

EDITORIAL

Human rights, democracy and neo-conservatism

This issue of the journal *Revista Katálysis* offers a critical analysis of central and vital themes in the current political situation in Brazil, based on the dynamics of the relations among the *class struggle, the production and reproduction of social relations, and ideologies*. At the same time, it focuses on the effect these themes have on the field of social work, considering its particularities, mediations, and contradictions within the historical context. The perspective adopted throughout this issue of the journal expresses a theoretical-methodological (and ideo-political) approach connected with methodological aspects related to historical materialism, to the category of totality and to dialectical reasoning. Against this backdrop, the articles analyze their objects of study based on a common thread that forms a unity, relating their research problems to the concrete historic contradictions of the development of capitalism in Brazil.

The potential of this alignment of the analytical method allows the objects of study to gain centrality and be presented considering their processes, which follows the best practices of the materialist dialectics. The themes studied are presented as particularities of the reproduction of social relations in the bourgeois society. Thus, the articles present contradictions, limitations, potentialities, tension, conflicts, and asymmetries, and the themes are researched according to (and reflect) their historical tendency for dialectical reasoning. The studies address issues such as *ideologies* (neoliberalism, conservatism, Marxism, liberalism, ethics), *politics* (human rights, democracy, state and civil society, public policies, organization of workers, issues related to the field of social work – academia and practice –, and possibilities of overcoming capitalism), and the *production and reproduction of social relations* (private ownership of the means of production, socialized production and private appropriation of wealth, crises of capital, changes in the pattern of reproduction of the labor force, the rise of conservative and authoritarian ideologies). The result is the possibility of defining strategies and consequent tactics, fronts for political and professional performance in tune with the ideals of the Ethical-Political Project.

The articles reflect the concerns of important and expressive sectors within universities and civil society organizations. These research works are focused on the breadth, diversity, and depth of social struggles and conflicts in Brazil. They are aligned to form fronts of intellectual, cultural, ideological, and political resistance in the face of conservative, obscurantist, and irrational characteristics that have intensified in the country, grounded on the so-called “*bolsonarismo*.” There is a specific trait to be explored by forces guided by substantive democracy and full expansion of social individuals: with the radicalization of the far-right – expressed in concrete actions and speeches advocated in different media –, *its strategic objectives appear in the light of day. They expose the content and form of their interests*, in an attempt to give prominence to political positions of the ruling classes. The antagonisms between the interests of the subordinate and dominant social classes appear, increasing the chances of conflict awareness by the largest contingents of workers, which is essential for a societal project that criticizes capitalism.

Since the 2000s, the radicalization of the far-right in Brazil, intensifying the materialization of conservatism, is a link in the international scenario of reorganization and recomposition of the dominant classes’ forces and interests. The dominant classes set up numerous fronts of action and defined new strategies reproduced by the



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“new right” in Brazil. Some of them are the international alignment, intensive performance in social networks and new technologies, sophistication of the conservative lexicon, theoretical basis, focus on training of youth staff, insertion in university spaces, disputes of local and parliamentary elections, insertion in the communities and articulation with business-evangelical and agribusiness sectors. It is a strategic political-ideological response, to build consensus and viability to an agenda that suppresses social rights in Brazil. At the same time, the actions contribute to form new conservative political leaders, preparing, in advance, the militant cadres of the coming decades. It is, therefore, a set of strategies designed for the short, medium, and long term, demonstrating the dominant classes’ rationality and organizational capacity, able to take roots and spread throughout Brazilian society. The far-right in Brazil gained conditions for substantial densification, which led to breaking the policy of class conciliation attempted in the period of “*lulo-petismo*,” related to the government and practices of Brazilian President Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and the Workers’ Party (PT).

The present context was originated from the 2008 crisis that hit financial capital on a global scale – and remains far from its end. Since then, measures, bailout packages, and adjustments have been designed and implemented to resume profit rates, with social repercussions that imply very high costs for the working masses, deteriorating living and labor conditions by suppressing social rights and policies. A vast repertoire is used all over the world, but the actions have a common point: *they intensify the exploitation of the workforce*, by expropriating rights through counter-reforms in social protection policies. The actions suppress rights, promote changes in labor, and take over public funds, among other practices. These are current ideological and political forms of the class struggle, which reinforce capital transfer from the periphery to imperialist countries. Such abusive measures have been deepened with few restrictions by the dominant classes. Often, the only criterion they adopted is the absolute limit for the preservation and reproduction of the workforce keeping only sufficient physical and mental conditions for the production and appreciation of value (considering national and regional variations and the social division of labor). Marx’s theory of value, in this context, presents an impressive theoretical vitality.

In Brazil, the June 2013 demonstrations can be considered as a watershed moment. Although the events had diffuse and contradictory features, it is not possible to classify them as reactionary. The intention dominating the demonstrations at that time emphasized democratic demands, as hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in defense of free public services. The country registered, even before June 2013, the growth of union activism (strikes were on the rise since 2009 in comparison to the union activism observed in 1980, and peaked in 2012). However, the hardcore of the Brazilian Unionism did not participate directly in the 2013 demonstrations.

The 2014 elections consolidated the new scenario: President Dilma Rousseff’s was re-elected, but her government left the race weaker. The socialist left (PSOL, PCB, and PSTU political parties) registered electoral growth, and the right-wing opposition was strengthened, while the country witnessed the emergence of the far-right. The political and economic situation deteriorated rapidly, and an alliance formed by sectors of the National Congress, the mainstream media in collaboration with the judiciary, the militant business community, and radicalized evangelical leaders, sparked a movement that culminated in the impeachment of President Rousseff. The street demonstrations fueled by the allegations of corruption supported by the Operation Car Wash added a mass content for the consolidation of the far-right wing. Thousands of people took part in the demonstrations, expressing demands characterized as reactionary, conservative, antagonizing the political party in power (Workers’ Party – PT), anti-communist. The demonstrations revealed traces of racism, xenophobia, and misogyny, with attacks on democracy, and human, social, and labor rights. This process provided fertile ground for “*bolsonarismo*,” which was guided, since its beginning, by the obscure figure of the astrologer and YouTuber Olavo de Carvalho and his followers.

Democracy was struck with impeachment. The Vice-President Michel Temer had already announced his plan – *Ponte para o Futuro* (a bridge for the future) –, even before taking office to replace President Rousseff. The plan sought to implement a new fiscal regime, operated through the Constitutional Amendment 95, and direct attacks on labor rights. The 2018 elections were held under the strong impact of this entire process, and the result was the electoral victory of the far-right, with the emergence of President Bolsonaro and the continuation of the ultraliberal agenda. Among the main strategies in this dispute are the intense activity of the “new right,” the heavy use of fake news on social media, the hate and dehumanization campaigns of the left and their multiple fronts of struggle, the support of networks of militias and paramilitary forces, and eschatological discourse of religious leaders. These resources degrade the sense of democracy and have been justified in the name of a “new policy,” allegedly technical, moralist, and anti-ideological.

On the other hand, the “*bolsonarismo*” agenda, inspired by “*olavismo*” (from Olavo de Carvalho) and its anti-communist “conspiracy theories,” has suffered important casualties since the crisis catalyzed by the spread of the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and the consequent pandemic of Covid-19. The pandemic opened a fracture in the far-right, with dissidents and ruptures by significant allies in various sectors. President Bolsonaro’s apparent fragility in dealing with the crisis, however, does not imply the immediate shattering of the

followers of “*bolsonarismo*,” who are numerous and disseminated beyond the group around the President. Democratic and left-wing forces, even in the face of the aftermath of a recent historic defeat, need to target these contradictions with critical sense, theoretical depth, political energy, and class solidarity. At stake are the tensioning of neoliberal and conservative rationality, the horizon of realigning the role of the state and social protection policies, and the dispute for hegemony to conduct this process. After the pandemic of Covid-19, social life on an international scale will enter a correlation of forces, more complex, more contradictory, and with an expanded horizon of possibilities for development.

Currently, science and critical social theory, play a vital role. There is an urgent need for reflection that apprehends the multiple determinations of the contradictions that structure Brazilian class society, and this issue of *Revista Katálysis* presents such reflections. The investigative stance supported by the perspective of totality and the materialist dialectic is an indispensable tool in this context. Therefore, it is worth remembering Romain Rolland’s idea, widespread thanks to Gramsci: to combine the “pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will.”

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