



## Reflections on the struggle at the fringes of capitalism: Frente de Luta Popular

*Reflexões sobre a luta na periferia do capitalismo: Frente de Luta Popular*

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**Abstract:** The new phase of capitalism, triggered by the economic crisis of the 1970's, caused a profound shaking-up of the world's critical thinking, making us rethink existing forms of political action. We will discuss the impacts of this rethinking on Brazilian social movements and the emergence of a new type of social protagonism, whose identity and actions grow from the inability of individuals to participate in the relationship between capital and labour and in universal competition as the common and general form of societal life. Based on extensive documentary research, we will analyse the trajectory of the Frente de Luta Popular (The Front for Popular Struggle), a social movement that reinvented the strategies and scenarios of struggle, transforming the City into a priority area for social disputes and conflicts, with the occupation of public buildings in Rio de Janeiro at the centre of their actions.

**Keywords:** Capitalist crisis. Social movements. Occupation.

**Resumo:** A nova fase do capitalismo, inaugurada a partir da crise desencadeada nos anos 1970, causou fortes abalos no pensamento crítico mundial, nos fazendo repensar as formas de ação política existentes. Discutiremos os impactos dessa história recente sobre os movimentos sociais brasileiros e a emergência de um novo tipo de protagonismo social, cuja identidade e ação se constroem a partir da impossibilidade da participação dos indivíduos nos marcos das relações entre capital e trabalho e na concorrência universal como forma comum e geral da vida social. A partir de ampla pesquisa documental, analisaremos a trajetória da Frente de Luta Popular, movimento social que reinventou estratégias e cenários de luta, transformando a cidade em espaço prioritário das disputas e conflitos sociais, tendo as ocupações de prédios públicos no centro do Rio de Janeiro como expressão máxima de seu programa.

**Palavras-chave:** Crise capitalista. Movimentos sociais. Ocupações.

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## Introduction

Debates around the crisis of world capitalism have intensified since the 1970's when we saw the emergence of a critical view of the capitalist mode of production, the most evident feature of which was overcapacity and factory production which resulted in less profitability. There is consensus among authors discussing the crisis that, at the time, fundamental changes to the functioning of capitalism occurred. The changes to, and deepening of, patterns of unemployment are one of the most important signs that this was a structural crisis.

In a context in which entire populations have become expendable to the logic of capitalist accumulation, thinking about the basis for a new praxis requires us to look further, to new actors whose practices may never have been located within the framework of the relationship between capital and labour. Without any effective market participation and without representation in traditional political spheres, these actors have had to resort to other strategies and scenarios of struggle and have transformed the city into a priority space for disputes and social conflicts.

To illustrate this, we are highlighting the activities of the Frente de Luta Popular (FLP), a social movement that was active, primarily in the city of Rio de Janeiro, between the years 2000 and 2008. Its strategies and practices were in line with the transformations that the city had undergone and, until it ended its activities, the group was involved, in one way or another, in the events of greatest importance and repercussion in Rio. As we will see, FLP created new organisational spaces linked to daily life and new strategies for building bonds of solidarity and collective identity, having found the greatest expression of its programme in the occupation of public buildings in the city centre of Rio de Janeiro, all marked by a critical stance towards the State and the defence of popular power.

In this article, our objective is to give visibility to the innovations introduced by this movement regarding the construction of an alternative social form and the possibilities of social emancipation. We consider that, being at the periphery, the limits of capital and the barbarism produced in the wake of progress are more visible and, therefore, the understanding of the world from this point of view can contribute to the revitalisation of critical social theory at a moment when the dialectic relationship between civilization and barbarism needs to be redefined.

For this, we initially used theoretical references to understand the social context of the capitalist crisis form which a new type of social protagonism has emerged. Then, based on extensive documentary research, we will analyse the trajectory of the FLP, identifying the strategies that allowed it to resist and make important achievements in a scenario in which unemployment, segregation and war, that had become everyday events, became striking features of capitalism and the only strategies for maintaining a decomposing society<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This article resulted from research on a thesis titled, *Frente de Luta Popular: reflexões sobre a luta na periferia do capitalismo* (COUTO, 2015).

## **Aids to understanding the crisis of capitalism**

There is consensus among authors discussing the crisis that a fundamental change occurred in the 1970's regarding the functioning of capitalism. At the time, the crisis was evident, but the political, economic and social restructuring and reorganisation that took place in the following decades, and in a way reaffirmed the potential of the, by then, traditional adaptation strategies implemented by Capital, caused doubt about the exact character of the changes triggered. Above all, if we consider that the capital development process was itself responsible for this crisis, that is, for the collapse of the production of value, we can view it as not only structural, but irreversible. Its duration and reach surpassed the historically known limits of cyclical crises and, as its symptoms have multiplied and intensified, it makes it seem plausible that capitalism is approaching its limits (KURZ, 2004).

One of the most important signs of the structural character of this crisis is the change to and deepening of unemployment patterns. When capitalism finally established the pattern of Fordist production in Western Europe, an excess of capacity and factory production hit the world economy, causing reduced profitability added by production. At the time, the solution was to carry out a wide ideopolitical and economic reorganisation of the system, aiming to circumvent not only the exhaustion of the post-war economic boom, the breaking of the dollar-gold standard and the oil crisis, but also the heavy bureaucracies and the growing public debts of interventionist national states and planners that have become obstacles to the free development of the market economy (BRENNER, 2001).

We tracked the return of a scenario of liberal criticism of the State and the long and deep recession that occurred between 1969 and 1973, which allowed neoliberals to advance their argument that the crisis was the result of the excessive union power and workers' movements, which they saw as responsible for the corrosion of the bases of capitalist accumulation and state social spending. Neoliberalism presented monetary stability as its main goal and, summed up by privatisation, the opening up of trade and deregulation, neoliberal policy aggressively targeted the State and at the same time paved the way for the reconfiguration of the international industrial scenario, definitively altering the organic composition of the system (ANDERSON, 1995).

The Third Industrial Revolution, also called the Informational Technical-Scientific Revolution, brought microelectronic innovations that would allow the large-scale mechanisation of production processes, giving over to robots and automation tasks that had previously depended on human labour. As this was a period of crisis, there was little money to be invested in new technologies. For this reason, the initial efforts sought to establish new organisational standards for production, rationalising it, principally, by reducing the number of workers employed and, consequently, spending on wages and labour rights.

The restructuring of production that accompanied the Informational Technical-Scientific Revolution, in the early 1970's, was one of the most important elements for a limited recovery of the critical framework of the capitalist production. Although its implementation varied according to the conditions of each country, in general, the Japanese model of management, known as Toyotism, was widely disseminated and became one of the main pillars of capitalist globalisation. The increase in the quantities produced and the reduction in the number of employees were two of the main strategies implemented in the restructured factories (ALVES, 2005).

As it became possible to implement new technologies, the main attempts to recover capitalist profitability were based on greater investments in fixed capital. The consumption of the labour force, with its demands, its wage costs, and labour rights, had become less profitable when the replacing workers with machines was possible. Capital structure saw a shift in its organic composition, with a significant increase in fixed capital and, consequently, a significant reduction in variable capital, that is, in the labour force.

In view of Capital's lack of interest or inability to incorporate a large part of the available labour force, we were following not only the emergence of a gigantic mass surplus of labour, but a worsening situation for those who lived from the exchange of their labour. Entire populations gradually became expendable within the logic of capitalist accumulation, which presents a fundamental contradiction of the production method itself. Instead of growing the industrial reserve army, we were faced with superfluous humanity, as cyclical recoveries did not guarantee the resorption of large parts of this work force.

The current rationalisation of production is not restricted to manufacturing industries, the service sector has also been inundated by innovations that increase mass unemployment, such as ATM's in banks and electronic turnstiles in transport. If that already seems somewhat outdated, consider the personal transport industry, which, in 2016, launched a car that does not require a driver? This at a time when becoming a driver for app-based transportation is one of the main survival strategies for many unemployed Brazilians.

The urban masses that remain within the capitalist forms of production in cities still encounter those from the most recent processes of expropriation in the countryside, as explained by Menegat (2012). Agribusiness is one of the causes of this narrowing. In the current capitalist situation, one advantage for peripheral countries lies in the exploitation of their natural resources and this *new-old* arrangement is responsible for the destruction of extensive rural areas, expelling the population from the countryside and increasing the structural unemployment which in turn puts pressure on social support networks, many of which depend on the State's tax collection capacity, which is already showing signs of stress.

Taxes are the main source of revenue for the State and, for that, it needs to tax real market profits or labour income. However, the combination of lower profitability from production, higher unemployment rates and lower wages has meant that taxes have

become insufficient to cover state spending. So, credit applications have expanded, via the Central Bank or private investors. As its activities are only for consumption, the State is left with only an inflated public debt, the payment of interest of which consumes a significant part of its budget. Without autonomous means of intervention and with its decisions financed by resources from accumulation processes, the policy ends up having an even more limited role in executing tasks aimed at the needs of capital expansion (LUKÁCS, 2003). Revelations about the scandalous relationships between political decisions and the interests of Capital appear almost daily in Brazilian newspapers. Individuals from within governments have been forced to resign after corruption scandals or because they have been unable to comment on the most important issues related to their ministries or areas of intervention. We also have seen a meteoric rise in the appointment of representatives of companies or financial groups to key political positions.

The expansion of the credit system was one of the strategies used to try to circumvent the contraction of the world economy in the 1980's and 1990's. This time however, in addition to deepening public deficits, as had been done before both world wars, it also sought to artificially stimulate demand through greater private indebtedness, both corporate and consumption. Companies borrowed money to invest in production and the population turned to credit cards to consume the produced output, temporarily solving the problem of weak demand.

These transformations have impacted so heavily on the productive system, on labour relations, on national and international markets, on finance, on the political sphere and on social life that it has opened a new historical epoch and another phase of capitalism, causing strong shocks in critical thinking worldwide. If one assumes that the current crisis does not stem from imperfections in the system, but rather from the maturity of its development and from its destructive make-up, that prevents or nullifies any effort to restrict it, the development of immanent solutions no longer seems possible.

Understanding the current challenges, taking a critical stand against capitalism, and discussing the basis for a new paradigm, requires us to subvert traditional concepts and forms of political action. This requires more than just a simple divergence from previous forms of political action, as we do not believe that they offer the necessary tools for understanding it and for contemporary society to overcome it.

### **Frente de Luta Popular**

The reason why the Frente de Luta Popular (FLP) was chosen as a model for this study is because its analysis and intervention strategies sought to adapt to the changes of its time. Until 2008, when it ended its activities, the group had been involved, to varying degrees, in the most important events with the largest repercussions across the city of Rio de Janeiro. Concatenated with the impacts of the transformations that took place in the world of work and a crisis in its traditional forms of representation, the collective sought to establish itself on new social basis, namely, a population segment that was growing rapidly at the time of its foundation, marked by informality and work insecurity, who were not covered by the State's protection network, which had already been

devastated by the crisis coping strategies implemented by capital, and who did not find political representation in the traditional left.

Apparently dispersed, these people were in fact concentrated in the slums and peripheries of the city, excluded from the benefits of the revitalisation projects and housing policies implemented until then. Two elements deserve to be highlighted in the group's trajectory that bring contributions to the discussion about social movements, 1) the establishment of the FLP's base comprised of the surplus masses, a population segment that grew rapidly after the 3<sup>rd</sup> Technical-Scientific Revolution and 2) its critical stance towards the coming together of social movements and the State, breaking with the institutional about-turn that occurred, primarily, during the period of re-democratisation in Brazil.

At the time of its founding, the FLP was mainly composed of Marxist militants who sought to circumvent the limits imposed by capitalist development on the theoretical and organisational forms that had dominated the left until then, but without giving up their critical tradition. A significant number of these activists had experienced, directly or indirectly, the social struggles of the late 1970's and 1980's. Although aware of the weaknesses and ambiguities of the practices of those social movements, FLP members did not fail to recognise in them a vast combative and creative potential that went beyond the limits of party and union vanguards.

Having followed the process of re-democratisation and the transformation of existing forms of social movement, both old and new, through their institutionalisation, co-optation and dismantling, the militants of the FLP could not ignore their development, as they set out in their first manifesto (FRENTE DE LUTA POPULAR, 2001). For these movements to become triggers for transformation, the autonomy and formation of their base needed to be focussed at the core of their theoretical formulations and their daily practices. But this did not happen <sup>2</sup>.

From the 1980's, Brazil also began to feel the effects of the capitalist crisis more deeply, watched by the attentive eyes of those who would go on to form the FLP. The changes in unemployment patterns had turned the formal contract into a privilege for a few, making the 1990's a decade marked by the growth of precariousness and insecurity in

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<sup>2</sup> What we followed during the Brazilian democratic transition period, permeated by the "great crisis", was the suppression of the differentiation processes of groups and social classes within Brazilian society. The widespread desire for social change ended up masking existing differences in perspective, forging a new political alliance that favoured conservative forces, "And so, the old solutions, sometimes with new clothes, continue to dictate the day-to-day rules of the relationship between the State and the Social Movement" (JACOBI, 1987, p. 23). Autonomy, so acclaimed in previous years, was gradually marginalised due to invitations to participate in tables, chambers and participatory councils promoted by the State. Reinforcing what Oliveira (1985) had said about the new political culture being created at the time, Arantes (2014) explains that popular participation has become citizen participation and has become a dialogue and a way of operating the State, devoid of *the utopian energies of the 1960's and 1970's*. Since then, social advancement has been represented by enrolment *in the field of rights, removing them from the field of claims and counterclaims*.

terms of entering and remaining in the formal labour market. The number of people surplus to capitalist development began to grow significantly and, therefore, unemployment was one of the defining issues in FLP practices. By understanding the situation to which the subordinate classes were subjected, the FLP was able to define its subject, its intervention space and to outline its militant strategies.

It was also in the 1980's that the effects of the economic crisis had a more profound effect on the city of Rio de Janeiro, a priority stage for the FLP's struggles. At the time, violence, previously restricted to marginalised spaces in favelas and at the periphery, began to spread, affecting the city in general. The increase in unemployment, informality, and the expansion of the illicit drug trade, coupled with the government's inability to promote meaningful social policies, contributed to the spread of a negative image of the municipality. Although violence was not a new phenomenon for residents of much of the city, for opinion makers, the mainstream media, businessmen and politicians, this became a problem when it started to affect the middle classes in Rio. From then on, violence gradually became the central issue for the city of Rio de Janeiro. The various political projects developed can all be summarised as seeking order and security, and placed the coercion and repression of the *dangerous classes* ahead of combating the underlying causes of violence (COIMBRA, 2001).

Considering that the FLP was guided by the reality in which it was created, it is not surprising that the upsurge in urban violence in Rio de Janeiro, the result of social breakdown, and the consequent expansion of police violence in the favelas and periphery were the most important elements that drove the aggregation of the various sectors of the popular movement in Rio that would come to form the FLP. The Front was built with the aim of organising joint actions by slum residents to denounce cases of police violence. The *People's Day of Struggle against Violence* was set for August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2000, the anniversary of the slaughter of Vigário Geral took place in 1993.

Initially, the Front was formed solely for the organisation of this one action and the idea of making it a permanent collective came later. The group started to assert itself as a union of independent popular movements that aimed to organise protests and street demonstrations, without the interference of the government, police, or drug dealers (C. E-mail "Re: Sobre a FLP". S/d). These collectives had been active in Rio's favelas and periphery for a long time and had, therefore, directly felt the impact of changes in public security policy and social relations as they were applied in marginalised communities. Critical to the worsening state violence, and distancing itself from the perspective of the subordination and focused integration of the poor people of the slums and periphery, the FLP sought to give visibility to the struggles by encouraging self-organisation in these communities.

The FLP considered the State forum to be a limited and unreliable space in which to combat the violence perpetrated by the State itself. The State's structure was understood as the continuation of a colonial heritage that had supported slavery and the killing of blacks and Amerindians, as well as sustaining the violent repression of political opposition through arrests and killings during the military dictatorship. Santos (2007), a former FLP activist, says that the foundation of the Brazilian Police State rests on a

peculiar type of domestic tyranny with a colonial heritage, as well as pressure from some parts of the media and from academic and political sectors to call for the ending of the consolidation of Brazilian democracy <sup>3</sup>.

In this way, the FLP played an important role in denouncing police abuses in communities. The coordination of the struggles that the group consistently sought to build gave visibility to these events. One of the most emblematic episodes in which the FLP was involved was the organisation of the *Can I Identify?* march, held on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The name of the march was a reference to executions that had become a constant in the state, in which workers, even when carrying their identity documents, were not permitted to present them, and identify themselves as *citizens by law*. This demonstration brought together thousands of people and was of paramount importance in changing the dominant discussions around these violent events. Until then the deaths that occurred in the communities had always been of criminals by criminals, so the focus of the press had to be changed and the authorities had to be forced to investigate the facts and apply justice. The communities assumed the role of protagonists in the fight against prejudice and violence, breaking with their historical role as perpetrators or victims of police abuses. For the FLP, this movement, as well as the foundation of the Network of Communities and Movements against Violence <sup>4</sup>, represented the realisation of its initial proposal presented on the first *Day of the People's Fight against Violence*.

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<sup>3</sup> Referring to the military civil bloc formed in Brazil in 1964, Arantes (2014) seems to agree that, due to the inefficiency of civilian elites in managing our national breakdown, we have lived with the maintenance of dictatorial devices during our *endless transition* and until today. In the 1988 Constitution, legitimised by *civic dramaturgy*, we find a series of elements that reinforce the idea of a *constitutional dictatorship*, such as article 142, which gave the guarantee of law and order to the armed forces. Arantes thus defines what he calls the “Oligarchic State of Law”: “[...] a political juridical regime characterised by wide liberal-constitutional latitude in which the comfortable classes move, while its face turned towards the scum that the retreat of the dictatorial tide has left on the beach of the economic order that it once unlocked, is distinguished by the intensification of paternalistic-punitive treatment” (ARANTES, 2014, p. 292).

<sup>4</sup> “As a result of the more organised struggle of communities and social movements against State violence, police arbitrariness and impunity” (NETWORK OF COMMUNITIES AND MOVEMENTS AGAINST VIOLENCE, 2006), the Network has become the privileged forum for discussing issues related to violence in communities, where local residents were able to express their opinion and decide on the paths of the struggle. It should be noted that the institutional relations established subsequently by the Network, in order to advance the legal rights of the families of victims of violence, was a controversial issue among FLP activists. This discussion refers to the possible limits of the autonomy of social movements. With regard to the Human Rights front, Arantes (2014) states that his anti-politics, in its libertarian sense, with its conflicting character, present in his epic period of confrontation with the deadly nature and violent “Disappearances” of the State, ended up becoming mere public policy, trivialised and bureaucratised in the gears of current technologies of social control. At the same time as it legitimises the resistance of individuals to the violence suffered, the discourse of human rights legitimises State policies, responsible for such violations.



## Occupations by the Homeless

From then on, the group was able to dedicate itself to a new front related to the occupation of buildings by the homeless<sup>5</sup>. Since the 1980's, social movements for housing began to emerge in Rio de Janeiro, aiming to regularise land lots in peripheral areas and slums, as well as the occupation of idle properties in the city centre. In addition to social inequality, the inheritance of several public buildings abandoned or underutilised by the transfer of the capital city to Brasília served as a basis for these movements. The issue of housing from the perspective of struggle, not only for a space in the city, but also with a view to influencing the direction of its development, brought the FLP closer to the struggle of the homeless. The issue gradually became a priority for the group, which encouraged the resumption of urban occupations in the city centre of Rio de Janeiro and subverted the occupation model that until then had been a reference point for the movement.

Although housing battles, urban reform, social transformation and the struggle for popular power (MTST, 2005 apud GOULART, 2011) had brought the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MTST) (The Movement of Rural Workers without Land) and FLP closer together, the way in which the two groups operate differs not only in the territories in which they operate (land on the outskirts of cities and abandoned public buildings in the centre), but also by the political models of management adopted in the occupations they support. Those linked to the MTST are organised through a hierarchy of coordination, varying according to scale, ranging from national coordination to the coordinates of camp squares, which represents the social base of a movement made up of *ordinary residents* who remain excluded from the communities' formal decision making bodies. The occupations linked to the FLP, on the other hand, adopted a horizontal and uncoordinated management model, in which the only decision making body was composed exclusively of residents, called residents', or collective, assemblies. As classified by Souza and Teixeira (2009), we call this faction of the homeless movement a *variant by collective* as opposed to the *variant by coordination* model adopted by MTST.

The *collective* is the group of residents who have the right to voice and vote in assemblies where all matters related to occupations are dealt with, from the uses and functions of the internal spaces of the buildings to their forms of political participation. In occupations, the FLP's objective was to transmit, through practice, specific knowledge related to direct action and the political and legal foundations that support the movement. The internal collective of occupations was strengthened in order to hinder the interference of external agents and the capture and practices of the movement by political parties, unions, and other institutions.

As Almeida (2011) explains, the horizontal form, characterised by non-hierarchical political relations, meaning that each of the occupations supported by the FLP had its

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<sup>5</sup> Campaign pledge by the president-elect in 2003, the transformation of unoccupied public buildings into public housing provided the initial fuel and boosted the struggle through occupations.

own development that had more or fewer features in common with the originally proposed model. Although the Chiquinha Gonzaga (OCG - 2004), Zumbi dos Palmares (OZP - 2005), Quilombo das Guerreiras (OQG - 2006) and Machado de Assis (OMA - 2008) occupations were started with the support of activists linked to FLP and consequently, having adopted, at least initially, the horizontal model described above, it was in the first two occupations that the participation of the FLP, as an organisation, was most expressed.

Expectations of the occupations were high, both because of their potential for building different forms of sociability among residents, and because of the possibility of achieving better living conditions for the people through their self-organisation. As Almeida (2011) points out, within the perspective of building alternative forms of political organisation and popular activism, the occupations functioned as a kind of laboratory and, therefore, it was only to be expected that problems would arise for which the FLP had no answers. During the OCG occupation, the FLP had to deal with disputes between residents and militants from different political groups and who had divergent interests and methods of intervention; in the OZP occupation, the greatest difficulty was the implementation of self-management in an environment marked by violent relations and identities linked to criminal factions. In both cases, it was the model of occupation organised by the collective that became the target of disputes, either by traditional left-wing movements accustomed to the hierarchy of their organisations, or by the vertical and aggressive structure that organises society. Maintaining the collective at the maximal effectiveness in deliberations and decision-making demanded constant efforts from residents and militants.

Today, for different reasons, both the OCG and the OZP no longer have their collectives, they have become so strong in facing complex controversies, attacks on drug trafficking, abandonment of minors, domestic violence, petty theft, etc. The OCG occupation is still awaiting a solution to its problems from the administrative authorities; the OZP occupation underwent an eviction process in 2011, when a part of its residents accepted public housing in the west zone and another part received an indemnity in the amount of twenty thousand reais.

The FLP bet on the idea that collective self-management would guarantee their survival, which turned out to be a mistake. The new residents/activists who were being trained in the occupation processes did not have enough time to mature and take on tasks and responsibilities as expected. Furthermore, the approach of a new cohort of militants, due to the innovative character of the actions undertaken by the Front, caused debates about which form of organisation to concentrate on. Divided between the recovery of its character as a mass front and its transformation into a closed organisation, in the style of traditional parties, the FLP was unable to survive the changes that occurred in the social and political context in which it acted.

Marked by deepening alliances between the federal, state and municipal governments with a view to revitalising the centre of the city of Rio de Janeiro, and by the intensification of the violence provoked by this project, the urban policies implemented reflected the intensification of ways of governing the populations poor and managing

cities. The resumption of evictions; the implementation of organised disciplinary control programmes, such as Shock Orders; and military police control of the favelas, through the so-called Pacification policy, are just a part of the list of actions implemented. We also saw the strengthening of the hegemonic and governmental political left, which developed and deepened its crisis management techniques, moving from “total war” to the co-opting of popular participation, and through an expanded distribution of family grants which contributing to social conformation (ARANTES, 2014).

The maintenance of several fronts of action, the compromise of its space for political discussion and the difficulties of critical interpretation about the transformations underway proved to be a disastrous combination for the FLP, which ended its activities on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

### Final Considerations

The FLP was responsible for creating its own cultural mix and an embryonic political culture, based on popular power and the autonomy of the popular classes. Although it was not able to generalise its experience, which in the end brought about the demise of its activities, the FLP stimulated the formation of individuals capable of building new embryonic social forms and new forms of political participation that went beyond the existing representative democratic system. Its proposal was fundamental to the struggles in Rio de Janeiro at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which, starting from a position that had been weakened by various *peace campaigns*, reinforced the idea of “war” for unifying the city, which was not dependent on the State and promoted a poly-classist discourse in a scenario which, at the time, was still dominated by a type of political intervention aimed almost exclusively at a working class in crisis, with its accompanying vanguard of centralising parties and organisations with vertical structures.

As a front, the FLP did not delve into theoretical discussions because it felt that it understood its agglutinating role and its objective of bringing militants together to carry out joint activities, but also because it believed that the new forms of sociability would not necessarily be derived from a long and deep political struggle, but from the objective needs of the popular classes. The group invested in the construction of bonds of solidarity forged from unity in the struggle, aiming to overcome the fragmentation of the traditional left, a differential that was the basis of its development and the actions it proposed.

The concept of popular power implies a break with the idea that it should be possible to build alternative spaces for political intervention or to create alternative forms of sociability without confrontations and clashes with the capitalist order. The process of growth and mutual education in popular struggles is at the base of the construction of popular power, as well as the strengthening and articulation of organisations linked to daily life, aiming at transforming them into alternatives for the State in all its functions. On the question of autonomy, in the case of the FLP, it refers to a structural criticism of the State and the impossibility of appropriating and transforming it within the framework of popular emancipatory interests. The revolutionary experiments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century achieved important improvements in life for the population, but which,

although profound, did not bring forth a “new world”. Based on the State, they proved inadequate for the creation of emancipatory social relations. More than a matter of principle, for the FLP its defence of autonomy derived directly from the experiences and analyses by its activists of the institutionalisation of Brazilian social movements that occurred in the 1970’s and 1980’s.

This mindset brought together the movements that formed the FLP and established the scope of its approach to the institutional organisations that had supported it throughout its history. Even though the contradiction between the struggle for autonomy and the demands of social movements is at the root of the relations of a commodity-producing society, the FLP exercised this issue as much as possible and remained attentive to its pitfalls, preventing the State from being considered the only one responsible for the absence or presence of public urban facilities, which would remove conflicts from capitalist relations of production. At the same time as supporting claims for rights, which implied greater access to public funds, presumed as necessary for financing capitalist accumulation and the reproduction of the labour force, the FLP proposed alternative development strategies for the popular movement, such as joint working and work cooperatives to avoid gravitating exclusively toward the State for solutions.

The experiments proposed by the FLP must be understood both as a process of self-management and as a process of self-training. This is because its activists proposed new forms of sociability that had no precedent or formulae to follow. Although this type of intervention has been quite positive through training and experimenting, the results achieved have not always been the ones desired. It is necessary to bear in mind that contradictions form part of any social movement experiment and that focusing on its limits or the fragility of its power-taking strategies should not be the main debate, especially when one considers that the popular sectors only reveal their power through action and should not be characterised in a ring-fenced or a priori way. Thinking about what could be done through the State, parties, or different combinations of them, distorts the centre of the debate that should be focussed on the social mobilisation of the subjects of transformation, their forms of organisation and the different forms of social relations that they engender to create singular experiments that can contribute to overcoming the barbarism which is already beginning to spring up in the fractures of capitalism.

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