. Instead of attributing violence to the autocratic and notarial exercise of union power detached from the will of the teachers’ assemblies, it is the assemblies themselves that are violent for criticising those who ignore collective decisions.

According to the political note, the teachers’ assembly of more than 500 people confronted the decision of the “majority” who voted, in a virtual poll, in a different direction from the one decided by the assembly. The people who voted in the survey reportedly did not attend the assembly because it was a “hostile” and “disrespectful” space without “basic conditions for deliberation”:

In summary, the deliberations of today’s assembly were alien to the opinion expressed by colleagues in the survey published yesterday, which seems to indicate that many do not feel comfortable attending the assembly, which

unfortunately presents itself as a hostile space, with several moments of disrespect, making impossible the primary conditions of deliberation with a democratic parameter. (Associação dos Professores Universitários da Bahia, n.d., 2024c)

The theme recovers and updates the momentum for the expansion of the use of ICTs at work, particularly strong during the COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced by the advance of e-learning in higher education and the expansion of teleworking, including in the civil service. According to Antunes (2023), this severe health crisis and inestimable socio-economic impacts have favoured the development of “new laboratories of capital experimentation” in different activities.

Other spaces of sociability and collective mobilisation have also been affected. The pandemic represented a catalyst for the challenges of establishing collective resistance in the trade union movement, especially for labour organisations. Examples of these changes are the holding of the unified May Day in a face-to-face format in 2020 (Ferreira, 2020) and the virtual assemblies of the Central Única dos Trabalhadores-CUT with more than 120,000 participants (Nuzzi, 2020).

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During the pandemic, especially in light of Provisional Measure No. 963, item II, article 17 (BRAZIL, 2020a) and the regulation of the Ministry of Economy, with Circular No. 1919/2020 (BRAZIL, 2020b), the authorisation to hold virtual assemblies was extended to trade unions. The virtualisation of spaces for trade union deliberation can be observed in the speeches of trade union representatives, such as that of the president of the National Confederation of Financial Workers (Contraf-CUT). According to her, pandemic social isolation has given way to a new culture, with new paths for trade union organisations, given that “telework is here to stay” (CUT, 2020). For Graça Costa (2021), Secretary for Trade Union Organisation and Policy of the CUT National Executive, assemblies and congresses must be “dynamic”, using virtual tools, as was experienced during the pandemic.

However, what does this “dynamism” consist of? Observing the policy of virtualisation of trade union life during the pandemic, in the CUT’s affiliated entities in the health, education and banking sectors, there was a limitation of the rights of participation and mutual recognition of members or, in the words of Campos (2020), there was a limitation in the contacts between the leadership and the rank and file without interaction and debate, by positioning those represented only as recipients of information, to the

detriment of the space for discussion, discredited alongside asynchronous voting (Campos, 2020).

Virtualisation has become law and, not by chance, supported by the Brazilian right wing. Law 14.309 (2022), the result of a bill by Senator Soraya Thronicke (former Social Liberal Party) and sanctioned by then President Jair Bolsonaro, was replicated by employers' unions (Federação das Indústrias do Estado de Minas Gerais - FIEMG, 2022; Sindicato das Indústrias Metalúrgicas, Mecânicas e de Material Elétrico e Eletrônico de São Leopoldo - SINDIMETAL-RS, 2022) as a legal framework authorising civil society organisations to hold virtual assemblies. However, in a notice published in 2023, a union in the banking sector affiliated with the CUT justifies holding a remote/virtual assembly under the terms of the legislation above (Redação Sindicato dos Bancários de São Paulo, 2023).

Among the services available to members of FIESP, Brazil's most prominent industrial organisation, is an agreement with two companies that offer platforms for virtual meetings and voting (Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo, 2024a; 2024b). In other words, employers' organisations are investing in technology to introduce new communication tools for their members.

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Presentiality poses dangers for capital, and the distance between those living in the same living and working conditions undoubtedly makes collective action more difficult. The employers who encourage this policy are responding appropriately to their class interests. Combative class organisations, such as the CUT unions, can only adhere to this policy within the transformation of combative trade unionism into a negotiating and citizen's trade unionism. This is a new moment that emphasises aspects summarised by Ricardo Antunes and Jair Silva (2015, p.525):

(...) the last decades seem to have pushed the new trade unionism towards a strange combination, a synthesis of at least three movements: the old peleguist practice,⁵ the strong statist heritage and the strong influence of the neo-liberal (or social-liberal) ideology, also driven by the cult of negotiation and the defence of the citizen.

Even if the trade union leadership analysed in this text limits the strike to a corporate process and restricts mobilisation and discussion activities to responses at the negotiating tables (Apud Sindicato, 2024b), the strong educational strike demonstrates the social

⁵ Pelegos has no translation; it is a term that refers to that type of union (or union leaders) who claim to represent the interests of the rank and file, but, in reality, respond to the interests of the bosses.



robustness of the political opposition to this conception of the movement and also the critique of an increasingly autocratic capitalist state, which submits to inhuman rules and codes stipulated by capital. In Harvey's (2016) interpretation, the advance of the contradictions of flexible accumulation is also the explosion, the contagion, and the growing pressure of the "necessary growth" of finance capital.

Within this framework of hot social analysis, the combined relationship between the attacks on public universities and education workers in the spaces of union mobilisation is worth addressing concretely. Suppose the social struggle in education makes it possible to connect economic demands, such as the search for wage increases, with political struggles, such as the dispute over public funds. In that case, it is also true that the growing use of TDICs is fraught with contradictions. The following is a study of the strengthening of rights during the social struggle of the education strike, with a look at the broadcast of the assembly to launch the strike at the UFBA.

Broadcast strike mobilisation and virtual anti-unionism: a case study from UFBA

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The discussion on strengthening the right by the anti-strike policy is the order of the day. It can be exemplified by the existence of editorials in prominent circulation newspapers against the strike by union leaders (Goulart, 2024) and by teachers' petitions against the power of the assembly to decide on the decision to go on strike, asserting the power of an online consultation (Bahia Notícias, 2024), as if the vote replaced the space for debate and collective conviction.

In this section, we have chosen to carry out this reflection based on a documentary study situated in the field of the analysis of the use of ICTs in trade union media, such as the online transmission of meetings and assemblies, as well as digital voting. Our study focuses on the effects of online transmissions of spaces for collective organisation and mobilisation of the teaching profession to discuss the hypothesis that this growing use of TDICs reinforces the discourse of the extreme right against the right to strike, the public university and education workers, mobilised in the context of the growing transformation of combative grassroots unionism towards negotiating unionism, as is the case of the leading political sector of the Apub- Sindicato, affiliated to the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT). In the situation analysed, it is possible

to evaluate the use of anti-union policies⁶ by sectors that are attacked by the new right in a broader political context, which denotes expressions of trade unionism's conformity to neoliberalism or anti-union policies.

The live broadcast of the UFBA teachers' assembly of 25 April 2024, which decided to initiate a strike in the institution, is taken as a singular source for our analysis, in which latencies or potentialities of the contradictions derived from the growing use of TDICs in the union's digital environment flourish and gain density. It combines a rejection of the class character of digital platforms and the instrument of strike action to result in a policy that undermines trade unions, teachers, the intelligentsia and discriminated sectors such as women, migrants, LGBTI+ and older people.

The selected video (Apub Sindicato, 2024a) has 15,000 views and more than 5,000 comments collected using the *Export Comments extraction tool*. The virtual chat of the video was kept open, with no restrictions for anonymous accounts or subscribers to the syndicate channel and no comments removed by moderation. The first step in selecting and filtering this universe was to choose descriptors such as "strike" and "vote". There were 934 mentions of the word "*strike*" among the comments and 147 mentions of "vote". The comments on "voting" express the centrality of the discussion of the issue and the pressure to speed up the teachers' right to speak to carry out the rite..

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After reading the comments and identifying the messages with offensive content, we segmented the main themes identified, following the categorisation stage of the content analysis method, using semantic classification criteria (Richardson, 2011). In this way, we classified the types of offence in the comments into the following categories: a) disparagement of trade union organisation and collective discussion; b) attacks on intellectuals and the university; c) attacks on teachers.

As for the messages of derogatory content directed at union organisation and collective discussion, several comments focus on the conduct and methodology of the teachers' assembly, disparaging the decision-making process and the spaces for debate among the members of the category, among which we highlight: "*One form [Google form]*

⁶ Anti-union policies are understood to be those that jeopardise the exercise of trade union functions by members, such as the right to decide matters in face-to-face meetings, with the right to speak and vote, and not only those anti-union policies that jeopardise the right to join or form a trade union. In the specific case under analysis, the anti-union acts or practices of Apub/Sindicato fit the definition of the Uruguayan jurist Oscar Ermida Uriarte (1989, p.9 et seq.), according to which anti-union conduct can be defined as that which "unduly harms a trade union right holder in the exercise of trade union activity or provokes it, or by which he is unjustifiably denied the facilities or prerogatives necessary for the normal development of collective action". In Luciano Martínez's definition, anti-unionism is also observed not only against trade unions, but also against trade unionists, hindering the exercise of individual or collective, positive or negative, organisational or national freedom of association rights (Martínez, 2013, p. 411).



and everything was already decided". Dozens of comments refer to the replacement of debate by voting. The social struggle is seen as a waste of time in this scenario. It is reduced to individual expressions by teachers as to whether or not they are interested in launching a strike, which, in this opinion, should only be determined by voting on digital tools.

Thus, the offensive comments collected reveal the perception of those unwilling to collectively build alternatives and forms of resistance, so the overvaluation of the virtual environment is presented as an opportunity to empty the political process of face-to-face mobilisation.

Hostile demonstrations are also marked by incitement to violence and arbitrary measures, albeit ironically. Comments encourage using physical force as a deliberative method and call for judicial intervention to obstruct the organisational process of the teaching profession. In this vein, some messages suggest the persecution and reprisal of teachers who took a stand in favour of the strike movement: *"It would be convenient to vomit on those who voted in favour"*. The space for decision is reduced to the possible damage resulting from their deliberation in a political analysis in which exercising the right to strike in education is understood as "detrimental" to students, who should mobilise, "swell"⁷, against the decision. Lula's government expressed the same position in a statement on the strike:

In this case of education, if you look at the whole picture, you will realise that there are not many reasons for this strike to last as long as it lasts. It is not Lula who is losing; it is not the rector who is losing; it is Brazil and the Brazilian students who are losing (Lula, 2024, in Mazui, 2024).

Capital sectors note the relationship between the increasing use of TDICs and the increased exposure of those involved in such activities. Pastore and Apostólico (2020) argue that the virtualisation of assemblies requires more significant preparation on the part of the leadership due to the rigorous monitoring of the grassroots and the public.

For the assembly public, political decisions would have to be taken lightly and without debate as a mere expression of the sum of individual wills since both the face-to-face meeting in assembly and the political instrument of the strike would be "outdated" or dysfunctional. The political and organisational methods accumulated by the Brazilian working class are attacked, with a particular aversion to face-to-face assemblies. This

⁶ Translator's note: the original concept is "torcida", which refers to the supporters of football clubs.

streamlining of the decision-making process aligns with neoliberal logic, which sees TDICs as a fundamental instrument for compressing the space-time of social relations (Harvey, 2011).

The analysis of the comments also reveals an anti-intellectual and anti-university orientation. Attacks on the teaching activity and the pro-strike position stand out, associating striking teachers with different negative personal and professional characteristics, such as laziness and carelessness, through messages such as *“nobody wants to get up early to work”*, *“laziness”* [derogatory term for a person with no occupation], *“the strike is a thing for cuckolds”*, *“no to the strike, you lazy bunch”*; lack of professional qualifications, when it is mentioned that *“teachers with less than two neurons can go on strike”*, *“I wonder if there are any exact sciences teachers there”*, *“you can’t believe these people are teachers”*; or even the use of psychoactive substances and mental disorders, for example, *“The CAPS [Psychosocial Care Centre] was released”*, *“Crack users in favour of the strike”*, *“So oh, this noinha [pejorative term for a drug user] is going to be in favour”*, *“She could only be a noia [pejorative term for a drug user] from history”*.

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It can be seen that these comments seek to delegitimise the strike movement by disqualifying professors and the activities they carry out in favour of the university, refuting the relevance of the struggle for better working conditions. The offensive against the civil service, implicit in these discourses, identifies civil servants as inefficient and opportunistic, who take advantage of the state as parasites, particularly in line with the ideology behind the Bolsonaro government’s administrative counter-reform proposal, when the Minister of Economy labelled civil servants as “enemies”, “privileged” and “inefficient” (Druck, 2021).

Aligned with the discourse of the extreme right and neoliberal measures, it is possible to verify other records calling for the privatisation of public universities and solid demands for private initiatives, such as “we have to privatise soon” and “those who have a PhD and think that 9k [a salary of 9,000 reais] is not enough, let them go to the private initiative”. Comments defending political figures representative of neo-conservatism, questioning universal emancipatory education and discrediting scientific knowledge were also published through comments such as Bolsonaro’s constant claim to be the only one capable of solving problems. The comments shed light on open disputes, especially with neoliberalism, over privatising public education, vindicating the extreme right and its public service policy.



In terms of attacks on teachers who made use of their right to speak at the assembly, there was a particular incidence of LGBTIphobic, sexist, ageist and xenophobic offences. The apparent anonymity of virtual interactions favours the emergence of offences directed at marginalised groups. Several comments were disparaging neutral language, which aims to address cis heterosexism and provide inclusive language for transgender and non-binary people. As if this segment of the population did not exist and did not deserve respect, the comments read: *“Teacher saying ‘Todes’?”*, *“Good afternoon to all, today, todos, plus, delusion, deals, lg, lgbt, love”*, *“alumnus”*.

In the same vein, there were LGBTIphobic insults against teachers during their speeches, such as *“let your hair down”*, *“the UFBA has active, passive and versatile”*, and *“where are the males against the strike”*. Just as the employment contract does not exclude the subjective elements of the worker, their participation in grassroots mobilisations is marked by the effects of LGBTIphobia. Below is a list of the main LGBTIphobic comments about teachers taken from the live broadcast:

Table 1 - LGBTIphobic comments

Is the professor talking all? hahahahahahahahahahah Todes meus oves [informal term for testicles, as well as neutral language]. Todes minha roles [informal term for penis, as well as neutral language]. A teacher who speaks a neutral language is an animal. Let your hair down [pejorative term for behaviour described as effeminate]. The UFBA has active, passive and versatile people. Querides hahahahaha Students hahahahahahaha Pabllo Vittar is in favour of the strike! Where are the anti-strike males? There are only doughnut burners [pejorative term for anal sex practitioners]?

Source: own elaboration.

The comments show that just as the workplace is sexualised and generally heterosexual (Borrillo and Formond, 2007, p.57), workers active in their union base are more exposed to ongoing abuse, contrary to their dignity and physical or psychological integrity. There is an intertwining between neoliberal practices of union action, such



as the transmission of sensitive discussions *online*, and neoconservatism expressed in derogatory comments, which expose LGBTI teachers more to situations of harassment.

In sexist comments against women teachers, physical aspects are questioned, such as age and tone of voice: “*crazy old woman*”, “*what a strange voice this woman has*”, and “*cut off this woman’s microphone*”. And registers that escalate to speeches of harassment with sexual connotations, such as “old woman with bad food, vote fast”. There is a firm distinction of gender discrimination, with hostility to the public participation of women professors in the university space and political debate. The main comments with sexist connotations are listed below:

Table 2 - Sexist comments

This woman is about to have a heart attack.
What a strange voice this woman has
Bad old food, vote fast!
The clown rolling
What’s that rude girl doing twirling around with her arm raised?
The woman is spinning; is she OK?
Why is this woman shouting?
The aunt is crazy
Is he crying? Analysis
congratulations on your vagrancy, Auntie Mia
vieja loka [pejorative term for an old person].

Source: own elaboration.

There were many derogatory comments at the assembly about the age of retired teachers. The comments referred to physical aspects of former teachers, pointing to an alleged age-related weakness: “*This one has his foot in the grave*”, “*the old man can’t even stand up*”, and “*If he raises his arm, God will take him away*”. Below is a table of the primary ageist attacks:



Table 3 - Ageist comments

He is retired, but he wants more money. Let him!
Madam, retire!!!!
The older woman stammers more than anything else.
crazy old woman
the coming wants to increase pensions
Older people have priority kkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkk
This one has his foot in the grave.
The older man can't even stand up.
Come on, man, back off.
Is that the retired teacher?
Who let this man out of the house?
Retire, my uncle
Almost with one foot in the grave
That's not good
Retire, Auntie
The dead are excluded.
Deathphobia
Let the living raise their hands.
Call SAMU [reference to Mobile Emergency Assistance Service medical rescue].
Retired, my aunt, go home.
You've done so much already; now enjoy your retirement, woman.
If he lifts his arm, God takes him away.

Fuente: elaboración propia.

When it was the turn of the foreign teachers, a series of xenophobic comments were observed, questioning the possibility of enrolling in the debate: *“I’m not being xenophobic, I’m just curious. Does a foreigner have a turn to speak?”*, *“the rule is clear: if you don’t speak Portuguese, you can’t have a right to speak”*. There were comments about the physical features of the teachers, comparing them to actors of Asian origin: *“Hispanic Jack Chan”*. Here are the main xenophobic comments:



Box 4 - Xenophobic comments

What happened to the Peruvian?

I am Peruvian!

La Cucaracha (referring to Latin American music)

Aloz with chicken [pejorative way of imitating the Asian accent, changing the “r” for an “l”].

Speak Portuguese!

Hispanic Jack Chan

The strike has already reached other countries.

el hermano quiere huelga [brother, name to refer to Argentines].

The rule is clear: if you don’t speak Portuguese, you don’t have the right to a voice.

Where are the subtitles?

Calm down Peruvian

Source: own elaboration.

The transmission of assembly spaces represents the spectacularisation of discussions, exposing participants to harassing discourses, mostly from students living in the same university environment. The possibility of relative anonymity favours the appearance of offences against marginalised groups, making their bodies, political conceptions and discourses more exposed.

In the case of the UFBA, Druck and Filgueiras (2024b) point out that the opposition movement, contrary to the strike, by advocating a virtual consultation as a broader and more democratic instance than the assembly, is breaking the ties and solidarity between teachers, weakening the process of struggle and the organisation of the category. These are the effects on the unions of three interconnected phenomena: the restructuring of production, the globalisation-financing of capital and the political-ideological rise of neoliberalism.

The anti-strike union leadership unreservedly defends adopting digital tools to increase participation, efficiency, agility and innovation without considering that such practices violate the rights and guarantees of teachers who participate in the mobilisation in person. The sample of comments analysed has a solid conservative and individualistic connotation, elements that are not unrelated to neoliberalism.

The virtualisation of trade union assemblies should be discussed from the perspective of the interaction between neoliberalism, public space and transformations in the meaning of collective organisation for trade union sectors. Virtualisation does not represent

a non-place but creates an environment of interaction and controlled social tension. Changes in the virtual spatial field of trade union assemblies modify the possibilities of intervention and the forms of political contestation of workers: “(...) those who dominate space can always control the politics of place” (Harvey, 2017, p.214).

The justification for the exposure of organisational spaces is based on the ideology that digital media can enhance social engagement and democratic action; such a justification clashes with concrete evidence revealing the proliferation of attacks on public universities, on the figure of the teaching worker, especially women, LGBTI+ people, older people and on working-class organisational spaces.

Final considerations

A major political struggle among Brazilian education workers has brought the dispute over public funding into the debate. Neoliberal policies have drastically reduced the budget allocated to education and have taken the issue out of collective discussions, regardless of the political group at the head of the federal government. Not by chance, and even though the teachers' movement placed the budget struggle at the forefront of its demands, the strike agreement drawn up by the federal government made no mention of the budget victories won by the movement.

While it is true that the Workers' Party is one of the main targets of the extreme right in Brazil, it is also true that Lula da Silva's federal government maintains and expands the fiscal policy that defunds federal educational institutions and makes the working conditions of teachers, administrative technicians and subcontracted workers more precarious. At the same time, the public budget is autocratically removed from political debate, immunising Brazilian democracy against the possibility of a dispute over public funds.

Neoliberalism advances in the federal government and its trade union arms. The dispute between combative unionism and virtual anti-unionism marked the 2024 federal strike in Brazilian education. The concrete study on the growing use of TDICs shows the advance of the transformism of sectors of the trade union movement. Neoliberalism attacks unions not only through repression but also persuasion: the actions of Proifes/Federação and the Apub/Sindicato board, studied in this text, reveal how anti-union politics is not only carried out by governments and employers but also by workers who do not believe in social struggle as a way to advance in politics.

In the UFBA's digital archives of strike activities, there was a proliferation of attacks on the public university, on the figure of the teaching worker, especially against women, LGBTI+ people, older people and the organisation of the working class. The sample of comments analysed has a solid conservative and individualistic connotation, elements symptomatic of the use of TDICs in the trade union sphere and the links between virtual anti-unionism and extreme right-wing politics in the country.

Opponents of the strike and the teachers they claim to represent, these sectors of the teachers' movement unreservedly defend the increasing use of digital tools under the logic of increasing participation, efficiency, agility and innovation without considering that such practices result in a violation of the rights and guarantees of teachers who participate in person in the mobilisation for the vindication of the rights of their category.

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ARTICLE

Capitalist crisis, human rights, and resistance through art

Crisis capitalista, derechos humanos y resistencia a través del arte

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Abstract

This article describes the advantages of art as a form of resistance against the triad of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism before moving on to popular artistic manifestations during the Chilean social explosion. Subsequently, three experiences of Latin American collectives and artists are analysed, whose worldviews are centred on resistance to this triad as a way of critically understanding the social injustices derived from cognitive capitalism, expressed in authoritarian power relations. We know the experience of art as a producer of critical subjectivity, mediated by counter-devices, as an effective strategy for creating spaces for social denunciation. The methodology is guided by qualitative research, specifically co-research, the fruit of narrative socio-analysis. This methodology, in connection with the proposals developed by the experiences of these collectives and artists, invites social workers to incorporate the use of art as a pretext for social transformation in their professional practices.

Keywords

: art; resistance; counter-device; qualitative research; narrative socio-analysis; counter-device; narrative socio-analysis.

Resumen

Este artículo describe las ventajas del arte como forma de resistencia contra la tríada compuesta por el patriarcado, colonialismo y capitalismo, para después aplicarlo a las manifestaciones artísticas populares durante el estallido social chileno. Posteriormente, analizamos tres experiencias de colectivos y artistas latinoamericanos cuyas visiones de mundo están centradas en la resistencia a esta tríada como una forma de comprender críticamente las injusticias sociales derivadas del capitalismo cognitivo, expresado en relaciones de poder autoritarias. Comprendemos la experiencia del arte como productora de subjetividad crítica, mediada por los contra-dispositivos, como estrategia efectiva para la creación de espacios de denuncia social. La metodología está orientada por la investigación cualitativa, específicamente la co-investigación, fruto del socioanálisis narrativo. Esta metodología, en conexión con las propuestas desarrolladas por las experiencias de estos colectivos y artistas, se convierte en una invitación a trabajadores/as sociales para incorporar en sus prácticas profesionales el uso del arte como pretexto para la transformación social.

Palabras Clave:
arte; resistencia;
contra-
dispositivo;
investigación
cualitativa;
socioanálisis
narrativo

Introduction

In this article, we describe the experience of three collectives/artists to find ways of critical reading for social transformation based on art and artistic expression as strategies for the essential construction of capitalist dominations and social problems. To this end, we describe the concept of crisis applied to cognitive capitalism and its consequences for independent and immaterial works. This crisis has been expressed, in an increasingly important way, in the field of art, which has been permeated by ideological practices that commodify and dilute creative processes in favour of political, ideological and economic interests. Thus, we describe the concept of the device to read the participants' experience through a qualitative methodology critically focused explicitly on narrative psychoanalysis (Curcio et al., 2017).

The crisis, in general terms, and according to McNamee (1996), implies a separation between social traditions constructed about specific discursive practices and personal ideas and perceptions, often countering these traditions. According to Gómez (2024), capitalism remains a totalitarian form over labour and bodies and continues to create conditions of precariousness in social, political and economic dimensions. The crisis of civilisation has created an unequal power relationship that is expressed in the precariousness of labour, the emergence of authoritarian power relations and the radicalisation of social relations, expressed in racism, xenophobia, and misogyny, among others (Rosario, 2023)

Cognitive capitalism

In recent decades, capital has shown a progressive decomposition and dematerialisation. The labour force has become increasingly separated from constant capital (Hardt and Negri, 2011) and is no longer tied to a specific location, as it was during Fordist capitalism. As a consequence, cognitive capitalism has developed, i.e. the co-optation of independent and usually immaterial labour, as opposed to the static labour of chain production.

The new information and communication technologies have become intertwined with immaterial labour, which has also acquired a “new centrality in the cultural industries” (Ribalta, 2010, p.243). Thus, cognitive capitalism knows how to capture all spheres with its immateriality, including desire, understood as the vital force composed of creativity, vitality, sensuality and willingness to change, and in the Fanonian sense, to political transformation (De Oto and Postléman, 2018).

Bifo (2003) has described this phenomenon as the “cognitariat”, a synthesis of “cognitive capitalism” and “proletariat”, the latter indicating the precariousness of immaterial labour. It implies “new forms of self-employment in the field of cultural industries and the emergence of a new highly skilled but simultaneously self-exploited, impoverished and precarious self-employed working class: the cognitariat” (Ribalta, 2010, p.243). The proletariat is connected to cognitive capitalism reflected in the emergence of professionals in the cultural field and the artistic-cultural industries, who see their labour rights undermined through job insecurity, the extension of working hours and the low expectation of lasting employment contracts, which is reflected in the absence of job stability and an imbalance between work and personal time, aspects that affect their quality of life.

Artists have become an essential element of post-Fordist production. Important strategies of cultural work, such as self-management and creativity, as well as supposedly anti-hierarchical and flexible labour structures, have replaced the disciplinary ones of the Fordist regime; similarly, the model of entrepreneurship, which in the case of Chile competes for funds in structures that do not differentiate specific types of work, including that performed by academics. Artists and cultural workers are the ideal workforce for this contemporary capitalism due to their enthusiasm, their high capacity for self-motivation and ingenuity, and the widespread assumption that they should not have high economic expectations in the field of the arts.

In this sense, capital penetrates and parasitises creativity (Fernández-Savater, 2003). For Rolnik, cognitive capitalism drains creative desire, fossilising and commodifying it in initially rebellious creative practices. Or it sponsors them and thus gets the sponsored to obey the orders of capitalism (Marxen, 2018; Ribalta, 2010). As a result, subjectivity is co-opted from its desire. The static obedience of the era of disciplinary power is exchanged for a fluid and equally submissive flexibility (Fernández et al., 2015).

This commodification of creative desire is possible because capitalism can assimilate a great quantity and variety of revolutionary content without risking its existence (Raunig, 2014). It knows how to turn revolution into spectacle and commodity. To confront it, the first step is to question what we do, our creativity and our criticality. In Ribalta's (2010, p.264) words: "Are we disrupting the logic of neoliberal capitalism and cultural industries, or are we reproducing and deepening it?"

How can artists achieve anti-capitalist resistance without inscribing themselves in the same capitalist logic? This is the question that has guided this work, the results of which are discussed with readers to consider a critical reflection that, based on three experiences of South American art collectives and artists, can propose an understanding of the impact of art on the social transformation of communities, based on heterodox languages, free from consumerist ideologies and resistant to the commodification of creative desire.

Of the device in times of social crisis

One way to understand the social crisis highlighted by a series of totalitarianism and strategies of subjugation to capitalist socio-political power is through the concept of the *dispositif*. Agamben (2014) describes the fundamental characteristics of the emergence of the *dispositif*: it acts as a network in the sense of a series of dispersed but interconnected elements, such as discourses, discursive utterances, laws, scientific propositions, etc. It has a strategic function, given that devices act in the mechanisms and games of power. Finally, the *dispositif* results from the relation knowledge – power: "It institutes a 'relational machine' that disposes someone according to a certain power relation (...) the agents involved participate procedurally in the reproduction of the *dispositif*" (Curcio et al., 2017, p.86). This is why Agamben states: "...devices must involve a process of subjectification, that is, they must produce their subject" (2014, p.16).

For Foucault (1994), the *dispositif* was “a formation whose main function is to respond at a given historical moment to an urgent need” (Holmes, 2006, p.147). In this sense, it responds to a societal need that can manifest as, a crisis. Likewise, the device is essential for communication, as it establishes a particular regime of enunciation that includes the arts. Devices are machines that make people see and speak, with the option of censorship included (Curcio et al., 2017; Deleuze, 1990). Deleuze, moreover, analysed the lines of rupture, fissure and fracture that each device entails: “Devices thus have as their components lines of visibility, of enunciation, lines of force, lines of subjectivation, lines of rupture, of fissure, of fracture that intersect...” (1990, pp. 157-158). And it is mainly the lines of subjectivation that are suitable for breaking with the old ones in favour of the creation of new devices: “Every device is thus defined by its tenor of novelty and creativity, which at the same time marks its capacity to transform itself or to fissure itself for the benefit of a device of the future” (Deleuze, 1990, p.159). It is the passage from the recent past to the near future, from history to events.

Now, the necessity of our contemporaneity, the “structural imperative” (Holmes, 2006, p.147), can be seen in a “cognitive creativity” that answers to cognitive capitalism and the shaping of subjectivities to the mandates of this late capitalism (Plaza, 2023). At the same time, fissure lines can break these mandates to develop liberated creative subjectivities and desires, leading to social and political transformation, as seen in the example of the artistic practices described below.

Bursts

In recent years, we have also witnessed lines of fissure in the form of collective protests, insurrections and social outbursts against late-capitalist and environmental exploitation and more social justice and recognition of human rights, as well as the rights to health, education and public, quality and stable pensions. We should clarify that we maintain the term “social outburst” in our text instead of “social awakening, social revolts, overflow,” etc. However, we know the criticisms raised, particularly for evoking the ephemeral without doing “justice to its importance within an extensive and profoundly transformative process for the country” (Plaza, 2023, p.7). However, we are more convinced by the term’s “etymological roots with the word ‘splinter’” (Plaza, 2023, p.7). In other words, it is a process that explodes and breaks a whole, in this context, the neoliberal state completely, without the possibility of repairing it without fissures.

We are also aware that this is not a geographically, socially, or politically isolated event in Chile. We have observed outbursts in other countries: Colombia (2021), 15-M in Spain (2011), the Arab Springs in the Middle East, Africa (2010-2012) and even in the USA with *Occupy Wall Street* (2011), with the content of these protests and demands coinciding pretty closely.

In 2019, Chilean society exploded against the malaise produced by neoliberalism over the last half century, first by the extreme capitalism installed during the military dictatorship and imported by the Chicago Boys, followed by the neoliberal perpetuation of the post-dictatorial Concertación.

The protagonists and participants of the explosion massively opposed the neoliberal status quo and “the dissolution of the social bond” produced by neoliberalism itself (Plaza, 2023, p.80). They created spaces for meeting, debate, discussion, and interaction, a new collectivity and relationality. These protests were articulated mainly in public space, with or through the arts, artistic activities and creative expressions, as “street making” (Cristi, 2023, p.19).

The arts allow for the most effective forms of resistance to “raise critical gazes at the paradigm of production of subjectivities in a community” (Plaza, 2023, p.74). However, we need a type of critical art that knows how to “produce changes in the collective interpretation of reality” to jointly evoke an alternative, anti-capitalist future (Plaza, 2023, p.75).

One of the main advantages of the arts is their greater symbolic effectiveness compared to verbal and written language. They operate with a freedom that allows them to go beyond what is verbally prescribed. This is due to their ability to condense different times in a single work, which can include the denunciation of a present malaise or injustice, with its possible causes in the past, and can simultaneously open the horizon to announce possible alternatives: a different future, a future freedom. This temporality in the arts is not necessarily linear. One of the advantages of artistic language is the possibility of interrupting or even breaking the imperatives of linearity. In this way, dominant discourses can be interrupted or recomposed, and alternative narratives can be found (Marxen and González, 2022; 2023; Vattimo, 2005; Gadamer, 1997).

In Chilean cities, the walls shouted and manifested the ‘rudder blows in the face of political becoming’ (Plaza, 2023, pp. 8-9; Red Conceptualismos del Sur, 2019). Without



following the neoliberalist superficiality and co-optation of the so-called ‘relational aesthetics’ (Bourriaud, 2006; Ribalta, 2010), we want to highlight the solid relational aspect of the arts during the explosion. They invited, reflected and supported public debates. Their scope was social interaction of a political nature. The recipients of the art of the blast “are constitutive participants in the piece or artistic action” (Plaza, 2023, p.75). The new artists committed to social transformation operate instead as facilitators who make these processes possible to recover the “creative, recreational, imaginative, expressive, impressionistic capacities of the common [...] for the flow of sensitive communication” (Delgado, 2020, p.137; Echeverría, 2010). This flow had to resist state repression in Chile and other countries.

Yet “the visual languages of the struggles of the present are interwoven with those actions that shaped the struggles of the past and, at the same time, with those of the future” (Cristi, 2023, p.16). Benjamin (2022) analysed the technical reproducibility of art and how art can serve politics. His text seems more current than ever if we consider the digital possibilities for interventions and archives of protest art (Ureta, 2023). However, we concur with Benjamin’s warning that reproducibility has to happen with a critical attitude (Marxen, 2019).

In Chile, one form of resistance has been related to the graphic and muralist practice of the Unidad Popular, under the term “graphic memory” and “ecology of visual resistances”, emphasising the dynamic character of these practices, especially the technical and conceptual developments in the graphic crafts (Cristi, 2023; Manzi and Cristi, 2016; Aguirre and Chamorro, 2008). Furthermore, the articulations of the outburst have taken up, both graphically and in terms of content, the Penguin Revolution (2006) and the Student Movement (2011) (Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y el Patrimonio, 2022). We consider that a strong performative aspect emerged at two specific moments in 2006 and 2011, which was taken up and further developed during the outbreak. However, we reject the idea of a linear development between the events, because of the plurification of the demands and the participating groups since 2019 (Dardot, 2023), who deployed an impressive artistic variety in the form of: “murals, photographs, serigraphs, chants, dances, photomontages, parades, poems, graffiti, banners, *stickers*, interventions on public statuary, masks, costumes, memes, batucada, costumes, performances, stencils, choreographies, flops, rituals, sculptures, posters and canvases” (Plaza, 2023, p.65).

This artistic expansion and variety, which has enriched the protests in recent times, as Patricio Guzmán noted in his film *La cordillera de los sueños* (2020), is summed up in the

phrase “writing together the memory of the future” (Dardot, 2023). Or, as the collective Las Tesis intoned it with a choreography that went around the world and exposed the validity of gender violence. These manifestations broadened the variety of narrative, visual and performative forms of social, political and ideological interests, which show the pertinent and current relationship of art as a form of resistance arising from collectives and organised subjectivities, which seek to tell the story with a different set of facts.

We can explain these ways of unveiling social reality with a diversity of devices, as in the previous examples, with the Deleuzian concept of the event that aims at “a new existence”, producing at the same time new subjectivities in the form of “new relations with the body, with time, with sexuality, with the environment, with culture, with work...” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993, in Pelbart, 2023, p.128). In these new experiences, “what was previously experienced as inevitable suddenly appears intolerable, and what was previously not even imaginable becomes thinkable, desirable” (Pelbart, 2023, p.128). What leads to events is an exhaustion that can be political, biopolitical, macro, micro or mesopolitical.

This detachment or emptying is what Deleuze called “rarefaction” that pushes the invention of new becomings, “the creation of the possible” (Pelbart, 2023, p.129), in short, to points “of inflexion in history” (Plaza, 2023, p.8).

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Figure 1. Marxen (2019). The streets of Valparaíso during the burst.

In these moments of maximum uncertainty, a very high degree of creativity is required first to conceptualise exhaustion and then express it to turn it into a new world to come, into “a new mode of existence” to be created. It is a matter of nothing less than “inventing new possibilities of life, new ways of existing” (Pelbart, 2023, p.130).

Artists such as Eduardo Molinari and the duo Iconoclasistas (both from Buenos Aires) have described these dynamics of fusing thinking with feeling in favour of new ways of inhabiting the world and against neoliberalist plundering as “feeling-thinking” (Marxen and González, 2023).

Molinari and Iconoclasistas are already examples of artists who present an effective resistance to capitalism, including colonialist environmental exploitation. We need such devices to confront the triad (capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism) since events that aim to resist only one aspect of this triad, for example, capitalism alone, risk perpetuating racial and neo-colonial injustices, as well as reproducing patriarchal systems. And if we only focus on opposition to patriarchy, we are likely to reproduce white feminism, which merely favours white, upper-middle-class women.

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This article focuses on *artistic devices* that have taken the form of counter-dispositions. They oppose both neoliberal logic and the disciplinary controls of the state and totalitarian politics, challenging the cooptation, usurpation and neutralisation of the arts and creative desire by neoliberal power agencies.

Methodology

We start from a qualitative methodology that becomes a situated activity in which the relations between the researcher and the community must become intersubjective (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). We also consider it as an encounter that produces subjectivities through artistic and poetic devices as performative strategies for the production of new meanings mediated by art and poetry (Marxen and González, 2023).

Accordingly, we start with the contributions of narrative socioanalysis (Curcio et al., 2017), which focuses on the generativity of narratives as situated constructions and how these narratives impact the communities from which they emerge. We consider alternative narratives as a fundamental axis in co-research, given that: “These spaces offer different models, opposed to hegemony, capable of deconstructing institutionalised lives and situations of domination” (Marxen, 2022, p.5).

The most suitable way to account for the subjectivity of communities that have usually been denied their rights and made invisible by society is through the claim of movements and artists who empower everyday expressions that “affirm a differential form” in opposition to capitalist, colonialist and patriarchal axiomatics, to reach “minor forms that appear as foci of resistance and lines of flight that are realised as spaces of self-determination” (Ezcurdia, 2023, p. 203).

Thus, subjectivities arrive at new representations centred on their critical and symbolic efficiency, which refract dominant and hegemonic discourses (Ezcurdia, 2023; Marxen, 2016). This allows the generation of a “minor language” in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari (1978), which starts from the margins of mainstream thought, where it can activate its hidden potential (Marxen, 2012; Fortun, 2010).

Against this background, we describe the experience of three contemporary collectives/artists who create a series of artistic strategies to express social subjectivity by constructing shared and collectively created knowledge. The most important selection criterion was the artists’ ability to continuously break with dominant capitalist, patriarchal, and colonialist discourses and with sophisticated symbolic efficacy.

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Following Stake (2013), we chose to select three collectives/artists through deliberate sampling, drawing on the specificity of the characteristics that frame the artistic work of the participants, thanks to previous encounters and knowledge of their creative strategies in particular social contexts. After contacting them and proposing a space for asynchronous conversation, they were interviewed virtually, with questions adapted to the specific practices of each artist/collective, in addition to interweaving bibliographical sources on their work and, above all, images of their works with the aim of softening, through art, the power relations between the participants. The interviews with Mujeres Creando, Danny Reveco, and Cholita Chic were conducted through questions about the objectives and resistance each of these artistic proposals seeks. From the interviews, an analysis of the most significant phrases was carried out to include them in the article, using an analysis of recurring themes (Wodak and Meyer, 2003).

Mujeres Creando

Mujeres Creando (MC hereafter) is an anarcha-feminist collective that emerged in La Paz, Bolivia, in 1992. Its primary mission is to fight “effectively against machismo, colonialism and neoliberalism” (Marxen and González, 2023, p.87).

This collective runs a self-managed cooperative shelter, Virgen de los Deseos, for women who have suffered violence, which defines itself as “a space of political fiction, a utopia, a uchronia, a laboratory in which to imagine how we would live in a post-patriarchal and radically decolonised world” (Preciado, 2022, p.12).

MC has created a series of artistic strategies to give an account of its objectives as a collective, to make concrete denunciations of abuses, as well as to consolidate spaces for social denunciation through artistic expressions such as graffiti, performance, *Radio Deseo* and films such as *Mamá no me lo dijo* (2004). In short, they develop a series of “practices of rebellion and deinstitutionalisation of violence” that they call “depatriarchalisation” (Preciado, 2022, p.18). As a result, the collective generates diverse actions to defend Bolivian women’s and other populations’ rights. Thus:

We constitute a space of reference for justice, a factory of justice and collective struggle against the violation of the rights of women, children, adolescents, young people and the LGTBIQ+ population in cases of male violence, such as family violence in all its expressions, rape, femicide, fatherhood irresponsibility, bank usury, harassment and abuse at work and other problems that affect the population we work with. (MC-Patricia Galindo, personal communication, April 2, 2024)

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The previous quote shows the expression of co-research within the daily activities of the collective, which is related to the impact of narrative socio-analysis (Lara, 2020; Arribas, 2020). Similarly, the actions developed allow for a free flow of events focused on social denunciation, which impacts the community’s social imaginaries. It is possible to see the diversity of narrative media, and actions focused on everyday dimensions to publicly express these rights violations.

MC has become a movement that definitely impacts respecting women’s rights and vulnerable populations. It can also be observed that the range of discrimination includes other types of silent violence, such as bank usury (Toro et al., 2010), fatherhood irresponsibility and labour abuse.

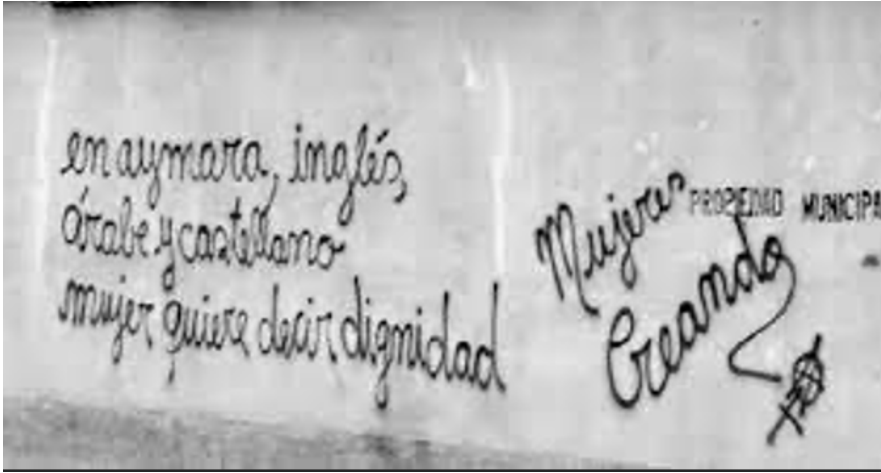


Figure 2. *Mujeres Creando* (2019). Graffiti made by *Mujeres Creando* on one of the walls (public space) of the city of La Paz - Bolivia.

The art, as shown in Figure 2, is a statement of principle about the intentions of the MC collective, expressed in the semantic equivalence of the words dignity and woman. In this case, the disruption of the blank space of a wall creates an alternative meaning, with a phrase superimposed on a previously written sentence: “municipal property”. Two types of phrase are superimposed; one, institutional, declaring a property owned by a municipality, with another phrase that restructures the properties of the wall. The handling of the blank space of the wall, which has its stable meaning, is re-signified by the construction of the graffiti, which expands the sense of interpretation by the passer-by.

It is also worth highlighting the insistence and constancy of MC’s graffiti activity: “It is not one graffiti, it is thousands; it is not one place, it is four cities; it is not the centre of the cities, but all imaginable spaces; it is not one theme, it is a chain of themes” (Galindo, 2022, p.120). The relationship between the arts in MC is established before any initial intervention in the very configuration and construction of the collective’s meaning. This allows us to think that graffiti is not an isolated expression but is interconnected as a work of expansion and movement.

In our very name, “Mujeres Creando” is the verb that signifies a transcendent part of what constitutes us as a movement. This verb also evokes one of our most essential forces, which is also our most fertile method of action for the struggle, which is creativity. (MC-Danitza Luna, personal communication, 30 March 2024; underlined in original)

The actions carried out by MC start from creativity as an axis of reconfiguration of reality; this dimension becomes an essential aspect to consider, given that, as seen in previous paragraphs, subjectivities, in this case, the MC collective, reach the construction of new representations, centred on graffiti and other social interventions, radio programmes and public denunciations, as a minor language that criticises hegemonic discourses (Marxen, 2012). Thus:

Creativity means a more fertile ground and engine for action, free from definitional disputes, delimitations, hierarchies and vertical classifications. We do not call ourselves artists, activists, or activists who use art as a mere tool to communicate their struggles (MC-Danitza Luna, personal communication, 30 March 2024)

For Galindo (2022, p.118): “Creativity is the skin with which we touch and explore our society, seeking and intuiting its erogenous zones, its everyday sensitive zones, its pain zones, its pleasure zones, its vetoed historical memory”.

They reject institutionalised, academic art: “As an anti-racist, anti-capitalist and feminist social movement, we establish that we do not have a utilitarian or servile relationship with the arts as they are defined” (MC-Danitza Luna, personal communication, 30 March 2024). Although they do use academic art to take up their proposals for critical and social intervention:

it is necessary to resort to symbolic historical references that come from these studies and that serve to deepen any current debate that we want to raise; we have no problem in doing so or even rethinking the hegemonic discourses that have been formed on these historical references. (MC-Danitza Luna, personal communication, 30 March 2024)

They insist that

creativity is not a power that should only be restricted to the purely artistic world. ...all our symbolic and concrete work of struggle is based on this principle; our main stage is the street. (MC-Danitza Luna, personal communication, 30 March 2024)

Understanding creativity as a force that encompasses all spheres of life and struggle has already had a strong tradition in Latin America (see, for example, the work and texts of Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica and Mário Pedrosa).

The relevance of the street as a space for artistic and critical production deserves attention in MC, and for the works/interventions referred to in this article. This preference is due to the importance it has for any political dispute and social struggle. The street and public space are not places of consensus, but of dissent. This is also true for the art that takes place there: it must generate dispute (Szmulewicz, 2023; Mouffe, 2021). Disputation operates as an act of resistance that is gestated in the public for an itinerant and active audience, without any institutional confinement. This is precisely characteristic of the methodologies of the “South”, anti-extractivist. Their validity is oriented to their capacity to support, initiate, sustain and strengthen social struggles (Cusicanqui, 2015; Marxen and González, 2023; Marxen, 2020). And an ideal way to account for these social struggles is, precisely, to use the public space of the streets to carry out critical processes that impact all possible audiences and publics, generating a deconstruction of the meaning of what the work of art is. In other words, from the street MC deinstitutionalises the artistic creative process (Galindo, 2022).

Their work has occasionally reached hegemonic events on the global art circuit. They have been invited to the 31st Sao Paulo Biennial (2014), Documenta XIV (2017), Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid (MNCARS, 2000-2001), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (MUSAC, 2011). María Galindo has been invited to the 57th and 60th Venice Biennale (2015 and 2024). One of the highlights of the 60th edition of the Venice Biennale was a critical encounter with the artist Sandra Gamarra (Arteinformado, 2024). Galindo (2022) appreciates the debates developed in these events and did not feel disciplined by them. She emphasises the pragmatism they can benefit from, thanks to their rigorously critical attitude towards the official institutions of international art.

As a consequence of the above, the work of MC has transformed the critical practices of feminist movements in Latin America, emphasising some actions for the achievement of these critical practices, which is to go from the pedagogy of indignation to the pedagogy of collective feminist struggle:

Our feminism is concrete, it can be touched, it can be read in a sentence against a rapist, it can be drawn in a law proposal for women, it is concrete in the accompaniment of hundreds of women in abortions, in the recovery of the sons

and daughters of hundreds of mothers, in saving women from the trap of bank usury, in teaching them how to apply feminist self-defence, in each and every one of the radio documentaries made by María Galindo to, for example, return a femicide to prison immediately, among so many other concrete actions that can be named. We don't just discuss our feminism, we get down to work to achieve visible results. (MC-Raíza Zeballos, personal communication, 30 March 2024)

The above comment shows the actualisation that for Galindo (2022) is a central part of MC. They act under the “feminist principle that ‘nobody represents anybody’” (p.106). This implies that they do not assume a self-proclaimed exclusive leadership, which makes them lose their principles of collaboration and disinterested work, which is related to their ideological positions based on a direct and reliable intervention, but without protagonism.

They clearly, effectively and continuously develop multiple counter-devices to combat patriarchalism, colonialism and neoliberalism, including environmental extrapolation:

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Mujeres Creando integrates a series of struggles that we consider an integral part of the feminist struggle, an anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist struggle, which is why we cannot close our eyes to what is being done with our forests, our reserves, against the Indigenous peoples of the Bolivian Amazon. (MC-Julietta Ojeda, personal communication, 30 March 2024)

The construction of artistic strategies of denouncing MC is a clear example of the relationship of collective action with shared meanings: it allows the experience of free writing and expressions, isolated from totalising discourses and turned to society itself with alternative meanings about social assumptions and imaginaries. This relates to the relational sequences that shared action representations have (Gergen and Gergen, 2011). Without going too far, shared action is the possibility of social construction of social meanings, which have their meaning in interpersonal relationships. In other words, meanings have a relational basis, anchored in language. In the case of MC's artistic strategies of denunciation, it is a collective action, thanks to the fact that: “... mental representations are not private individual possessions. They are components of relationship” (Gergen and Gergen, 2011, p.48). In this sense, the shared meanings of collective action are a social and mediated construction of the experiences to which MC invites us for a reconfiguration of reality, mediated by art and social denunciation.

Cholita Chic

Since 2010 this has been the pseudonym of the artist from Arica who dedicates herself to photography and portraiture, inspired by the art and culture of the Andean American chicha, the figure of the chola, *pop art* and the tripartite border culture between Chile, Bolivia and Peru. It is worth noting that the definitions of ‘chola’ provided by the RAE’s dictionary of Americanisms, itself a colonialist linguistic and cultural domination, set the trend in its derogatory treatment of women¹. These definitions are resemanticised in the work of Cholita Chic, moving from a pejorative and aggressive connotation to a form of female empowerment based on the everyday, the poetic and the photographic. This allows for a re-reading of the word chola, pragmatically re-signifying its social meanings

In the context of colonial history and “tripartite cultural circulation”, she vindicates Andean, border, migrant and Aymara beauty. “[I]n pursuit of empowering ourselves as Latin Americans” her works reflect “strength, colour, diversity, sensuality, empowerment, sensitivity, appropriation of bodies and resistance to the Euro-white mandate” (Colavitto, 2019, para. 5). Thus, her work addresses and discusses the concept of beauty itself, in a colonial and patriarchal context.



Figure 3. Cholita Chic (2020). Mural in Arica.

¹ <https://www.asale.org/damer/chola>



She also places herself in a context of colonial wounds and exploitation: “We are very far from having justice for the people, everything is being privatised more and more every day. Chile does not belong to the Chileans and South America does not belong to the South Americans”. For this reason, it is essential to have “creative militant practices, every day, [since] we are very far from having justice for the people”. In this sense, the visual arts have awakened “the rebellious unconscious of creative militant practices” (CC-Cholita Chic, personal communication, 28 April 2024).



Figure 4. Cholita Chic (2022). Profile picture.

She wants to build images from liberated memories from “bodies - racism - pain - migration and soundscapes” that are especially relevant in cross-border areas. She points out the importance of reaching an “awareness for women’s rights, but with cultural poetic action” (CC-Cholita Chic, personal communication, 28 April 2024) which is a form of resistance with symbolic effectiveness that does not forget poetry, in the sense of a struggle that refers to sensibility. The incorporation of poetry as a form of raising awareness of women’s rights owes its impact to the symbolic efficacy of the poetic, as a provocateur of broad and critical readings of a particular event. According to Marxen and González (2023), cultural poetic action could be framed as a poetic device given that it is “...a multimodal, multisituated and relational strategy, which allows the expression and understanding of phenomena of human life, mediated by verses and created to account for subjective processes” (p.111). Thanks to this poetic action,

it is possible to interpret re-signified images of an experience, converted in turn into sensitive expressions that allow a reconfiguration of that memory, previously centred on oppression, and now converted into a sensation of real and practical liberation.

This is expressed in the following poem in response to the question: What has been the impact of your work in raising awareness of women's rights in the area, by extension, Latin America and especially for Indigenous women?

My body made of bodies
 My body as the first territory
 My body made of bodies
 My body is tripartite
 My body is colonised

My body is from the earth and the desert
 My body is in the sea
 My body is on the border
 So far the borders are illusory - until you get to the border crossing.
 (CC-Cholita Chic, personal communication, 28 April 2024)

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Danny Reveco

Danny Reveco is a Chilean multimedia artist who integrates different techniques, such as performance, graffiti and the artist's own corporeality, and who "from a critical and decolonial perspective explores themes of anonymity, history and identity" (López, 2022, para.6). Reveco's connection with art and the street is significant, given that it is a way of giving an account of a critical reading of how art is understood on a daily basis, with lessons that transcend beyond the walls of a museum or a regular exhibition, shifting the stage to the common space, the wall and the social context:

We have become accustomed to thinking that art has to be in a sanitised and comfortable place, with a specialised network that guarantees you validation and appreciation of your work with literate criteria regarding the image you propose. Or the public space itself, which is the institutionalisation of the street, with rules and permits that limit street practices, under that sanitising and domesticating gaze on certain artistic practices. I feel that art doesn't have much to do with that, that it doesn't have to ask permission or be liked by those



in power, ... I choose the street because it is dirty, contradictory, it is a space in dispute, a place where historical struggles are fought, daily struggles of survival and resilience, multiple layers make it up and cover it with memories, different looks cross it, the street is a complex space that tends to escape and that bothers many people. (DR-Danny Reveco, personal communication, 30 April 2024)

The displacement of art to a space in permanent dispute, such as the street, breaks with the semantic fence of the univocity of the artistic interpretation of an object (be it a painting, a work, a sculpture) to become a counter-device to be filled in the passer-by's own experience, who gives an alternative meaning to his everyday life, his routine, which reconfigures the experience of a new possibility of life (Pelbart, 2023)



Figure 5. Danny Reveco (2021). *Enough of impunity*. Peripheral Festival. Pudahuel, former courthouse.

Reveco rightly insists on the importance of popular knowledge and he himself claims to come from the popular sectors. Without romanticising or idealising poverty, these are the places “where privileges are scarce... that interest me and that feed my creative process; observing, conversing, they are where ideas are incubated” (DR-Danny Reveco,

personal communication, 30 April 2024). In accordance with the above, Reveco's work considers the relevance of popular logics as an emerging form of knowledge, which promotes creativity, the astuteness of the alternative. Thus, his reflections resonate with the capacity and potency of the "differential forms" and "minor languages" described in the methodology.

This makes the artist part of the experience of art as a social production, which arises from these popular logics. There he feels "part of it, I'm one more, I'm a learner and observer, I don't feel like a representative of anything, but part of a whole. People know a lot and they are my first point of reference. Sometimes you just have to listen and that's enough work" (DR-Danny Reveco, personal communication, 30 April 2024).

Thanks to them, it is possible to develop "an art that seeks a bridge with its own history, with the memory of its territory, to look with distrust at the official narrative of imposed history" (DR-Danny Reveco, personal communication, 30 April 2024), as today.

artists from the first nations who are making a historical reflection that this country [Chile] has silenced and made invisible ...because they have whitewashed our identity to the point of not recognising our brownness and all that the nation state has generated to set itself up as such, all the racism and dispossession that has been silenced with euphemisms. That is why what the whole generation of Mapuche artists is doing, for example, is of radical value, ... Or the colleagues who come from the popular sectors, we are also breaking down the barriers, occupying spaces that used to belong to a privileged few, ...and I see that in this matter of imaginaries in art, it does super good, it refreshes a whole scene and raises other challenges, other questions. (DR-Danny Reveco, personal communication, 30 April 2024)



Figure 6. Danny Reveco (2023). No +—. Frame of the video at 12 channels.

Exhibition *El lenguaje no alcanza* (Language is not enough). Valparaíso Cultural Park. Registration Renata Campodinico.

It is about artistic practices that know how to confront the triad of colonialism, patriarchy and neoliberalism. In the current context of domination, devastation, genocide, of “a world that is veering to the right in a maddening way”, it is not the task of artists alone to oppose this,

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I feel that something interesting is happening here that has to do with the proliferation of reflections from different places of enunciation that point towards a critical crossroads. It is no longer the old partisan left, the vanguard with the male bastion of truth and of what should be done and thought. Now it is different groups, communities and collectivities that are weaving together a complex reflection.... A very propitious place for the political imagination because situated reflections sprout from different corporalities, constructing rendering of the imaginable possible, giving a face, putting the body, collectivising the displeasure. From there, a certain type of Art emerges that accompanies these processes, forms part of them, raises pertinent reflections from a propositional, counter-alienating place. (DR-Danny Reveco, personal communication, 30 April 2024)

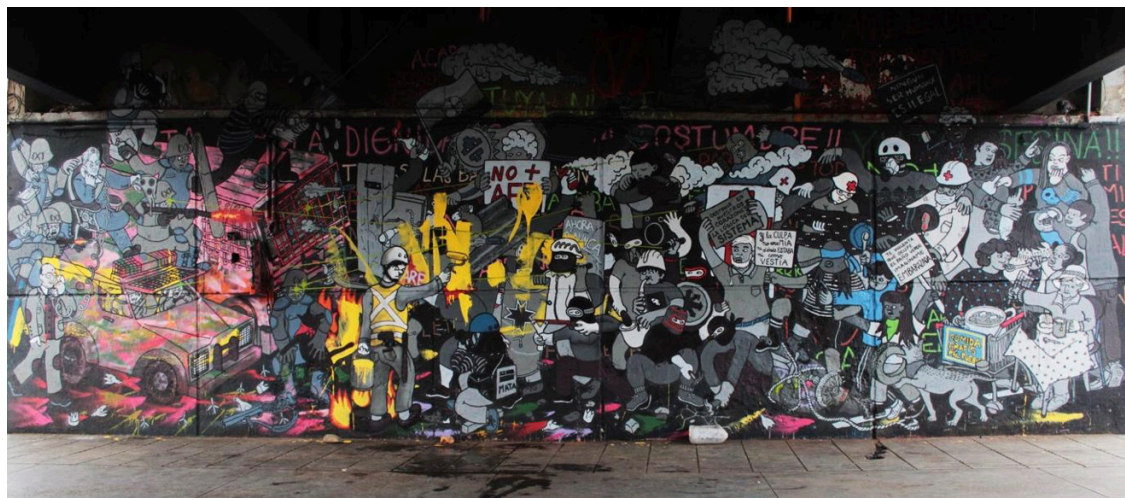


Figure 7. Danny Reveco (2019-2021). *When Chile is over. Nudo Barón, Valparaíso.*

Reveco describes the role of the “new artists” who go beyond representation, acting as facilitator-participants to make social transformation possible with the people. With Reveco’s affirmation of the use of the street as a dirty, contradictory and disputed space for the realisation of his works, one can see the relevance of creating an alternative space to present art as a moment of convergence of historical struggles, memories, which generates not only reflection in passers-by, but also a mixture of often contradictory feelings. This opening up of meanings is a pretext to disperse and atomise the dominant narratives, usually coined for institutional art. In other words: “Many contemporary artists ...share an eagerness to oppose totalising, dominant narratives as well as universalisable responses in order to de-totalise their works...” (Marxen and González, 2022, p.3).

In this way, to relate Reveco’s work to the proposals we describe in this article on artistic and poetic counter-devices, his works configure an alternative sense of art, usually understood as stable and timeless, to be a work in movement, re-signified at the moment of its creation and appropriated by audiences, with a social sense, which dynamises not only the relationships of audiences with art, but the impact that art has on the understanding of everyday life.

Confluences and final reflections

We reaffirm the importance of public space for all three participants. Danny Reveco and MC highlight the importance of the street for their work, and Cholita Chic also acts in the public space, especially with her murals. In this sense, they all make use of the walls in the public space. It is there that they shake and re-signify the social imaginary, against the triad of capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism.

Moreover, the work of all three stands out for its continuity (manifested, for example,

in the insistence of MC's graffiti on a spatial and temporal level), collectivity (MC's collective work, Danny's confluence and dialogue with social movements and communities) and particularly for its symbolic efficacy. These three elements have already been highlighted as a value of Latin American critical art of the 1970s and 1980s for its effective political resistance (Marxen, 2019). This resistance has allowed, as a common aspect of the three artists/collectives, to consolidate the idea that the artist, from their field of action, contributes to social criticism thanks to the construction of their works as a device that moves alternative senses to understand the social reality of Latin American countries, which undoubtedly contributes to the academy, to create bridges between social artistic work and the awareness of phenomena that impact the quality of life of the people in Latin America.

Likewise, the artists mentioned above have successfully leapt beyond the canonical genres of institutionalised art to bring their works and practices into the public, political and community spheres. This expression of art offers a critical perspective, which confirms the need to create spaces of resistance through art that is the product of collaborative actions, centred on collective construction, opening up the constant transformation of society itself. As María Galindo de MC (2022, p.121) states: "its strength lies in the 'thinking, acting and dreaming collectivity'".

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However, all the participants are aware of the risks involved in their work: "It is always in militancy, I take certain risks of going out to paste on the street; making murals on unauthorised walls, and resistance is the strength of the rebelliousness that I have to take these walls to communicate a feminine endurance and integrity. Without risks there is no resistance" (CC-Cholita Chic, personal communication, 28 April 2024).

And, in Reveco's words,

Disputing imaginaries brings consequences, Chile knows a lot about that. Víctor Jara felt it in the flesh, lemebel was always ignored and has been one of the most beautiful things we've had, Las Tesis para la revuelta, were also harassed for their performances [lower case in the original]. There is a long history of colleagues who have been persecuted and censored; it is a practice and it has to do with the image of culture that they want to propagate versus the image that emerges from these other sensibilities that go against the grain (in agreement with Galindo, 2022).

In this sense, we end with a phrase by Loreto González that Reveco contributed to us:

“There is no point in working in art if one doesn’t militate for it. And I don’t belong to a party, my militancy is art” (Montesinos, 2022).

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ARTICLE

Authoritarian neoliberalism in the discursive articulation of the Chilean Right post Social Outburst

El neoliberalismo autoritario en la rearticulación discursiva de la derecha chilena post Estallido Social

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Abstract

The following article explores the discursive articulation of the Chilean right, exploring its evolution from a moderate position to one of radicalisation. The article argues that this articulation is based on the defence of the main ideological legacy of the dictatorship: authoritarian neoliberalism, as represented by trade unionism. This evolution is based on a strategy of moral panic that seeks to radicalise neoliberal positions through authoritarian techniques within the democratic framework, taking advantage of a political context conducive to a reaction of far-right ideas.

The research is based on in-depth interviews with leaders of the Republican Party and the Independent Democratic Union and analysis of documentary sources and public speeches. These narratives provide crucial information for understanding the process of discursive articulation of the Chilean right.

Keywords:
authoritarian
neoliberalism;
far-right;
backlash politics;
discourse

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In the context of the rise of the far right globally, examining the dynamics of its contemporary discourses in Chile offers crucial insights into the complex interplay between capitalism, democracy and the right. Thus, this study seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of neoliberalism's authoritarian and flexible character.

Resumen

El siguiente artículo indaga en la rearticulación discursiva de la derecha chilena, explorando su evolución desde una posición moderada hacia una de radicalización. El trabajo argumenta que esta rearticulación se fundamenta en la defensa de la principal herencia ideológica de la dictadura: el neoliberalismo autoritario representado en el gremialismo. Esta evolución se basa en una estrategia de pánico moral que busca radicalizar las posturas neoliberales mediante técnicas autoritarias, dentro del marco democrático, aprovechando un contexto político propicio para una reacción de ideas de ultraderecha.

Palabras Clave:
neoliberalismo
autoritario;
ultraderecha;
reacción política;
discurso

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La investigación se apoya en entrevistas en profundidad realizadas a dirigentes del Partido Republicano y la Unión Demócrata Independiente, junto con el análisis de fuentes documentales y discursos públicos. Estas narrativas proporcionan información crucial para comprender el proceso de rearticulación discursiva de la derecha chilena.

En un contexto de auge de la ultraderecha a nivel global, examinar la dinámica de sus discursos contemporáneos en Chile ofrece ideas cruciales sobre la compleja interacción entre capitalismo, democracia y las derechas. Así, este estudio busca contribuir a una comprensión más amplia del carácter autoritario y flexible del neoliberalismo.

Introduction

“Has rebellion become right-wing?” asks Stefanoni on the rise of the global right wing (Stefanoni, 2021). One of his central theses is that the sense of indignation and disobedience has been transferred from progressivism to right-wing and far-right groups. This has occurred gradually in Latin America and the Caribbean, with explosive and successful speeches, such as those of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Javier Milei in



Argentina. Chile seemed not so close to this phenomenon after the waves of protests in 2019 known as the *Estallido Social*. Until that moment, not only did the rebelliousness seem to be on the side of progressivism and the anti-systemic left, but the Chilean right seemed to have adopted a programmatic and discursive moderation in two of its principal axes: neoliberalism and social conservatism (Madariaga & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020). However, since the rejection of the process that proposed to change the Constitution between 2021-2022 – known as the Constituent Convention – the Chilean right seems to have hegemonised the representation of the sense of rage and unease through the re-articulation of a discourse that combines the defence of free market values and a conservative and authoritarian social order (Alenda et al., 2023; Díaz et al., 2023; Escoffier et al., 2023; Martínez Mateo, 2021; Rovira Kaltwasser & Zanotti, 2022).

What has this discursive articulation of the right been like, from moderation to radicalisation? What role has the national context played after the 2019 protests and the discussion of changing the current constitution? Why has the ideological defence of neoliberal principles been so crucial in conjunction with a rhetoric that promotes social conservatism, order and security? This article addresses these questions by proposing that reordering the Chilean right is a re-articulation of the ideological legacy of the dictatorship: authoritarian neoliberalism expressed in the ideas of guilds.

This re-articulation has been based on a strategy of moral panic (Escoffier et al., 2023; Payne, 2023), which seeks to radicalise neoliberal positions through authoritarian techniques within democratic norms. This is taking advantage of a favourable political context for a *backlash politics* of far-right ideas based on ideological and material considerations. A mixture of the perception of a loss of authority and the risk of endangering the maximum institutional reference point of authoritarian neoliberalism: the 1980 Constitution.

As I will discuss in the section on discursive analysis of right-wing actors, there has been an active attempt to contribute to the construction of a symbolic discourse contrary to the anti-neoliberal demands raised during the *Estallido Social* (2019) and the constituent process (2021-2022). On the one hand, through the defence of neoliberal pillars that are constitutional guarantees and deny the extension of social rights: a) the Chilean state declaring itself to be subsidiary; b) preventing the state from invading the field of the economy and individuals; and c) the defence of property rights. On the other hand, by appealing to conservative and authoritarian values, a strong state can be advocated for, which allows for the above points.

To carry out the discursive analysis, I draw on documentary research and interviews conducted in 2023 with leaders of two right-wing parties: the Republican Party and the Independent Democratic Union (UDI). How can one explore the depth of the link between neoliberalism and values of defence of the family or national identity? From this question, my interest in conducting in-depth interviews was born. For, in a context of radicalisation of right-wing groups and ideas, where direct interaction between social scientists and these actors is scarce, it is not always possible to find the link between neo-liberalism and values of defence of the family or national identity (Damhuis and de Jonge, 2022). I decided to investigate the discourse of these groups first-hand, which can be seen as a contribution in itself, as they are a complex population to access. Therefore, I decided that it was necessary to interact with individuals who shape the reality of my questions and the social phenomenon I am investigating (de Souza Minayo et al., 2012).

As membership in right-wing parties corresponds not only to ideological considerations but also to constructing an identity and belonging to a community (Blee, 2002), my interviews also focused on the motivations and community considerations of their leadership. Thus, these interviews addressed life narratives related to their involvement in politics and self-perceptions of decision-making at critical moments, such as the Social Outburst and the functioning of the Constituent Convention (2021-2022). Therefore, although all interviewees agreed to give their accounts publicly with informed consent, I decided to anonymise their identities to touch on personal issues related to their motivations and identities.

Along these lines, this article aims to empirically explore authoritarian neoliberalism in the discursive articulation of the Chilean right after the aforementioned vital moments. In Kathleen Blee's compilation of works that have carried out ethnographic studies of the extreme right in the world, she argues that despite the different regional contexts and the political and compositional differences they may have, emotionality, culture and suspicion are crucial to understanding these groups (Blee, 2007). Therefore, the richness of this work lies in the complementarity of documentary analysis with the individual motivations that may have contributed to the re-articulation of the Chilean right-wing discourse

Authoritarian neoliberalism and the breakdown of consensus

The contemporary evolution of the Chilean right is linked to the development of authoritarian neoliberalism. Taking a holistic view that blends the work of Poulantzas (2000), Bruff (2014) and Tansel (2017), the theory of authoritarian neoliberalism leaves aside the conceptual dichotomy between liberal democracy and authoritarianism. In essence, authoritarian neoliberalism would have rigid inclinations that, through joint action between state practices and civil society institutions, support a 'minimal' notion of democracy. In this line, methods of imposition by force, such as installing neoliberalism through coups d'état and dictatorships, are overcome. Instead, the legal norms of a democracy are used to isolate from public power those discussions that would imply a possible change in neoliberal policies (Salyga, 2022). This is especially true when certain formal freedoms are restricted through legal and coercive mechanisms to protect the system (Bruff, 2014, p.115-116; Poulantzas, 2000).

How do authoritarian practices relate to a notion of economic freedom? Several works have studied what at first sight would appear to be a contradiction: the exhaustive use of state policies in supporters of Hayekian doctrines (Bruff & Tansel, 2019; Kiely, 2017; Martinez Mateo, 2020; 2021; Saidel, 2021; Tansel, 2017). These studies propose that neoliberal doctrine attaches fundamental importance to using state policies to protect its hegemony.

Implementing laws provides a means for preserving the rules of economic freedom, which are supposed to be naturally created. However, this instrumentalisation of the state is accompanied by a critique of the state, accusing it of having a privileged role because of the possibility of becoming the greatest threat to the freedom of society: it can intervene destructively and block market forces (Martinez Mateo, 2020, p.607). This is where the paradox is resolved because, for neoliberal actors, the state can and should be authoritarian and repressive when it is necessary to protect the free market. Thus, the conception of neoliberalism as an economic system is overcome. Along these lines, Vivaldi (2019) defines neoliberalism as expanding the market in all aspects, such as the family and bodies. In this way, it would be presented as a rationally sacred truth (Harvey, 2007). Market principles regulate social behaviour and power strategies (Vivaldi, 2019). Along these lines, neoliberalism has become a hegemonic phenomenon in the contemporary world. As Harvey states, it has become embedded in how people interpret, live and understand the world (Harvey, 2005).

This article proposes that the Chilean case is directly related to the characteristics of authoritarian neoliberalism due to the characteristics of its implementation during the dictatorship (1973-1989) and its legitimisation in democracy (1990 - to date). Although during Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, there were internal discussions in which different actors proposed different ways of transforming the Chilean socio-economic system, after the 1982-83 foreign exchange crisis, the radicalised version of neoliberalism was imposed on the political elite of the regime (Harvey, 2005; Madariaga, 2020; Rumié Rojo, 2018). The so-called *Chicago Boys* conducted a state intervention focused on post-crisis economic stabilisation. This intervention involved increasing the role of the private sector in social services, strengthening the financial and business sectors, reducing state spending, deregulation and liberalisation of the economy, and creating a more stable economy (Madariaga, 2020; Pitton, 2007; Silva, E, 1996).

For Madariaga (2020), the three pillars underpinning these transformations in Chile are *ideas* represented in constructing a neoliberal cultural hegemony, the economic interests of the local elite, and the institutions that limit changes to the system itself. This last point represents what Garretón (1991) categorised as “protected democracy”: a process characterised by institutionally shielding the model erected through various authoritarian enclaves that accompany the new social consensus. In other words, a central element in the process of neoliberal implementation was establishing an institutional political model to ensure and deepen the transformations of the dictatorship. Garretón (1991) established an unquestionable narrative with the new social order.

The best example is the 1980 Constitution, promulgated during the dictatorship and still in force today. Through this institutional apparatus, the state is conceptualised as a subsidiary and the dominance of the elites is ensured, establishing different regulations that remove any substantial change in the model from public power (Martínez Mateo, 2021; Turner, 2008). At the same time, it expresses and protects two central components of the dictatorship's legacy: authoritarianism and neoliberalism, with the Constitution being the common thread between these two social phenomena (Martínez Mateo, 2021; Turner, 2008).

In this context, the defence of the 1980 Constitution has been a fundamental pillar in the discourse of the Chilean right. Authoritarian neoliberalism became an institutional consensus and a social and political one. The construction of a hegemonic system encompassing all aspects of life was a priority for the main party of the Chilean right and defender of the dictatorial legacy, the Independent Democratic Union (UDI) (Rubio Apolaza, 2015; P. Silva, 2015; Valdivia Ortiz de Zárate, 2016).

Before the 2019 protests, there was little change for over two decades. Thus, this period embodied political stability by excluding demonstrations against free market policies. This meant an ideological agreement between many political actors in alliance with the leading economic power groups and the repressive forces that governed during the dictatorship (Avendaño and Sandoval, 2016; Bargsted and Somma, 2016; Huneus, 2000; Romero and Bustamante, 2016; P. Silva, 2015).

However, this sense of 'normality' was accompanied by a parallel social phenomenon of the emergence of grassroots-backed social movements (Joignant et al., 2020; Levitsky, 2011; Roberts, 2013; E. Silva, 2012). Issues such as profit-making in education, environmental struggles, inequality, the Constitution and the privatisation of social rights entered the public debate. Moreover, in this context of gradual mutation, the Chilean right opened up to changes that allowed it to adapt to social transformation through programmatic and discursive moderation but without breaking with the fundamental pillars of authoritarian neoliberalism (Alenda et al., 2023).

Programmatic moderation: the prelude to neoliberal-authoritarian radicalisation

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Chilean rights have experienced a series of conflicts in dealing with the new political landscape. Rovira Kaltwasser (2020) argues that the right has recently experienced a tension between moderation and radicalisation. His central thesis is justified by how the social and cultural change brought about by the proliferation of social movements aggravated tensions within this current, making the emergence of new referents and coalitions possible. For the author, this was intensified in a context where the Chilean electorate has become more culturally liberal and less tolerant of socio-economic inequality (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020, p.46).

The tension between programmatic moderation and radicalisation has meant a rapid transformation on the right (Díaz et al., 2023; Madariaga & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020). This is illustrated by how specific points of discord, such as positions on abortion, equal marriage and inequality, began to erode the homogeneity of alliances and discourses (Ecoffier & Vivaldi, 2023; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020).

The clearest example is the case of the top leader of the Chilean far right, José Antonio Kast. A historic militant of the UDI, he resigned from that party in 2017, accusing it of abandoning its ideological pillars. In this way, he created a new far-right referent: the



Republican Party. His criticism was based on a discourse opposed to reform that sought to reduce inequality gaps and promote a progressive agenda regarding values (Díaz et al., 2023; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020). In other words, a radicalised defence of the two fundamental pillars of the dictatorship's legacy, neoliberalism and conservatism, forming a new political force that positions itself "to the right of the right" (Díaz et al., 2023; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020).

The Republican Party is a party that political science defines as radical populist right-wing, characterised by three ideological aspects: populism, nativism and authoritarianism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). The populist aspect divides society between a "pure people" and a "corrupt elite". The nativist aspect refers to the idea of protecting native groups (those belonging to the nation) from those who undermine local values. The authoritarian aspect apologises for an ordered society, demanding severe action against those who deviate from this order (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020).

In this context of right-wing polarisation, the country's social-political process known as *Estallido Social* is developing. In October 2019, following the government's announcement to increase transport fares, millions of people spontaneously protested throughout the country during intense days. Without formal leadership, diverse social demands were raised that radically changed the Chilean neoliberal consensus, opening a new political and social cycle (Alzueta-Galar, 2023; Frens-String et al., 2021).

There is no unanimity on whether or not the Social Outbreak was a generalised representation of protests of an anti-neoliberal nature. Some authors attribute it more to an endemic political crisis, a demand from sectors traditionally marginalised in decision-making (Bellolio, 2020; 2022; Peña, 2020). Other authors argue that the essential component of the protest has to do with disaffection towards the neoliberal model (Joignant et al., 2020; Ruiz, 2020; Ruiz & Caviedes, 2022). The organisation of these sectors of society, fuelled by criticisms of inequality and lack of opportunities, is what Rovira Kaltwasser (2020) defines as the "politicisation of inequality". In other words, the construction of organisational resources with an agenda that demands a more active role for the state in guaranteeing minimum socio-economic rights.

Despite the diverse demands and causes that the Social Outbreak may have had, there was a coalescence into one: that of a new constitution (Martínez Mateo, 2021). Less than a month after the mobilisations, political actors from the left and the right agreed on an institutional solution to the social crisis. This meant a process of constituent discussion that contributed to deactivating the conflict. This led to the creation of a Convention



of 155 democratically elected people charged with drafting a new Constitution that would then be submitted to a plebiscite. Thus, a formal discussion began changing authoritarian neoliberalism's most critical institutional lock: the 1980 Constitution

In the following section, I will discuss how the opening of the constitutional debate contributed to the radicalisation of right-wing positions based on the discursive and institutional defence of the two main components of the dictatorial legacy: neoliberalism and authoritarianism.

Cracks in the neo-liberal consensus and backlash from the far-right

The discourse of protecting the hegemony of Chilean neoliberalism is represented as a reaction to the demands condensed in the Estallido Social and the constituent process. The literature refers to backlash politics as a reaction that mixes the perception of a "loss" of order and culture with economic deprivation (Salyga, 2022). Along these lines, actors mobilise to return to a previous social condition through unconventional tactics (Alter & Zürn, 2022). This action attacks efforts to promote equality among historically marginalised groups (Weeks and Allen, 2023); moreover, as ideas of conservatism are often linked to the notion that people are naturally evil, institutions need not only contain transformative impulses but also preserve existing ones out of fear of change (Castro-Rea and Solano, 2023).

On the other hand, Payne et al. (2023) have coined the categorisation Right Against Rights to explain right-wing backlash politics in the region. This would be a collective mobilisation to "control, roll back or reverse specific rights promoted by previously marginalised groups and communities and to restore, promote or advance a status quo ante of traditional political, social, economic and cultural rights" (Escoffier et al., 2023, p.2). Thus, this response does not involve hidden actors seeking to maintain order but specific individuals and institutions mobilised to defend neoliberal hegemony.

The most studied example of far-right backlash politics is Donald Trump, labelled as an unwitting 'beneficiary' who took advantage of a political, ideological and institutional moment (Castro-Rea and Solano, 2023). As in the case of Trump, in Chile, the series of defeats of the moral-conservative agenda and the debates on wealth redistribution that opened up with the constitutional debate provided the context of backlash politics for the emergence of new referents, such as Kast and the radical populist right-wing party he



leads. He emphasised the importance of radicalising positions in a new scenario where progressive parties would apply an agenda contrary to conservative and neoliberal values (Díaz et al., 2023; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2020).

Authoritarian neoliberalism and trade unionism: discursive analysis in right-wing actors

In what follows, I analyse the components of backlash politics that shape the discursive articulation of the Chilean right after the Social Outbreak. To do so, I present a discursive analysis composed of interviews with leaders and interventions and public material produced by the two parties mentioned above. The interviews, representing my primary qualitative data collection technique, were conducted in Santiago de Chile in late 2023.

To measure the discursive articulation, I examined two central components that right-wing parties maintain from the dictatorial legacy: authoritarianism and neoliberalism, which Martínez Mateo defines as the two political foundations of the 1980 Constitution (Martínez Mateo, 2021). Therefore, I focused my discursive analysis on one of the guiding principles of the Chilean right that combines these elements: Gremialism.

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Gremialismo is a movement formulated in the 1960s by the conservative academic of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC), Jaime Guzmán. It has an ideological structure influenced by Catholic nationalism and anti-communism (Santoni and Elgueta, 2018). It is aimed at the formation of guilds or so-called “intermediate bodies”, referring to various civil society entities represented in the family, businesses, think tanks, NGOs, religious institutions, political parties, etc., and advocates that the state should facilitate their proliferation and strengthening (Barros, 2000; Castro, 2022). Unionism has formed an ideological alliance with the neoliberal currents of the Chicago Boys, formalised in its first reference party, the UDI (Santoni and Elgueta, 2018; Tamayo, 2018). However, those who adhere to this movement are also in the Republican Party, following the flight of militants to that party.

The sense of defending the values of authoritarian neoliberalism is intensified in the ideological conception of trade unionism. For example, one of my interviewees, a former representative of the UDI in the constituent process, when asked about his motivations for participating in national politics, expressed strong ties to this ideological current:

I had decided to join a political party shortly before the referendum with a group of unionists from the PUC. Until then, the thesis was still: Can the Constitution be saved, can the UDI be saved, or do we have to create a new party? José Antonio (Kast) was already leaving with the Republicans. Moreover, we said it could be solved, but let us try to unite this issue more (Interview with former UDI convention member, 2023).

The previous paragraph shows us that unionism plays a fundamental role in a context where the Constitution's future will be discussed. The ideological motivations of its political actions are categorised as “gremializar”. That is to say, to represent the ideological bases of trade unionism in the party space and the constituent discussion.

Another example is the response given by a senior Republican Party youth leader. After mentioning the Social Outbreak as a turning point for his involvement in politics, when asked about the identities or values that motivate him to participate in his party, he comments:

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In order for me to dedicate myself to politics in the end, I believe certain feelings in the Movimiento Gremial are identifiable beyond one's position concerning that movement (...)I believe that in the Movimiento Gremial PUC, there is something that does not exist in any other right-wing grouping in Chile, which is very similar to what I see in left-wing movements or parties in our country. Someone who uses the flag declares himself loyal to his movement or party and is disciplined for the same reason. Moreover, that generates and has generated, I believe, that my case exists (Interview with national youth leader of the Republican Party, 2023).

In the previous paragraph, this leader emphasises the relevance of trade unionism in his political motivations despite no longer being part of the UDI. Not only because this ideological current has inspired him to participate in politics but also because, after his guild formation, he assumes the defence of these values in any future political arena.

What is the relevance of two national leaders, one from the Republican Party and one from the UDI, mentioning the importance of unionism in their motivations? Unionisation is a central element in re-articulating the discourse of authoritarian neoliberalism. This is

because in the figure of Jaime Guzmán lies the central importance of the consolidation and expansion of the conservative neoliberal alliance in Chile (Moncada, 2018). In other words, the guild sentiment allows the radical defence of capitalism to be combined with a conservative perspective, hand in hand with an authoritarian understanding of politics, especially in the context of the constituent discussion.

The right's participation in the constituent process began not only with a minority in representation but also with a sense of defeat. As the former UDI convention member explains:

We were very defeated. So, we said, let us try to work collaboratively. However, from day one, I would say that, above all, the UDI and Republicans, who were few but who were on our bench, said there was absolutely nothing to be done here (Interview with former UDI convention member, 2023)

However, the interviewee accepts the need for a strategic reorientation in defence of the historical values of unionism. This would coincide with Republican visions:

That is where we make a strategic decision: stand up for what we believe in. Let's make it as bad as possible. We have to choose the bad between the bad and the very bad. Let us prepare ourselves so that this option is approved, and we can try to recover the country long-term. That was the thesis. Moreover, we started with that. We always defended our beliefs (Interview with former UDI convention member, 2023).

The previous paragraph emphasises promoting an agenda oriented towards defending trade unionist principles but assuming that the constituent process would be lost. By the same logic, from the beginning of the Constituent Assembly discussion, the Republican Party emphasised that defending the 1980 Constitution meant protecting free market values. This is exemplified by Díaz et al. (2023) in their analysis of this party, showing how the guiding principles combine a conservative stance on the cultural axis with economic liberalism:

(...) the defence of constitutional guarantees to prevent the State from invading the field of economic and social activity of individuals, and our defence and promotion of everyone's right to property because we are convinced that

private property, as a result of the exercise of personal freedom, constitutes one of the pillars of a truly free and responsible society (Republican Party Guiding Principles, quoted in Díaz et al., 2023).

The expression of trade unionism as a re-articulation of authoritarian neoliberalism is exemplified in the above fragment, specifically in the defence of the autonomy of intermediate bodies to develop with economic freedom, in the subsidiarity of the state and in the defence of property rights. At the same time, the strong state presence to enable this freedom makes explicit the importance given to the defence of constitutional guarantees as the guiding thread of neoliberalism in the Republican Party's guiding principles. This notion of freedom goes hand in hand with denying the extension of social rights. The Right Against Rights manifests itself in the response of the Republican Party's youth leader when mentioning the priorities of political actors in the aftermath of the Outbreak:

In Boric's government, two important projects, the 40-hour law and the minimum wage increase, can be found. We voted against issues just before the plebiscite, which some thought was political suicide. However, people still voted for us (...) I mean, a party that rejects the minimum wage increase, rejects the reduction of working hours two weeks before an election, and simultaneously has the most significant number of votes in Chile (...) Nobody is getting their priorities right and can do anything about it except us (Interview national youth leader Republican Party, 2023).

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In the previous paragraph, the interviewee emphasises his pride in belonging to a party opposed to social welfare policies and still obtains good electoral results. The position of refusing the reduction of working hours and the rejection of the minimum wage increase shows a radicalised post-Brexit right-wing stance.

The re-articulated unionist discourse highlights the importance of the connection between conservative and traditionalist currents and neoliberal and subsidiarist thinking. Along these lines, Alenda et al. (2023) argue that there is a uniformity in the Chilean right wing that goes through "value conservatism" as support for the family, considered the primary cell of society; the "right balance" that the state should play to correct market errors; and "economic liberalism", characterised by its orthodoxy (Alenda et al., 2023, p.196). Being aware of the different sensibilities within the right wing, both during the dictatorship

and in democracy, the authors conclude that there are no substantial differences in these principles inherited from the dictatorship, but rather a remarkable homogeneity.

The same happens when analysing the Social Outbreak in the interviewees' responses and the documentary analysis. This critical moment becomes a gravitating element in forming the current right-wing identity and the authoritarian defence of the dictatorship's values (Díaz et al., 2023). Along these lines, since the Estallido, the right has focused on the problematisation of public order and violence alteration. For example, it proposed that the institutional solution agreed to overcome the crisis should include limits on social protest (Dávila, 2020).

This same prioritisation was evident in the 2021 presidential election, where Kast obtained a majority in the first round but lost to the progressive candidate Gabriel Boric in the run-off. Rovira Kaltwasser and Zanotti's (2022) analysis of the Republican Party's government program highlights the authoritarian proposals of a party with solid neoliberal values. For example, proposing "greater resources for the police forces and harsher penalties for criminals" along with "many mentions of a greater legitimisation of the role of the police" (Rovira Kaltwasser and Zanotti, 2022, p.7). This would strengthen the authoritarian axis, which calls for an orderly society and punishes those who transgress it with severe actions.

The prioritisation of authoritarian measures in a post-Social Outbreak context would remedy a so-called "Portalesian order". This concept, used independently by two interviewees, refers to the Chilean conservative ideologue Diego Portales (1793-1837), an essential reference point for authoritarian conservatism in Chile. Hence, the "Portalesian order" is linked to moments of social calm, respect for authority, and unification of visions between the political class and society (Correa Sutil, 2005; Cristi and Ruiz Schneider, 2015), which, for example, accompanied the neoliberal consensus prior to the Social Outbreak. Following this line, this prioritisation is evident in the response of the former UDI convention when commenting on his priorities for the country in a post-Social Outbreak scenario:

Safety first. Everyone will give you the same answer. The situation is difficult in this area because crime and the public's perception of the same thing has increased. I feel that in Chile, there are places where the state is weak. That is to say, I don't believe in a big state with so much bureaucracy, but I do believe in a vital state in the sense of Portalean, in which the state enforces the law (Interview with former UDI convention member, 2023). en el que el Estado haga respetar la ley. (Entrevista ex convencional UDI, 2023)

In the above excerpt, the interviewee emphasises that addressing the security problem requires a strong state that imposes order but does not expand into other spheres. It is essential to make this distinction, for when he states the need for a strong state in the “Portalean sense”, he follows the trade union logic of allowing a liberalisation of the economic aspects of life, along with a state authority that regulates the other aspects. After decisive junctures, priority is given to a discourse that prioritises the defence of principles linked to authoritarian neoliberalism.

This same line of argument was used independently by another UDI militant and member of the training area of the think tank linked to that party, the Jaime Guzmán Foundation (FJG). When asked about the causes and consequences of the Estallido Social, he answered how Chile’s ideological evolution meant a break with the Portalean consensus:

This is directly linked to the fact that in Chile, the unity of vision, which perhaps existed at the beginning of the Republic and is very much reflected in the Portalean consensus, so to speak, is something that has been lost. I would say that between the conservative and liberal vision that existed in the 20th century, today we have many more, as many as there were posters in the social outburst. (Interview member FJG, 2023)

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The Portalean consensus, which the FJG member mentions, would have a simile with the neoliberal consensus and the sense of normality prior to the Social Outbreak. This is exemplified in what he problematises as a proliferation of political currents different from those that shared power prior to the protests. Therefore, the ideological spread of different positions and leaderships is evaluated as a cause of the Social Outbreak and the break with the previous order and authority.

For Díaz et al. (2023), the authoritarian aspect is a central element in the Republican Party’s radical populist right-wing project. This discursive rearticulation is exemplified in Kast’s public speeches. From very early on, he positioned himself against the constituent process. Not only because he defended the legacy of the dictatorship and the 1980 Constitution but also because of his appeal to the use of authoritarian means to restore order. Díaz et al. (2023) identify that one day before the agreement was signed to hold the national referendum that would lead to the Convention, Kast tweeted:

While politicians in Congress meet to distort democracy, extreme violence is unleashed on the streets, destroying everything. The rule of law and public order are out of control, and the government has not yet reacted (Kast, 2022, quoted in Díaz et al., 2023).

In other words, from the beginning of the discussion on the new constitution, the discourse expresses a mobilisation against change, positioning order and security as antagonists of the constitutional discussion.

Another example is given on 4 September 2022, in Kast's speech celebrating the rejection of the proposal for a new Constitution by popular vote. In this speech, he emphasises how the constitutional process was linked to the loss of order, authority and neoliberal stability:

That Convention tried inexplicably to re-found our beloved country, and today, with their vote, millions of Chileans have closed the door to this constituent process that has failed in less than a thousand days. The constituent process has brought insecurity, uncertainty, fights and poverty in less than a thousand days. Today, the common sense of the majority has prevailed over the ideology and violence of a few (Kast, 2022, on CNNChile Channel, 2022, 01m15s).

Kast criticises the foundational character of the constituent process to draw a similarity between common sense and order and security as an antagonism to the defeated constituent proposal. In the discourse, he uses the resource that The Right Against Rights refers to as "moral panic", understood as a right-wing backlash political tactic against the conquests of rights by social movements. This resource represents an attempt to create a sense of fear in society, arguing that conservative values are under attack. This is intended to create support among religious, conservative and far-right groups (Escoffier and Vivaldi, 2023, p.157; Payne, 2023). For example, by accusing the constituent process of bringing insecurity and poverty when the work of the Convention was not linked to public policies on security or the economy. The recourse to linking the common sense of voting against the proposal with the struggle against the ideology of violence of a few appeals to authoritarianism to combat the political and social changes discussed in the constituent process. Added to this is the parallel between the days that the process lasted and the thousand days that Salvador Allende's socialist government lasted (1970-1973).

The strategy of moral panic in Kast's victory speech also uses other resources associated with the symbolism constructed around the ideological representation of the constituent process. The re-foundation of Chile and the violation of cultural values are discursive codes that are intended to be associated with those who drafted and supported the failed constitutional project:

After a profound process of moral, institutional and social disintegration that we have experienced in the last three years, we no longer want our flag to be sullied; we no longer want these offences against our families and our children by people who feel that they abhor what is our tradition, our culture (...) Moreover, that is where we have to go out to defend our homeland and values and rebuild what has been destroyed and lost in recent years (Kast, 2022, on CNNChile Channel, 2022, 2m48s)

In the previous paragraph, the constituent process is accused of moral, institutional and social disintegration, as opposed to those who seek to defend Chile's values. By emphasising freedom and security, there is an intention to install the notion of authoritarian neoliberalism as common sense.

The criticism of right-wing leaders, both from the UDI and the Republican Party, is thus articulated with a discourse of longing for the previous order, intertwining the ideas of economic freedom and social conservatism. Thus, the defence of the 1980 Constitution is based on the containment of social innovations, appealing to a fear of their catastrophic consequences (Castro-Rea and Solano, 2023). Therefore, in the face of this uncertainty, the discourse is articulated to maintain the institutions inherited from the dictatorship and the social order that existed before the Social Outbreak.

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Concluding remarks

The discursive rearticulation of the Chilean right after the Social Outbreak adds Chile to the phenomenon of right-wing radicalisation in Latin America and globally. The particularity of this case is that the shift from programmatic and discursive moderation to more extreme positions is based on the defence of the values of Chile's authoritarian neoliberalism: unionism.

As the interviewees cited in this article point out, the progress of the progressive agendas and social movements that led to a break with the neoliberal consensus and the so-called 'Portalian order' generated a political context that favoured the proliferation of far-right ideas. Thus, the Republican Party and its top leader, José Antonio Kast, play a leading role in this *political backlash*, while the UDI tends to be attracted to this radicalisation.

The strategy of moral panic that this phenomenon fosters has been to generate a sense of distrust and horror at the possibility of changes to neoliberalism and its institutional pillar, the 1980 Constitution. This was demonstrated in analysing different speeches by leaders of the Republican Party and the UDI. These prioritise the construction of a rhetoric that runs counter to the demands made during the Social Outbreak and the constituent process. Finally, the right's discursive rearticulation has taken advantage of a discussion of national relevance to put forward a radicalised agenda in defence of national "principles", contributing to the discursive defence of authoritarian neoliberalism.

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ARTICLE

Five ideas on social welfare from the political right in Argentina (1955-2024)

Cinco ideas sobre la asistencia social de las derechas políticas en Argentina (1955-2024)

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Summary

The article identifies five ideas about social welfare that have characterised the political right-wingers in government. It analyses the period from 1955 to the present day in Argentina, constituting a first attempt to take a comprehensive and historical look at the link between these social forces and the state's social welfare practice.

The comprehensive analysis comprises academic literature on the subject, a database of its own, and observation of the first measures of the current government. In expository terms, elements with significant continuities are grouped. Five typical ideal meanings are identified: 1) "dispute with its political adversary": social assistance has been thought of as an element that would make it possible to win over a part of the social base that is alien to its affinities and political project; 2) "re-education of the poor": it moralises the living conditions of the poor and sees poverty as a problem of "mentality", which is why they

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propose the practice of assistance in educational terms; 3) "governability": 4) "technocracy": it understands that welfare demands should be depoliticised and that they should be defined by experts, redefining social needs "from above" in a process that deconstructs the social and the political; 5) "social econometric": it incorporates cost-benefit logic to think about state agencies and presupposes the subsidiarity of the social to the economic. In instrumental terms, it was based on the proposals of fiscal adjustment plans as state policy and citizen effort, considering the consequences that this could have on a specific population segment.

Abstract:

The work identifies five ideas about social assistance that have characterised the political right in government. The period from 1955 to the present in Argentina is analysed, constituting a first attempt to locate a view that comprehensively and historically addresses what the specialised bibliography has studied singularly. The comprehensive analysis is made up of academic literature that addresses the topic, its database, and observations of the first measures taken by the current government. In expository terms, elements with significant continuities are grouped, and five ideal-typical meanings are identified: 1) "dispute against one's political adversary": social assistance has been thought of as an element that would make it possible to win a part of the social base outside of one's affinities. 2) "reeducation of the poor": moralises the living conditions of poor subjects and observes poverty as a problem of "mentality", which is why it proposes care practice in educational terms; 3) "governance": within the framework of healthcare, the aim is to ensure minimum social reproduction to eradicate social conflict; 4) "technocracy": understands that assistance demands must be depoliticised and that they must be defined by experts, redefining social needs "from above" in a process that destructures the social and political; 5) "social econometrics": it incorporates the cost-benefit logic to think about state agencies and presupposes the subsidiarity of the social to the economic. In instrumental terms, it was based on the proposals of fiscal adjustment plans as state policy and citizen effort, considering the drifts that this could have on a particular segment of the population.

Keywords:
rights; assistance;
ideas



Resumen

Palabras Clave:
derechas;
asistencia; ideas

El trabajo identifica cinco ideas sobre la asistencia social que han caracterizado a las derechas políticas en el gobierno. Se analiza el periodo temporal que transcurre desde 1955 hasta la actualidad en Argentina, constituyendo un primer intento por situar una mirada que aborde de forma integral e histórica el vínculo entre estas fuerzas sociales y la práctica estatal de la asistencia social.

El análisis comprensivo está compuesto por la literatura académica que abordó el tema, una base de datos propia y la observación de las primeras medidas del actual gobierno. En términos expositivos, se agrupan elementos con continuidades significativas y se identifican cinco sentidos típicos ideales: 1) "disputa a su adversario político": la asistencia social ha sido pensada como un elemento que posibilitaría ganar una parte de la base social ajena a sus afinidades y proyecto político; 2) "reeducación de los pobres": moraliza las condiciones de vida de los sujetos pobres y observa a la pobreza como un problema de "mentalidad", por lo que proponen la práctica asistencial en términos educativos; 3) "gobernabilidad": en el marco de la atención asistencial se pretende asegurar mínimos de reproducción social con el objetivo de erradicar el conflicto social; 4) "tecnocracia": entiende que se deben despolitizar las demandas asistenciales y que ellas deben estar definidas por los expertos, redefine "desde arriba" las necesidades sociales en un proceso que desestructura lo social y lo político; 5) "econometrismo social": incorpora la lógica costo-beneficio para pensar las agencias estatales y presupone la subsidiaridad de lo social a lo económico. En términos instrumentales, se fundamentó en los planteos de los planes de ajuste fiscal como política estatal y esfuerzo ciudadano, atendiendo las derivas que ello podría tener en cierto segmento de la población.



Introduction

This article attempts to systematise and organise some persistent elements and ideas about state assistance in the actors, alliances and political parties on the right of the political field. Taking as a reference those experiences that were at the helm of the state, it is nourished by a reflection carried out in the framework of an ongoing investigation that observed and identified how the justifications and meanings assigned to the state's social intervention correlate in the design and implementation of specific programmes.

To understand social phenomena historically, the article deals comprehensively with what has, until now, been studied singularly. While it is true that assistance as a socio-state practice is a recurrent theme in the social sciences and that the study of the political right in Argentina was revitalised in the second half of the last decade, its link was studied in the specificity of political cycles. In this sense, this article is an initial historical reflection on the relationship between the ideas and meanings that these political identities have given to social welfare in the context of the instrumentalisation of the state, highlighting what they have in common through an understanding of a tradition of thought. From the analysis of the specialised literature, the main findings of my doctoral research (which uses as empirical material a database from the period 2015-2019 consisting of public pronouncements by government officials) and the observation of the first measures and speeches of the current government in Argentina, persistent elements in the welfare ideology of the political right in government are exposed.

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Firstly, the identification, reconstruction and analysis of the main findings of academic work on the subject has the advantage of knowing the historical reality within the framework of the operationalisation of the research object. Although this strategy of observing the past may have the limitation of using an artificial element of reality – that is, scientifically constructed – it is possible to take advantage of its conclusions to give it another treatment, according to a different objective (Scribano and De Sena, 2009), trying to offer an additional interpretation to those presented by the authors (Sierra Bravo, 2003). Secondly, the use of public pronouncements and measures carried out by contemporary right-wing political officials allows for the analysis of formal position-taking and the direction of welfare practice from what the state “does” (Oszlak, 2003), both in the singularity of its agencies (Soprano Manzo, 2007) and its “faces” (O'Donnell, 2008). This secondary data is analysed under the observation criteria of “enunciative continuity” and “apparent discontinuity”, which form part of an epistemic base that aims to understand the recurrent categories with which the actors signify the social world.

Para la reconstrucción histórica del ideario de las derechas sobre la asistencia estatal se realiza un recorte temporal: aquellas que han gobernado el país a partir de 1955. Este recorte es, fundamentalmente, porque la política social del peronismo transformó el campo de la acción asistencial del Estado, incorporando la lógica y el lenguaje del derecho social, la noción de “dignidad” de las personas asistidas y el horizonte de justicia social.

For the historical reconstruction of the right-wing ideology on state assistance, a time frame is used: those who have governed the country since 1955. This is mainly because the social policy of Peronism transformed the field of state welfare action, incorporating the logic and language of social law, the notion of the “dignity” of the people assisted and the horizon of social justice.

There are two types of right-wing government: dictatorial and electoral. Within these, six experiences can be identified: “Revolución Libertadora” (1955-1958); the coup d'état of José María Guido (1962-1963); “Revolución Argentina” (1966-1973); “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional” (1976-1983); the political coalition “Cambiamos” (2015-2019), led by PRO; and, recently, “La Libertad Avanza” (2023-2027).²

While it is true that each of these experiences has its ideological particularities, its specific format for exercising power and differentiated societal projects, it is possible to consider that persistent social, economic, political and cultural ideas can be identified within a tradition of thought. Taking this assertion as a reference point, this article deals with those ideas that have lasted the longest and from which assistance was thought of. In other words, it aims to answer the questions: How does the right wing think about state assistance; under what criteria and challenges do they define assistance mechanisms; what are the arguments and categories they use to justify them, and What are the reasons and categories they use to justify them? Familiar notions of these collective subjects can be grouped into at least these three questions.

² The periods selected for analysis should be analysed with caution on a number of issues. Firstly, the difference between constitutional and dictatorial governments in the framework of the management of public affairs and, particularly, in terms of the forms of exercising power; from where they have acted to process social conflict around demands for needs and the ways in which they have promoted strategies of control, disciplining and political domination, as well as the implications this has had for the relationship between the state and civil society.

On the other hand, it is necessary to consider that assistance had – and still has – a preponderant place in the strategies of social reproduction of capitalist societies and, especially in Argentina, acquired greater visibility and boom after neoliberal policies (Servio, 2021). However, as one of the state areas with the greatest institutional weakness and instability (Perelmiter, 2012), changes in the political cycle often mean transformations in the normative orientation of the state's social intervention.

Finally, with respect to the last period selected on the welfare ideas of the political right, at the time of writing there are no published works that address the implications of the new redefinition of the state for the welfare policy of the first “anarcho-capitalist” government in Argentina. However, a first approach to the symbolic foundations, in which bridges are built between the intellectual references of this strand of the Austrian school of economics and the government's first measures, can be seen in Zuccaro (in press).

On the other hand, assistance is understood as a process that is constantly redefined within the framework of specific political cycles (Alayon, 1989) that build state devices legalised through legal and normative foundations (Krmptotic, 2016) within the framework of orientations, guidelines and ideas that are possible to maintain and sustain regularly by government actors in the exercise of power (Ottone, 2014; Alcántara Sáenz, 2016). Under this point, it is understood that “ideas have consequences” (Camou, 2001), observing that state policies are symbolically constituted by a set of senses and meanings by political officials in terms of social order. Senses and meanings are based on the basis on which the state acts governmentally to enforce and achieve the ideal horizon to which these actors adhere (Aguilar Villanueva, 1984; Weber, 1991; Schluchter, 2008).

In this scenario, the article presents the ideas underpinning the welfare task during the periods right-wing actors took charge of the state. These values, beliefs and interpretative frameworks of social significance are grouped into five “ideal types” which have been used over time to argue for the practice of social welfare: the struggle against the political adversary, the re-education of people experiencing poverty, technocracy, governability; and social econometric. In the sections that make up this article, a definition of each of these is given, with examples from each period.

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Disputing the political adversary: Winning social support and eradicating the ideas of the antagonist

The first idea that articulated the right, when it came to thinking about state assistance, was to dispute social and political support for their adversary. Because of its instrumentality and capacity to contact the working and popular sectors, this social action by the state was considered an element that would make it possible to win over a part of the social base alien to their political project.

They have tried to do so in two consistent ways: to eradicate from the social imaginary that the only ones interested in attending were left, centre-left, progressive or national-popular political actors, and to create conditions to broaden their electoral and representative base in the popular sectors. Such moves are possible to see in the intention of “westernisation” of the dictatorships of 1955 and 1966, “decommunisation” in 1976, “deskirchnerisation” in 2015 or “depopulation” in 2023. Under the adversarial radicalisation and construction of the political antagonist as a cultural enemy, the right wing assumed that aid would be a good state instrument to achieve this.

These two meanings have two hypotheses: that the social support for their political adversary came from the state's welfare tasks as a form of political domination and that it was through welfare that they could establish their ideas in the popular sectors. For example, during the 1976 dictatorship, in the division of political work carried out by the armed forces, Emilio Massera was in charge of the area of assistance, and he set out a strategy of power-building based on institutionalising support from popular sectors. The aim was to generate social support and, from there, to achieve greater political power within the alliance (Canelo, 2008). On the other hand, he understood that state assistance could be an element in the "fight against communism", as it could reunify the family and, through this pillar, "re-establish a social order without subversive ideas" (Salerno, 2022; Sala and Agüero, 2023). The commissioning of the welfare area of the state served in two possible directions: 1) to build power in the framework of a strategy to implement social assistance in order to conquer a social base to achieve better internal positions and try to 'eradicate' the sympathies that workers and popular sectors had with the ideas of 'communism'; 2) based on the different vectors of practical, affective, cognitive and moral socialisation implied by state actions, to generate a process of social reorganisation based on the family – in a conservative and patriarchal sense – customs and traditions

A similar mention can be made of Francisco Manrique, Minister of Social Welfare between 1970 and 1972. During that period, he built up political capital that he used to run for president in 1973, where he won 12% of the vote. Also, in 2018, the Minister of Social Development, as a result of playing an essential role in the dialogue with social movements and in containing social conflict in a context of economic crisis, came to be considered as a possible member of the presidential ticket in the 2019 elections (Stanley, 2018, in Animales Suellos, 2018).

On the other hand, for the right-wing, assistance became an element to dispute and eradicate the problems their political adversary's ideas brought with them in a sector of society. Hence, it is sometimes one of the cornerstones of the 'cultural change' proposed by "Cambiemos" and "La Libertad Avanza". A 'cultural change' that aims to return to a pre-Kichnerist or pre-populist Argentina. What both cases ascribe to their opponents would be the manipulation of the masses, the destruction of liberal free market principles, the subjugation of republican institutions and the exercise of authoritarian power. In this polarisation, the limits of confrontation outside the realm of political institutions are widened to other registers that radicalise and polarise public debate.

La lógica descripta puede recuperarse y observarse, por ejemplo, en el desmantelamiento. The logic described above can be recovered and observed, for example, in dismantling the Fundación Eva Perón, which the dictatorship carried out in 1955 as one of its first acts of government. From the looting of its furniture to its dissolution, the dictatorship tried to eliminate all traces of the institution (Alayón, 2019), which would become one of the most important milestones of Peronism both for its closeness to the sectors assisted and for the way and capacity to respond to the demands that came to it. It was part of what Portantiero (1977) called the ‘cleaning operation’ to take the country back to a pre-Peronist period.

For their part, the recent forces that gained access to state leadership by electoral means configured their adversary in terms of assistance. Each chose their antagonist differently: “Cambiemos” for Kirchnerism and “La Libertad Avanza” for social movements. The former labelled them as “punters” (Stanley, 2019, in *Terapia de Noticias*, 2019) and the latter as “poverty managers” (Adorni, 2024, in *A24*, 2024). In both cases, such adversaries would use the management of public resources to subjugate or manipulate popular sectors in exchange for favours, support and mutual reciprocity. Under this idea, in both periods, channels were opened to denounce political leaders who had committed these practices, accompanied by public defamation in various media outlets. In particular, “La Libertad Avanza”, to dispute social support, reactivated philanthropic networks and institutions to carry out assistance policies, which resulted in the signing of various agreements to develop joint food assistance projects (Ministry of Human Capital, 2024) in the context of the public conflict over the delivery of food to neighbourhood canteens.

The cultural co-extension of the political adversary widens the degrees of adversarial intensity by placing it on the cultural plane, denies the political character of the confrontation and places it on the moral terrain. For example, the ‘foundational’ project headed by Juan Carlos Onganía in 1966 postulated social welfare as a strategic area of social intervention and institutionalised it with the Ministry of Social Welfare. Through this agency, he set out to reorder society to confront Peronism, which was radicalising “towards the left” (Portantiero, 1977; Giorgi and Mallimaci, 2012) and was gaining social support. One of the strategies to achieve this would be promoting family, human resources and community action (National Law N°16.956, 1966).

According to the above, it is possible to consider that one of the ideas and objectives that lead the political right to build the welfare area as one of the pillars of their government



is the dispute for social support to eradicate the ideas of their political adversaries, trying to establish specific values, objectives and projects in the popular sectors in order to shape a way of being, thinking and acting. In this sense, assistance would include a second idea and function: the re-education of the poor.

Re-education of the poor: “elitist suspicion” and restricted sociability

Related to the previous idea, it is interesting to note that the right-wing understands that in order to dispute the social support of its political adversary, it must work to re-educate the popular sectors. This is what can be seen in the spiritual and moral work that Onganía’s dictatorship understood it had to do with the reunification of the family to eliminate the ‘communist traces’ of the dictatorship initiated by Videla, the ‘capacities’ that “Cambios” sought to generate, or the idea of human capital that “La Libertad Avanza” proclaims. Suppose assistance is a way of approaching and linking with the popular sectors. In that case, it is also an instrument to re-educate them according to the needs of their project of society.

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The idea of re-educating the poor has at the heart of its justification the “elitist suspicion” that poverty is an individual problem rooted in the customs and traditions of the excluded sectors and their cognitive, moral, practical and affective capacities. Hence, one of the tasks, for example, that is required of the target population of the welfare policy is training (Stanley, 2014; Jefatura de Gabinete, 2017), as it was in the government of “Cambios”. For them, “people living in poverty” – as defined by officials – were there because they did not possess the skills that transnational companies demanded, based on the understanding that the market assigns value to skills, services, and goods.

The “elitist suspicion” naturalises poverty and the accumulation of wealth. To put it another way, what is naturalised is inequality through a justification that refers to the capacities of the individual and the social characteristics that determine his or her social situation from the perspective of restricted sociability. A restricted sociability that places people within the framework of their primary social ties – the family or the social environment – classifies them according to their abilities and moralities and caters to them according to their desire to stop being poor. These issues can be identified in the “moralisation of the social question” process during the Onganía dictatorship. In that period, the Catholic vision was incorporated (Osuna 2012; 2017) with the aim of re-Christianising the popular sectors (Giorgi and Mallimaci, 2012) and introduced a notion of the ‘social question’ in cultural and spiritual terms (Laguado Duca, 2010). In its founding act, the military officers Pascual Pistarini, Benigno Varela and Teodoro Álvarez³ characterised the ‘spiritual rupture’ of the nation as one of the elements that had allowed ‘Marxist penetration’, which required the armed forces to act (Secretaría de Estado de Gobierno, 1969).

In terms of restricted sociability, on the other hand, it is interesting to note that both Videla’s dictatorship and the “Cambiemos” government proposed the family as a space for intervention. In the former, it was identified as the fundamental pillar of society and people with low incomes were “good savages” (Osuna, 2017) who had to be re-educated to move away from subversive ideologies. Care for low-income families was based on the assumption of considering them as a moral reserve of national and Catholic values that should structure the social order. The second is a space where intersections and fissures could be generated to “break” intergenerational poverty. Under this idea, the state should ensure minimum conditions of social reproduction and generate the conditions to provide everyone with the same opportunities for social competition. In Mauricio Macri’s presidency, it was argued that parents who made efforts could inspire their children to excel (Stanley, 2018, in Spillman, 2018).

Currently, it is possible to note these elements in the “Back to Work” programme, which aims to help people develop “socio-labour skills” in order to “achieve employability” (Secretary of Labour, Employment and Social Security, n.d.). According to government officials, this visualises “a cultural change in the programme’s beneficiaries” (Cordero, in Ámbito, 2024, n.d.).

³ These three military men formed the “Junta de Comandantes en Jefe” (Board of Commanders-in-Chief) which ordered the overthrow of Arturo Illia and Juan Carlos Onganía as the President of the military government.

Technocracy: depoliticisation of the social and de-socialisation of politics

Technocracy is a vision that understands that public affairs, particularly the state's tasks, are a matter of technical, expert and rational treatment. It is a way of depoliticising the social and the subject-necessity relationship.

In Argentina, international financial institutions created in the post-war period have played a decisive role since their inclusion in national issues in 1956, with the first loan contracted with the International Monetary Fund. In the heat of "developmentalism" ideas (Campana, 2011), they promoted a "model of promotion and social assistance" (Arias, 2012) that emphasised the articulation between the delivery of material resources and the activation of state devices that allowed for aptitudinal changes in the assisted population. This trend would continue in other periods, as seen in the sanctioning of Decree N° 392 (1976), which requested the Ministry of Social Welfare to promote the participation of communities in solving their problems.

In general terms, the technocratic utopia reversed the welfare equation: if in Peronism, the need was defined by the subjects, in the 1955 dictatorship, the need was defined by the experts. Paraphrasing the well-known saying, "People do not need fish; they need to be taught to fish", in a recent television programme, the country's current president, Javier Milei, argued and justified the creation of the Ministry of Human Capital by arguing that: "in such a way as to change the way assistance is given: instead of giving you fish, you will be taught to fish" (Milei, 2023, in Viale, 2023).

In the welfare sphere, technocracy proposes redefining social needs "from above". It assumes that a technical criterion for processing social demands, preferences and conflicts resides in authority (Camou, 2001), highlighting the dichotomies between administration vs politics or punters vs technocracy (Rey, 2001). Hence, the discussion becomes an issue of form in the context of challenging the ways social actors make demands visible and place them on the public agenda to demand attention to inequality. For example, in the context of a recent demonstration, Sandra Pettovello, minister of the Ministry of Human Capital, mentioned that she would directly attend to those who are hungry but that she would not talk to social leaders who use them to generate conflict (Pettovello, 2024, in LPO, 2024). By seeing social conflict as an anomaly and the collective strategies of the popular sectors as a grotesque form of manipulation of poverty, the dispute over the meaning of the social is shaped by other values, criteria

and meanings. Therefore, the depoliticisation of the social sector refers to a form of re-politicisation linked to the destructuring and dissociation of the political and social fields.

This idea becomes more visible if we observe the distinction established in the welfare area during Onganía's dictatorship between "populist welfare" and "community development" (Osuna, 2012; 2017; Giorgi, 2015). For the de facto government, the first version of the state's social intervention consisted of a paternalistic manoeuvre that generated a dependency between the popular sectors and the state institution, mediated by political-personal interests identified in the governmental sphere. Meanwhile, the second proposed increasing the autonomy of these sectors concerning the state, given that it was based on their participation and promotion inscribed in the technification of assistance where the community emerged as the "place" – or the zone of civilian "intermediate bodies" (Gomes, 2016; Osuna, 2012; Giorgi, 2015) – of training, modernisation and inclusion. Technification enacted new foundations for national development based on scientific ideas (Osuna, 2017). During this period, the Ministry of Social Welfare had as its domain the training of "social welfare technicians" (Law N°16.956, 1966) that would allow the renewal of welfare practices.

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In this way, the definition of need is based on a technical criterion that redefines it according to what the expert understands about the demands of the popular sectors to manage and discretionally allocate public resources efficiently, objectively, and technically. It is a way of trying to solve public problems based on specific forms of knowledge. For example, during the "Cambiamos" government, this criterion was used to justify the 'myth' of the creation of equal opportunities, in which assistance was seen as a transitory stage and infrastructure works as decisive elements for the 'exit' from poverty (Macri, 2021; Vidal, 2021). In this sense, although welfare demands increased, the government maintained that the popular sectors needed sewers and asphalt (Stanley, 2018 in Mujeres Líderes, 2018). Welfare is not considered a right here but rather an institutional, political and governmental strategy to ensure social reproduction morally.

Technocracy incorporates other coordinates for the welfare policy design, where notions that attempt to process social conflict are woven together. In other words, the state's actions do not follow socially reached consensus about how public resources should be redistributed but rather technical criteria that define what people need based on expert knowledge. The idea of "disintermediation" of assistance put forward, for example, by the government of "La Libertad Avanza" is suggestive of this, given that it assumes the technical certification of poverty and need (Ministerio de Capital Humano,



in Perfil, 2024). The depoliticisation of state action, as a split between state social intervention and politics, is an operation that implies the de-institutionalisation of social organisations within the framework of assistance.

The examples that have been reconstructed show that technocracy, as an idea, redefines the subject-need relationship from the coordinates of the depoliticisation of the social and the dissociation of the political. As a hierarchical foundation that can establish social preferences “from above”, it situates a structural destructuring of the social and the political as autonomous and separate spheres. At this point, a fourth idea becomes visible: assistance as a necessary element for governability.

Governance: containment and social cohesion

Governance is inscribed in the relationship of political domination between the representatives of society and the represented. It refers to how government is governed (Comou, 1993; De Riz, 2017), how the exercise of public power is carried out, and the degrees of governmental stability that a political establishment has to carry out its programmatic plans through the legalised use of the state act.

Taking such a definition, it is possible to recall the idea of “social time”, of which the dictatorship of 1966 spoke, whose guideline established the strengthening of state intervention mechanisms on the processes of wealth distribution within the framework of control and containment of workers’ demands (Gomes, 2016) – the ‘social time’ projected by Onganía aimed to meet the demands of the popular sectors to contain social mobilisation and guarantee the minimum levels required for the continuity of the dictatorship. At the same time, the senior political-strategic cadres understood that the state’s social intervention aimed at the community could maintain the degrees of social cohesion necessary to ensure the functioning of their government’s plan. It is interesting to recall Osuna (2012), who argues that intervention in the community eradicates conflict, where individuals have to accept their place in the social structure, guaranteeing the spiritual cohesion of the popular sectors.

In general terms, governance is the capacity of a government to process social conflict and amalgamate the interests of the different collectives that make up society. For example, welfare was one of the most critical demands and conflicts during 2015-2019 (Natalucci and Moujan, 2022). Since the “Cambiamos” government, each mobilisation was seen and felt from the latent fear of a new “2001”, which operated in the partisan

memory as a “trauma”. Every time December approached during the four years of government, journalists asked officials how they saw the social situation and how they would calm the social conflict. The government staff specified that they had been working every day to ensure that Mauricio Macri did not leave office early and that the difference lay in the fact that they were accompanying the deterioration of living conditions with different assistance plans and social containment strategies (López Medrano, 2016, in Lado P, 2016).

The idea of governability for these actors situates the social as synonymous with ‘citizens’ moods’ regarding the acceptability or otherwise of their government plan. It appears to be linked to ‘waiting’ or ‘sacrifice’ as a governmental imperative in realising the promising future state measures would bring. As the president-elect Javier Milei argued in December 2023, explaining that the future fall of the economic system had to be contained (Milei, 2023, in Último Momento, 2023).

In the context of the economic reform projects that have historically inspired Argentina’s right-wingers and which have brought, in general terms, an increase in poverty and a deterioration in the living conditions of the population in general, waiting and patience have become a political necessity and a proposal for a patriotic attitude. In any society, the horizon of the future is an indispensable vector of social cohesion. As a governmental imperative, waiting and patience are constituted as petitions to make this common future effective and, in the meantime, to attend to social suffering and anguish. Hence, assistance begins to be configured as an element of social governance. Thus, assistance as a criterion of governability appears as a substratum of economic projects. The fifth idea is based on this subsidiarity.

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Social Econometrics: Managing Uncertainty

The econometric vision of the social incorporates the cost-benefit logic to think about state agencies and presupposes the subsidiarity of the social to the economic. In historical terms, it begins to be visualised in Onganía’s dictatorship⁴ (Gomes, 2016) to consolidate in Videla’s dictatorship when Martínez de Hoz won the political internecine (Salerno, 2022), a period in which economists began to achieve greater public visibility and inflation acquired the status of a social problem (Heredia, 2017). For example, inflation was considered the worst ‘tax’ on the poor during the current government and in the evolution of the “Cambiemos” government

⁴ It is appropriate to quote the following excerpt from the “Junta Militar en Jefe” where it was stated in its founding act that one of the reasons that led them to dismiss the elected President was: “the monetary inflation that the Nation was enduring was aggravated by an insatiable statism and incorporated as a system and, with it, the most terrible scourge that can punish a society, especially in the lower income sectors, making wages a swindle and savings an illusion” (Secretaría de Estado de Gobierno, 1969, p.14).



(Macri, 2016, in Casa Rosada, 2016). The fiscal adjustment measures and the creation of a welfare system that can guarantee a minimum acceptable level of coverage for social reproduction are based on the objective of combating inflation.

The econometric view of social issues has always been based on fiscal adjustment as a state policy and citizen effort. In this sense, the econometric conditional meaning presupposes, first and foremost, the establishment of an economic principle to be followed: reduction of the fiscal deficit. A subsidiary one is attention to how this could affect a particular population segment. As was argued by various members of the party that governs Argentina, the fiscal management of the economy would leave many people in poverty (Milei, 2023, in Último Momento, 2023), but they were not going to let them “starve to death” (Villarruel, 2023, in Todo Noticias, 2023).

These narratives observe and explain the social characteristics in terms of an econometric criterion and a financial premise. Adjustment, therefore, is the main driving force behind political decisions to balance the economic situation, an argument that demands the sacrifice of citizens as a contract of political domination. This ‘sacrifice’ incorporated, during Onganía’s government, the importance of individual responsibility for the development of the project of personal self-realisation (Gomes, 2016). While this future where everything would be ‘welfare’ was being achieved, the state should ensure the minimum thresholds for the reproduction of the material conditions of existence of the population outside the formal employment market.

Social assistance would be a strategy to contain the adverse effects of market liberalisation, such as economic recession and rising unemployment. For example, from the political and economic crisis of Mauricio Macri’s government in 2018, as a result of the run on the dollar, the deterioration of social indicators and food inflation, added to measures to eliminate subsidies for public services, assistance attempted to consolidate itself as an instrument to manage the uncertainty generated by market dynamics in excluded sectors, as substantiated by the political authorities (Stanley, 2018, in Legrand, 2018).

Thus, attention to the urgent and immediate becomes vital for ‘right-wing’ governments. It recovers a ‘transitional state’ notion that assists those most in need, arguing that they are taking economic measures to bring in foreign investment and produce quality employment (Stanley, 2019, Ten to Ten, 2019). Today, the econometric view of the social emphasises the neoliberal aporia of the commodification of human life. It exalts the economic sphere as the core of human beings and configures a set of practices, worldviews and affectivities that attach the rational calculation between cost and benefit.

This idea of the transitory nature of assistance to the poor sectors does so to re-educate them to follow the needs of its social project, ensure its governability, dispute their adversary's social support, and redefine social needs. Moreover, it must do so based on a rational cost-benefit calculation, assuming the efficiency of public spending and the fiscal deficit reduction. This is how the minimum possible (and acceptable) levels of welfare management that these governments must establish are configured. In uncertainty management, the randomness of the deregulated economic market and its impact is incorporated and naturalised as a constitutive element of social life. Uncertainty emerges as the domain of social management and intervention localisation.

Conclusions

This work constituted a first approach to observing the ideas that political rightists have in common concerning social assistance. While it is true that the ideal groupings that were identified contain singularities and historical expressions, the significant continuities and symbolic statutes were invariant elements that were maintained to give meaning to this state action.

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At the same time, no attempt was made here to question or verify whether each of the ideas or objectives that the actors set for themselves could be achieved. Instead, it was a search to understand the symbolic structures from which reality is interpreted, acted upon and given meaning.

In this first outline, we recognise a line of research that is propitious and of current relevance for the social sciences in general but for the discipline of Social Work in particular, given that the ideas of governmental institutions shape forms of intervention on the manifestations of the 'social question', the design of public policies, the criteria for the distribution of resources, and the living conditions of the population, among other elements (Zuccaro, 2024). Thus, observing, interpreting and analysing these dynamics of institutionalised politics can be a fruitful field for exercising mastery of its intellectual status and observing the argumentative structure of the discipline from other coordinates.

Moreover, a comprehensive look at the trans-historical characteristics of the thinking of the political actors analysed is an exciting space for better knowing and understanding the present and, in a certain way, facing the challenges, dilemmas and aporias that constitute the professional field in the current context. In the specialised literature, we

find research of great relevance and knowledge about the singularity of each historical period, which can serve as a starting point for developing this research agenda.

In this essay, we found five elements in each instance where the right was in government. It is a first approach that needs to be debated, deepened and updated. To do so, it needs to be circulated.

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ARTICLE

Prison Management and the Ultra-Right in Brazil: Social Struggles in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Gestión carcelaria y ultraderecha en Brasil: luchas sociales en contexto de Pandemia de Covid-19

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Abstract

This article analyses the prison management of the extreme government in Brazil. It highlights the main strategies triggered by the Human Rights movements of people deprived of liberty in the face of the denialism that characterised Bolsonaro's government during the Covid-19 pandemic. This qualitative investigation of a bibliographic and documentary type traces the author's experiences (professional and academic) of articulation with these movements in Rio de Janeiro. The main results show that, despite the initiatives of social movements tending to incarceration, this government, in a pandemic context, ratified central incarceration, ignoring international recommendations.

Keywords:
prison
management;
extreme right;
pandemic;
Human Rights
movements

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la gestión carcelaria del gobierno de extrema derecha en Brasil y traza las principales estrategias accionadas por los movimientos de Derechos Humanos de personas privadas de libertad, frente al negacionismo que caracterizó el gobierno de Bolsonaro, durante la pandemia de Covid-19. Se trata de una investigación cualitativa de tipo bibliográfica y documental que trae las experiencias (profesionales y académicas) de articulación de la autora con estos movimientos, en el Estado de Rio de Janeiro. Los principales resultados muestran que, a pesar de las iniciativas de los movimientos sociales tendientes a la excarcelación, este gobierno, en contexto pandémico, ratificó las políticas de gran encarcelamiento, ignorando las recomendaciones internacionales.

Palabras Clave:
gestión carcelaria;
ultraderecha;
pandemia;
movimientos
de Derechos
Humanos

Introducción

(...) Instead of building houses, they throw the homeless into prison. Instead of developing the educational system, they throw the illiterate into prison. They imprison the unemployed because of deindustrialisation [and] the globalisation of capital (...). Please get rid of them all. Remove that population dispensable to society.

Angela Davis (2019)

This article reflects on the appropriation of rights² in the Brazilian prison system during the Covid-19 pandemic. With an emphasis on the debate on the particularity of the situation of prisons in the State of Rio de Janeiro, it considers the fundamental traits of the penal policy in the extreme right-wing management deployed by the former army captain and member of the executive, Jair Bolsonaro, during the health emergency.

Thus, considering the social struggles in Brazil, we also bring to this analysis the leading strategies and responses of organisations and movements linked to the defence of the human rights of persons deprived of liberty in the face of the denialism that characterised this government.

The methodological design is based on bibliographical and documentary research, with analysis of reports issued by the National Council of Justice (CNJ), the Criminal

² For Boschetti (2018, p.10), "the destruction, or reduction of social rights in capitalism, suppresses from the working class the possibility of accessing part of the wealth socially produced and appropriated by the state in the form of public funds and reduces the participation of the state (...) in the reproduction of the workforce and their families, a situation that forces [the class that lives off labour] to submit to the most barbaric forms of exploitation or to remain unemployed".

Information System and newspaper articles that contain the leading positions and arguments in the public debate on prison management in the period in question. The author's own experience with institutional links through the Human Rights Commission of the Professional Association of Social Workers of the State of Rio de Janeiro and Extension Projects articulated with social movements of Human Rights, which positioned themselves, once again, in a pandemic context, in defence of guarantee policies aimed at the release of prisoners and the monitoring, denunciation and follow-up of cases in which the violation of the rights of the prison population in the State of Rio de Janeiro was verified, was also used for this elaboration.

The article is divided into three parts: first, a characterisation of the previous context and the Bolsonaro government itself; then, the reflection focuses on prison management and specifically on the situation of appropriation of the rights of the prison population in the state of Rio de Janeiro; the third section focuses on the strategies of resistance implemented by the leading human rights organisations in this context.

Far right: reflections on Bolsonaro's (mis)federal government

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Analysing the Brazilian process, Demier (2017) observes that the days of popular struggles in 2013 in the central Brazilian capitals for transport, health and education were decisive for the process of erosion of the Petista project that had governed the country since 2007, considering the lack of openness of this government to negotiate and improve the living conditions of the suffering working class, after twenty years of civil-military and business dictatorship (1964-1984), and since the return to formal democracy in 1985, the harmful consequences of successive neoliberal policies, mainly implemented in the country since the beginning of the 1990s.

On the other hand, in the context of the capitalist crisis³ that has worsened since 2008, part of the Brazilian bourgeoisie gradually abandoned its alliances with the PT government, giving rise to the growth of ultra-conservative expressions, which had also led these 2013 mobilisations, contradictorily, alongside the legitimate demands of workers against the so-called fiscal austerity policies, during the third government of the Workers' Party (PT), whose president, at that time, was Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016).

³ Mészáros (2009), in a direct interlocution with Marx, analyses the global capitalist crisis that began in the 1970s/1980s. In this sense, the Hungarian philosopher observes that, among the main responses of capital to its own crisis, is the expansion of the financial sphere, especially of fictitious capital, which occupies a leading position in the dynamics of contemporary capitalism.

Thus, the structural crisis is characterised by being endemic, cumulative, chronic and permanent; and its main manifestations are structural unemployment, environmental destruction and permanent wars. In this sense, according to Demier (2017), the crisis of bourgeois democracies (formal and liberal) is an expression of the structural crisis of capital, with this form of government finding it increasingly difficult to legitimise itself and provide the answers demanded within the framework of the contradictions also exacerbated by the same crisis of capital.



At this juncture, fertile ground was created for the legal-parliamentary and media coup carried out against the aforementioned PT president and her government in 2016. With the illegitimate government of former president Michel Temer, the offensive against social policies, attacks on labour rights and social protections related to formal employment were accentuated, causing an accelerated increase in the generalised precariousness of the living and working conditions of the Brazilian working class.

Thus, as Braz (2017, p.87-88) analysed, “the interests of big capital in contemporary Brazil required a genuinely bourgeois government, capable of not ceding the least to the workers and withdrawing from them the little they had won”.

In the same vein, Soares (2018) explains the diversified and innumerable measures taken by Michel Temer that demonstrate the acceleration of the coup government’s process of appropriation of public resources: authorisation for privatisation of aquifers, advancement of the privatisation process of the state oil company, PETROBRÁS, alteration of labour legislation, proposed reform of the pension system and approval of Constitutional Amendment No. 95, which, in 2016, created a new tax regime; extension of the so-called Decoupling of Union Resources (DRU), which had an impact on the national budget and channelled resources intended to finance the public pension system, education and health policy, for the formation of primary surpluses, guaranteeing more resources for the payment of foreign debt amortisation and interest. In addition to this, the coup government implemented a series of measures to liberalise the national patrimony, such as the sale of ELETROBRÁS, handing over the exploitation of Pré-Sal (the name given to the presence of gas and oil in deep rocks located on the Brazilian continental shelf of the Atlantic Sea) to companies other than PETROBRÁS, among many other measures contrary to the interests of the Brazilian working class and which, at the same time, express an intense acceleration of the process of expropriation by private capital of the state public fund.

In Soares’ (2018) hypothesis, these policies were not simply an adjustment programme but an austericide whose project and objective was to fully integrate the country into the contemporary capitalist order under the domination of interest-bearing capital.

In this sense, and according to Vasques (2020), the coup radicalised the neoliberal

model based on the control of sectors of the working class and ideologically based on moral panics, starting with the repeated discourse of corruption, which was socially cemented by *anti-scepticism*, as well as the so-called gender ideology, the drug problem, *urban violence* and various other scapegoats associated with centre or centre-left governments.

Thus, these discourses constructed by the extreme right legitimised the escalation of pre-emptive violent repression against the working class to discipline the progressive social forces that had expressed themselves forcefully in the mobilisations of 2013 and which, until the coup of 2016, had been on the rise.

With the above, it is made explicit that Bolsonaro's electoral triumph in 2018 did not happen overnight; on the contrary, it was built in light of historical, political and economic processes that demonstrate the growing adherence to extreme right-wing ideas in the context of permanent capitalist crisis, and in turn, the channelling of popular discontent by far-right governments as a trend, not only in Brazil but also in several countries in the world.⁴

Thus, the government of former army captain Jair Bolsonaro, since coming to executive power, has continued and deepened Temer's austerities, rigorously fulfilling the ultra-neoliberal agenda demanded by international finance capital, headed by the orthodox policy of his economy minister (Paulo Guedes), which has made public resources for social policies increasingly scarce, while keeping untouched the demands for financing the reproduction of capital. Among other policies, according to Magalhães and Osório (2023), he launched a new wave of privatisations and new attacks on natural resources, with the dismantling of institutions for environmental preservation and control, while at the same time accentuating the logic of indigenous genocide, seeking to oust lands demarcated for native peoples, among many other policies aimed at the destruction of life and public patrimony.

Regarding the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, Raichelis and Arregui (2020, p.138) highlight that: "the emergence of the new coronavirus, in the profound structural crisis of capital, exponentially accentuated its ongoing systemic traces,

⁴ Bonnet (2023, p.63) analyses the international political scenario consolidated after the financial crisis of 2007-2008, "marked by a notorious rise of extreme right-wing organisations or political parties, which even ascended to state power. A few examples suffice: D. Trump in the United States, Le Pen in France, Vlaams Belang in Belgium, Vox in Spain, V. Orbán and Fidesz in Hungary, among others." The tendency of the extreme right to take root and grow can also be seen in Latin American countries, as, for example, in Argentina, with the electoral victory of Javier Milei in December 2023.

articulating in a contradictory totality its economic, political, social and health dimensions”.

According to the same authors, in the particularity of the country, the rapid proliferation of this virus was related to the structural inequality caused by the private appropriation of socially produced wealth and the appalling living conditions imposed on the majority of the working class. Recent data produced by the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, OXFAM, show that “63% of Brazil’s wealth is concentrated in 1% of the population, while the poorest 50% hold only 2% of the country’s wealth” (Instituto Conhecimento Liberta, ICL, 2024). It should be noted that, according to Garcia (2024), the same OXFAM document warns of another ongoing trend in the country: the gap between the richest and the poorest continues to grow due, among other determinations, to the existence of a regressive tax system, which exempts the super-rich from paying taxes proportional to their income and property.

Immersed in this reality, during the pandemic period, the Brazilian working class faced high rates of unemployment, underemployment and precarious working conditions. As Castro Sousa (2023) points out, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Brazil’s unemployment rate reached alarming levels. In the first semester of 2021, this rate reached 14.9%; in other words, the lack of formal employment affected more than 15.2 million people.

In turn, considering that more than 40% of the economically active population in this country lives in the informal sector, according to Costa (2020), beyond the health crisis, one of the consequences of the pandemic, in addition to the increase in unemployment, was the rise in informal work, outsourced, subcontracted, flexible and part-time workers who were the first to suffer the consequences of the pandemic because they live in precarious areas, receive low and irregular wages and have no labour rights.

In addition to these labour market conditions, the far-right Bolsonaro promoted disobedience campaigns with systematic boycotts of international recommendations on restricting human contact and using masks. Furthermore, as was widely reported, this government omitted and delayed the purchase of vaccines when they were already available, costing the lives of at least 95,000 Brazilians who would have been immunised in time, according to the BBC-News Brasil news agency.⁵

⁵ Magenta (2021, 28 May).

Moreover, counting on his propaganda machine, Bolsonaro convinced many of his voters and followers not to be immunised because, even though on the day before one of his first declarations (22 March 2020) 3159 new deaths were registered in the country in 24 hours, the former president himself declared on the National TV and Radio network: “[...] because of my history as an athlete, in case I were contaminated with the virus, I would not need to worry. I wouldn’t feel anything, or I would be attacked by a bit of cold [...]”⁶.

Thus, the depreciation of the severity of the pandemic and the late purchase of vaccines, as well as its campaign on the ineffectiveness of immunisation and the proven lack of investment in public health policy, contributed to the deaths of more than 700,000 people⁷(not counting under-reporting).

It should be noted that this was compounded by Bolsonaro’s repeated public positions calling for the quarantine not to be respected. The former president himself, according to Brettas (2020, p.13), declared: “Do not stay at home, continue working; the country and the economy cannot stop” (2020, p.13).

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Similarly, in analysing the federal government’s commitment to the rentier sector, Miranda (2020) highlights the delay and bureaucratic hurdles for workers who lost their income due to the pandemic to receive the so-called Emergency Aid of 600 reais. Meanwhile, the then Minister of Economy, Paulo Guedes, was quickly transferring 1.2 trillion reais to the financial market.

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⁶ Lima (2021, 24 March).

⁷ Data from the Ministry of Health confirm that, in April 2023, one month after the World Health Organisation (WHO) decreed the end of the health emergency, 701,400 deaths from Covid-19 were recorded in Brazil. Henrique (2023, 10 May).



With these preliminary considerations, we seek to analyse what happened during the pandemic, particularly with the prison population, with emphasis on the debate about the reality of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Thus, in the context of the pandemic, the deterioration of the already appalling and inhumane conditions of detention in the Brazilian prison system was undeniable, mainly due to the decision not to release prisoners in the proportions required by the health emergency, as we will see in the following section.

Prison management in the Bolsonaro (mis)government

Among the initial guidelines given by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations (UN), one of them was the indication that national states should implement measures for a drastic reduction of the prison population.

Since then, several countries around the world, under various political trends, have significantly reduced the number of detainees in prisons:

Table 1: Countries that reduced their incarcerated populations during the first year of the pandemic (13 countries where data were available are presented). Source: World Prison Brief, 2020. ⁸

Country	Percentage reduction	Pre-COVID-19 prison population	Number released	Dates data collected
Afghanistan	33%	30,748	10,000	2018 & 3/26/20
Turkey	31%	286,000	90,000	2019 & 4/14/20
Iran	29%	240,000	70,000	2018 & 3/17/20
Myanmar	26%	92,000	24,000	2018 & 4/17/20
South Sudan	20%	7,000	1,400	2019 & 4/20/20
The Gambia	17%	691	115	2019 & 4/26/20
Indonesia	14%	270,387	38,000	3/31/20 & 4/20/20
France	14%	72,000	10,000	3/2020 & 4/15/20
Ireland	13%	3,893	503	2018 & 4/22/20
Italy	11%	61,230	6,500	2/29/20 & 4/26/20
Kenya	9%	51,130	4,500	2018 & 4/17/20
Colombia	8%	122,085	10,000	2/29/20 & 3/31/20
Britain	5%	83,189	4,000	3/27/20 & 4/4/20

Thus, without the intention of establishing a direct relationship between extreme right-wing governments and the lack of reduction of the prison population during the Covid-19 pandemic, we intend to show in this article how, in the particularity of a country like Brazil, governed by the extreme right, there was an open campaign against the release of prisoners, despite international recommendations, and as we will see

⁸ Wagner and Widra (2020, 1 May).



later, also national guidelines issued by the Judiciary with the same objective, related to the reduction of the percentage of the incarcerated population. As a highlight, the Bolsonaro government carried out open campaigns to discredit policies aimed at the release of prisoners and their relationship with the prevention of contagion and deaths from the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

To demonstrate the above, according to Macedo (2020), the former Minister of Justice and Security, Sergio Moro, publicly declared in March 2020: “the lack of official data that would justify taking any decision in this sense, [to release from prison]”. Similarly, the director at the time of the National Penitentiary Department (DEPEN), Fabiano Bordignon, criticised the pro-guarantee positions that tended to understand the absolute incompatibility between large-scale imprisonment, prison overcrowding and the prevention of COVID-19, and ironically labelled this defence as a ‘*solturavirus*’.

Thus, both Moro and Bordignon attacked sectors of civil society and the judiciary that defended the release of prisoners as a way to prevent contagion and deaths in prisons. It was noted that, despite their subsequent departure from the Ministry of Justice and Security in April 2020, along with its former director, both figures played a prominent role in the dissemination of false events associating acts of ‘release’ of alleged dangerous persons and serious crimes linked to arms and drug trafficking.

These ideas spread rapidly and permeated the majority of the decisions from the judges, who, under the (liberal and abstract) argument of the defence of society against crime, denied release and let people die from Covid-19, with imprisonment remaining the rule. It was not uncommon to find in the sentences arguments denying the highly precarious conditions in the detention units, arguing that, both inside and outside the prisons, it would be “the same situation” in the face of a virus unknown to “everyone” (MEPCT/RJ, 2020b).

It should be noted that effective measures with some degree of forcefulness to prevent the proliferation of contagion in prisons were not identified at any time during the health emergency; on the contrary, the three main characteristics of prison management, from the beginning of the pandemic, according to Silva and Sinhoretto (2023), were: 1) a policy of secrecy and disinformation oriented by the low quality of data and public information; 2) under-reporting of cases allied to the poor application of tests; 3) generation of deaths by omission and negligence, once people with legal possibility of obtaining freedom by progression of regime or re-evaluation, remained in prison.

In addition to these policies, the Brazilian state violates the human rights of its detainees. According to Kilduff (2020), with prison overpopulation ranking third in the world in terms of incarceration (in 2020, there were more than 600,000 prisoners in the whole country), Brazil produces and reproduces terrible conditions of detention. The prison system is characterised by overcrowded spaces, precarious structures, limited and poor quality food, lack of or restricted access to drinking water, recurrent power cuts, shortages of hygiene products and other personal items and high rates of torture and cruel, dehumanising and degrading treatment.⁹

The precarious health care of prisoners due to lack of medicines and professional care, the existence of pre-existing diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV, which are responsible for more than 60% of deaths, the scarcity (and always dubious quality) of food, forced inactivity, intense emotional suffering (high rates of suicides are recorded in prisons), the lack of beds, mattresses and drinking water in overcrowded and inadequately ventilated detention units, among other factors, created favourable conditions for the rapid proliferation of this type of coronavirus, including the structural impossibility of establishing “social distancing” in prisons (National Mechanism to Combat and Prevent Torture, MNCPT, 2022).

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It is worth noting that the Brazilian prison system has 436,000 beds for a population that, in March 2024, will reach 839,700 prisoners. According to Mello (2020) and the Network of Security Observatories, the proportion of prisoners in available places varies in each state. The states with the highest overcrowding are Ceará, 173%; Pernambuco, 172%; and Rio de Janeiro, with more than 70% of prisoners without available beds.

When looking in particular at the initial period of the health emergency, the State Mechanism to Prevent and Combat Torture in Rio de Janeiro (MEPCT/RJ, 2020a) found an ordinary reality throughout the prison complex of this state: lack of testing, under-notification of cases, inadequate medical assistance in cases of suspicion or confirmation of Covid-19, lack of access to hygiene materials and drinking water, lack of guidance to prisoners about the virus, denial of information to family members about treatment, flows and health conditions of their detained loved one, and prohibitions of visits and communication with family members, under the pretext of guaranteeing the health measure of social distancing.

⁹ According to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1984, in its article 1: “the term torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession; punishing him for an act which he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed; intimidating him or a third person; or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by a public official or other person acting in an official capacity (...)” (Simas, 2020, p.132).



Thus, as can be verified from the data of the National Penitentiary Department (DEPEN) about the preventive measures adopted regionally in the State of Rio de Janeiro, among other actions, the interruption of visits by public defenders and lawyers was maintained, with no alternative form of communication (virtual or telephone) being offered to guarantee the right to information about their own processes and criminal situation.¹⁰

This pattern of repeated violations of rights mobilised complaints and demanded responses from the State. As we will see below, institutions and organisations linked to the defence of life, specifically the Frente Estadual por el Desencarcelamiento/Regional Rio de Janeiro, together with the Mechanism to Combat and Prevent Torture in Rio de Janeiro (MEPCT/RJ), during the pandemic, in a national articulation, gave public visibility to the severe conditions of detention and presented proposals for the release of prisoners.

Actions by human rights organisations

The Frente Estadual por el Desencarcelamiento/RJ was created in January 2017, following the initiative of several human rights organisations, in response to the massacres that have taken place in prisons in the states of Amazonas, Roraima, and Rio Grande do Norte. The human rights organisations that the Front brings together denounce the Brazilian state for the dehumanising conditions to which it subjects people in its custody. The lack of drinking water, beds, clean clothes, personal hygiene items, medical care and interdisciplinary teams, and adequate food, among other precariousness, is recurrent in the Brazilian prison system.

Thus, this state front for the release of prisoners, which also responds to a national organisation, the National Agenda for the Release of Prisoners, articulates various institutions, collectives and regional social movements to build a typical programme capable of reducing the prison population in the country. Alternatives such as these, among others, are essential to guarantee the right to life of persons deprived of their liberty.

In the particularity of Rio de Janeiro, the Frente Estadual, together with the MEPCT, during the pandemic period, demanded that, within the State Courts of Justice, Recommendation nº62 of the National Council of Justice (CNJ, 2020)¹¹ be implemented to make the release from prison effective.

¹⁰ National Survey of Prison Information, INFOPEN (2019).

¹¹ National Council of Justice (2020, 17 March) and Brazil (2020).

Through this recommendation, the National Council of Justice (CNJ) issued guidance to courts and magistrates throughout the country to adopt preventive measures against the spread of SARS-CoV-2 in the prison system. In this regard, the Front and the Mechanism identified the need not only for groups considered at risk to leave the system but also for there to be a reduction in the number of prisoners at what is known as the “gateway to the system”, i.e. to reduce new prison sentences drastically. There was also a need for the release of pre-trial (i.e. unconvicted) prisoners, who constitute approximately 40% of the total prison population in the country.

In this regard, the re-evaluation of pre-trial detention was indicated, especially in the case of pregnant women, people with disabilities and indigenous people, or when the prison was overcrowded and without medical care. It was also suggested that pre-trial detention for more than 90 days for less serious crimes should be reviewed and that new detention orders should respect “maximum exceptionality”. Similarly, CNJ Recommendation No. 62 offered magistrates the option of reversing open regime imprisonment to house arrest or where there were symptoms of COVID-19, as well as the suspension of mandatory reporting for trial in applicable cases.

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It is worth noting that the increase in house prisons (with and without electronic bracelets) during the peak of the health emergency, according to Silva and Sinhorretto (2023), is shown as a national trend. This reality was a conquest of the social movements of Human Rights that pressured effective compliance with Recommendation n°62 of the CNJ.

However, what was verified in the courts of the State of Rio de Janeiro was, in general terms, the non-application of this recommendation, in line with the position of Sergio Moro, who “did not see the need for release in the pandemic”. It is worth noting that, as we have shown, the former Minister of Justice and Security publicly attacked these positions with false information and accused those who defended the application of this resolution of irresponsibility.

In this regard, and by way of example, between 17 and 18 April 2020, and within less than 24 hours of each other, two detainees died in the prison system of the state of Rio de Janeiro, with suspicion of COVID-19, one of them being a 73-year-old person. Being considered a risk group and protected by Recommendation No. 62, the Court of Justice of Rio de Janeiro (TJRJ) could have granted house arrest to avoid this contagion and, subsequently, this death. Así, al constatar su incumplimiento, partidos

y organizaciones. Thus, upon noting their non-compliance, political parties and human rights organisations, in the process of collective organisation, demanded the approval of a bill (Law nº978 of 2020) authored by federal deputy Glauber Braga and federal deputy Talíria Petrone, both from the Socialist and Liberty Party of Rio de Janeiro (PSOL/RJ), which sought to reduce the number of people in prison as an urgent measure to prevent the spread of Covid-19, both in the prison system and in the socio-educational system, where young people and adolescents in conflict with the criminal law are detained.

In an official note of support, human rights organisations highlighted their support for Bill No. 978/2020, which proposed concrete measures to reduce the prison population and the number of adolescents undergoing socio-educational internment measures, in line with Resolution No. 62 of the National Council of Justice.

The bill above (which was not approved but was annexed to other similar bills by the Federal Chamber of Deputies) proposed the substitution of custodial sentences by house arrest/internment or other alternative precautionary measures rather than imprisonment for persons in risk groups, elderly, pregnant women, nursing mothers and mothers or carriers of pre-existing diseases, also including cases that do not involve violence or severe threat and sentences of less than four years, to avoid exposing people under the protection of the state to a greater risk of contamination and aggravation of the disease.

It should be noted that the bill was drafted based on international recommendations, such as the one issued in April 2020 by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. In this regard, this global organisation suggested that member states commit themselves to: 1) Reduce overpopulation; 2) Establish protocols or action plans for the prevention of contagion; 3) Provide pregnant women with free access to sexual and reproductive health care services, as well as maternity care services and facilitate access to adequate health services for young people and adolescents in the socio-educational system; 4) Promote sufficient food and access to drinking water; 5) Adopt measures to ensure natural ventilation, maximum cleanliness, disinfection and waste collection to prevent the spread of disease; 6) Distribute free of charge masks, gloves, alcohol, disposable towels, toilet paper and waste bags, among other items, both for the population in detention and for custodial staff and health teams; 7) Enable access to health care services for all detainees, as well as to the health care system; 8) Facilitate access to mental health services for people who require it, considering anxiety or other pathologies that could be generated by the fear caused by the possible contagion.



Thus, despite the importance of international guidelines (WHO, UN and Inter-American Court), in general terms, in Brazil, these norms have not materialised strongly in real life.

This observation links to the reflections of Marx and Engels in “Critique of the Gotha Programme” (1985), when they discuss bourgeois law as unequal, i.e. formal equality of laws and natural or material inequality. If the capitalist state is not a neutral arbiter above and outside class interests, the laws are not equal for all and do not defend all interests; in this sense, their application responds to criteria of class selectivity. According to Kilduff (2010, p.246):

Despite the liberal concept of equality before the law being deeply rooted in society, the profound selectivity that runs through differences from access, application, and enforcement allows us to demystify the bourgeois idea of the equality of all before the law.

Thus, even if all these orientations exist on the level of bourgeois legal formality, they have not been realised on the level of real life, or when applied, they often respond to the ruling class’s interests.

Having said this, in the particularity of Rio de Janeiro, human rights organisations, noting the difficulties for family members and public human rights organisations to monitor the violations of rights in prisons, organised themselves with the aim of weaving strategies to reverse this reality.

This situation mobilised the Frente por el Desencarcelamiento/RJ and the MECPT/RJ, in June 2020, to create and launch the so-called: “Plataforma Desencarcela ¹²”, a virtual tool that allowed anonymous complaints (mainly by prisoners and family members), during the pandemic, to be made, facilitating monitoring, communication and relevant referrals to public agencies, also considering the prohibition of entry to prisons of the State Mechanisms to Combat and Prevent Torture, to verify conditions of detention and access to health of those in custody during this pandemic period.

In this way, through this platform, these organisations, protected by Recommendation No. 62, managed to free (or reverse the sentence to house arrest) some prisoners, considering the criteria set out in the recommendation, as well as to guarantee access to health treatment (in the detention units and also outside the prisons), enable

¹² Lucius (2020, 08 June).

communication with family members and defenders and obtain authorisation, in critical cases, to bring food, personal hygiene items, medical care and access to medicines into the prisons, in the face of the State's omission.

Final considerations

Denialism was a part and expression of the project of the ultra-right in Brazil and claimed the lives of thousands of Brazilians. During the pandemic, the violation of rights in the penal system was not only maintained as a rule but also worsened with the argument of exceptionality, serving as a pretext to suppress and expropriate the rights of prisoners, in line with the ultra-neoliberal project, in favour of significant capital and to the detriment of the lives of the working class.

According to Kilduff (2018), state violence against the subaltern classes is not a new or recent phenomenon in Brazil, on the contrary, it is structural to its social formation; the implementation of the neoliberal programme, as noted in the introduction to this article, initiated in the 1990s, brought with it a redirection of the penal system, necessary to respond to the growing manifestations of the social question associated with the growth of inequality, unemployment, job insecurity and poverty.

Thus, the policy of large-scale imprisonment, its maintenance, and the violations of rights in places of deprivation of liberty are not realities exclusive to the government analysed here. In this sense, right-wing or progressive governments that have governed the country since the beginning of the implementation of the neoliberal project have historically participated in and been responsible for the growing incarceration since the start of the 1990s and, with overpopulation, the intensification of all kinds of rights violations.

Thus, we conclude that Brazil, having gone through the whole pandemic governed by the extreme right and considering its long history of neoliberal consolidation and over-incarceration for more than 30 years, distanced itself from any possibility of adapting its policies with any degree of seriousness and systematicity, to confront the pandemic, on the understanding that, in the penal field, de-incarceration (seriously) was a possible alternative to avoid contagions and deaths in the country's penitentiary complexes.

Thus, ignoring the dramatic effects of the proliferation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in a



prison system that is already overcrowded, precarious, unhealthy and responsible for all kinds of human rights violations is part of a silent strategy of the Brazilian state to continue (and deepen) a policy of elimination of subjects, from the point of view of capitalist ideology, considered “undesirable” and “disposable”.

It is worth noting that although the profile of prisoners in Brazil is fundamentally made up of unemployed and precarious people, this population also participates in the extended mechanisms of reproduction and accumulation of capital since, for example, large capitals profit from the provision of various services linked to public-state and private prison management.

As a result of this research, we verified that the number of people incarcerated in prison units during the pandemic showed a slight downward trend as a result of pressure from social organisations and movements for the application by magistrates of Recommendation No. 62, which in turn also demanded improvements in detention conditions; however, this did not mean a reduction in the deprivation of liberty as the primary form of punishment in the country, a situation that confirms as a rule (and not as an exception) the policy of large-scale imprisonment.

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Allende for the 21st century

Paula Francisca Vidal Molina and Ximena Odekerken review *Allende and the Popular Unity. The Road to Democratic Socialism*, New York, Routledge, 2024. 208 pp. 208 pág

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This book brings together speeches by President Salvador Allende and government texts by officials of his government, such as Pedro Vuskovic, a Socialist Party militant and Minister of Economy, Development and Reconstruction in the Unidad Popular government, also Minister of Agriculture from 1970 to 1972, who played a crucial role in the Agrarian Reform of the government before Allende's, Eduardo Frei Montalva's and the Christian Democracy. The volume also includes documents by female leaders, such as the journalist Amanda Puz, director of the magazine *Paula*, and the writer Virginia Vidal.

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Documents from institutions such as the Central Única de Trabajadores and Mapuche and Araucanian communities are translated here. Some of Allende's speeches, such as the one at the National Stadium on 5 November 1970 or the one at the University of Guadalajara in December 1972, are well known, but other texts in this book rescue less visible voices – some of them collective – from the Chilean political process, in addition to that of the socialist president. This effect of discursive chirality is slightly reminiscent of *Listen, Yankee*, the book by C. Wright Mills (1960) on the Cuban Revolution, in which the American sociologist reproduced other voices of the Cuban revolutionary leadership, in addition to those of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, which were the most recognisable.

This anthology is organised thematically, towards a redefinition of what is traditionally assumed to be “democratic socialism” or the “Chilean road to socialism”. The latter has generally been understood from the point of view of the means of access to power, no longer through armed insurrection but through democratic elections and a preservation

of the Chilean liberal constitutional framework, with its representative government and division of powers.

In Allende's discourse, for example in his conversation with Régis Debray and the debates between the armed and peaceful lefts of the 1970s, this emphasis was already apparent. However, by focusing more on the ends or concrete impacts of Unidad Popular's public policies, this book contributes to giving new meaning to or redefining the content of "democratic socialism".

This redefinition is in tune but also in contradiction with a new historiographical corpus on the Popular Unity project, which we can identify with studies such as those of Eugenia Palieraki (2014), Marian Schlotterbeck (2018), Tanya Harmer (2011) and Marcelo Casals (2010), among others.

There would be at least four flanks to this redefinition of Chilean democratic socialism. The first would be the adjectivisation of that democratic experiment as "participatory" rather than parliamentary or representative, two conceptualisations that carried a lot as well as time's actors and in the historiography. Both in the section that includes documents related to the nationalisation of copper (or mining in general) and those that deal with industrialisation, the role of the working class and trade union politics, the emphasis is placed on the "participatory" dimension of that democracy.

The second flank would be that of popular government as a platform of existing social rights. Agricultural and industrial policies do not appear here to be too closely tied to developmental planning strategies or the search for community self-management. The people's government would be the transition to socialism, insofar as through the structural transfer of ownership of the means of production, the destruction of the liberal state would take place from below or from within.

The third flank is the one we can associate with the participation of women in the Unidad Popular project and the gender policies of Allende's government. The selected documentation conveys a desiderative sense or a sense of demand to the Allende government from the voices of Amanda Puz and Virginia Vidal against the predominant machismo in Chileans that the correspondence between these demands and the programme of "women's emancipation" or the gender policies of the Unidad Popular is not so clear. Perhaps, here, a dissonance could be identified between the meaning sought by the anthology and the studies of Tanya Harmer (2011), for example.

Finally, the fourth flank would be that of the indigenous communities. It is interesting to note here that two of the documents, Allende's agreements with the Mapuche community of Ñielol, Temuco, and that of the Araucanía representatives on the Law for the "protection and integral development" of these peoples, date from 1964, when Allende was the presidential candidate of the Popular Action Front (FRAP), during the government of Jorge Alessandri. These documents would converge with another line of more recent historiography, which calls for the origins of the Popular Unity project to be traced back to the FRAP.

So this anthology seeks to propose a romanticisation of the Unidad Popular project, not in terms of the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s, but of the more recent left of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. A left that sought alternatives to representative or parliamentary democracy, this time feminist and communitarian rather than developmentalist or extractivist. It is, therefore, a revision and updating of the interpretative repertoire that has most commonly been applied to the reading of the political programme and governmental performance of Salvador Allende and the Unidad Popular.

Therefore, the anthology has the value of bringing primary documents of the Allende government into contact with the English-speaking reader, bringing that fundamental experience of the Chilean and Latin American left closer to the English-speaking public of the 21st century. Similar projects from those years include a well-known study by Aviva Chomsky (2010), for example, on the Cuban Revolution, understanding the phenomenon in terms of racial, sexual, gender and religious diversity, a reality like that of Cuba in the 1960s and 1970s, a period which, according to the most up-to-date historiography – Lilian Guerra (2012), Michelle Chase (2015), Alejandro de la Fuente (2001), Abel Sierra Madero (2016) – was marked by the homogenisation of the revolutionary subject.

TI conclude, then, by asking whether there is not a risk here of extemporaneous political correctness that displaces the project of Allende and the Popular Unity of the 1960s and 1970s from its Cold War context and, above all, from its belonging to the heterodox Marxism of the New Left. A location which guarantees that experience of a highly innovative, open-minded or even dissident field of significance within the tradition of the Latin American left in the 20th century.

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A left with audacity, decision, conviction, a programme and a clear strategy can confront the Right: an interview with Claudio Katz.

Paula Vidal (PV)

Gonzalo Durán (GD)

Claudio Katz (CK)

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Claudio Katz is one of the most prominent economists of recent decades, with a long career in critical reflection in politics and academia, and who actively supports the defence of human rights. His publications have been translated into Portuguese, English and Chinese. He currently participates in several CLACSO working groups and has coordinated some of them. Among his most outstanding books are: “América Latina en la Encrucijada Global” (2024)¹ ; “Teoría de la Dependencia: cincuenta años después” (2019)² ; “Bajo el Imperio del Capital” (2011)³ ; “Las disyuntivas de la izquierda en América Latina” (2008)⁴ ; and “El porvenir del socialismo” (2004)⁵ . He won the Libertador Prize for Critical Thought in 2019, awarded by the Ministry of Popular Power for Culture of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Network in Defence of Humanity, for his work “Teoría de la Dependencia 50 años después”.

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PV/GD: Claudio, in your latest book “Latin America at the Crossroads”, you deal with the situation of different countries, both in Latin America, China and the United States. We want to delve more deeply into the question of the right wing, given that it has taken on new currency in the political, academic and social spheres. What would you say?

Claudio Katz: Well, I believe that the advance of the right is the dominant fact in the world and, therefore, also in Latin America, and here we have a different right, but related to that of Europe and the United States, which is not classic fascism, which should not be interpreted in terms of mere populism, that has a strong onslaught, that faces limits, but what is central is the priority of fighting this right with a firm decision, prioritising action from below, popular mobilisation, and with the forcefulness that

¹ Katz, C. (2024). Latin America at the Global Crossroads. Buenos Aires. Battle of Ideas.

² Katz, C. (2019) Teoría de la Dependencia, cincuenta años después. Buenos Aires. Batalla de las Ideas.

³ Katz, C. (2011). Under the Empire of Capital. Buenos Aires. Ediciones Luxemburg.

⁴ Katz, C. (2008).). Las disyuntivas de la Izquierda en América Latina. Buenos Aires. Ediciones Luxemburg.

⁵ Katz, C. (2004). The Future of Socialism. Buenos Aires. Ediciones Herramienta - Imago Mundi.

Chávez and Fidel bequeathed to us, and not with the hesitation that predominates today, especially in the various exponents of progressivism, who not only fail to fulfil the promises of their governments, allowing the right to regain permanent strength, but who, in the face of the right, do not show the decisiveness, the audacity, the courage needed to confront the danger of these characteristics, of this dimension.

PV/GD: At different moments in the history of Latin America, the left has had a place in confronting the right wing and pushing for the demands of the popular sectors. In this general framework, for the moment we live in as a society, how would you characterise the left, and what role would they have in confronting the right wing?

Claudio Katz: First, the left needs audacity, decision, and conviction; then, they need to set out a programme and a strategy, especially a programme and a strategy, because it is not enough to fight. We have had a wave of recent revolts, from 2019 onwards, in several countries that brought down neoliberal governments, and the right came back. Conservative restoration has regained strength. This means that a successful struggle is not enough, but that the left has to conquer enough authority to, beyond resistance, manage to consolidate a project with solid foundations. And that, in the face of a right-wing that so brazenly exposes what it wants to do, requires the left to reveal its anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and social transformation project forcefully.

And that means a struggle against inequality, a struggle against dependent capitalism, a struggle where the socialist ideal is present as a goal to be achieved. In my opinion, the left can only regain consistency and strength if it enunciates a strategy to achieve the objectives of equality, democracy, justice, and socialism.

PV/GD: The left has always thought about strategy and tactics to advance the struggle in favour of the disadvantaged; what would that strategy consist of today? What can we learn from the experiences of the Latin American left since a programme is not enough?

Claudio Katz: Regarding strategy, I share with a broad sector of the left the conception that the plan that suits our times is to win the government and begin to contest power. To win the government by electoral means and to contest military, media, economic and judicial power in a long battle once the government has been won.

The first key idea is that government and power are not the same thing, and the conquest of government is only a tiny link in the power struggle. But the first step is to consolidate this arrival in government and this political transformation from the government, generating an integral democratic transformation of the political system where citizens conquer real decision-making power, with experiences of democratic constituent assemblies, as we saw in Venezuela, as we saw in Bolivia, and where this transformation is sustained and driven by a widespread power built from below, parallel to the institutional system. To govern by winning through elections but creating support for extra-institutional, extra-parliamentary mobilisation linked to the institutional parliamentary project.

If the social struggle only unfolds in the limited terms allowed by the institutional framework, the left's project will not advance in the dispute for power. It can reach the government, but it can only dispute power by breaking the current institutional framework's restrictive framework. From there, the dispute for power, in my opinion, will have different temporalities, where the key is the rapid and forceful control of the political system, the battle for the media to develop an economic transformation that will not be immediate, that will have different steps and where we have to learn a lot from important experiences in Latin America, Bolivia or internationally, such as China, which give us certain guidelines of where to go through processes of transformation and development.

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PV/GD: From your perspective, how does this strategy differ from previous ones that have crossed the struggles in Latin America and the world, and what new features would it have?

This strategy that I am putting forward differs substantially from the predominant socialist strategy in Latin America during the second half of the 20th century, which was a strategy that counterposed armed struggle, in terms of protracted people's war or insurrectional processes, against the parliamentary road to socialism; this was what was discussed in the last decades of the last century: guerrilla, insurrection, parliament, as counterposed instances.

Well, about the idea of reaching the government, conquering and disputing power, we can say that it is this dynamic of Reform and Revolution in which it is always necessary to determine when one is concatenated with the other because that will depend on the process as it unfolds. And where the social subject of this change is an expanded popular subject, I distance myself from the sociological view of a privileged



subject, which is the traditional idea of classical Marxism, of the proletariat, of the exploited, as the subject that, unlike the rest of the oppressed, has the capacity, through its control of the levers of the economy, to play a leading role in the transformation of society. The true part is that these are the key sectors for a transformation, the bankers, those who run the ports, those who manage the oil, they are the subject that manages society's transformation. However, this does not mean that the one who is driving the transformation, the one who is pushing the dynamics of Reform and Revolution, is the one who will follow; it may or may not be the same subject. And experience instead induces us to be flexible, the experience of the 20th century. There have been revolutions of the proletariat: the classic Russian one, there have been revolutions of the peasants in China, and there have been many revolutions, many revolts of the precarious or the mass of the precarious as intervening subjects in contemporary processes. Flexibility on this point and flexibility in the organisation: there is no doubt that this process requires organisation. An organisation is needed for the struggle; you cannot fight without organisation. However, whether this will be with movements, with parties, or what kind of parties, there are various situations where it is impossible to predetermine and where there is no single model for Latin America. There is no programme for Latin America; in no way is there a presupposition and a priori definition that the subject in Haiti is going to be the same as in Brazil.

PV/GD: What are the challenges for a work agenda in favour of the gains of the popular struggles?

It seems that all this that I have just explained needs to be investigated, studied and clarified in terms of four concrete experiences so that there is no vacuum of projects to be carried out in the future; we need to assess what there was and what there was not of these elements in the Salvador Allende process in Chile, in the Cuban revolution and Venezuela and Bolivia in recent decades. These four processes have to be studied there, how it was, and what they did and did not have. It does not seem that the idea of socialism we want to build is something we will invent tomorrow, apart from the experiences that have already occurred. In many cases, they are experiences that teach what was not done and what was lacking. Processes frozen today in Venezuela and Bolivia failed, and there are other tremendous ones like that of Salvador Allende. That is why we study what has been done and we build future projects on what has been done. This would be the first panorama to tackle in order to move forward.

Biography

Biography of Claudio Katz (interviewee): Argentine economist, militant, and human rights activist. He was born in 1954. He completed his undergraduate studies in Economics at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), where he also obtained his doctorate. He is one of the most prominent economists of recent decades, with a long history of critical reflection in politics and academia. His publications have been translated into Portuguese, English, and Chinese. He currently participates in several working groups of CLACSO, in addition to having coordinated some of them.

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Biography of Gonzalo Durán (interviewer): Economist from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, holding a Master of Sciences in Labour Economics from the University of Turin (Italy) and a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Duisburg-Essen (Germany, DAAD scholar). His research interests include: trade unionism, collective bargaining, wages, and inequality. He is an assistant professor in the Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Chile.

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Understanding the rise of the far right through Marxist Economics. Interview with Michael Roberts

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Michael Roberts worked as an economist in the City of London for over 40 years. He has closely observed the machinations of global capitalism from within the dragon's den. At the same time, he was a political activist in the labour movement for decades. Since retiring, he has written several books. *The Great Recession – a Marxist View* (2009); *The Long Depression* (2016); *Marx 200: A Review of Marx's Economics* (2018); and jointly with Guglielmo Carchedi as editors of *World in Crisis* (2018) and *Capitalism in the 21st Century: Through the Prism of Value* (2022)¹. He has published numerous papers in various academic economic journals and articles in leftist publications. Michael Roberts actively participates in the Marxist economic debate, participating in trade union schools, in public discussions and interviews, and mainly writing his analysis in the blog "The Next Recession".

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GD/PV: Michael, tell us how you became involved in the battle of ideas from a Marxist perspective, when, how and why you began your blog, The Next Recession.

Michael Roberts: I studied economics at university to the level of a higher degree while at the same time becoming convinced of Marxism, i.e. historical materialism and Marx's value theory. I also became an activist in the labour movement. When I left university, I did not become an academic but went into the private sector as an economist for various financial institutions - working in the heart of the beast! There are just a few Marxist economists who did this - most Marxist economists (and there are not many anyway!) became academics.

Working in the financial sector was advantageous in that I learned the practical workings of finance capital. Still, it was disadvantageous because the day job restricted my time in developing my understanding of Marxist economics. I was spending my time working out what finance capital wanted to know e.g. was the dollar going to rise or fall and only in my spare time working on the Marxist theory of financial crises.

¹ Carchedi, G., y M. Roberts (2022). *Capitalism in the 21st Century: Through the Prism of Value*. Londres: Pluto Press.

Eventually, I ended my schizophrenic status and retired from finance and worked full time on Marxist economics. That's when I set up my blog back in 2009 (I had done other works before that). My aim was to explain Marxist economics and its relevance to what was happening in the world economy AND to tell readers about mainstream economic explanations and what was wrong with them. And this was to be without academic jargon and concentrating on empirical evidence and not just quoting Marx. After the blog came my books that developed my views more thoroughly.

GD/PV: Marx never developed an exhaustive theory of inflation. Using the labour theory of value, you have developed one with Guglielmo Carchedi. Could you please explain what it is? Are inflation and inflation control the greatest economic hobbyhorses of the right?

Michael Roberts: In our view, mainstream explanations of inflation of prices of goods and services in an economy have proved to be inadequate. The two main theories are monetarism and wage cost push. Monetarism argues that changes in money supply cause changes in prices but the empirical evidence for this is not there. On the contrary, we (and Marx) would argue that changes in prices cause changes in money supply. The second theory reckons that excessive demand for goods (coming both from wage rises and government spending) causes prices to rise as supply capacity is filled. So, workers asking for more wages only causes a wage-price spiral. Marx refuted this theory over 160 years ago and the recent inflationary spike has also refuted this Keynesian type theory as it is clear that prices jumped because of supply blockages, scarcity of commodities and low productivity not because of 'excessive demand' or 'too high wages'. On the contrary, wages have been trying to catch up with price rises. If anything it was profits that rose in a profits-price spiral.

Our theory of inflation returns to Marx's value theory. Under this theory, *ceteris paribus*, in a capitalist economy, there is a tendency for value per worker to fall as productivity reduces the hours of work needed to produce commodities. However, rising productivity takes place as capitalist invest in more machinery and technology relative to employing workers. As value only comes from labour, if the hours worked fall relative to the rise in expenditure on the means of production, then there is a tendency for the rate of profit on capital to fall. If profitability falls, then total value growth will slow.

And here is the rub. When the monetary authorities in capitalist economies note that production is slowing down or even falling (they don't connect this to Marx's law of profitability), they react by pumping in more money supply to try and boost the economy (monetarist theory) and/or to raise demand (Keynesian theory). But value growth is unaffected by this and result is that money supply growth can become greater than value growth and the gap between the two is covered by an inflation of market prices. This is our value theory of inflation (money supply growth versus value growth). We find good correlations between official inflation rates and our value rate of inflation. To give an example, in 2021-22, money growth rose sharply as the authorities tried to overcome the pandemic slump, but value growth was weak, so price inflation accelerated. In 2023, value growth improved while the central banks reduced money supply growth, so inflation rates fell. We shall be publishing the latest version of our theory soon.

GD/PV: Michael, can you characterize the present economic-political and social situation? Can one speak of a structural crisis of capital, and if so, how does it manifest itself on a regional-global level? If not, what kind of crisis do we face?

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Michael Roberts: In my view, at the beginning of this 21st century, the world capitalist economy entered what I call a Long Depression similar to that of the 1930s and the late 19th century. This is where the profitability of capital in the major economies is so low that investment and production growth remains very weak and nothing seems to shift profitability up much (unlike the brief neo-liberal period of 1980-2000).

As a result, capitalist production cannot meet the basic needs of 8bn people: poverty globally remains high, and inequality of wealth and income has worsened. Capitalism cannot solve the climate crisis quickly enough (if at all) to avoid disastrous consequences for humanity and the planet. And this crisis of profitability has increased rivalry between the major capitalist powers led by the US against those economic powers that resist US hegemony – e.g. Russia and above all China. The danger of global conflict has risen sharply, as it did in the early 1900s with major war possibly on the horizon.

Crises i.e. slumps in production, investment and living standards, are endemic to capitalist production. These are usually resolved by the recurring slumps themselves, as they lead to a reduction in the costs of production and a rise in profitability for a while. But then the contradictions return for another bout. In a Long Depression, however, this becomes very difficult. Can capitalism revive? Perhaps it can with the introduction of new technologies (AI), but only after significantly raising profitability, and that means further serious slumps to do that - that is what eventually happened in

the long depression of 1873-95 - only this time capitalism is completely global and integrated (in the pandemic slump, 95% of all economies went down).

GD/PV: Is there a relationship between the above and the rise of the right-wing in the governments of the North and South?

Michael Roberts: The failure of capitalism to take humanity forward in the last two decades of the 21st century is mirrored by the failure of social democratic reformist policies to work for the benefit of the many. Instead of gradual improvements in wages, public services and welfare, the opposite has been the case: the prosperity (if only in the major advanced economies) that was experienced to some extent in the mid 20th century gave way to neoliberal policies of cuts in public services, the crushing of trade unions and welfare. This was followed in the 21st century with austerity. Social democratic parties have been found wanting and have dramatically lost support everywhere in Europe, and so there has been the rise of dangerous so-called 'populist' parties who blame the mess on immigrants, minorities, government, unions and free trade. Just as in the 1930s depression, these forces are gaining electorally in the North, while in the global South even more anarchic parties are coming to the fore (Bolsonaro in Brazil, Milei in Argentina etc).

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GD/PV: What are the differences between right-wingers of yesterday and today, and what are the consequences for the countries?

Michael Roberts: The main difference today is that the neo-fascist right do not (yet) have militias that can bust people up on the streets as in fascist Italy or nazi Germany in the inter-war period. And they are still the early stages of gaining state power in most countries. So, they will look to the military and the state machine for support. So, there is still time to defeat them.

GD/PV: What are the reasons for the rise of the right in countries with a strong working class and union movement (e.g. Argentina, Germany, Uruguay)?

Michael Roberts: All alternatives have failed: conservative neo-liberal parties or social democratic parties and even those more recent anti-capitalist parties have failed. The trade union leaders have also failed to take a robust lead. That is because all these alternatives do not rely or build on the working class but instead continue to put their faith in the state machine and in gradual reforms. They oppose with great fear any revolutionary alternative. That approach may have worked for a while in the 1950s and 1960s, but really since the 1980s it has not. So now the middle class (petty bourgeois)

and sections of the unorganised working class have turned in desperation to these right-wing parties.

GD/PV: What alternatives or experiences exist or could emerge with the capacity to confront the right, considering an emancipatory, anti-capitalist, emancipatory project? What place do the working class and the dispute for the state have in this?

Michael Roberts: As a Marxist, I am convinced that class struggle cannot disappear into the fog of nationalism, racism and fascism. The working class is still the objective agency for change and for the progress of humanity based on achieving a collective and cooperative system of human organisation that is in harmony with nature. Globally, the working class has never been larger in the history of capitalism, while the objective forces of capital have never been smaller or weaker. Moreover, as capitalism changes from a heavy industry manufacturing economy to one based on knowledge and hi-tech industries, new sections of the working class are emerging untainted by past conservative ideas within the older parts of the labour movement. It is the job of those of us working to build a fighting alternative to the nationalist, racist right wing to develop a socialist alternative based on these new sections of the working class. That means using all methods to do this. Yes, we must work electorally within the confines of the existing capitalist state but also outside based on the independent entities of working-class power when they appear.

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Biographies

Biography of Michael Roberts (interviewee): (He worked as an economist in the City of London for over 40 years. He has closely observed the machinations of global capitalism from the dragon's mouth. He was also a political activist in the labour movement for decades. Following his retirement, he has written several books, including "The Great Recession - a Marxist View" (2009); "The Long Depression" (2016); "Marx 200: a review of Marx's economics" (2018); and, alongside Guglielmo Carchedi, co-edited "World in Crisis" (2018) and "Capitalism in the 21st Century: Through the Prism of Value" (2022). He has published numerous papers in various academic economic journals and articles in left-leaning publications. Michael Roberts actively participates in the Marxist economic debate, engaging in trade union schools, public debates, interviews, and primarily writing economic analyses on his blog "The Next Recession" (<https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/>).

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