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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INEQUALITY AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN BRAZIL

Abstract: Income concentration has risen sharply in the world since the 1980s. The global health crisis shook global capitalism and gave rise to an unprecedented crisis. In Latin America, the most unequal region in the world, the health crisis has further aggravated the picture of inequity. Since 2014, due to the end of the cycle of commodities, the reduction of poverty and income inequality in the region has lost momentum. With the pandemic, the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean, already with low economic growth in recent years, have increased uncertainty and put to the test the state's capacity to provide public health services and policies to alleviate the shortages for vast portions of the population. With the attention of Brazilian society focused on fighting the pandemic, the Bolsonaro government (2019-) has taken advantage of this situation to try to advance its ultra-liberal agenda to reverse public policies for the promotion of equality. The understanding of the Bolsonaro government is that the Brazilian social state foreseen in the Constitution does not fit into the country's budget. The objective of this article is to discuss the possible paths and policies that the Brazilian State may take as a result of the pandemic and the concomitant political and economic crisis. In the first part, we present the elements that allow us to understand the crisis of neoliberalism from the 2008 crisis and its persistence; in the second, we analyze the Bolsonaro government from the implementation of its ultra neoliberal agenda and the worsening of the picture of inequalities in the country; in the third, we discuss the health crisis and its effects on employment, the health system and the need for a basic citizen income that gained strength with the extension and deepening of the social and economic crisis.

Keywords: BRAZIL, INEQUALITY, NEOLIBERALISM, PANDEMIC, STATE, WELFARE

Introduction

Income concentration has risen sharply in the world since the 1980s. The latest edition of the World Inequality Report (Piketty et al, 2022) confirms that global inequality continues to grow: the richest 10% have 52% of the income and 76% of the wealth. On the bottom of the pyramid, half the world population holds only 2% of the wealth and 8.5% of the income. In Brazil, according to Oxfam (2017), income inequality continues to be brutal: six Brazilians have the same income as half of the country's poorest population. We live in one of the most unequal countries in the world, where "an adult in the 95% [i.e. the richest 5%] has an income almost eight times higher than one in the 33%; in the 99% [i.e. the richest 1%], almost thirty times higher [...] the top is so much richer than the rest, but so much richer, that it is unequal even in relation to the highest incomes" (Medeiros, 2024, p. 24-25).

As he did in his first two terms in office, between 2003 and 2010, President Lula is now trying to take up the agenda of promoting social justice by revamping the Bolsa Família Program, fighting hunger and poverty, raising the minimum wage above inflation, and launching a number of initiatives in the areas of education and health. Social indicators in these almost two years of Lula's government have improved, albeit very slowly. Key obstacles include the congressional inroads into, and control of the federal budget since 2016, fiscal austerity, and the persistence of neoliberalism.

In Latin America, the most unequal region in the world, the health crisis has further exacerbated the situation of inequality. Since 2015, due to the crisis in the commodities cycle, the reduction in poverty and income inequality in the region has been losing momentum. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean's Social Panorama for Latin America 2019 (2020), there are 191 million people living below the poverty line, 72 million of whom are in extreme situations, compared to 185 million in 2018. With the pandemic, the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean, which have already been experiencing low economic growth in recent years, have seen uncertainty increase and have tested the capacity of their states to provide public health services and policies to alleviate the situation of vast portions of the population in these countries. The Brazilian case is emblematic.

Brazil, the largest economy in the region which, between 2002 and 2014, managed to reduce inequalities by "[...] combining over time the effect of different policies aimed at different audiences, whose common characteristic has been the prospect of reversing the long trajectory of stability of high inequality in Brazil" (Arretche, 2015, p. 455), has seen this process lose momentum.

In the context of the chaos caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the then Bolsonaro administration (2019-2022) took advantage of Brazilian society's focus on fighting the

pandemic to try to advance its ultra-liberal agenda by reversing public policies that promote equality. His administration radicalized austerity policies with the adoption of new cuts to social rights and social security as well as further deregulation of the labour market and the privatization of public services. The understanding of the former Bolsonaro administration was that the Brazilian welfare state provided for in the Constitution did not fit into the country's budget. Thus, the commodification of everything public became the government's priority.

Thus, in this paper, we address the following topics: 1) the role of the state and its relationship with the market; the global economic crisis in the context of the pandemic; changes in the Brazilian welfare state; the myth of the neoliberal state; and post-Keynesian social welfare policies; and 2) Brazil under the then Bolsonaro administration in the contemporary world system. The aim of this paper is to discuss how the pandemic has reinforced the picture of inequality in Brazil, due to the ultra-liberal agenda of the Bolsonaro administration. Therefore, the questions we are working on are: 1) considering the scenario of recession in the world economy, could the economic policy trajectory of the former Bolsonaro administration have been altered due to the pandemic?; 2) what are the relevant social forces that, in this crisis, reinforce or resist the current economic policy?; and, from there, 3) is an alternative scenario possible in the post-pandemic in which the Brazilian state is no longer guided by neoliberal logic? To do this, we will use the theoretical perspective of world systems in dialog with specific works on inequality and neoliberalism.

In addition to the introduction and final considerations, the article is structured as follows: in the first part, we present the elements that allow us to understand the crisis of neoliberalism from its birth to the 2008 crisis and its resistance; in the second, we analyze the then Bolsonaro administration based on the implementation of its ultra-liberal agenda and the worsening inequalities in the country. In the next section, we discuss the health crisis and its effects on employment, the health system, and the need for a basic citizenship income, which has gained strength with the extent and depth of the social and economic crises.

Neoliberalism in crisis

The 2020-2023 health crisis exacerbated a broader social problem: the lack of social control over resources and decision-making. To understand why societies around the world have allowed these deaths, why they have allowed the gap between the super-rich and middle classes and the poorest to widen so dramatically (Piketty, 2014), we must look at the history of the political relationship between the state and the market. Following Saskia Sassen (2018, p. 65), we should understand how "[...] the difference between periods over time is only minimally accidental: [that] such differences are the outcome of a mix of identifiable transformative processes". It is in this trajectory that the impact of the corona virus on societies around the world can be best captured.

Karl Polanyi (2021) was one of the first to observe a slow pendulum trend (decades in the making) as power shifted between the state and the market. As the relative power of the market increases in relation to the state, the ability of the latter to curb the agency of the former would gradually diminish. In this pendulum, when the market's prowess is so expansive that economic crises begin to threaten general stability, the state has historically intervened by deciding to regulate and tame the market. Throughout this process in which the market has sought to expand its self-regulatory horizon, the state has not lost its management responsibilities (sometimes more focused on market demands, at other times also concerned with dealing with society's problems). The pendulum of power has tended to swing back towards the state as a counter-movement by society in search of stability.

In a more sophisticated understanding of the world system, Giovanni Arrighi (2010), based on the work of Fernand Braudel, highlighted the main trends in historical capitalism's *longue durée*. The essential characteristics of capitalism lie in its need for flexibility and eclecticism. The investment of capitalist agencies, from this perspective, is considered not as an end in itself, but as a means of acquiring greater flexibility and freedom of choice.

For Arrighi (2010), mainstream thinking is at odds with capitalism and the market economy. Unable to make a clear distinction between the two, it also sees state power as antithetical to market power. Within the world systems approach, however, the emergence and expansion of capitalism is understood as having an absolute dependence on state power. Over the last five hundred years, a central tendency has been for periods of struggle to be preceded by a process in which the accumulation of capital reaches its limits. Underlining the symbiotic relationship presented, the ability to control the most abundant sources of surplus capital is linked to the ability to organize the next phase of capital expansion. Interstate competition for mobile capital alone cannot guarantee capitalist power, but depends on political structures and the formation of organizational capacities to "[...] control the social and political environment of capital accumulation on a world scale" (Arrighi, 2010, p. 15). Alongside the material aspects of state/market power, ideology has played an important and complementary role in these movements.

The first decades of the post-war period saw an increase in production and trade, creating a demand for greater financial flows (Ruggie, 1982). The rapid response of private banks to the 1973 oil price crisis led oil-producing countries to inject huge amounts of petrodollars into the financial system. The unilateral abandonment of the convertibility of the dollar into gold agreed by the United States in 1971, which brought an end to the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates, ushered in a new system of floating exchange rates. Among other conjunctural elements, these helped weaken the Bretton Woods movement, notably undermined by the very state that had risen to hegemonic status as a result (Gonçalves; Pomar, 2000; Helleiner, 1994; Ruggie, 1982).

A defining feature of the neoliberal era is the greater liberalization of the world economy, accompanied by renewed freedom of choice for financial capital. This

process of financialization is distinguished by a fundamental change in the capitalist world-system, whereby productive capital has lost to finance (or fictitious) capital its centrality in organizing the system's reproduction. Herein, the profits of the financial sector have come to prevail over that of the real (productive) sector; the debt-to-GDP ratio has increased ubiquitously; the rise of fire (finance, insurance, real estate); the proliferation of exotic financial instruments; and the growing importance of financial bubbles for the system's functioning (Braga, 2012; Foster; Mcchesney, 2012).

Sassen (2022) adds that (high) finance is best understood as containing transformative dynamics, in which its effects go beyond the winners and losers of distribution. Within the literature that discusses the shifts in income distribution from the lower and middle classes to the upper classes (Piketty, 2014), her concern is with finance's ability to pull together key elements from the 1980s onwards, and with understanding the shifts in its power and role vis-à-vis, its continued presence in and importance to the world economy. While traditional banks were previously in the business of "making money", constituted within the logic of mass consumption, finance today is characterized within the logic of extraction. The former's profits came from the money it owned, while the latter derived from the invasion of other sectors, abstracted as "financialization".

Although we can, more abstractly, speak of a "return" to the dominance of the market over the state, observed at the beginning of the 20th century and in the interwar period, there are two additional significant qualitative differences in the current world economy: a transformation in the elaboration of *de facto* norms, through which the privilege of financial interests has been increasingly institutionalized; and the ability of finance to "[...] systemically, not just through influence, shap[e] elements of national government economic policy and, by extension, other policies" (Sassen, 2018, p. 72). The market, therefore, came to occupy a role traditionally thought of as belonging to the citizenry: that of holding administrations accountable.

The Great Recession of 2008-2009 is best understood within this general context of the dominance of financial capital and its new predatory logic of invasion (or financialization), its distancing from the "business of making money," and the end of the Bretton Woods commitments to multilateralism and domestic stability (i.e. in employment and income).

Of particular importance is the Anglo-Saxon Reagan-Thatcher neoliberal revolution of the 1980s, through which the myth of "There is No Alternative" (TINA) penetrated the collective minds of even the most progressive parties (Solomon, 2010). The acceptance of the power of finance capital has led to a new, broad neoliberal consensus, even if the political choices within the parties were not universal.

Celia Kerstenetzky and Graciele Guedes (2021) provide a careful analysis of the welfare state in the 21st century. They counter, quite convincingly, that the welfare state has not disappeared, and that it will most likely not disappear in the near future. Although many scholars have shown that inequality has grown, and specific policies seem to be receding, aggregate data shows that: (a) there has

been a growth in state social investment in much of the West; and (b) there has been a qualitative change in the type of social services provided that reflect global economic transformations (for example, state support for vocational training and early childhood care). In other words, we should not so easily dismiss the ideological power that underpins the welfare state.

Solomon (2010) and Kerstenetzky and Guedes (2021) provide counter perspectives but which can complement each other in specific ways regarding ideational vitality of market liberalism and resistance of the welfare state, respectively. Solomon demonstrates how neoliberalism's ideological dominance in society has made significant inroads, encouraging us to raise awareness of its power. Kerstenetzky and Guedes, on the other hand, give us hope that all is not lost, as the state continues to provide welfare to its populations, albeit not at the desired (or even necessary) level. This battle of ideologies is central to our issue. What the latter do not seem to recognize is how the changes they describe demonstrate in qualitative change in whose needs the state is seeking to meet: from a citizen-centered focus the welfare seems to have shifted to a market-centered focus—that is, in meeting the welfare needs that the market deems necessary, to best prepare the citizen for the market over a high living standard. This battle of ideologies is central to our problem.

Following Arrighi's (2010, p. 27) insight, the aim of this section is to briefly demonstrate how "[...] what initially may appear to be mere historical contingency will begin to appear to reflect a structural logic". There are different sources of the COVID-19 crisis—man's incessant incursions into nature as a systemic component of the capitalist world-system; the current management structure of the world-system that privileges profit over life and which has left governments and international governance agencies unprepared for such crises; and the associated distribution problem, which has not only exacerbated inequality, but turned it into a profit-making enterprise within a predatory logic. But each source—and potentially others—needs to be placed and understood within the broader framework of the capitalist world-system in general, and the current cycle of neoliberal expansion in particular.

Brazil under Bolsonaro: persistence and deepening of neoliberalism

Bolsonaro affirmed his commitment to the financial sector when he announced he would invite Paulo Guedes to join his cabinet before the 2018 electoral cycle and again with his subsequent appointment to head the new Ministry of Economy in 2019 at the start of his administration. Guedes, a banker and graduate of the University of Chicago, defends the neoliberal agenda as the solution to Brazil's economic and social problems. Until then little known in intellectual, political, and academic circles, he had been a figure of no significance in the debate on national issues. But

he would become a super-minister in Bolsonaro's administration, as the Ministry of Planning, Budget, and Management, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Social Security, and the Ministry of Development, Industry, and Trade were all grouped under his command within the new Ministry of Economy. The predecessor Ministry of Finance became this expanded "super-ministry" under the new administration, serving as an umbrella for all matters concerning the economy. This allowed for the coordination of an ultraliberal organizational logic under an ultraliberal hawk, which included participation of international trade negotiations and negotiations around Brazil's entry into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Paulo Guedes has been a staunch opponent of the social protections guaranteed by the 1988 Federal Constitution as well as a proponent of second-generation neoliberal reforms. In his view, and in line with what Sassen (2022) has termed the neoliberal predatory logic, the federal government should transfer the provision of education, health and social security, among other areas, to the market. A few months before the start of the pandemic, the then minister declared: "Don't look to us to end social inequality" (UOL, 2019).

The challenges posed by the pandemic did not deter the former minister Guedes from pursuing his ultraliberal agenda. On the contrary, the minister relied on the absence of social protests and the low social mobilization that the pandemic imposed on citizens to persuade Congress to approve several unpopular measures.

Faced with the need to deal with the paralysis of the economy imposed by covid-19, the Bolsonaro administration reluctantly proposed a bill to Congress to ensure emergency aid for the millions of Brazilians who had lost their jobs and the millions of workers in the informal sector. His initial proposal called for the payment of three monthly installments of R\$200.00 (about US\$1.25 a day). In the press, Paulo Guedes not only defended this amount, but also threatened that if the amount was higher, the country could go bankrupt and thus jeopardize the austerity policy. After several sessions, the Congress raised the amount to R\$600.00 (US\$3.75 per day). Although still an insufficient amount, it was three times higher than the Bolsonaro administration's proposal.

As soon as the federal government started registering workers in the new emergency aid payment system, reality turned out to be different from what was initially expected. An unexpected 40 million Brazilians were not listed as beneficiaries in any of the existing social programs (Bolsa Família or the Single Registry System). These millions of invisible citizens, left to their own devices, had to expose themselves to the lethal virus, as most were forced to appear in person in the government-designated agencies to regularize their documentation and prove their need to receive the aid. The televised press repeatedly showed the saga of these workers, from the queue to register—many had no access to the internet nor a bank account—to the service points in search of information and the long waits in the harsh sun or rain to be able to access benefits.

After being exposed to the risks of contamination, around six million workers were still unable to receive support. The pandemic brought new dimensions of inequality to Brazil. At the end of Bolsonaro's administration, one in two Brazilians needed some kind of aid or benefit from the federal government. At the same time that Bolsonaro was reluctant to acknowledge the country's social reality, he and his ministers sought to take advantage of the health crisis to roll back social rights in Congress. In contrast to the previous period, from 2002 to 2014, in which Brazil's relative inequality fell, it began to grow again after 2015, in a scenario of greater concentration of income at the top (1%).

Maristella Svampa (2019) argues that, between 2003 and 2013, Latin America moved from the Washington Consensus to the Commodities Consensus. Without disregarding the importance of resources from the export of primary products in the trade balance and fiscal surplus, the author points out that this favorable situation meant that "Indeed, over the years, past all of the ideological differences, all the Latin American governments implemented the return of a productivist vision of development and sought to deny or conceal discussions regarding the implications (impacts, consequences, damage) of the extractive export model" (Svampa, 2019, p. 1).

Domestically, in the wake of the deepening crisis in the commodities cycle, Dilma Rousseff implemented an economic platform in 2015 opposite to the one she had defended during the electoral period the year before. Her appointment of Joaquim Levy to the Ministry of Finance, in November 2014, represented the option for the agenda of neoliberal orthodoxy, further opening up the arena for predatory logic to take hold. According to Levy, to get Brazil out of the crisis, it would be necessary to carry out (pro-market) social security reforms, review benefits and other social programs, privatize state companies, reform the state, and advance other policies that make up the well-known structural adjustment programs. This orthodox agenda was eventually embraced by President Rousseff as necessary and unavoidable to overcome the economic crisis that had begun in her first term. Although the Workers' Party (PT) never embraced neoliberalism, this option was not foreign to the coalition led by the party. Lula da Silva had also implemented neoliberal policies, while defending the strengthening of the state and its centrality in economic and social development. This is one of the contradictions, as we saw earlier, of Latin America's progressive wave—pink tide, for some—between 1998 and 2016. As mentioned above, although it did not fully embrace the neoliberal agenda as a proposal for government, the PT ended up internalizing part of its logic.

With this economic agenda, the Rousseff administration failed to achieve its goals vis-à-vis economic growth, and an irreversible political attrition was already evident by the end of 2015. The impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in August 2016 brought to power a coalition headed by conservative forces in Brazilian politics. Involved in corruption scandals and with little political legitimacy, then-president Michel Temer proposed a constitutional amendment to Congress that would impose a ceiling on public spending. Approved in December 2016, Constitutional

Amendment 95/2016 boasts an understanding of political economy based on the notion of 'expansionary austerity', which is based on cutting spending before increasing taxes. This conception presupposes that, under an environment of ostentatious government sacrifice to indicate to market agents the commitment to service the public debt, the risk of the respective bonds is reduced. Consequently, there are favorable conditions for lower interest rates, with a positive impact on the supply of credit and confidence in the country's macroeconomic stability. It is believed that businesses would make new investments, which would allow for economic growth and an environment of prosperity (Tavares; Silva, 2020, p. 2).

Health crisis, social protection, and welfare in Brazil during the covid-19 pandemic

As discussed above, one of the first effects of the pandemic, in Brazil and around the world, was the rapid loss of income for millions of workers. The health crisis further exposed Brazil's deep social inequality. By revealing an invisible contingent of around 40 million workers who simply were not in any of the government databases—a fifth of the Brazilian population, left to their own devices and performing different tasks in the informal economy—the health crisis shed new light on “the long trajectory of stability of high inequality in Brazil” (Arretche, 2015, p. 455). The interruption of the “redistributive experiment,” combined with the dispossession of many labor rights, has pushed workers towards the phenomenon known as “Uberization”—the “Gig worker”. The Brazilian welfare state, built through much struggle since the 1988 Constitution was enacted, suffered a severe blow with the approval of Amendment No. 95. This austerity policy, expanded during the Bolsonaro administration, has deepened the structure of inequality in the country. It is worth noting that the federal government, under Bolsonaro's presidency, aimed to privatize all public services, including health, education, and public policies for children and young people.

The labor counter-reform approved in 2017 by the Brazilian Congress allows for intermittent work, outsourcing of essential activities, and negotiations of labor agreements to supersede current labor legislation. Recent research has shown that “[...] almost half of the existing jobs in the country are of poor quality, with low wages, instability or excessive working hours, corresponding to 40.8 million jobs or 45.5% of the total” (Bôas, 2020).

In addition to the loss of income, the uncertainty of obtaining emergency relief, and the small number of installments paid by the federal government, access to health care represents an additional source of anguish for the population. Images of then-president Bolsonaro encouraging non-compliance with social isolation, trifling, above all, with the lives of the country's poorest and dismissing the deaths of thousands of Brazilians, are a clear demonstration of necropolitics. In December 2022, 693,800 Brazilians had already had their lives taken by COVID-19.

The Bolsonaro administration health authorities' disregard for indigenous, quilombola, and riverside communities, among other traditional peoples, is another example of this. Meanwhile, gold miners, loggers, and large and small-scale miners invaded the territories of these populations, with the undisguised support of the federal government, and spread the COVID-19 virus. The result was an increase in violence against these peoples. Historically, the right to life has not been guaranteed in Brazil but, at that moment, this violation gained frightening proportions.

The situation was not worse only because of Brazil's Unified Health System (SUS). Few countries in the world have a sophisticated and universal system like SUS, partly inspired by the British National Health Service (NHS) created in 1948. SUS was only made possible through the articulation of hundreds of social movements in Brazil, health professionals, and leaders in the progressive field committed to the right to health. Based on the principles of equity, integrality, and universality, SUS has social participation through health councils and national conferences.

In relation to the ethnic-racial profile of the victims, inequality is once again evident. Although we do not have disaggregated data for all COVID-19 victims in the country, black men and women are more likely to die than the non-black population. According to the then High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations (UN), Michelle Bachelet, black people and ethnic minorities have been hit hardest in Brazil and the United States.

SUS has a drug distribution program that the vast majority of the population would have difficulty accessing if the drugs were not provided free of charge. As the service is universal, the rich also have free access to medicine and treatments for the most diverse diseases. The social struggle that led to the creation of SUS ensures that health is considered a right and not a commodity. However, a back door has been created in Brazil's excellent public hospitals, allowing care through private health insurance. Although it is compulsory for health insurers whose clients are treated in public hospitals to reimburse these institutions, it is an ongoing struggle for plan operators to pay into the public coffers. The situation has only become less tragic thanks to their capillarity throughout the national territory and the fact that two thirds of the population receive medical care through the Family Health Program.

Brazilian science also suffered from budget cuts. With the pandemic, Brazilian universities and research centers began to expand their connections with research centers abroad, in a countermovement to the inertia during the former Bolsonaro administration. The president and his ministers demonstrated great lack of awareness to the country's social reality and insensitivity to its concrete problems. They showed concern with the damage the pandemic could do to Bolsonaro's administration and his political image, as well as the possibility of the Brazilian social conscience maturing in relation to the need to rethink the administration's ultraliberal policies—in a potential shift to valuing what is public and the common good (such as the SUS). In short, Bolsonaro and his administration have not lived up to the call made by the then High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michele

Bachelet: “Ultimately, efforts to tackle COVID-19 and to begin the recovery process will only be successful if everyone’s rights to life and health are protected, without discrimination” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020).

Concluding remarks

The text sought to contextualize the coronavirus crisis within the general framework of the post-war period and the Bretton Woods system, as a first moment, which was followed by the rise of financial capital at a global level, under the auspices of neoliberalism and US hegemony. The political and economic events discussed in the second and third sections are best understood within this general context. It is within and through this conjuncture that alternatives must be sought in an attempt to recover social welfare with the support of the state, to help in the fight against inequality and for an end to social precariousness in Brazil. This movement permeates the confrontation with the predatory logic embedded in the neoliberal program and its counter-reforms.

The aim of this article was to discuss how the pandemic tended to reinforce the situation of inequality in Brazil vis-à-vis the ultraliberal agenda of the Bolsonaro administration. After the economic crisis of 2014, together with the political crisis of 2015-2016, which resulted in the impeachment of then president Dilma Rousseff, neoliberal policies were intensified in the country. In the administration of former president Michel Temer (2016-2018), the passing of Constitutional Amendment No. 95/2016 represented a restriction on public spending and “marked the interruption of the redistribution experiment” begun in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. It also represented a retreat from the social rights enshrined in the Constitution. The labor counter-reform was an additional factor that contributed to the increase in social inequality. Approved in 2017 with strong support from the business community, federal deputies, and senators, the elimination of some existing labor protections pushed workers into precarious and poorly paid jobs.

This aggravated picture of social inequalities continued under the Bolsonaro administration and took on new forms. Throughout Bolsonaro’s mandate, his administration pushed to privatize public services and, thereby, financialize access to health and education. The drive was to reproduce in Brazil the economic and social experience of Chile under Pinochet. The attempt to end public pensions is exemplary, a move that would leave individual workers worrying about their individual savings without taking into account current levels of (most often negative) disposable income.

However, the global health crisis, as was the case with the 2008 financial crisis, has demonstrated the extent to which neoliberal hegemony is incapable of providing an adequate response to critical situations of crisis. The state’s legitimacy is more readily reclaimed, whereby it can, through its capacity, guarantee the subsistence

of the population. In Brazil, the existence of the Unified Health System was crucial in dealing with the pandemic. Despite being underfunded, SUS has saved millions of lives. Once again, the neoliberal logic has failed to pass the test of reality.

With the economy at a virtual standstill beginning in early 2020, the need to guarantee a minimum income for workers became apparent. According to the logic of the Bolsonaro administration, the state should not intervene to prevent an increase in poverty and misery. However, Congress, despite the reluctance of the president and his ministers, approved emergency aid in the context of a state of public calamity. Bolsonaro sought, at all costs, to take advantage of the moment of crisis to further deny social rights.



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ПОЛИТИЧКА ЕКОНОМИЈА НЕЈЕДНАКОСТИ И ПАНДЕМИЈА КОВИД-19 У БРАЗИЛУ

Апстракт: Концентрација прихода је нагло порасла у свету од 1980-их. Глобална здравствена криза је уздрмала глобални капитализам и довела до кризе без преседана. У Латинској Америци, најнеравноправнијем региону на свету, здравствена криза је додатно погоршала слику неједнакости. Од 2014. године, због завршетка робног циклуса, смањење сиромаштва и неједнакости прихода у региону изгубили су замах. Са пандемијом, економије Латинске Америке и Кариба, већ са ниским економским растом последњих година, повећале су неизвесност и ставиле на тест капацитет државе да обезбеди јавне здравствене услуге и политике за ублажавање несташице за огромне делове становништва. Уз пажњу бразилског друштва усмерену на борбу против пандемије, Болсонарова влада (2019-) искористила је ову ситуацију да покуша да унапреди своју ултра-либералну агенду и да преокрене јавну политику за промоцију једнакости. Болсонарова влада схвата да се бразилска социјална држава, предвиђена Уставом, не уклапа у буџет земље. Циљ овог чланка је да се расправља о могућим путевима и политикама које бразилска држава може предузети као резултат пандемије и пратеће политичке и економске кризе. У првом делу представљамо елементе који нам омогућавају да разумемо кризу неолиберализма из кризе 2008. године и њену истрајност; у другом анализирамо Болсонарову владу из спровођења њене ултра неолибералне агенде и погоршања слике неједнакости у земљи; у трећем, разматрамо здравствену кризу и њене ефекте на запошљавање, здравствени систем и потребу за основним приходима грађана који су јачали проширењем и продубљивањем социјалне и економске кризе.

Кључне речи: БРАЗИЛ, НЕЈЕДНАКОСТ, НЕОЛИБЕРАЛИЗАМ, ПАНДЕМИЈА, ДРЖАВА, БЛАГОСТАЊЕ