

THEMATIC SPACE: STATE, AUTHORITARIANISM AND CLASS STRUGGLE

Latin America: capital and social desolation

José Fernando Siqueira da Silva¹

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1040-9558>

¹São Paulo State University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Social Work, Franca, State of São Paulo, Brazil

¹Federal University of São Paulo, Social Work and Social Policies Program, Santos, State of São Paulo, Brazil

Latin America: capital and social desolation

Abstract: This article analyzes the current stage of capitalist accumulation in Latin America. It relies on a socio-historical approach that engages with components of Marx's critique of the political-economy. Also, this work is based on observations from part of Marxist tradition on imperialism, colonialism, dependence, the bourgeois revolution carried out through colonialism, conservative modernization, and the unequal and combined development. In this, the composition of the dominant classes and Latin American states. The text blends the author's Latin American experience and the studies carried out in research projects he has coordinated since 2011 in the field of Social Work.

Keywords: Latin America. Authoritarianism. State and Class.

América Latina: capital e devastação social

Resumo: O artigo analisa a América Latina no atual estágio de acumulação capitalista. O faz a partir de uma abordagem socio-histórica que recupera componentes da crítica à economia-política de Marx, bem como observações de parte de sua tradição sobre o imperialismo, o colonialismo, a dependência, a revolução burguesa realizada pela *via colonial*, a modernização conservadora e o desenvolvimento *desigual e combinado*. Nisto, a composição das classes dominantes e dos Estados latino-americanos. O texto recupera a experiência latino-americana do autor e os estudos realizados em projetos de pesquisa por ele coordenados a partir de 2011 na área de Serviço Social.

Palavras-chave: América Latina. Autoritarismo. Estado e Classe.

Received in 26.06.2020. Approved in 02.08.2020. Reviewed in 04.09.2020.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium provided the original work is properly cited.

Introduction

The theme proposed for volume nº 24, issue nº 1, of the journal *Katálysis*, entitled “*State, authoritarianism and class struggle*”, is of great relevance. It is an invitation to the analysis on the historical constituent aspects of this part of the American continent. Particularly from October 12, 1492, when Christopher Columbus sighted San Salvador, now the Bahamas, a process that was intensified by the Spanish themselves and by the Portuguese who divided their possessions in Latin America until the first half of the 19th century. It is in this context that the peoples and cultures constituted here were subjected to force, vilified, plundered and decimated. Colonialism and primitive accumulation of capital - *both not only situated in the distant past* - were also very efficient here, either to divide very diverse native peoples, to fragment them in order to weaken them, or to manage the bloodletting of this part of America by conveniently *associating slavery of natives and blacks, agricultural-exporting expropriation, and production aimed at the economically dominant zones*. This formula persists until today, although absolutely reorganized by multiple mediations imposed by late capitalism (MANDEL, 1985) and its increasingly structural crises (MÉSZAROS, 2002).

Thus, the nature of states, of authoritarianism, of the social classes constituted here, of the struggles waged here, and of the continuous destruction of rights, cannot be explained by the pure exercise of politics. *But by the critique of political-economy, that is, by the analysis of the real conditions that determine the production and reproduction of the lives of human beings in real historical conditions. In this case, labor as a creator of value, the lacks and necessities contained there, and the class struggle that has been constituted in this process*. It is not a question here of disfiguring the political dimension, but of placing and enhancing it with multiple economic determinations that are imposed from very precise socio-historical determinations. We should ask: what is understood by Latin America? What is happening in this Central-South American part marked by common socio-historical traits, close realities and diverse dynamics? How to situate it in the current stage of capitalist accumulation and measure the impact of this on Latin American workers who live off the sale of their labor force under brutal and extreme conditions? What are the clues to value and align the critical legacy of Social Work with the requirements of the current scenario? The answers to these questions, certainly very complex, contribute to the theme suggested for this issue of the Journal and mark Social Work as a profession in this context. We dare to offer some clues in this direction.

Accumulation and capitalist crisis: the place of Latin America

The current debate on Latin America, the capitalist crisis that is impacting here and the social desolation that is taking place in it - the tensions of Social Work as a profession - demands the recovery, albeit briefly, of some important structural historical traits that are necessary to explain the current conditions of the Latin America.

Firstly, mercantilism fed the primitive accumulation of capital based on the competitive-commercial capitalism condensed from the 16th century (MARX, 1984a). It was updated at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, when colonialism was reorganized under the command of monopolist/imperialist capitalism (LENIN, 2008) and dependence constituted in the context of two great world wars. Financialization (fusion between industrial and banking capital), the consolidation of monopolies, the export of capital, the organic capture of national states and public funds, began to sustain the imperialist-monopolistic fabric of the new phase of capitalist accumulation consummated at the dawn of the 20th century¹. This part of the American continent, in turn, modernized its role in the world economic mechanism as a dependent region and realized at overexploitation of the labor force (MARINI, 2008)². This generated a certain type of modernization, the conservative one, carried out in the second half of the 20th century under the dictatorship of the great capital (IANNI, 2019). Dependence here could not generate development as Ruy Mauro Marini correctly insisted, but it led to another kind of somewhat strange composition: *the unequal and combined “development”* (FERNANDES, 1968, p. 139-140; OLIVEIRA, 2003, p. 59-60)³.

Colonial possession alone gives the monopolies complete guarantee against all contingencies in the struggle against competitors, including the case of the adversary wanting to be protected by a law establishing a

state monopoly. The more capitalism is developed, the more strongly the shortage of raw materials is felt, the more intense the competition and the hunt for sources of raw materials throughout the whole world, the more desperate the struggle for the acquisition of colonies. (LENIN, 2008, p. 83).

Secondly, the bourgeois revolution in this part of the world was tremendously late and took effect through colonialism (FERNANDES, 1987 and 2009), that is, it was structured on the basis of the agrarian-exporting economy, responsible for organizing a market essentially geared to foreign interests (therefore displaced and uncommitted to Latin American needs). It was based on the widespread submission, slavery and genocide of native and black African peoples with deep patrimonialist and patriarchal marks, as well as scars of structural racism (MOURA, 1983 and 1988), indelible traits of a colonialism that was updated and reaffirmed - with other mediations - at the beginning of the 21st century. It is important to point out that the Latin American bourgeoisie of the 20th century needed the decisive intervention of strong national states to accumulate and stimulate capitalism⁴, whether they were explicitly in favor of imperialism or closer to national development projects, with a certain internal distribution wealth. José Batlle y Ordóñez in Uruguay, Getúlio Vargas in Brazil and Juan Perón in Argentina (besides their differences - temporal and conjunctural - and their contradictions), were classic examples of this second path, definitively defeated by the civic-military dictatorships imposed throughout all of South America from the mid-1960s (FERNANDES, 2009). The outcome of this debate, held predominantly until the early 1960s, is well known: bourgeois autocracy, conservative modernization and the “dictatorship of big capital” (IANNI, 2019, p. 27-89); the re-edition of dependence, the recreation of authoritarian states and the triumph of US-led imperialism.

Third, the deterioration of the Latin American situation is structurally linked to late capitalism, (MANDEL, 1985) inaugurated at the end of the Second World War and the Cold War, but it is also a consequence of its structural crisis (MÉZSÁROS, 2002), which culminated in the neoliberal project in the early 1970s. The capital's offensive was sustained by privatizations of institutions and public spaces, deregulation and general flexibilization, labor precariousness, outsourcing, increase of grey economy (today also uberized - ANTUNES, 2018), unemployment, private drainage of public funds, destatization, growth of finance capital, mercantilization of different spaces of social life, and the paradigm of control of public spending that affect the affirmation of fundamental rights. István Mészáros (2002, pp. 39-40, 49) makes the following comment on the predatory expropriation of human and material resources of the planet during the current stage of capitalist accumulation:

Instead, the universal viability of emulating the development of the ‘advanced capitalist’ countries is predicated, ignoring that neither the advantages of the imperialist past, nor the immense profits derived on a continuing basis from keeping the ‘Third World’ in structural dependency can be ‘universally diffused, so as to produce the anticipated happy results through ‘modernization’ and ‘free-marketization’. [...] At the time of capital's global ascendancy, crises erupted in the form of ‘great thunderstorms’ (Marx), followed by relatively long *expansionary* phases. The new pattern, with the end of the capital's historical ascendancy, is the growing frequency of *recessionary* phases tending towards a *depressed continuum*⁵.

Fourthly, it must be emphasized that the old, recycled and current forms of colonialism, historically established in the conditions described so far, were not imposed without the resistance of the Latin American peoples (original or formed here in the colonization process). The explicit use of violence, looting and genocide by the dominant sectors has been tragically affirmed (SILVA, 2018). Thus, the examples here are vast: a) they transit from the elimination of very diverse native peoples who resisted colonization in different ways (Tupiguaranis, Mapuches, Wichis, Diaguitas - Quechuas, Andean Quechuas -, Yamanas, Huarpes, Aymaras, Tobas, Onas, Calchaquíes, Matacos, Mazatecos, Comechingones, Yanomamis, Sanavirones, Quichuas, Man, Ashánincas, Xavantes, Yukpa, Paítavyterás, Pemóns, among many others); b) go through the resistance of enslaved black peoples (Quilombos dos Palmares, with Zumbi and the Haitian Revolution - 1791, led by François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture, for example); c) involves peoples and the anti-colonial struggles for the Latin American Patria Grande (Great Fatherland) that were formed from the native Euro-African mixture (many of them led by Simon Bolívar, José Artigas, José Martín, José Martí, among others); d) expresses itself in the cowardly massacre carried out by the Brazil-Argentina-Uruguay coalition against Solano Lopes-led Paraguay in the Triple Alliance War or Great War (1864-1870); e) also, it has developed extensively throughout the 20th century throughout the Latin American continent, through anti-dictatorial struggles, armed, anti-capitalist,

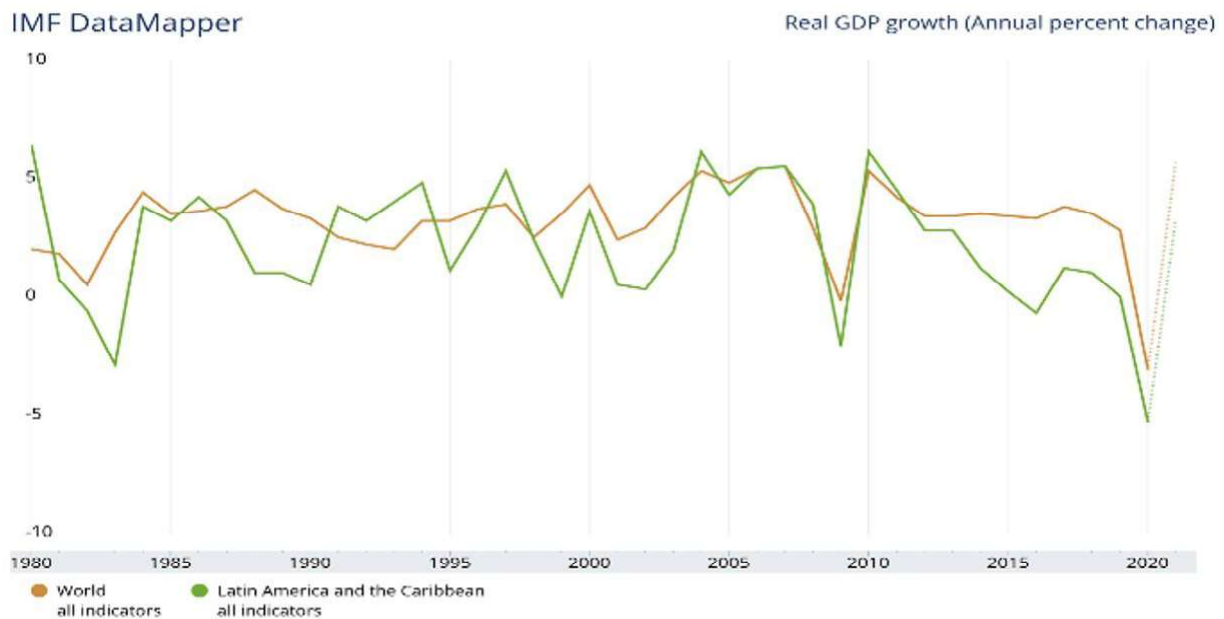
anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist movements, in which the Cuban experience of 1959 was exemplary. And these are a few representative examples.⁶

Fifth, there is no way to analyze pauperism, authoritarianism, the states and their contradictions, the classes, the struggle between them and the reproduction of capital in Latin America, without searching the entrails of this reality summarily indicated here, as well as without criticizing the ideology that hides, naturalizes, justifies, inverts, and generalizes as truth alien propositions to groups subjugated by capital and capitalism (MARX; ENGELS, 2007). All this under the conditions of imperialism, neo-colonialism and current dependency, under the command of the financial fraction of capital. The neglect of this often results in the *description of the immediate given, the emphasis on a scientific exercise supported by different forms of logicism that hide the real and its movement and re-edit the impoverished reason and its ideological decadence* (PAULO NETTO, 1981, p. 109-131). Therefore, the point of view of totality (MARX, 1989; LUKÁCS, 2012) is absolutely essential to methodologically orient this endeavor, although this in no way subjugates the very dynamics of the real as “*logic of the proper object*” (MARX, 2005, p. 39). It is a matter of producing knowledge guided by the *ontological-materialistic* point of view in which the representations of the real are not confused with the real itself. Therefore, it is up to science to mentally reconstruct the dynamics objectively placed, historically situated and dated, as real knowledge theoretically inscribed, in tune with the real lives of historical and social beings, an analysis subject to corrections and adjustments. What counts here is not the exactness of this mental reconstruction (impossible as such), but the rational exercise of pursuing the movement of the given reality. As Marx warned, “All science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided. [...]” (MARX, 1985, p. 71). And he insisted:

[...] The totality as it appears in the head, as a totality of thoughts, is a product of a thinking head, which appropriates the world in the only way it can, a way different from the artistic, religious, practical and mental appropriation of this world. The real subject retains its autonomous existence outside the head just as before; namely as long as the head's conduct is merely speculative, merely theoretical. [...] (MARX, 1989, p. 410-411).

It is necessary to recall the Marxian genial observations on the general law of capitalist accumulation (MARX, 1984a). The attempt to manage the dynamics between constant capital, which is destined to the means of production, and variable capital for the remuneration/maintenance of the labor force - altering the organic and technical composition of capital in favor of accumulation -, always allows the extraction of the surplus value of labor (source of value) to be expanded or maintained at bearable levels and profits to be increased. In times of contraction, management is done in the sense of transferring crisis losses to workers. The alternatives for dealing with the crises that are part of capitalist accumulation are diverse: insert technology and reduce labor force (or expand it if increasing the rate of surplus value); reduce production costs in general by optimizing and or reducing expenses with constant and mainly variable capital; expand markets either to drain stocks or obsolete technology; increase relative overpopulation to force down wages; as well as compensate for the fall in the profit rate through financial gains, for example. For this purpose, it brings into play typical organic actors of the monopolistic-imperialist phase: *the state (very crucial for capital), banks and the financial system complex*. In general, this entire process tends to prioritize constant capital over variable capital and the expenditures derived from it (costs of reproducing the labor force), managing the reserve army of labor and increasing the rate of surplus value. In other words, while there is no *full control* of the bourgeoisie and its fractions over the elements that materially generate accumulation and crises, the dominant classes tend to influence this context to offer the best possible management of the general law of accumulation as a global process. It is in this scenario that relative/absolute pauperism grows, since expropriation is essentially part of capital's order and it requires this to promote accumulation by subduing labor through different mechanisms.

Considering data from the last 40 years on the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) released by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)⁷ itself, it is possible to verify that the long waves of growth followed by over-accumulation crises typical of the post-World War II were, at the end of the 20th century, after the deep post-Fordist restructuring of capital (with an explicitly ultraliberal profile), replaced by low global growth and a sequence of GDP falls. As shown in Graph 1 below, between 1980 and 2007 the real growth of the world GDP (in orange) combined little growth with successive plunges. The world's GDP irregularly oscillated (up

Graph 1 – Real GDP growth

Source: International Monetary Fund

and down) between 0.6% (lowest index, between 1981 and 1982) and 5.6% (highest index, between 2006 and 2007), with declines followed by 4.6% to 2.1% between 1988 and 1993, with oscillations and low growth between 1994 and 2000 and a new drop from 4.8% to 2.5% between 2000 and 2001. The advance of the world economy between 2001 and 2007 from 2.5% to 5.6% was not sustained and showed a slight drop between 2004 and 2005 (from 5.4% to 4.9%) and a deep crisis in 2008 that led to negative growth of 0.1%. The novelty of 2008 is that the crisis was born, for the first time, in the center of world capitalism immediately identified as a *housing bubble* in the US market. Since then, the worldwide recovery of 2009 has not been sustained: it presented successive drops with slight stability between 2012 and 2016 (growth of about 3.5%), a small recovery between 2016 and 2017 (3.9%) and a new crash brutally accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 onwards (with a negative forecast of -3%) (REAL GDP growth, [2020])⁸.

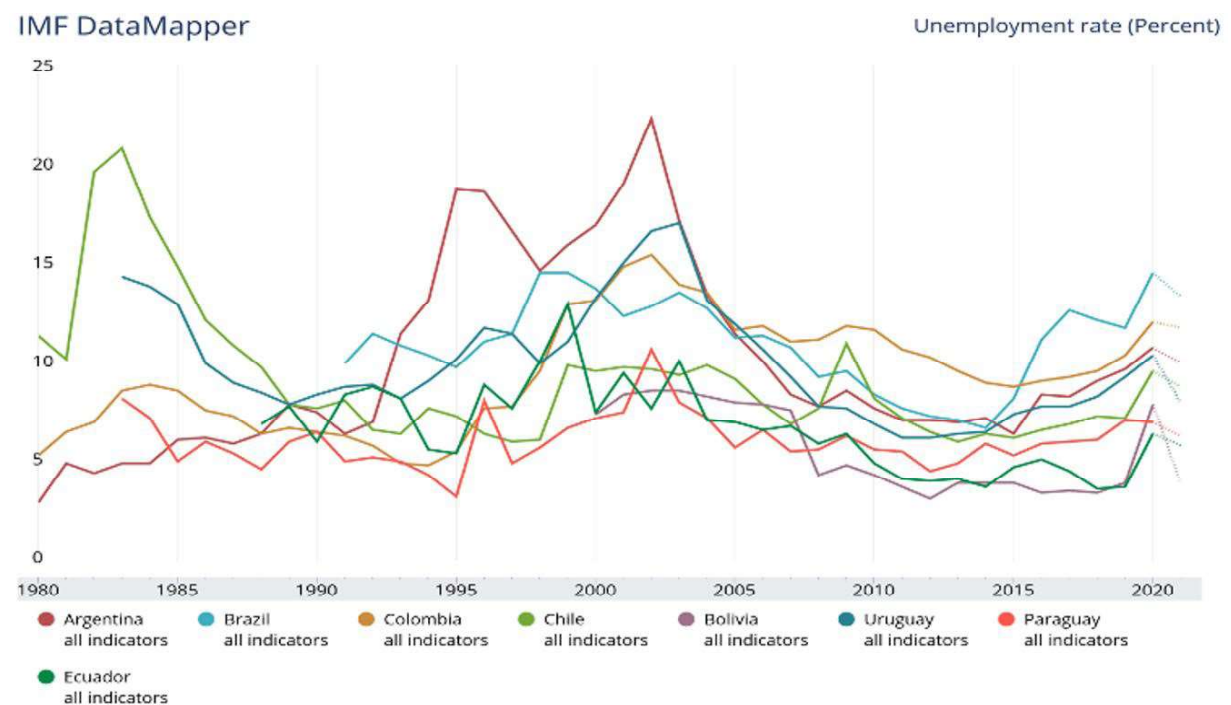
The situation of the Latin American economy (South and Central America and the Caribbean) is even more serious. The green line in the graph above shows that in this part of the American continent the poor growth rates have went paired with regular instabilities that have increased in the last 40 years. The moments of abrupt growth in Gross Domestic Product (almost always marked by modest rates - although above the world average at specific times) are quickly replaced by stronger falls, both primarily associated with international raw materials⁹ prices. Between 1980 and 1983 there was an abrupt drop in GDP from 6.5% to -2.8%, a resumption from 1984 of 3.9%, a slight stability until 1986 and another intense drop until 1990 (reaching the level of 0.6%). This instability persisted throughout the 1990s, with numbers ranging from 5.4% (best index, 1997) to 0.1 (worst level, 1999). The swing, up and down, persisted until 2002, with rapid growth until 2004, slight stability until 2007 and a strong decrease with the world crisis of 2008 reaching the index of -2%. The recovery in 2009 was not sustained and went into free fall until 2016, with a slight recovery in 2017 (1.3%) and an abrupt fall aggravated by the COVID 19 pandemic in 2020 (with a forecast of -6%) (REAL GDP growth, [2020]). It is necessary to point out that these average figures for Latin America logically fluctuate among the countries of the bloc, although in general the ascension and descension curve follows the international pattern: more modest at times of world growth (when above the world average) and more radical at times of depression (below the world average line). It should be noted that these figures represent projections made in the first half of 2020. Updated data, officially released by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in August 2020, indicate that the Brazilian GDP of the second quarter had a fall of 9.7% compared to

the same period in 2019 (0.1 positive - which reveals the seriousness of a scenario already underway before the pandemic). Revised information on the first half of 2020 points to an even greater drop than had been projected: -2.5% compared to the same period in 2019.

Taking as an example the three largest economies of the block and the same period (1980-2020), it is possible to check the following indices published by the IMF on the same website indicated in footnote number 6: a) Brazil had the highest positive GDP peaks in the periods 1984-1985 (7.9%), 1993-1994 (5.8%), 2003-2004 (5.8%) and 2006-2007 (6.1%) and, in turn, the most significant drops in 1980-1981 (-4.4%), 1982-1983 (-3.4%), 1989-1990 (-4.2%), 2008-2009 (-0.1 - the well-known 'ripple' or marolinha, so called by President Lula), 2015 (-3.6) and 2020-2021 (forecast of -5.3%); b) Argentina presented positive indexes in the periods 1985-1986 (7.1%), 1990-1991 (10.5%), 1996-1997 (8.1%), 2002-2003 (9.0% - after the very serious crisis of 2001-2002) and 2009-2010 (10.1% - after the deep world crisis of 2008), as well as lower rates in 1980-1981 (-5.7%), 1984-1985 (-7%), 1988-1989 (-7%), 1994-1995 (-2.8%), 1998-1999 (-3.4%), 2001-2002 (-10.9%), 2008-2009 (-5.9%), with negative growth or little growth between 2012 and 2020 and forecast of -5.7% for 2020-2021; c) Mexico obtained its best figures in the periods 1983-1984 (3.4), 1989-1990 (5.2), 1995-1996 (6.8), 1999-2000 (4.9) and 2009-2010 (5.1 - after the 2008 world crisis), with the lowest figures in 1982-1983 (-3.5), 1985-1986 (-3.1), 1994-1995 (-6.3), 2000-2001 (-0.4), 2008-2009 (-5.3 - also after the 2008 global crisis) and 2011-2020 with a trend of declining GDP associated with small growth and a forecast of -6.6% after the effects of the 2020 pandemic (REAL GDP growth, [2020]). This trend, with some variations, as a general curve, follows the same pattern by all the countries of the region, worsening in special situations: historically Cuba and more recently Venezuela, examples of more intense economic embargoes led by the USA.

The unemployment rate, also based on IMF data (Graph 2), *considering that this index does not grasp the size of the grey economy, the precariousness of the labor force employed and labor-intense methods (essential aspects and in full expansion)*, was clearly affected by the moments of expansion and crisis, handled by the management of the organic composition of capital that tends to negatively affect regions like Latin America. The general trend of decreasing unemployment since 2003 in countries of the region such as Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador and Colombia, must consider that the jobs created there occurred

Graph 2 – Unemployment rate



Source: International Monetary Fund

under the conditions of neoliberal labor flexibility (therefore, certainly more precarious), in states that are organically akin to financial monopoly capital (even in their most progressive versions) and restricted on dealing with extreme pauperism and minimum wage recovery¹⁰. This has meant, in different degrees in the region, not exactly the reduction of social inequality, but the temporary and partial inclusion of the poorest layers of the working class into internal consumption strings. However, after the 2008 global crisis born in the nest of world capitalism and the successive attempts by Latin American governments to contain it (several of them with a progressive profile), unemployment showed signs of growth in 2013 and explicitly deepened from 2015 onwards in practically the entire region, worsened by precariousness and the rapid trend of labor deregulation, with devastating prospects - not yet measured - after the COVID 19 pandemic.

Now, what do these numbers show synthetically? The last 40 years, in the wake of the monopolistic-imperialist order of capital, typical of the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, the two world wars generated in this context, the post-war development model and its crisis already felt in the early 1970s (MANDEL, 1985), the end of the Cold War and the adoption of a neo-liberal project (which transited from the Fordist-Keynesian base to Toyotist-ultraliberalism - not without hybrid compositions on the periphery of capitalism), *are being marked by a tendency to replace long waves of growth followed by crises of overproduction, with a scenario of worldwide low-growth associated with increasingly regular and deep crises (including those born at the center of world capitalism)*.¹¹ In the recent past (1980-2020), Latin America's tragic history has reproduced an economic instability marked by reconfigured dependence in the context of the monopoly-financial order of capital and by profound social inequalities that are reconfigured in the wake of colonial tradition: a) a massive exporter of primary products (agricultural and minerals); b) a promoter of local governments that are often authoritarian, subjugated to international interests and protect the internal elites associated with them, bourgeoisies that are completely uncompromised with Latin American interests and opposed to minimally democratic reforms; c) societies that reposition and revive overexploitation of the labor force (MARINI, 2008) under racist (MOURA, 1988), sexist (FEDERICI, 2019) and anti-Latin American bases; d) constant and abrupt economic oscillations marked by the inability to maintain solid and persistent development patterns that promote deindustrialization or the simple non-industrialization of countries in the region¹²; e) an emphasis on conservative modernization committed to creating the necessary foundations for the *constant updating of dependence as unequal and combined development* (FERNANDES, 1968; OLIVEIRA, 2003).

Right wing radicalization: the growth of reactionary conservatism

Although it is not simple to point out the central elements that elucidate the bases of the right-wing offensive and its most radical fraction in Latin America, some aspects should be summarized here. They have at least two axes of support that recover essential traces of Latin American history (developed in the previous section): a) the profile of the bourgeoisie and its factions constituted under the bases of imperialism, dependence and unequal and combined conservative modernization, today under the command of the financial faction of capital. The Latin American ruling classes were constituted from the material base that marked the bourgeois revolution here were carried out with long overdue, through the colonial route (FERNANDES, 1987); b) the growing productive restructuring, underway since the 1970s/1980s in the context of the structural crisis of capital, the end of almost thirty glorious years of world growth and the process of political redemocratization in Latin America from the second half of the 1980s that generated another social pact in the post-dictatorial period (explicitly broken from 2012/2013 onwards). The neoliberal formula was vigorously implemented in the 1990s throughout this region and has been updated - in different ways - since the 2000s, be it under the command of more progressive agreed governments or of genuinely right-wing government projects gradually strengthened from the impact of the structural crisis of capital in 2011¹³.

Well, the consequences of the right-wing policies tend to intensify worldwide (always facing resistance), considering the afore mentioned *trend of the organic and technical composition of capital to mutate, sustained by the increase of constant capital opposing to variable capital*. In other words, the association of two general trends. The first one is the technological improvement and accumulation tendency -, altogether with the goal of reducing spends with living labor to resume optimal levels of accumulation. In Latin America the scenario is more drastic and dramatic, considering the historical tendency to compensate the labor force below its

average reproduction value (MARINI, 2008), which determines even more tragic contours for informalization, outsourcing, uberization and other precarious forms of exploitation. Add to this some other determining traits:

- a) national states that are explicitly strong to capital and weak to labor (a global characteristic, but especially radical in Latin America), an organic component of capitalist-monopolist accumulation, but with even more devastating regional social consequences;
- b) in this, bourgeoisies not committed to processes of democratization in Central South America, even in its most elementary form - political democracy -, a region often and historically seen as a focus of social instabilities that must be a constant object of preventive counterrevolution (FERNANDES, 1987);
- c) rapine and violence in the dispute for public funds in regions like Latin America tend to be much more intense. This creates objective and subjective conditions that stimulate authoritarian procedures that are also expressed in the struggle for state hegemony through government and social projects genuinely of the right and/or the extreme right;
- d) this complex process, pointed out in item c, built in the process of the structural crisis of capital, tends to worsen substantially in this stage of capitalist accumulation explicitly marked by low growth, for a short period of time, followed by important crises that affect not only the periphery of world capitalism;
- e) Latin American historical, precarious, fragile and even non-existent social protection - at the limit linked to the management of extreme poverty and the absence of public services aimed at social rights - tends to become even more fragile, a fact that adds to the catastrophe underway.

Although this is not an entirely new subject, it contains new mediations that need to be revealed. Florestan Fernandes (2009), in a series of conferences on Latin America given throughout the 1960s, precisely exposes the axis that continues to sustain the old-new problem:

Latin American countries face two harsh realities: 1) sociocultural economic structures and internal politics that may absorb the transformations of capitalism, but which inhibit national integration and autonomous development; 2) external domination that stimulates modernization and growth in the advanced stages of capitalism, but which prevents national revolution and real autonomy. The two aspects are opposite sides of the same coin. The heteronomic situation is redefined by the reciprocal action of structural and dynamic factors, internal and external. The social sectors that control Latin American societies are as interested in and responsible for this situation as the external groups that take advantage of it. Dependence and underdevelopment are good business for both sides. However, under current historical conditions, the new pattern of imperialism and the hegemony of the United States pose a dramatic question: Can Latin American countries really achieve national integration and economic, socio-cultural and political autonomy through capitalism? (FERNANDES, 2009, p. 34).

Surely, today, the North American hegemony is at stake. Capitalism too does not have the same power to manage its crises. China is its greatest threat and the effects of the depressions do not only affect the periphery of capitalism. But this, in absolute terms, puts imperialism in check or alters the essential argument contained in Florestan Fernandes' reflection. He reaffirms the Marxian theses on the internal contradictions of capital and its tendency to increasingly penalize the working classes in the process of centralization and continuous concentration of capital. And the question announced by Florestan is more than pertinent: "*can Latin American countries really achieve national integration and economic, socio-cultural and political autonomy through capitalism?*" For our part, the answer is no! And the current moment reaffirms this direction. The struggle for rights, for democracy (in its full sense), for authentic national and Latin American liberation is a progressive anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle (in this, antiracist, antisexist and antipatriarchal). There is no other way out for Latin America. Even the most elementary forms of participation and management of social inequality are severely compromised, whether by the fierce competition for public funds or by the expansion of explicitly genocidal and/or ultraliberal, *politically correct*, discursively humane government projects.

The authoritarian upsurge in Latin America, though diverse, has a definite objective: to implant governments genuinely committed to the imperialist and ultraliberal agenda, that is, to break the policy of class conciliation initiated in the second half of the 1980s, to expand the advance of capital over labor, to privatize and accelerate the drainage of funds and public resources (financial and natural). This voracity demoralizes and even criminalizes rights, as well as further undermines the actions that regulate extreme pauperism. In other words, it is necessary to end the service begun with the old neoliberal project of the 1980s/1990s by

radicalizing its intensity with workers and states. This meant, in practice, the intensification of privatizations, the regularization of absolute labor insecurity (informality, uberization, outsourcing, and diverse forms of precariousness), the radical devastation of rights (health, education, and social security, especially - where they were no longer privatized), and the advance over the natural resources of this part of the American continent (in which the Amazon region is absolutely strategic). Their objective is to deprive the public of these spaces.

How can this be accomplished without counting genuine local and regional governments? Not by chance Mauricio Macri, under strong media impact, was elected in 2015 promising a new Argentina with his motto “*cambiamos*” (defeated in 2019); coups d’état were implemented in Honduras (2009 - Manuel Zelaya), Bolivia (2019 - Evo Morales)¹⁴, Brazil (2016 - Dilma Rousseff) and Paraguay (2012 - Fernando Lugo); violence has been systematically committed in Piñera’s Chile, where strong resistance took place in the second half of 2019 which culminated in a victorious referendum in which 78% of the Chilean population chose to change the Constitution inherited from the Pinochet government; Colombia has eliminated progressive leaders and has been strongly weaponized under the local leadership of Iván Duque; Peru, since March 2018, has followed a similar path under the command of Martín Vizcarra; Venezuela has been surrounded by an embargo that until then was the *privilege* of Cuba, defending itself with support from the rising empire: the Chinese-Russian, which is influencing Sandinist-led Nicaragua of Daniel Ortega, and has been impacting Cuba for quite some time; the Ecuador quickly adjusted in Lenin Moreno’s government; more recently, Carlos Alvarado Quesada assumed the presidency in Costa Rica (2018), Nayib Bukele was elected in El Salvador (2019), Laurentino Cortizo in Panama (2019 - following a long tradition of supporting US imperialism in the country); and, the newly sworn in (2020) Alejandro Giammattei (Guatemala) and Lacalle Pou (Uruguay), the latter’s spokesman for the capital in the *eastern bands* through the *Ley de Urgente Consideración*. Absolutely peculiar situations arise in Belize whose country has a governor general commanded by the English Monarch Elisabeth II, Puerto Rico (annexed by the U.S. without proper benefits) and the devastated Caribbean islands: Jamaica, Dominican Republic and Haiti (the latter icon of the first anti-colonial and anti-slavery Latin American revolution). Finally, the tragedy intensifies in Brazil of Jair Bolsonaro (elected in 2018), an explicitly protofascist government (FONTES, 2019), propagator of the motto “*God, family and Homeland*,” articulating popular base, authoritarianism, militarism, obscurantism, religious fundamentalism, irrationalism and social media - beyond formal space - financed by extreme right wing groups, but explicitly neoliberal and subservient to US imperialism. This in itself shows that the old-fashioned *Brazilian fascism* can only be properly elucidated in the dialectics between ineliminable historical marks and their modernization under current conditions sustained by previously unseen traits.

Although important resistance has been expressed in relative local and regional victories (particularly in Bolivia, Chile and Argentina), it would be naïve not to recognize the offensive of capital on labor and its expressions in the various governments that occupy most of the Latin American states (more intensely from 2011 onwards). It is also necessary to point out that this paradigm has tragically reaffirmed, in the current conditions, historical inequalities, with that the countless and diverse resistances to it. The current scenario has revealed fissures between the sectors that comprise the global and Latin American right, which means that the present situation calls into question the strategies to be used by conservative and/or conservative-relationary sectors to manage the structural crisis of capital¹⁵. The election of Joe Biden in the U.S. expresses, in the particular conditions of the decadent empire, this dispute financed and closely followed by the representatives of the great capital. It is not a question of celebrating the Democratic victory, but the electoral defeat of Donald Trump¹⁶. This is in the exact sense of fighting the extreme right and criticizing the Democratic right, which will surely have its Latin American offspring. A critical and programmatic unity of the left is more than necessary. It must have a worldwide basis and regional and local expressions, which is a complex and urgent task.

The old and extinct class struggle is reaffirmed! The mole shakes the ground! Marx (1984a, 1984b, 1984c) was right: the same conditions necessary for the permanent and expanded accumulation of capital recreate, under diverse historical conditions, new insurmountable contradictions on the borders of capitalism. Although the society of capital has shown an impressive breath in the management of its crises, the real conditions for this have diminished (thesis defended by Marx in *The Capital*). The struggle for social emancipation (political and human - MARX, 2009) of Latin American men and women (as) is certainly a worldwide and anti-capitalist and progressive struggle. However, it needs to critically incorporate the diverse experiences of resistance here historically built, as well as genuinely humanistic agendas: antiracist, feminist struggles for a vary of equalities and protection of our natural resources.

Final regards

Finally, it is necessary to summarize the real conditions for a critical repositioning of Social Work in Latin America, emphasizing that it is a profession whose genesis is linked to the monopolistic order of capital and is formed by an extremely heterogeneous range of theoretical and practical orientations within it, not all of which are linked to the effective defense of the life of the various fractions of the current working class.

More than ever, reaffirming the progressive anti-capitalist tradition is the most promising way for Social Work to contribute to civilizing struggles, as a profession, with the enormous clashes already underway within and outside its borders. For this tradition, it is necessary to endorse and re-update the critique of capital and society that allows its reproduction (capitalism), not as a logicist/speculative exercise, but as a basis to support the decoding of reality objectively placed throughout Latin America (as an ontological reason - LUKÁCS, 2010, 2012, 2013). It is necessary to decode the production and reproduction of pauperism in the current stage of capitalist accumulation (in this regard the particular refractions of the social question as an expression of the General Law of Capitalist Accumulation - MARX, 1984a), the determinations of the profession, its objective demands, limits and potentialities, its internal clashes and possible rearticulations. It is in this context that professional work, the social worker as worker (a) and Social Work as profession (IAMAMOTO, 2007; RAICHELIS, 2020; SILVA, 2013 and 2020) - under the conditions of dependent capitalism and Latin American unequal and combined development - can be objectively analyzed and criticized, as well as subsidize necessary and useful political-professional actions. Without this, the profession tends to be dredged up not only by the harsh conditions that have been acting on it for some time now, but also by the weaknesses of those who help operate social inequality (and here the challenge is enormous).

Not acknowledging the harsh scenario underway and not critically reassessing professional insertion in this context will be fatal for the more progressive segments of Social Work, specifically for its most critical fraction. The actions of the global bourgeoisie and its fractions in the context of the global and structural capital crisis, particularly in Latin America, *reveals that the structural incompatibility between capitalist accumulation and the affirmation of rights is a reality* (SILVA, 2013). The advance of the true right and the extreme right, adapted to our dependent socio-historical conditions, opens up the barbarism in progress. While on the one hand there is an urgent need to radically combat the neoconservative sectors that are growing inside and outside Social Work, on the other hand there is a need to widen the critical and reasoned debate, inspired by the point of view of the totality, with civilizing social sectors, broadening and articulating progressive demands with the working class today that is extremely diverse (ANTUNES, 2018). And here the range is enormous in the general scenario of the organic and technical composition of capital modification necessary for the resumption of accumulation: formally insecure, informal, outsourced, uberized, unemployed (oscillating or permanent), among others, which, it is important to emphasize, is imbricated with particular demands from women, blacks, indigenous peoples, sexual diversity, among other agendas that need to be articulated with the class struggle.

The profession has much to contribute to this in social spaces where the working class is present: in the different institutions that deal with poverty management, in the area of social assistance (at federal, state and municipal levels) and the public service system of social rights handling, in public health maintained by the Unified Health System (SUS) and in different spheres of public service, state or not, even considering the brutal fragmentation of the current labor market and the precariousness in hiring the labor force of social workers. The organized and progressive segments of Social Work cannot disregard this imposition of the reality in the process of analysis of the real and formulation of professional alternatives.

Barbarism has been in place for some time. In it, despair and fear feed up-to-date forms inspired by fascism. Does anyone doubt this possibility? But it is not an inevitable path, although it is certainly in motion and can be consolidated.

References

- ANTUNES, R. O privilégio da servidão [The privilege of serfdom]. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2018.
- CARDOSO, F. H.; FALETTO, E. Dependência e desenvolvimento na América Latina [Dependence and development in Latin America]. 8. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2004.

- FEDERICI, Silvia. O ponto zero – trabalho doméstico, reprodução e luta feminista [The ground zero - domestic labor, reproduction and feminist struggle]. Tradução do Coletivo Sycorax [Translation by the Sycorax collective] – São Paulo: Elefante, 2019.
- FERNANDES, F. A revolução burguesa no Brasil; ensaio de interpretação sociológica [The bourgeois revolution in Brazil; sociological interpretation essay]. 3. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Guanabara, 1987.
- FERNANDES, F. Capitalismo dependente e classes sociais na América Latina [Dependent capitalism and social classes in Latin America]. São Paulo: Global, 2009.
- FERNANDES, F. Sociedade de classes e subdesenvolvimento [Class-based society and underdevelopment]. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1968.
- FONTES, V. El proto-fascismo: núcleo central del gobierno Bolsonaro [Proto-fascism: central core of the Bolsonaro government]. *Trasversales*, 46, 2019. Disponível em [Available in]: <http://www.trasversales.net/t46vfontes.pdf>. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2020.
- IAMAMOTO, Marilda Villela. Serviço Social em tempo de capital fetiche – capital financeiro, trabalho e questão social [Social Work in time of fetish capital - financial capital, labor and social question]. São Paulo, Cortez Editora [Cortez Publishing house], 2007.
- IANNI, O. A ditadura do grande capital [The dictatorship of great capital]. São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2019.
- LENIN, V. I. O imperialismo: fase superior do capitalismo [Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism]. 4. ed. São Paulo: Centauro, 2008.
- LUKÁCS, G. Para uma ontologia do ser social I [On the Ontology of social being I]. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2012.
- LUKÁCS, G. Para uma ontologia do Ser Social II [On the Ontology of social being II]. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2013.
- LUKÁCS, G. Prolegômenos para uma ontologia do ser social [Prolegomena for the Ontology of social being]. Tradução de Carlos Nelson Coutinho. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2010.
- MANDEL, E. O capitalismo tardio [Late capitalism]. São Paulo: Nova Cultural, 1985.
- MARINI, R. M. América Latina, dependencia y globalización [Latin America, dependence and globalization]. Bogotá: CLACSO y Siglo del Hombre Editores [Century of Men Publishers], 2008.
- MARX, K. O método da economia política [The political economy method]. In: FERNANDES, F. (org.). Marx e Engels: história [Marx and Engels: History]. 3. ed. São Paulo: Ática, 1989.
- MARX, K. Crítica da filosofia do direito de Hegel [Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right]. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2005.
- MARX, K. O capital: crítica da economia política [Capital. A Critique of Political Economy]. São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1984a. v.1, t. 2.
- MARX, K. O capital: crítica da economia política [Capital. A Critique of Political Economy]. São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1984c. v.3, t. 1.
- MARX, K. O capital: crítica da economia política [Capital. A Critique of Political Economy]. São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1985. v. 3, t. 2.
- MARX, K. O capital: crítica da economia política [Capital. A Critique of Political Economy]. São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1984b. v. 2.
- MARX, Karl. Para a questão judaica [On the Jewish question]. São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2009.
- MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. A ideologia alemã [The German ideology]. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2007.
- MÉSZÁROS, I. Para além do capital [Beyond Capital]. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2002.
- MOURA, Clóvis. Brasil: raízes do protesto negro [Brazil: origins of the black protest]. São Paulo: Global, 1983.
- MOURA, Clóvis. Sociologia do Negro Brasileiro [Sociology of the Brazilian Blacks]. São Paulo Ática editora. 1988.
- PAULO NETTO, J. Lukács. São Paulo: Ática, 1981.
- OLIVEIRA, F. de. Crítica à razão dualista: o ornitorrinco [Critique of the dualistic rationale: the platypus]. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2003.
- RAICHELIS, R. Atribuições e competências profissionais revisitadas: a nova morfologia do trabalho no Serviço Social [Professional duties and competences revisited: the new morphology of labor in Social Work]. In: CONSELHO FEDERAL DE SERVIÇO SOCIAL [FEDERAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL WORK] (org.). Atribuições privativas do/a assistente social em questão [Exclusive attributions of the social worker in question]. Brasília, CFESS, 2020. v. 2. Disponível em: <http://www.cfess.org.br/arquivos/CFESS202-AtribuicoesPrivativas-Vol2-Site.pdf>. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2020.
- REAL GDP GROWTH. International Monetary Fund, [2020]. Disponível em: https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP_RPCH@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2020.
- SILVA, J. F. S. Serviço Social: resistência e emancipação? [Social Work: resistance and emancipation?] São Paulo: Cortez, 2013.
- SILVA, J. F. S. Sociedade do capital, violências e práxis profissional [Society of capital, violence and professional praxis]. Juventudes, violências e políticas públicas [Youth, violence and public policies]. Porto Alegre: EDIPUCRS, 2018.
- SILVA, J. F. S. Trabajo social y crítica marxista [Social work and Marxist critique]. Propuestas críticas en Trabajo Social [Critical proposals in Social Work]. Santiago: Revista del Departamento de Trabajo Social de la Universidad de Chile [Journal of the Department of Social Work of the University of Chile], número [issue] 1, 2020. (prelo)
- THE WORD BANK. Brasil: aspectos gerais [Brazil: general aspects]. O Banco Mundial no Brasil [The World Bank in Brazil], 2019. Disponível em [Available in]: <https://www.worldbank.org/pt/country/brazil/overview>. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2020.

Notes

- ¹ “The concentration of production; the monopolies arising therefrom; the merging or coalescence of the banks with industry—such is the history of the rise of finance capital and such is the content of that concept.[...] Finance capital is such a great, such a decisive, you might say, force in all economic and in all international relations, that it is capable of subjecting, and actually does subject, to itself even states enjoying the fullest political independence [...]”(LENIN, 2008, p. 47, 82).
- ² Dependence understood as “[...] a relationship of subordination between formally independent nations, within the framework of which the production relationships of subordinate nations are modified or recreated in order to ensure the extended reproduction of the dependency”. (MARINI, 2008, p. 111). Super-exploitation is analyzed both as payment of the labor power below the average value necessary for its reproduction, but also, at the same time, as its extreme exploitation and deterioration through the insertion of technologies in the process of conservative modernization, either as an absolute or relative surplus value.
- ³ It is worth indicating, briefly, the influence of Trotsky’s thought (1985) on the debate on Latin American dependence, particularly the ideas of Florestan Fernandes and the stimuli for the studies of Ruy Mauro Marini and his group (summarily discarded from this debate in Brazil). Cardoso and Faletto (2004) are part of this polemic, but they culminate, in our view, in the inevitability of associated and combined development and its possible gains (?).
- ⁴ Which is not a Latin American novelty.
- ⁵ All the emphasis highlights of this quote are reproduced from the originals.
- ⁶ This does not mean, however, that there were only subversive uprisings. On the contrary, counterrevolutionary actions have also taken place and are constantly taking place, even with popular support.
- ⁷ This is a free of suspicion source, since refers to a privileged actor of the great capital (REAL GDP growth, [2020]).
- ⁸ These rates will certainly fluctuate with the final 2020 figures.
- ⁹ It is necessary to emphasize that the Latin American economy’s growth moments have not meant the reduction of social inequality in the countries of the region (even during the most progressive governments).
- ¹⁰ Programs such as the Bolsa Família in Brazil (Lula-Dilma governments) and the Asignación Universal por Hijo in Argentina (Néstor-Cristina Kirchner governments), among others similar, while preserving their undeniable importance, were widely stimulated by the World Bank, which firmly follows the IMF guidelines for Latin America and the Caribbean: strict fiscal control, privatizations, labor deregulation, a state focused on extreme poverty, primary surplus, and a floating exchange rate. Interest rates, at this time, tend to fall, but higher than the rest of the world. On the Brazilian case, in the view of the IDB, see The Word Bank (2019).
- ¹¹ Even the robust Chinese figures, never negative between 1980-2020, have declined after the 2008 world crisis. It has decreased from 14.4 (2006-2007) to 9.7% (between 2007-2008), showing a trend of constant decrease to 6.1% (2019-2020) and a forecast of 1.2% (2020-2021 - which would be the lowest index, by far, in the last 40 years). (REAL GDP growth, [2020]).
- ¹² Consider, for example, in the case of South America, Argentina and Brazil (submitted to continuous deindustrialization and denationalization), Chile (absolutely denationalized during the Pinochet dictatorship) and Paraguay (not industrialized).
- ¹³ In which Sebastian Piñera (Chile, 2011-2014 and 2018 to the present day) and Mauricio Macri (Argentina, December 10, 2015/2019) were political and governmental paradigms of this resumption in South America.
- ¹⁴ Recently reversed after strong mass mobilization.
- ¹⁵ The discrepancies between such alternatives cannot be levelled and underestimated.
- ¹⁶ It is an illusion to think that Trump’s defeat means the end of the extreme right.

José Fernando Siqueira da Silva

jose.siqueira-silva@unesp.br

PhD in Social Work from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP)

Associate Professor at the Social Work Department of the São Paulo State University (UNESP-Franca)

UNESP/Franca

Eufrásia Monteiro Petráglio, 900

Jd. Dr. Antonio Petráglio - Franca/SP

CEP: 14409-160.

Acknowledgements

Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP) e Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq).

Funding Agency

FAPESP – processo 2017/14497-5. CNPq – processo 302472/2017-7.

Author's contributions

Written by the author based on studies conducted in 2020 and on recently developed research projects.

Approval by Ethics Committee and consent for participation

It does not apply.

Consent for publication

Author's consent.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.