

From the expropriation of public patrimony to the expropriation of labor rights: the new neoliberal offensive

THE PARLIAMENTARY COUP OF AUGUST 31, 2016 was not only aimed at removing a democratically elected government from power, but at implementing an economic project absolutely different from that approved at the ballot boxes by the majority of the population. Such project expresses the new neoliberal offensive, more nefarious than that of the 1990s, when the main attack was directed at the patrimony of the Brazilian State, built since the 1930s.

In the governments of Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992), and especially of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002), companies, banks and public services were privatized in order to reduce the size and change the role of the State, following the thesis of political liberalism of minimal State as part of the strategy to overcome the accumulation crisis. Much of the state patrimony were transferred to the private sector, through privatizations, for values that did not even correspond to the public investments made over decades. Also, the regulatory action of the State was delegated to indirect administration, special autarchies in general, the regulatory agencies, currently 11 in Brazil: electricity (Aneel – 1997), telecommunications (Anatel – 1997), petroleum, natural gas and biofuel (ANP – 1998), supplementary health (ANS – 1998), sanitary surveillance (Anvisa – 1999), water (ANA – 2000), cinema (Ancine – 2001), water transportation (Antaq – 2001), ground transportation (ANTT – 2001), civil aviation (Anac – 2005) and, recently, mining (ANN – 2017).

The regulation is constituted by governmental actions – creation of operation rules of market segments explored by private companies, supervision and quality control in the provision of services – aiming to assure the public interest (BRASIL, 2009, N. P.), according to the “new approaches” of public management.

To cite only the regulatory agencies in the field of health, the ANS regulates the market for private health plans, and the Anvisa

exercises sanitary control of all products and services (national or imported) subject to sanitary surveillance, such as medicine, food, cosmetics, sanitizers, tobacco products, medical products, blood, blood products, and health services. (WIKIPÉDIA, 2017, N. P.).

As one can notice, such agencies regulate important segments of the health economy, of market interest.

It should be noted that, from the social areas, only the health sector was ‘deserving’ of a regulatory agency; other social sectors, such as education, continue to be regulated by organs of the direct administration of the State, in which the market has less power of interference than in regulatory agencies.

If on the one hand, however, neoliberalism in the 1990s impoverished the state, both from the standpoint of patrimony and from the regulatory capacity and the supply of public services, since the ‘new’ State should concentrate its actions on the basic areas (basic education, basic health), on the poor population and on groups at risk, on the other hand, it could not completely dismantle the system of social protection and the rights of the working class, conquered in the process of democratization of the country and consecrated in the Federal Constitution of 1988.

The current phase of neoliberalism, in turn, is aimed precisely at restricting/reducing/eliminating the workers’ social rights and the achievements of the popular classes, to some extent preserved in the first neoliberal offensive. The labor reform (Law nº 13.467/17) and the proposal for a reform of social security (PEC nº 287/2016), both on the initiative of the presidency of the republic – neither of them approved by the population –, are expressions of the dismantling of rights and of the breaking of the social pact established in the process of redemocratization.

The argument that high social security costs – which correspond to 22.69% of the Federal Budget –, as the main cause of the uncontrol of the Union accounts, can not be sustained when compared to the payment of interest and amortization of the debt, which consume 42.43% of the Federal Budget (FATORELLI, 2016). We annually transfer almost half of the federal revenue to the private sector, a direct transfer of the national wealth. The effort of the group in power, through the proposed reforms and the ongoing economic policy, is to guarantee the permanence of the situation, that is, to ‘honor’ the payment of a debt, which has never been audited, and that represents much more than all social expenditures in the country.

Globalized financial capitalism, large multinational corporations, speculative capital, and subservient national bourgeoisies are now demanding more, not only the remaining national wealth (ores, electric power companies, and telecommunications) or those discovered after the first neoliberal offensive (oil reserves), but are demanding the ‘immolation’ of the working classes. In addition, they found in the current Brazilian political elite the perfect allies to carry out the destructive project of the capital in any of its forms.

The ongoing project in Brazil exempts capital through a regressive tax system and through the forgiveness of its debts, such as the Refis (Tax Recovery or debt refinancing), while demanding sacrifices from the others.

At the time of the coup, Boff (2016, p. 1) already foresaw what the “bloodthirsty” would do:

[...] what they have always done: to take advantage of public goods for self-enrichment, to desperately escape from the arm of justice and carry on their situation of privilege, always at the cost of the poor people that they want to keep away, in the outskirts, an army of reserve, useful for their services almost in the fashion of slaves.

What we observed during the last year, in terms of loss of rights and regression of citizenship, seemed unthinkable in the trajectory of Brazilian society. However, history is not linear, it may have setbacks, not only to join forcing and advancing, but to approach barbarism.

To exemplify some of the setbacks, in the field of health alone, we mention the Constitutional Amendment of Ceiling of Expenditure (EC nº 95/2016), which limits, for 20 years, the expansion of health spending; the revision of the National Policy for Primary Care (August 2017), which de-structures the strategy of organization of the Unified Health System (SUS) from basic care; the proposal for the creation of popular health plans by the Minister of Health; and the legitimization of such a proposal through the Bill of Health Plans, by congressman Rogério

Marinho (Brazilian Social Democratic Party – PSDB), rapporteur of the Special Committee on Health Plans of the Chamber of Deputies, which aims to establish a new legal framework for the market of health plans and insurance, revoking the current Law n° 9.656.

Such project, of review of the health plans law, was jointly endorsed in a note by the Brazilian Association of Collective Health (Abrasco), the Brazilian Center for Health Studies (Cebes), and the Brazilian Institute for Consumer Protection (Idec), which alert for the possible setbacks that the project will bring, if approved, such as: segmentation of care coverage, with the establishment of cheap plans, with reduced coverage; higher readjustment after 60 years of age, which would exclude the elderly population from the plans; decrease in the amount of compensation to the SUS, a form of subsidy to the plans, which financially penalizes the SUS; extinction of bills in process in the Chamber that benefit consumers; reduction of the amount of fines applied to plans that do not comply with the contracts, giving scope for systematic noncompliance of due attention to users (ABRASCO; CEBES; IDEC, 2017).

The note denounces that

[...] there was no transparency in the rapid conduct of the work of the special commission [...]. Entities from civil society, the National Health Council, consumer protection organizations and even government agencies did not have enough room to speak. With few exceptions, the audiences were the stage for the exhibition of entrepreneurs interested in expanding the market. (ABRASCO, CEBES, IDEC, 2017, P. 1).

The note concludes that the content of the changes exclusively attends the interests of the companies and owners of health plans and summons all,

[...] specially health entities, consumer defense and protection entities, SUS managers, medical entities, pensioners associations and movements, organizations for the defense of patients and disease carriers, unions pleading collective health plans, and all interested parties, to manifest themselves and participate in this moment of mobilization to prevent the approval of such atrocity. The future of the health system in Brazil, our health and our lives are at stake! (ABRASCO; CEBES; IDEC, 2017, P. 1).

As it can be seen, it is time to join forces to resist and face the new neoliberal offensive which, more than a political ideology of reconfiguration of the state, operated through sectoral and/or structural reforms, has become an unlimited rationality, in which public opinion and the degree of inequality it causes is of little importance.

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