

Dependent Capitalism and Social Assistance in Brazil in the 21st Century

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Abstract: The work aims to present an analysis of trends in Brazilian Social Assistance policy in the last two decades, addressing the main political orientations of the state thought from the contradictions of dependent capitalism in the current context of radicalization of the conservative offensive of capital post-crisis 2008. In order to do so, we will seek contributions to the notion of dependent capitalism in Florestan Fernandes and Ruy Mauro Marini, seeking to problematize how dependent patterns, which are updated in the historical movement, present structural elements of the State and social policies that are also present in social assistance policy.

Key words: dependent capitalism; state; social assistance

JEL codes: I38, H55, O15, P16

1. Introduction

The implementation of the Single System of Social Assistance (SUAS), created in 2005, brought a new stage to the structuring of Social Assistance policy in Brazil. New legal orientations, normatizations, several institutional aspects and new concepts are present in PNAS/SUAS.

However, although its consubstantiation in SUAS has many merits, the trends that have presented themselves in social assistance show a contradictory process that, at the same time that it seeks the guarantee of rights to the entire population by the notion of social security, presents neoconservative tendencies that limit its own structuring as a protection policy — centrality of income transfer, focus on the alleviation of extreme poverty, focus, without letting go of the old assistentialist and clientele dilemmas that are still present, but reconfigured and sometimes potentialized.

The text seeks contributions from Ruy Mauro Marini and Florestan Fernandes to search for a correlation between the foundations of the State and Brazilian dependent capitalism, to think about its correlation with social policies, especially social assistance, seeking to show how dependence and the autocratic structuring traits of the State tend to forge minimum levels of access. And although with social struggles (of class and of the oppressed) access to services and programs has expanded at different historical moments, in a context of crisis like the present, the return to degrading levels of living conditions tends to be predominant. To this end, the State "makes use of consensual and coercive, hegemonic and dictatorial elements, with the growing use of police and now, military apparatuses (Castelo, 2009, p.13).

Far from affirming that the trends that present themselves in the politics of Social Assistance today are only an update of the past, it is a matter of placing it as a complex part of a set of contradictions that compose a new

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standard of intervention on the social question by the State in the current imperialist phase in the face of financialization and neoliberalism, in which the assistance actions, encapsulated under the logic of poverty alleviation, appear more and more conjugated with punitive elements of control and vigilance.

2. Literature Review

When thinking about dependent capitalism in Brazil and the Brazilian State, Iasi (2014) starts from the understanding that there are no leftovers to be overcome or elements that can be faced being left behind, but “remain in the sense that such aspects remain functional to the order in which they are associated” (p. 81). That is, we do not have an incomplete capitalism, whose particularities would be based on the remains of the colonial past, since Brazil has developed a “complete capitalism within the framework of an insertion subordinated and dependent on the imperialist and monopolist order” (Iasi, 2018, p. 140).

Both Florestan Fernandes and Ruy Mauro Marini provide foundations to show that there is a type of state that necessarily needs an autocratic, violent way of being in order to legitimize the maintenance of this dependence, this pattern of dependent and heteronomic capitalist development, also agreed upon through the perpetuation of degrading material conditions for female and male workers, in which conservative welfarism does not go out of fashion.

For Marini ([1973] 2011), the dependency conforms to the contradictory form that marks the historically constituted integration of Latin American economies into the world market, which is based on the transfer of value because the relations of production are unequal, based on market control by imperialist nations, with the transfer of surplus generated in dependent countries, in the form of profits, interest, patents, royalties, among others, causing the loss of their own resources by those who transfer value¹.

This appropriation of value by the central countries cannot be compensated by a production of internal value added based on technological innovation, or a development of the productive capacity of dependent economies to compete on the same level as the central economies. This is why dependent economies seek to compensate for the losses resulting from these transfers by resorting to overexploitation of the labor force² within the framework of domestic production, which is reflected in a particular form of the capital cycle of dependent economies (Marini, [1979] 2012)³, which perpetuates and reproduces these mechanisms, thus maintaining the reproduction of dependence itself.

According to Marini ([1973] 2011), in order to increase the mass of value produced internally, overexploitation of the labor force corresponds to a situation where the worker is systematically paid below his

¹ For more details on the question of value transfer in Marxist Dependency Theory, see chapter 1, entitled *Transferência de valor comointercâmbiodesigual*, in: Luce Mathias Seibel, *Teoria Marxista da Dependência: problemas e categorias – uma visão histórica*, São Paulo: Popular Expression, 2018.

² To deepen the debate about overexploitation of the labor force, see: Carcanholo M. & Corrêa H. F., *Uma teoria da superexploração da força de trabalho em Marx? Um Marx que nem mesmo ele tinha percebido*. *Revista da Sociedade Brasileira de Economia Política*, n. 44, pp. 10-30, jun./set. 2016; Luce Mathias Seibel, *Teoria Marxista da Dependência: problemas e categorias – uma visão histórica*, São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2018, chapter 3; Bueno Fábio Marvulle, “A superexploração do trabalho: polêmicas em torno do conceito na obra de Ruy Mauro Marini e a vigência na década de 2000”, thesis presented to the Graduate Program in Sociology of the University of Brasília, 2016; BUENO.

³ Originally published in 1979 in Mexico, it was translated and published in Marini Ruy Mauro, *O ciclo do capital na economia dependente*, in: Carla Ferreira et al. (Eds.), *Padrão de reprodução do capital: contribuições da teoria marxista da dependência*, São Paulo: Boitempo, 2012. “Marini discusses the problem of the split between the phases of the capital cycle, demonstrating how dependence in the technological and financial spheres, as well as the persistence of overexploitation of the labor force, perpetuate the subordination of dependent countries to the international division of labor” (p. 18).

value, even outside crisis situations⁴. Marini considers that, in dependent economies, despite the working class to be submitted daily to the extension of the day and the increase of the intensity of their work, does not receive salary readjustment that compensates for this wear and tear. This is a structural situation in dependent economies, since external-internal dialectics requires the local bourgeoisie to program policies that create conditions for the maintenance of imperialism, whose conditions are reproduced by the State, which requires extremely violent processes to keep workers within patterns of survival structurally at the limit of survival or even below it. This conforms the authoritarian character as a particular and structural feature of states in dependent countries.

Latin American states need to reproduce these conditions in the political and economic fields in order to meet the interests of the ruling classes in the imperialist countries, while welcoming the interests of the internal bourgeoisies. Since the power relations of different states in the world system are unequal, giving them fragile sovereignty at the international level, the local bourgeoisies always operate on the basis of association with imperialist capitals at various historical moments.

However, despite fragile sovereignty abroad, dependent states possess strong local political power and use it in their respective national territories from the state apparatus (executive, legislative and judicial powers, state bureaucracy, military and police power) to guarantee dependence, particularly from the control and regulation of working class life, building and managing political, ideological and social conditions that allow for the perpetuation of over-exploitation (Osorio, 2014).

In Florestan Fernandes (1981, 2005), the dependent and subordinate character of Brazilian capitalism is the basis of exclusion of the majority of the population, which leads to the persistence of the autocratic traits of the state. In the work “Capitalismo dependente e classes sociais na América Latina” (Dependent capitalism and social classes in Latin America), Fernandes (1981) points out that the transition to dependent capitalism in Latin America is characterized by a movement of continuity and innovation due to three fundamental factors: external control, the weakness of the bourgeois revolution, and the dual pattern of expropriation of economic surplus.

For the author, over-appropriation and dependence constitute the substance of an economic logic proper of dependent capitalism. In Florestan’s words, “external and internal economic dynamisms would have no reason to be [...] if the perspective of capitalist over-appropriation did not exist” (Fernandes, 1981, p. 54). Therefore, dependence is not an accident, but a structural articulation of external and internal economic dynamisms, where the strategy of the hegemonic side is accepted by the subordinate side, guaranteeing desired conditions for both external and internal partners (Fernandes, 1981, p. 54).

In other words, we have a bourgeoisie partner of imperialism as a structuring element. This means that the shared appropriation of economic surplus does not mean that dependent capitalism has “failed”, on the contrary, it is responding very well to the pattern of accumulation of imperialist capital. Hence the bourgeoisie that derives from it is composite, because with the disintegration of the oligarchies it gives way to a plutocracy, in which the external partners are directly represented in the internal bourgeoisie. In other words, our bourgeoisie is already born conservative (Fernandes, 1981, pp. 57-58).

Dependent capitalism organizes itself and expands, reinforcing the concentration of income, social prestige

⁴ It is worth noting that the use of overexploitation appears in regions of central countries in times of crisis and in the most precarious sectors of these economies, usually filled with segments of the working class composed of blacks, blacks and immigrants, confirming that the value of the labor force of this population is paid below even outside their respective countries. See studies by Valencia Adrian Sotelo, *A estruturação do mundo do trabalho. Superexploração e novos paradigmas de organização do trabalho*. Uberlândia: EDUFU, 2009.

and the power, but imposing limits on the working class regarding economic participation (by restricting the universalization of the working condition itself), socio-cultural and political participation.

As the dominant privileged classes have their bourgeois condition affected by external conditions, they are led to use what they historically know as self-protection, i.e., the estamental forms of cooperation and solidarity, building market classification criteria based on archaic elements of stratification (Fernandes, 1981, pp. 69-70). For the classes considered “ow”, the fractions that make up the dominant class will also seek historical references, based on the ethnic-racial elements (here I also include the patriarchal ones) and socio-economics as access limiters or as factors of subordinated integration in the market. Large segments of workers will find limitations in the conditions of sale of their labor force, which creates impediments to social mobility in the capitalist order, staying in restricted structural conditions of consumption and access to public goods.

The pattern of mercantilization of labor that is forged from these structural elements generates masses of workers who suffer capitalist appropriation by the market and capitalist expropriation when they stay out of it (corresponding to what Marx classified as relative overpopulation).

Therefore, the permanent external appropriation of a substantial part of the economic surplus associated with the capitalist order with the revitalization of anachronistic relations (including there the own pattern of mercantilization of labor and reproduction of workers in minimum standards) creates conditions to guarantee the reproduction of dependent capitalism, configuring a condition of permanent heteronomy (Fernandes, 1981, p. 72).

Florestan Fernandes in his essay “A quem serve o Estado” (1977) (Who does the State serve) already emphasized that the functions assumed by the state in monopolistic capitalism are instrumental to private initiative, the protection of capitalist profits and the consolidation of an unequal world system of capital power. In other words, state intervention in the economy aims not only to guarantee expanded accumulation, but to intensify it and create various ways to protect and maintain the security of capital.

If dependent capitalism, for Fernandes ([1975], 2005) is organized and expanded, reinforcing the concentration of income, social prestige and power, imposing limits for the working class regarding economic participation (by restricting the universalization of the working condition itself), socio-cultural and political participation, the dependent and subordinate character of Brazilian capitalism is based on the permanent pauperization of the majority of the population and the maintenance of minimum standards, which leads to the persistence of the autocratic traits of the State to maintain order and contain the struggles that may arise to fight for more rights.

In this sense, Fernandes ([1975] 2005) assumes that the requirements of the development pattern inherent in dependent monopolistic capitalism are not only economic, but also require political stability and effective control of state power by the native bourgeoisie, considering the double expropriation of economic surplus (by the external and internal bourgeoisie) and the over expropriation of the working class, which require constant actions to legitimize order with the implementation of public policies, but within minimum standards, and among these we have potentially located the Social Assistance Policy.

According to Paiva, Rocha and Carraro (2010), social policies in Latin American dependent economies have always been in dispute for the economic surplus historically expropriated from the overexploited working masses, therefore, traditionally designed to minimize the effects of poverty, most of the time working with fragmented, emergency actions, pulverized and linked to meritocratic and particularistic schemes of access to social rights. Even so, any kind of social policy or regulatory state intervention that meant improvement in living conditions were the result of hard fought class struggles.

Brettas (2017) points out the overexploitation and the colonial slave heritage, along with the conservative modernization that consolidates monopoly capitalism in the country, as the structural basis of Brazilian social policy, which shape the confrontation of the expressions of the social issue in Brazil, which occurs “permeated with contradictions, so that the fight for the guarantee of rights is affirmed in the context of the culture of favor and colonelism” (Ibidem, p. 58). According to the author, “the Brazilian (dependent) State combined fragmented and corporative social policies - based on guardianship and favor — with an action through large state-owned companies in the production of capital goods and infrastructure” (Brettas, 2017, p. 61).

Such historical specificities of our social policy meant that, unlike other central social formations, we did not have a structured network of social protection to be dismantled when neoliberalism was consolidated in Brazil as a reconfiguration strategy of the imperialist bourgeois power and the domestic bourgeoisie to respond to the crisis that had been brewing since the 1980s. In this sense, neoliberalism initiates structural adjustments in the economy and counter-reforms in social policies amid a very early and limited process of implementation of the legal achievements inscribed in the Charter of 1988 (Brettas, 2017).

These more recent processes respond to the contemporary monopolistic order, which demands a new role for the State in the face of the needs of financial capital and the parasitic character of imperialist capital in crisis, which imply a singular appropriation of socially produced wealth: where all the productive effort of the labor force is dilapidated to guarantee the conditions of predatory profitability of monopolized capital, the health of financial capital and the well-being of the flow of capital. Faced with the contemporary crisis of capital, the counter-reforms implemented by the capitalist state in the transition from the 20th to the 21st century had one thing in common: an accelerated process of transferring the costs of the crisis to workers in the form of the expropriation of rights⁶, which in dependent economies are combined with super-exploitation.

If we consider that neoliberal policies have been implemented as a project to reestablish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore bourgeois power (Harvey, 2008), it is possible to observe that, since the 1990s, neoliberalism has deepened the condition of dependence, since it has increased the transfer of value produced in these economies, but which is appropriated and accumulated in the central economies, among these forms of transfer are debt service payments (Carcanholo, 2018).

Hence, at the core of the imperialist system is the dispute over mechanisms for draining wealth from the dependent economies in financial form, with public debt as one of the main mechanisms. Therein lies the meaning of the dispute over the public fund. A dispute, it must be said, unequal and, many times, cowardly between capital and the working class as a whole, given that the parliamentary and governmental instances of the national states determine beforehand the supremacy of capital's interests through economic policy and through mechanisms of systematic fiscal adjustment, which constrains the distribution of public funds for social policies and services to satisfy financial capital and other segments of monopoly capital.

Moreover, the resources made available to meet the most essential demands of the working majorities end up being captured by the logic of the financialization of social policies, which means something beyond privatization, which occurs when services and structures that are of interest to society as a whole are transformed into capital in search of the best opportunities for application, the highest profit rates, and the deepest measures to extract unpaid labor (Granemann, 2007).

Social policies, in responding to this, have had (and have) as main trends the reduction and current threat of destruction of the public pension system⁷ and the increase of private complementary and welfare services, allied to labor incentive policies (of activation, employment and income generation).

Hence, in the crisis Social Assistance no longer appears as a subsidiary policy to labor or to other social policies, but has been gaining the scene as an important policy in guaranteeing income to ensure consumption and the reproduction of the labor force and resources for those who cannot work. In the periphery of capitalism the tendency for the growth of the assistential tip was greater due to the axis of the cash transfer, which gains centrality as one of the only solutions to the issue of labor precarization, being summoned to help promote the expropriation and the expanded reproduction of capital at the moment it is constituted as public policy (Boschetti, 2016a).

This tendency has to do with the contradictory process of the implementation of Social Assistance as a public policy of Security, which in this text only three considerations considered essential fit. First, Social Security was never implemented as designed, neither from the point of view of intersectorial articulation, nor legal - separate organic laws, nor from the point of view of the budgetary base. A second point is the late implementation of Social Assistance that, despite the LOAS, kept the same institutional base (social assistance network) after the 1988 Constitution until the approval of PNAS in 2004. The innovation came with the SUAS, but with important changes in the conception of the policy, already incorporating elements that depart from the pattern of the LOAS and hybridize the notion of protection present in the Constitutional project, bringing the PNAS closer to a policy more focused on coping with poverty more directly and less integrated with the initial Security project⁸. And, a third point, but one that does not end the set of contradictions that present themselves with the Assistance policy has to do with the historical conservative heritage that has never been completely overcome. The past, characterized by clientelism, patrimonialism, bureaucratic engorgement, and the culture of favor, appears updated and strengthened. In other words, new contradictions are interposed under old historical dilemmas.

The Social Assistance policy with SUAS has come acquiring a curious centrality before the other social policies (Mota, 2013), focusing its intervention on the relative pauperization and control of segments of the working class, especially those considered part of the stagnant relative overpopulation (i.e., that make up segments with informal labor relations and precarious and unstable ties) and those that make up pauperism (Boschetti, 2016).

On the one hand, the expansion of the assistential tip has meant an obscuring of the decrease of the other policies that make up the Social Security (Boschetti, Teixeira, Salvador, 2013), or even its capture of its logic by monetarization on the part of the income transfer, by the logic of financialization on the part of access to microcredit for micro-entrepreneurship actions associated with new forms of productive insertion and empowerment of the poorest segments for consumption. On the other hand, these actions showed the importance of the material basis of welfare actions for the social reproduction of the most impoverished and precarious strata of the working class (precisely the groups that grow the most in face of the reconfiguration of labor conditions and relations as a response to the capitalist crisis) in face of the structural precariousness of life and impoverishment in the midst of the crisis.

It should be noted, however, that the welfare arrangements for poverty alleviation do not expand historically only by increasing pauperization, but, above all, by the various forms of popular resistance that are being configured through the processes of spoliation of life (Mauriel, 2009). In this sense, the expansion of social assistance policy at this historical moment responded to a particular strategy to absorb and discipline precarious and informal workers through the expansion of SUAS, through its institutional structure, programs, data registries, among other aspects.

Hence, the corresponding institutionality needs to have efficiency and effectiveness in management, which is

contradictorily configured as access to goods that reproduce the workers' immediate material life and, at the same time, exercise control and surveillance over their users' lives - materially and symbolically, since we cannot forget the strong ideological, moral, and ethical dimension that granting vital assistance can have on those who have the precariousness of life under daily threat.

However, as the value of labor power and wages depend on class struggle (Marx [1867], 2017), the State does not only use the expropriation of rights and the reorganization of welfare schemes to direct and control contingents of workers to a new level of more precarious organization of life and work, but tends to increase coercion over struggles and resistance to the worsening of exploitation, claiming repression by various mechanisms.

If during the class conciliation strategy of the PT governments, under the so-called neo-developmentism, social assistance was part of a list of actions that sought to reconduct social policies towards poverty alleviation, naturalizing and individualizing poverty, expanding cash transfers to respond to the most urgent processes of precariousness in the lives of those who precariously sell their labor power, from the deepening of the crisis, new measures have become necessary to ensure even "more minimal" levels for these segments. It is worth inferring that the reduction in the level of the means of subsistence of the stagnant relative overpopulation ultimately collaborates with the reduction in the value of labor power in other economic branches (Marx, [1867], 2017).

Assistance begins to be reorganized to insert itself into a new and complex strategy of recomposition of dominant power to further reduce the level of benefit values, which historically have always been kept below the lowest wages in the market. This is not accomplished only with changes in the value of benefits or cuts in the services offered, but is associated with a broad set of counter-reforms and expropriation of rights, whose criteria used recover stratification estatorial factors (Fernandes, 1981) in which certain groups such as women, blacks, native populations, immigrants are co-opted to serve as cheaper labor, reiterating racist, patriarchal and conservative patterns of social normativity including the actions and welfare programs.

When large segments of underpaid workers are necessary, such as in the current phase of reconfiguration of labor relations in the face of the contemporary crisis of capital, care schemes not only retract, but are associated with extremely regressive labor reforms, necessary to reduce the costs of hiring and dismissal and the flexibility of working hours, creating an increasing trend of overtime worked are not socially recognized, and, therefore, not being remunerated. Added to this is a historically precarious, informal labor market, where intermittent, unstable and discontinuous labor insertion prevails, and in all cases, workers have almost none or do not have social protection.

The main result has been the revival of old forms of labor relations rooted in traditional or pre-capitalist production systems - multiple jobs within the same family, not to mention the persistence of child labor, slave-like situations in various sectors of the economy, the growing expansion of credit debt, a tendency to extend the working hours and conditioning an increase in absolute surplus value (Valencia, 2010).

In this sense, the social welfare policy participates in a new pattern of confronting the social issue in Brazil, which, according to Castelo (2014), begins with the arrival of the effects of the 2008 crisis in the country, taking as a landmark the demonstrations of June 2013, which show sign of the exhaustion of the class conciliation strategy. This new pattern of intervention in the social issue makes use of consensual and coercive elements simultaneously, with the increasing use of police and, more recently, military apparatuses. In Castelo's words: "While maintaining the old coercive structures, the state can resume them at the present moment as one of the ways to maintain order in the face of the conjunctural crisis [...] reactualizing old methods and erecting new

structures” (Castelo, 2014, p. 49).

Now, the cycle of expropriations of rights that presents itself from the end of PT governments, for being much more aggressive symbolically and materially, tends to be led by an expansion of authoritarianism, either by direct economic means (increased exploitation via labor reforms), or by extra-economic means (through the creation of legislations, measures, policies that expand the repressive, punitive, and control mechanisms of the State) (Gonçalves, 2019).

3. Conclusion

Iasi (2018, p. 143), infers that the current economic order and the role of national states need to guarantee conditions and forms of property that generate a degree of exploitation of such an order that undermines the minimum conditions of existence, to the point of making collapse the very material basis that guarantees the legitimacy of the order on which they are founded. In light of this, “the political form to fulfill such a role is not the democratic order”, thus re-actualizing “the bases of bourgeois autocracy in what is fundamental to it”.

Moreover, “welfare minimalism gives the arm to extra-economic repression of the impoverished strata” (Netto, 2010, p. 30), found a new organic articulation between repression of the working class and conservative forms of assistance, which seem to constitute a structuring axis of social policies directed to the confrontation of the “social issue” in the Brazilian dependent capitalism, measures reissued and deepened in the face of the crisis we have been going through since 2008.

From this perspective, it can be concluded that the main actions conducted by the reactionary offensive of the bourgeoisie that is currently underway point to a new phase of conservative welfarism, by deepening resources to the standards of first-damnsism, culture of favor, meritocracy, allied to ultra-focalization, reduction of resources, and strengthening of managerialist, privatist, and individualist principles in the management and organization of the policy, in order to further reduce the levels of protection, but without ceasing to regulate, control, and monitor the labor force.

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