



Capitalist Greed, Pandemic, and the Future of Social Policy

Cobiça Capitalista, Pandemia e o Futuro da Política Social

Camila Potyara PEREIRA*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1117-2468>

Potyara A. PEREIRA-PEREIRA**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4823-5119>

Abstract: This text analyses the harmful implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for social policy as a citizen's right. The article defines the current global capital system, with its endless structural crisis, as the foundation of these implications. It incorporates emerging or under-visited themes and approaches, such as climate change, to broaden the conventional analytical scope and add new factual and theoretical contributions. In this context of a double lethal threat to humanity, social policy guided by a commitment to satisfying human needs has undergone a violent reversal. It has been reduced to satisfying capital's need for profit of and has become averse to democratic sociability.

Keywords: Capitalism. Structural crisis. Greed. Pandemic. Human needs. Social policy.

Resumo: Este texto analisa as implicações nefastas da pandemia da COVID-19 para a política social como direito de cidadania. Demarca, para tanto, o atual sistema do capital global, com sua crise estrutural interminável, como o elemento fundante dessas implicações. Incorpora temas e enfoques emergentes ou pouco visitados, como mudança climática, para ampliar o escopo analítico convencional e adensá-lo com novos aportes factuais e teóricos. Nesse contexto de dupla crise letal contra a humanidade a política social pautada pelo compromisso com a satisfação das necessidades humanas sofre violenta reversão: reduz-se a satisfazer as necessidades de lucro do capital tornando-se avessa à sociabilidade democrática.

Palavras-chave: Capitalismo. Crise estrutural. Cobiça. Pandemia. Necessidades humanas. Política social.

Submitted on: 8/11/2020. Accepted on: 9/12/2020.

* Sociologist. Masters and Doctorate in Social Policy from the Universidade de Brasília (UnB). Professor of the Department of Social Service and of the Post-graduate Programme in Social Policy at UnB. E-mail: camilapotyara@gmail.com.

** Social Worker and Lawyer. Masters and Doctorate in Sociology. Post-Doctorate in Social Policy from the University of Manchester – UK. Emeritus Professor at the Universidade de Brasília (UnB). E-mail: potyamaz@gmail.com.



© A(s) Autora(s)/O(s) Autor(es). 2019 Acesso Aberto Esta obra está licenciada sob os termos da Licença Creative Commons Atribuição 4.0 Internacional (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.pt_BR), que permite copiar e redistribuir o material em qualquer suporte ou formato, bem como adaptar, transformar e criar a partir deste material para qualquer fim, mesmo que comercial. O licenciante não pode revogar estes direitos desde que você respeite os termos da licença.

1 Introduction

Any assessment of the possibilities and limits of social policy in the current stage of development of the system of global capital, which mobilises interests and institutions, and shapes the dominant ideas, must go beyond conventional themes. Furthermore, it must be open to a realistic understanding of neglected issues and subject them to up-to-date analysis, making use of basic assumptions about the political economy that informs this system. The important question of the COVID-19 pandemic, associated with climate change with its motivations and consequences, is one of these issues.

This text analyses the harmful implications of this pandemic for social policies which were implemented as a right in the post WWII period, and responds to calls for the inclusion of a little explored theme into studies on, and the actions of, these policies: that of *critical ecology*, which makes up the field of eco-capitalism which is, in turn, part of an eco-social political economy (ESPE) of a multi and interdisciplinary character. It is a contribution, with a Marxian affiliation, guided by the understandings developed by progressive social scientists, notably in environmental economics, sociology, political science, and social policy (GOUGH, 2017). The multi and interdisciplinarity nature of ESPE aims to: broaden the scope of disciplinary contributions concerning the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on human well-being; to elevate the social and political dimensions of this problem to a status comparable to that of the economic dimension which has been dominated by neoclassical economics and hegemonic neo-rightism since the late 1970s; include into the debate, the concept and logic of *human needs*, as worked on by social policy theorists as a counterpoint to the logic of private economic profitability that currently presides over capital outflows resulting from its structural and systemic crisis. The fact that social policy is, according to Alcock (1992) and Dean (2006), among others, a multi and interdisciplinary academic discipline, at the same time that it is a policy of protective intervention in any sphere of human well-being (*wellbeing*)¹, means that it is also incumbent upon him to discuss the implications for humanity of the COVID-19 pandemic in a scenario already suffering the negative effects of the endless crisis of capital; or in a scenario dominated by “virotic” “pandemic capitalism”, in the words of Antunes (2020, online), which “[...] combines increasing levels of human exploitation and degradation with the destruction of the environment”.

Among the contributions of the field of *social policy*, two stand out in the face of setbacks to the idea of *social policy as a public action*: the idea of *living well* proclaimed by the so-called capitalist welfare economy and anchored in anti-capitalist references; and questioning the dialectically contradictory disjunctive that overlaps the dictates of unlimited economic growth to the demands for satisfying human needs. For this, new, impactful, and disturbing global empirical evidence needs to form part of the range of interconnected relationships in the context of defining the object of this discussion.

¹ The use of the term *wellbeing*, instead of *welfare*, to designate human well-being, results the authors sharing the understanding of Dean (2006), Gough (2003) among others, that *wellbeing* refers to how well people are; *welfare*, on the other hand, denotes the welfare provided by social policies to the extent of its possibilities. From the perspective of *welfare*, social policy establishes the social and political relations necessary for human well-being (*wellbeing*) and requires systems and resources through which well-being can be provided.

Firstly climate change, as it is considered “[...] the most comprehensive and threatening of all the planetary limits of this new [geological] age of the Anthropocene [...]” (GOUGH, 2017, p.1), which is intricately connected to the COVID- 19 pandemic. In view of this, these limits pose, *a challenge unparalleled in the past* in the form of a “[...] complex and diabolical political problem [...]” (STEFFEN, 2011, apud GOUGH, 2017, p. 19) because human well-being depends upon support and preventive care that includes respect for nature. According to Gough (2017), given the historical particularities of the pre-capitalist socioeconomic relationship between human activities and the natural world, this respect for nature existed in *the era of the Holocene*, which lasted for around ten thousand years. This era had stable ecological conditions for the emergence, formation and development of human civilization which then moved, post the industrial revolution, towards the Anthropocene era when humanity started to dominate the planet; and today, under the uncontrollable impulse of profitable economic growth, it produces negative global impacts on the climate and its ecosystems.

The second is the extraordinary increase in income and wealth inequality which underlies the prevailing social inequality and the spectacular growth of so-called casino capitalism; that is, through the practice of speculation with financial capital, through banking institutions, insurance companies and similar agencies, whose soul is the unregulated management of money in ultra-profitable businesses spread throughout the economic system (NAVARRO, 2015). Contrary to what is often reported, the inequality of income and wealth, in both wealthy and poor nations, is not due to technological changes that have caused labour productivity to fall, and the consequent poor distribution of income resulting from this fact. It stems from the obscene concentration of capital income in 1% of the population whose income derives, mainly, from financial operations. Proof of this is that, as Navarro (2015) points out, among the 90% of the population whose income derives from income from work, such an immense discrepancy does not occur.

The third is the evidence that the current global capital system has already given what it had to give in terms of social protection and democratic guarantees. Therefore, according to Mészáros (2017), capitalism, as the dominant form of capital realisation over the last three centuries, has reached a point of historical development where there are no longer controlling manoeuvres that can be made to control the destructive metabolism of capital in search of profits; it no longer bothers to hide, in this insane race, its antisocial and inhuman nature in the face of the predicted annihilation of humanity, both at the ecological, economic, and military levels; and it no longer permits the existence of any public social policies with a solidary ethos in its midst, because the needs to be met are those demanded by the ethics on *living well*, typical of consumerist/hedonistic morality. Hence the current wave of privatisation of these policies, which degrades and distorts the meanings of *wellbeing* and *welfare* that have been won and enshrined in democratic movements over centuries of class struggles.

At the centre of this evidence lies the structural power of capital driven by its most predatory instinct: greed (or avarice), which emulates the incessant and conspicuous capitalist processes of accumulation, growth, inequality, and genocide. Running parallel to it, warns Gough (2017), is the system of state domination, as guarantor and faithful squire. For this reason, Gough continues, any attempt to halt and reverse the processes expressed in this interconnected evidence will have to start with capitalist greed and its dire implications.

The fight against unbridled and amoral greed is a necessary condition for at least beginning to talk of an ethical, fair, and sustainable future for humanity.

2 Factual profile of the obstacles encountered by social policy in the pandemic context of 21st century capitalism

From the above, it becomes clear that the COVID-19 pandemic is not an unusual occurrence. It has been predicted for many years and, therefore, should not come as a surprise. Furthermore, it is not the cause of the structural crisis in capital which has remained active and destructive since the 1970s. On the contrary, it is the accumulated product of the voracious exploitation of resources of nature and human labour by industrial civilization, which is still expanding, and which, added to the structural crisis of capital, gains extraordinary proportions. Consequently, nothing that is happening in the current health crisis is original and stems, according to Rifkin (2020), from climate change caused by predatory human actions that researchers have been warning against for a long time. “Natural disasters - pandemics, fires, hurricanes, floods - will continue because the temperature on Earth continues to rise and because we ruin the soil”, Rifkin emphasises,

Ours is the civilization of fossil fuels. For the past 200 years [it] has been based on the exploitation of the Earth. The soil remained intact until we started digging away at the earth’s foundations to turn it into gas, oil, and coal. And we thought that the Earth would always remain there, intact (RIFKIN, 2020, online).

Regarding pandemic of the new coronavirus, it is necessary to consider, as Rifkin points out, that climate change, “[...] causes movements of the human population and other species; and that animal and human lives are closer every day as a consequence of the climate emergency and, therefore, their viruses travel alongside each other” (RIFKIN, 2020, online). Global warming is causing the melting of glaciers, and when combined with the destructive actions of human beings on flora and fauna, such as fires in Brazil, favours the spread of viruses embedded in these environments. Consequently, environmental destruction driven by the unstoppable imperative of economic growth, based on the unsustainable use of non-renewable resources, the destruction of biodiversity and the emission of greenhouse gases, is responsible not only for ecological catastrophe, but also for the deepening of social inequality. After all, the globalisation of capital has seriously compromised social sustainability and turned it into the most underestimated component of global sustainability.

The resulting economic growth takes place at the expense of Dantesque failings to meet satisfy human needs and the increased precariousness of work, since the mechanism that produces this growth aims at the massification of consumption, the profits of which do not reach the entire population of the planet. Quite the contrary, they are concentrated in a small minority, creating a deep chasm between rich and poor characterised by the following phenomenon: the creation of a social caste known as the super-rich, and the corollary international expansion of poverty. And the more this caste grows stronger, the more poverty becomes global. The curious thing about this relationship is that it does not only happens in central capitalist countries, but also in peripheral ones. In these, the alliances between their economic and political elites, as agents of imperial transnational capital, account for their presence.

It is in this context of environmental destruction and social barbarism on a planetary scale that humanity in the 21st century is experiencing not only the COVID-19 pandemic, but a syndemic.

This neologism, coined in the 1990s by the American physician Merrill Singer, designates the interaction between two or more serious illnesses, enhanced by precarious socioeconomic and environmental contexts and which generate greater damage than the mere sum of the consequences of each disease. In the current situation, the interaction of the contagious COVID-19 with pre-existing non-contagious conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, obesity, heart and respiratory problems, and hypertension, among others, combined with poverty and the lack of access to basic conditions for hygiene and food and health security, makes specific population groups, such as blacks, indigenous peoples, and members of peripheral communities, more vulnerable to the impacts of the syndemic pandemic.

So, an effective fight against the pandemic does not occur through the administration of drugs or vaccines, but through state actions and public policies that reduce social and economic disparities and prevent non-communicable diseases. With these measures, COVID-19 mortality would be reduced.

However, what has been observed, especially in Brazil, is the opposite: the dismantling of social policies based on meeting human needs and the resulting deepening of inequalities. In its place, inhumane government interventions have been carried out that exclusively favour capital appreciation. The following is just one example.

Until September of this year², the following text was included in the *Plan for Returning to Presential Activities* of the Public Education Network of Espírito Santo, prepared by the Secretary of Education of the Government of Espírito Santo:

If there are deaths of students or school professionals, and if it is something desired by the school community, the group can organise farewell rites, tributes, memorials, ways of expressing feelings about the situation and in relation to the person who died, and also to pay attention for the construction of a socio-affective network for the mourners (ESPÍRITO SANTO, 2020, p. 65).

Carolina Catini, in her article, *Brutalism goes to school*, published in Editora Boitempo's blog, on September 13, 2020, summed up the impact that this paragraph had on its readers. According to her, "[...] the inhuman frankness of the communiqué is shocking, and it is up to us to ask why such brutality is possible" (CATINI, 2020, online). That is because, she says, part of the plan to return to school includes the increase in spread of the coronavirus and

² The document, which had already been published on the Espírito Santo Department of Education's website, has since been modified and republished. This excerpt was replaced by the following: "In addition to the emotional impact caused by social isolation, and the feelings caused by the pandemic, such as fear, insecurity, anxiety, sadness, as well as the financial consequences for some families, professionals and students may have lost family members and loved ones, victims of COVID-19. Considering the need for sensitive handling and observing each situation from the perspective of its particularities, the school needs to be attentive to the different situations experienced by the school community, to support and understand the feelings that may be manifested. Therefore, if the school community so desires, the group can organise various ways of expressing feelings about the situations that have had an emotional impact on students and school professionals and pay attention to the construction of a socio-affective network aimed at supporting this public, aiming to minimise the psychosocial consequences of the pandemic". (ESPÍRITO SANTO, 2020, p. 65).

the consequent possible deaths of students or school workers. It is the introduction through public policy, of death at school as a banality.

Death has always been an integral part of so-called contemporary social protection. This is not only a result of the absence or the scrapping of quality public policies that prevent hunger, homelessness, disease, and unemployment, but also as a predictable result (declaredly intentional or not) of cruel political actions. The return to school in a country that has counted hundreds of deaths per day, every day, for months, is one of those actions that lead to increased deaths.

There are many others, both direct and explicit, such as the massacres of blacks and the poor, or indirect, such as the reactionary Labour and Social Security reforms. Another example is the tightening of rules around emergency aid³ and the halving of payments to poor working-class families who are experiencing large increases in basic food prices, such as rice, meat, and milk⁴. According to the survey, “*Municipalities facing COVID-19 in Brazil: socioeconomic vulnerabilities, transmission mechanisms and public policies*”, carried out by UFRJ, in partnership with the French Institute for Research and Development on the relationship between the expansion of COVID-19 and the result of the first round of votes in the 2018 presidential elections, identified what the researchers called the *Bolsonaro effect* on the spread of the disease (ROUBAUD et al, 2020): it grew more and killed more in the cities where Bolsonaro received the most votes. There are two explanations for this phenomenon: a) direct identification with a leader who denies the severity of the virus, who refuses to wear a face-mask and condemns social isolation, ends up encouraging his supporters to adopt higher risk behaviours, and b) indirect identification with the ideals defended by the current government, a detestation of public universities, science, and critical thinking, and with fake news and conspiracy theories, potentially inducing the rejection of COVID-19 protective measures.

Furthermore, the state that kills, directly and indirectly, is also one that simply *allows it to die*. This policy of intentional omission is expressed in total indifference to the death of someone who the State no longer considers a person, but just a thing, an object. Safatle (2020), argues that when a person dies, that death is marked by pain, by the social manifestation of the loss, but when the person who dies is considered a *thing*, the reaction is as if an object had been used-up and put in the trash. This death, says Safatle, “[...] has no narrative [...]” (2020, online), becomes a number, is quantified in a list. He goes on to exemplify: “those who live in countries built from the colonial matrix know the normality of such a situation when, even today, they open the newspaper and read: “9 dead in the latest police intervention in Paraisópolis.” or, “85 killed in a prison riot in Belém.” (SAFATLE, 2020, online).

³ Created in April 2020, it is a federal income transfer benefit focused on the unemployed, informal workers, individual microentrepreneurs (MEI) and self-employed people who have a per capita family income of up to half a minimum wage or total family income of up to three minimum wages. The stated objective is to offer emergency financial protection during the pandemic period of the new coronavirus. The benefit was paid in three instalments in the amount of R\$ 600.00 or R\$ 1200.00 for family providers. With the persistence of the pandemic, the Federal Government increased the payment of instalments until December, but with amounts cut in half: R\$ 300.00 or R\$ 600.00 for mothers who provide families.

⁴ According to the Center for Advanced Studies in Applied Economics (Cepea) of the Luiz de Queiroz School of Agriculture (Esalq), of the University of São Paulo (USP), between August 3rd and October 30th, 2020, the price of rice increased by 54.7%, fat cattle by 22.2% and milk by 10.8%. Available at: <https://www.cepea.esalq.usp.br/br/consultas-ao-banco-de-dados-do-site.aspx>

According to Safatle, the objectification of these individuals, separating them from those who are considered people, and the subsequent normalisation of their death, is a fundamental political device since it perpetuates an undeclared civil war logic in which the working class, especially one based on the foundation of colonial relationships and which is increasingly exploited and condemned to bestial living conditions (to use a term from Marx), has its power of revolt undermined by the panic caused by State extermination or contempt. Nothing is more comfortable for the ruling classes than having their subordinates paralysed by fear.

Deaths from COVID-19, especially when they occur in the favelas, in the suburbs, or in isolated municipalities, are counted in large numbers that turn into large lists and which, from the point of view of this blasé community, lose their human weight. It is the degradation of things on a large scale, and it no longer shocks. Scientists of the Mind explain that when death is on such a large scale, so common, and so frequent, it is perceived as less frightening and paralysing than when it is sudden, unexpected and in parts. This explains, in part, why when there were 50 cases of COVID-19 in Brazil the fear was much greater than now, when there are more than 5 million. Ultimately, the working class, especially blacks, sees the bodies of their lost loved ones being diluted by huge numbers, that are more and more tolerated by a numbed collectiveness.

If COVID-19 deaths include all those that are indirectly caused by the syndemic, even if they were not caused by the virus itself, then the number is scandalous. It is necessary to remember that, in such an unequal world, in times of pandemic, people do not only die from the disease. For example, Oxfam Brazil (2020) issued a warning that by the end of 2020 between 6 and 12 thousand people may die daily of hunger due to the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic.

In Brazil, the study “*Income dependents of the elderly and the coronavirus: orphans or new poor?*” conducted by economist Ana Amélia Camarano (2020), found that more than 4 million adults and more than 1 million children and adolescents up to 15 years of age could be left with no income after the death of parents and grandparents who were solely responsible for the livelihood of the entire family, either using their retirement pension or their Benefício de Prestação Continuada (BPC) (Continuous Instalment Benefit). According to the IBGE, almost 20% of Brazilian households have the earnings of their elders as their only source of income. According to Camarano (2020, online), “[...] the social security and social benefits of the elderly have never been so important in avoiding family poverty”. To this statement it is possible to add: social policies, the State’s presence in the social field, supporting the economy and regulating markets, have never been so important in saving lives.

However, as saving lives has never been a concern of capitalism, *more* State is not always *more* quality social policy, *more* rights or *more* citizenship. And, above all, *more* state today does not mean *less* market.

Returning to the excerpt from the *Plan for Returning to Presential Activities* of the Secretary of Education of the Government of Espírito Santo, above, raises some questions: In who’s interest is it that children and adolescents, especially children of the working class, return to school so soon? What kind of school is this that, instead of safe space, becomes a place of

risk and where the decision to return to school it is not guided by science or by facts based on national and international research amid a tragedy unprecedented in recent times? That does not encourage solidarity, collective thinking, ethics or caring for others when individualising a decision that cannot be taken by parents or guardians who have been deprived of access to serious information and the basic conditions to survive lockdown?

As Catini (2020) points out, entrepreneurs are not only present in the private school system, pressing for the return to face-to-face classes because they lose money with the quarantine, they also “[...] privately appropriate state education [...]” (CATINI, 2020, online), desperate for the industrial reserve army supplied by the public-school system, anxious for the economy to revive and to make the education of the poor productive. Catini (2020) reinforces her conclusion by inviting the reader to visit the website of the State Secretariat of Education of Espírito Santo and to note that, among the partners of this Institution, there are large companies such as Instituto Unibanco, Instituto Natura, the Telefónica Foundation.

The business community, by the way, does not only control educational policy. Capital yearns for an end to isolation. It urgently wants to resume activities that can make the *satanic mill* of the capitalist economy revolve and crush people (POLANYI, 1988). With every positive piece of news regarding advances in vaccinations, the stock market goes up. However, the race for the vaccine that could save humanity (and, more importantly for capital, its own reproduction) is more like a new Space Race than a union of brains from all over the world in search of cure for a plague. Not surprisingly, the name of the Russian vaccine is Sputnik, the same name as the first satellite to orbit the Earth in 1957, which opened-up an advantage for the Soviet Union in its Cold War with the United States.

This hunt for the vaccine has exposed what was already widely known, but not explicitly stated: the perverse subordination of science, technology, and minds across a variety of fields, including health, to financial interests. The race between the large pharmaceutical corporations to be the first to develop, produce and sell a vaccine presupposes that there is no transparency in the research process, much less collective coordinated action to achieve faster success. On the reverse, the major concern at this time of global tragedy has been the protection of intellectual property and patents. To make matters worse, nations at the centre of capitalism purchased large stocks of vaccines while still under development, to ensure the immunisation of their own citizens. Those with no money will have a struggle to get out of the health crisis. To emphasise that the main concern has never been with life, the United Nations Children's Fund states that, every year, about 1.5 million children die from diseases that could be prevented by vaccines that already exist and that are routinely given to children in countries that can pay for them (UNICEF, 2019).

In short, whoever wins the race for the vaccine will not only have profit in the billions, but also national and international influence and power. Vaccination, in these terms, elitist, marketed, privatised, and disputed by supranational elites, is and will always be considered *social protection*. Even if it only protects those who can pay for it. Even if it, first and foremost, protects the white West and the rich.

From this it appears that the concept of social protection has suffered distortions and co-optations. The ideological current that has usurped and reframed him is known as the *new right*, which amalgamates two other currents: neoliberalism and neoconservatism.

Neoliberalism has already been the subject of study of Brazilian social policy for some decades. However, neoconservatism only started to be widely debated a few years ago. According to Wendy Brown (2006), one of the references in this study, is a profane hodgepodge that mixes classic conservatives, repentant socialists, right-wing feminists, technocratic politicians, neo-Pentecostal religious, moralists in general, and anti-intellectuals. All of whom have a common will to conserve. They also share an aversion to communists, atheists, left-wing feminist activists, anti-racists, the LGBT population, the welfare state, human rights, and many others.

It is worth mentioning that the new right is not simply an alliance between neoliberals and neoconservatives, historical competitors on several issues, but a fusion of the most rigid and antisocial elements of both, resulting in a negative ideology with a high potential for radicalisation. So, economic neoliberalism and its values based on individualism, meritocracy, free and unregulated market relations, hard currency, and the minimal state, have merged with political, social, and cultural neoconservatism with its backward-looking values of patriarchy, the traditional family, compulsory heterosexuality, patriotism, hierarchy, order, religion as an institution and strong government in the control of morals and good manners (PEREIRA, 2019).

Both currents, separately, have already made it clear that any form of social protection must be minimal, just enough to guarantee the survival of the plaintiff, since one must not harm the principle of meritocracy or spend public money on “social failures”. However, when they merge, these values become more pronounced, and the struggle is increasingly for a state that is strong in imposing traditional values on individuals and families, but weak in interfering with the economy. Whilst vociferously denying it, the new right is giving birth to racism, machismo and misogyny, LGBT-phobia, xenophobia, and various other forms of prejudiced violence. It is also a fertile ground for breeding hatred of democracy. This ideology, extreme or not, is a perfect instrument for expanding the hegemony of capital and, like all false consciousness, it conceals the real relations between classes, turning everything into merchandise and accentuating the gap between rich and poor by massively concentrating income.

3 Conclusion: what does the future hold for social policy?

The extraordinary concentration of income and wealth as a product of capitalism occurs, predominantly, through political interference imposed directly or indirectly by the structural power of capital; through the imperial domination of capital over the State, represented by owners and managers of large transnational financial companies that demand that politicians satisfy their need for profit. An important political factor, exemplifying the State's participation in fostering this inequality, is the implementation of regressive fiscal policies; that is, of policies that burden income from labour in favour of tax-free income from capital. So, the accumulation of financial assets, through these political expedients, has stimulated speculative activities to the detriment of investments in productive activities, which have tended to stagnate due to the decrease in demand. This is reflected in, the lowering of wages that causes the indebtedness of the popular classes, in the financial crisis of the system, in unemployment and in the deterioration of the quality of life of most of the population.

In this process, the State that collaborates with the preservation of the super-rich is the same State that is incapable of exercising its public function to care for the common good and the same State that renounces its role as guarantor of individual and social rights, still provided for in the Constitutions of many nation States, including Brazil. The significant deterioration in the labour market and the loss of labour rights imposed by the global system of capital are also due to the reduction in the power of the labour unions and the fall in the number of members resulting from increased labour informality.

This, associated with the current health crisis, have produced high levels of social insecurity, especially among the poor who are the most subject to morbidity, mortality, and institutional violence. This insecurity only increases, as the loss of legitimacy of the State prevents the development of democracy, and the excessive proximity of this State to the financial, business, and high-income sectors, distances government policies from the appeals of human needs (NAVARRO, 2015, p. 142). The popular classes, says Navarro (2015, p. 142), want government policies that are different from those implemented, as evidenced by research carried out in Europe and the United States, namely: a) taxation of the incomes of the rich and poor in the same proportion; b) progressive taxation, in order to tax the super-rich not only by name, but according to their income and property differential; c) elimination of tax havens; d) establishment of maximum wealth and income ceilings; e) reduction of excessive inequalities; f) eliminating the influence of money on electoral campaigns and political parties; g) breaking the link between financial institutions and the political world; h) prohibition, for five years, of politicians to work, after leaving the post, in the sector that they regulated or supervised in the public administration; i) State intervention in the financial sector to guarantee credits to social segments and small or medium income entrepreneurs; j) establishment of a minimum wage that increases in line with the increase in prices; and k) guarantee of public services to the population. However, none of these claims have been answered. In response, they received permanent economic austerity policies, dubbed by Navarro as *austericide*.

Under this oppressive *austericide* in the service of private economic profitability, the trajectory of social policy as public policy and citizenship rights faces a dark future. Available analyses indicate that it is not possible to return to the standards of social protection implemented in the second post-war period, which, even though they were not revolutionary and did not propose to overthrow capitalism, only encountered conditions in which to function after World War II, not long after the end of the First World War, which, in turn, had been preceded by mounting social and political turbulence. This seems to demonstrate that protecting the world of work under capitalism requires a prelude period laden with catastrophes and tragedies that threaten the power of capital. For this reason, many believe that after the COVID-19 pandemic social protection policies of solidarity and redistribution will witness a rebirth. However, there are controversies that cannot be addressed within the scope of this reflection. For the time being, abstracting the optimistic forecasts about the social effects of this pandemic, it is reasonable to consider the *possible* and *probable* scenario described by Moreno (2012) before the outbreak of the pandemic.

Possibly, there will be the return of the five giants of the social security system proposed and implemented, in Great Britain, by William Beveridge, during the Second World War, to fight: *need, illness, ignorance, misery* and *unemployment*. To confront them, there will be no social security policies guaranteed by the State as a right, but nineteenth-century forms of “beneficence, labour discipline and social paternalism” (MORENO, 2012, p. 210). Such

policies, generally of low quality, focus only on the economically dispossessed classes, since the middle class, with better purchasing power, prefers to buy commercialised social services. The super-rich will, ironically, be the segment most assisted and molycoddled by the state, reversing the conventional sense and the target of the capitalist State's assistance. In view of this inversion, the question arises: is it be possible to state that a process of the welfareization of wealth is underway at the expense of the de-welfareization of poverty?

Probably, there will be a return of minimum social provisions to the so-called old *social risks* (illiteracy, retirement, abject poverty). The *new risks*, including, among others, the dependence of the incapable, such as children and the elderly or the disabled, will be more commonly managed by associations providing personal services, for or not for profit, in parallel with micro solidarity practices in smaller family environments or under active restructuring. The *living well* banner, unfolded by the dominant, neo-right ideology, as a product of personal merit and the self-protection of the individual, by means of labour paid for by capital, will further strengthen the current transition from a socio-tropic perspective of society to another narcissism. We will see, amid the unfailing intrinsic contradiction between the logic of human needs and the logic of profit needs of capital, “[...] the replacement of the participatory commitment of young people by their inclusion in a demobilising anomie” (MORENO, 2012, p. 211).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALCOCK, Pete. The discipline of social policy *In*: ALCOCK, P. *et al.* **The student's companion to social policy**. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

ANTUNES, Ricardo. Capitalismo virótico: um sistema destrutivo que só será superado através das lutas sociais. [Entrevista cedida a] Liana Coll. **Cultura e Sociedade**, Campinas, 8 out. 2020. Disponível em: <https://www.unicamp.br/unicamp/noticias/2020/10/08/capitalismo-virotico-um-sistema-destrutivo-que-so-sera-superado-atraves-das>. Acesso em: 12 out. 2020.

BROWN, Wendy. American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and Democratization. **Political Theory**, v. 34, n. 6, p. 690-714, Dec. 2006.

CAMARANO, Ana Amélia. **Os dependentes da renda dos idosos e o coronavírus: órfãos ou novos pobres?** Brasília (DF): Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada, jul. 2020. (Norma Técnica, n. 81).

CATINI, Carolina. O Brutalismo vai à Escola. **Blog da Boitempo**, São Paulo, 13 set. 2020. Disponível em: <https://blogdaboitempo.com.br/2020/09/13/o-brutalismo-vai-a-escola/> Acesso em: 15 set. 2020.

DEAN, Hartley. **Social policy**. Cambridge (UK); Malden (USA): Polity Press, 2006.

GOUGH, Ian. **Heat, greed and human need: climate change capitalism and sustainable wellbeing**. Cheltenham (UK); Northampton (USA): Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017.

GOUGH, Ian. **Capital global, necessidades básicas y políticas sociales**. Madrid. Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2003.

ESPÍRITO SANTO (Estado). **Plano de Retorno às Atividades Presenciais**. Vitória: SEDU, 2020. Disponível em: <https://sedu.es.gov.br/plano-de-retorno-as-atividades-presenciais>
Acesso em: 15 set. 2020.

MÉSZÁROS, István. Entrevista. Istvan Mészáros e sua ardorosa defesa da humanidade. [Entrevista cedida a] Ruy Braga e Ricardo Antunes. **Cult**, São Paulo, 2 out. 2017. Disponível em: <https://revistacult.uol.com.br/home/istvan-meszaros-e-sua-ardorosa-defesa-da-humanidade/>. Acesso em: 12 out. 2020.

MORENO, Luis. **La Europa asocial: ¿caminamos hacia un individualismo posesivo?** Barcelona: Península, 2012.

NAVARRO, Vicenç. **Ataque a la democracia y al bienestar: crítica al pensamiento económico dominante**. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2015.

OXFAM Brasil. **O vírus da fome: como o coronavírus está aumentando a fome em um mundo faminto**. São Paulo: OXFAM Brasil, 2020. Disponível em: <https://d2v21prk53tg5m.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Informe-Virus-da-Fome-embargado-FINAL-1.pdf> Acesso em: 18 out. 2020.

PEREIRA, Camila Potyara. Nova Direita e Política Social: neoliberalismo, neoconservadorismo e a negação de direitos. In: GÓIS, João Bôsko Hora; SOUZA, Sidimara Cristina. **Temas de Política Social: análises e discussões**. Volume 1. Editora CRV: Curitiba, 2019.

POLANYI, Karl. **A grande transformação: as origens da nossa época**. Rio de Janeiro: Campus, 1988.

RIFKIN, Jeremy. Coronavírus: “Estamos diante de ameaça de extinção e as pessoas nem mesmo sabem disso”. [Entrevista cedida a] Juan M. Zafra. **BBC News/Brasil**, 2020. Disponível em: <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-52657148>. Acesso em: 12 out. 2020.

ROCHA, Rosely. Mortos de idosos por Covid-19 deixa 5 milhões de adultos e crianças sem renda. **Notícias**, São Paulo: Cut, 24 ago. 2020. Disponível em: <https://www.cut.org.br/noticias/mortes-de-idosos-por-covid-19-deixa-5-milhoes-de-adultos-e-criancas-sem-renda-8dbd> . Acesso em: 10 out. 2020.

ROUBAUD, François *et al.* **The municipalities facing COVID-19 in Brazil: socioeconomic vulnerabilities, transmission mechanisms and public policies**. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto de Economia da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2020. (Texto para Discussão, nº 032). Disponível em: <https://www.ie.ufrj.br/images/IE/TDS/2020/TD IE 032 2020 ROUBAUD et%20al.pdf> . Acesso: em 20 out. 2020.

SAFATLE, Vladimir. **Para além da necropolítica**. São Paulo: n-1 edições, 2020. Disponível em: <https://www.n-1edicoes.org/textos/191>. Acesso em: 19 out. 2020.

UNICEF. **A cada ano, mais de 20 milhões de crianças em todo o mundo não recebem a vacina contra o sarampo**. 2019. Disponível em: <https://www.unicef.org/brazil/comunicados-de-imprensa/cada-ano-mais-de-20-milhoes-de-criancas-em-todo-o-mundo-nao-recebem-vacinas>. Acesso em: 2 out. 2020.

Camila Potyara PEREIRA Worked on the concept, outline, and redaction of the article. Sociologist. Masters and Doctorate in Social Policy from the Universidade de Brasília (UnB). Professor of the Department of Social Service and of the Post-graduate Programme in Social Policy at UnB.

Potyara A. PEREIRA-PEREIRA Worked on the concept, outline, and redaction of the article. Social Worker and Lawyer. Masters and Doctorate in Sociology. Post-Doctorate in Social Policy from the University of Manchester – UK. Emeritus Professor at the Universidade de Brasília (UnB).
