

Social Struggles and Social Work: seeds and fruits

*But it is in them (mouths and hands,
Dreams, strikes and denunciations)
That I see you vibrating,
New world,
Even in a state of upheaval
and hope.
Ferreira Gullar*

The streets explode in Brazil in rebellion and indignation, surprising those who believed in the peace of appearances, ignoring the contradictions that germinated under the ideological mantle of transformism and cooptation.

The spreading protests will mark a new phase in Brazilian history, but will bring a phenomenon that is certainly well known by those who study our society from the perspective of social struggles and do not give in to the post-modern seduction of fragmentation and an elegy to randomness.

The different particular manifestations of the contradictions of the capitalist order that are expressed in the exploitation of labor, in the oppression that marks the relationships between men and women, in racism, in environmental destruction, in homophobia, in the housing conditions, in the occupation of urban space and many others, do not deny the structuralizing force of the society of capital, but prove that it has become completely generalized.

Never has the category of totality been so necessary. Nevertheless, its mere affirmation is not enough to confront the pretensions of a thinking aimed at the particularism of the event bound to a pseudo-concreteness of phenomenon. Totality is always a universal void if it is not understood as a movement that leads to the concrete universal by means of the particularities that compose it.

The class struggle that springs from the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist order is expressed in a diversity of forms for which it is not always so simple to establish the connections with the whole. As Lukács said, it is not the philosopher who places these contradictions in the world, therefore, one cannot cast an arrogant eye on the small struggles of the world and belittle them.

In relation to Social Work, the connection that links the various particular forms of the contradictions of our historic epoch and the most general determinations that are found at its base, becomes essential. Not only because of the fact that this materializes the central object of our reflections, the so-called "social question" but because we want to understand it in the dynamic of the class struggle and from the perspective of emancipation.

The movements and social struggles are found precisely at the tension that marks the limits and possibilities of this emancipation. All of our struggles must take place at the interior of a certain order, whether in the form of the dominant social relations of production, whether in the political and legal forms that are their expressions, and at the interior of a certain form of social consciousness that corresponds to them. Even those that struggle in a revolutionary manner against the established order, wanting to find radical routes for overcoming it, have no other means but to construct the future with the materials that we find in our present.

For Social Work that affirms its political and ethical commitment at the horizon of human emancipation, this is one of the most important questions: how to act in the struggles within the order that limits and at times, even falls short of simple political emancipation, without losing the goal of human emancipation?

Thus, for us, more than noting the substantial difference between a social struggle within the limits of the

existing order and those that point to its overcoming, we are interested in the real movement that leads from one to the other. The essential mediation of this movement is found in daily life. It is here that we live the relations that materialize the order of commodities and of capital. These relations involve being born in a certain type of family, educating children, establishing hierarchies of sex and age, selling our labor power, mediating our needs by monetary equivalents, living in our homes whose architecture expresses the deep individualization of the social being and the reified massification of the city and its oppression, its violence, its gritty grayness, but also its resistance in colorful graffiti, in the irony that smiles at our condition, transforming pain into smiles, festivity, struggle. It is in daily life that we experience the conditions that lead us to the reification but also the contradictions that can point us to emancipation.

The seeds of resistance are sown by the oppressors, and not rarely, by the actions that intend to avoid it. We are tillers of the revolt, but we work in fields that are not ours. The seeds germinate in solitude, watered by the tears of our pain, warmed by the sun of repressed anger, contained by the strength of the earth that oppresses us.

Bound to this moment, a social theory can only be an anthropology of suffering, of muted and repressed resistance, of adaptation or of mere resistance: how do workers live submitted to exploitation, women to oppression, how do blacks live under racism, the poor in a visible invisibility?

Enter the earth to better see the seeds and we can lose sight of the sown field. Even when they sprout, they rise above the earth that oppresses them, we care for the small leaves and fragile stalks that timidly rise only to be reaped and harvested by the order of commodities, or by the domination of the state that represents it.

A social struggle is the expression of a social being that was subsumed to the reified individualized seriality that makes us believe that our pain is *his* pain, that our anger is *his* anger, that our destiny is *his* personal fate; and that, under certain conditions, is capable of seeing his own suffering in the suffering of the other, their revolt in the struggle of others. Individuals who never fail to be social beings, but who now, before an injustice or a particular form of oppression, can overcome the inert practical field in which they are inserted and they call reality, by means of joint action that can be converted into free praxis.

We are convinced that not only can individuals once again find their social being in the body of a social movement or struggle, but that these private movements, facing a universal threat, can find their point of fusion in the action of the masses and in very specific conditions, their fusion as a class.

Youth rise against the increase in bus fares and soon confront the authority of the order. Mayors say that they will not lower fares, governors mobilize their shock troops, presidents and congresses pretend pathetically to have nothing to do with it all and that's it; everyone goes to the street with their own revolt and indignation, catalyzed but not produced by the social media. And by chance we are all young, all women, all black, all poor, all workers... fusion: their rebelliousness becomes mine, my revolt becomes our revolt.

Still heterogeneous, diverse and multiple, but the common threat points to common and precise targets: the federal, state and municipal governments, and their personalities and symbols, palaces, assemblies, tribunals; but also, the banks, the temples of consumption, the fares, the police. A heterogeneous homogeneity, a unity in the once fragmented diversity... a social struggle of the masses that has still not revealed its class fusion. For this to take place revolt is not enough, poverty is not enough, as Marx and Engels said, what is necessary is for the misery to be conscious of its misery and for this to happen the deepest determinations and the intentionality of class behind the various forms of oppression and exploitation must be revealed.

This threat must gain a face and a name – companies, bankers, developers, large retail monopolies, agribusiness, the owners of the media, the mafia of the health plans, the education merchants – that is, the great monopolist bourgeoisie. Only when we clearly define “them” does the proletariat “we” take shape. And the goal of human emancipation begins to take shape. But, how can we search for it, when will it be possible to attain, what forms of organization are needed, who will be its subject? A class that asks these questions has already begun to construct its answers.

The seeds sprout and because they are people and not plants, they pull their roots from the ground, walk and struggle, and begin to seek beyond the imposed horizons, they discover themselves in the other that struggles alongside, they fall in love. It is still early, we look at them with the pride of our hands tired from planting, we salute and welcome them. It is time for harvest, we have no time to feel the exhaustion of which the body complains. It is still early, we have a lot to do, but we are certain of one thing: they carry our fruits.

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