

FROM REGULATED CITIZENSHIP TO "UNREGULATED" CITIZENSHIP? – THE DISMANTLING OF SOCIAL PROTECTION AT WORK IN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

In this article we deal with how the social metabolic system of capital produces a logical inversion of society. For the maintenance of this system, the State, labor and capital are fundamental. With this, we address how the Social State was structured in Brazil, the regulation and protection of labor and, consequently, the promotion of regulated citizenship. Finally, we understand what citizenship is and its challenge in times of authoritarian liberalism, de-democratization and deregulation of social policies.

Keywords: Capital. Work. Regulated citizenship. Social policy. Deregulation.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been debated about work in the 21st century; We intend to bring to the discussion how the dismantling of social policies in a time of digital economy has affected workers, especially those who do not have (or have never had) access to public goods and services; and also to those who are without (or have never had) access to socially protected work in Brazil.

In this sense, we begin the analysis with the concept addressed by Ricardo Antunes in his work "The meanings of work: an essay on the affirmation and denial of work" (2009), which defines the "inversion of societal logic". This concept represents a fundamental element in the "system of social metabolism of capital" (p. 19). Deprived of an orientation that has a human meaning, capital, in its process of development, operates according to a logic in which the use value of things is integrally submissive to their exchange value.

Societal inversion happens by the submission of first-order mediations² to second-order mediations. According to Antunes (2009), first-order mediations are those that reproduce human

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² The primary mediations include: 1) the essential and relatively spontaneous regulation of reproductive biological activity in line with available resources; 2) the regulation of the work process, through which the necessary exchange between the community and nature can result in the production of essential goods, in addition to the work tools, productive initiatives and knowledge necessary to meet human needs; 3) the establishment of a system of exchanges that is aligned with changing historical requirements, seeking to optimize the available natural and productive resources; 4) the organization, coordination and supervision of the variety of activities, both material and cultural, in order to meet a system of social reproduction that is becoming increasingly complex; 5) the rational allocation of material and human resources at our disposal, combating forms of scarcity through the viable economic use (in the sense of saving) of the means of production, in harmony with the levels of productivity and the existing socioeconomic

existence, "a singularly human ontology of labor" (p. 22). The key point is that none of the primary imperatives of mediation require the creation of structural hierarchies of domination and subordination, which characterize the system of capital's social metabolism and its secondary mediations.

The author (2009) defines that second-order mediations³ are part of a system of clearly identifiable mediations, which, in their properly developed forms, strictly subordinates all social reproductive functions – ranging from gender relations in the family sphere to material production, including also the creation of artistic works – to the absolute imperative of the expansion of capital, that is, to its own expansion and reproduction as a system of mediated social metabolism.

The continuous expansion of exchange value, to which all other spheres – from the most elementary and intimate needs of individuals to the various productive activities, both material and cultural – must be rigorously subordinated. Thus, as Antunes (2009) approaches, the total subordination of human needs to the reproduction of exchange value – aiming at the expansive self-realization of capital – constitutes the most distinctive aspect of the capital system since its emergence.

This system, according to Antunes (2009), is constituted by three fundamental dimensions: capital, labor and State; they are materially interconnected, which makes it unfeasible to overcome them without the eradication of all the components that constitute this system. The author cites an example of a post-capitalist system:

"What was witnessed in that historical experience was, on the contrary, the enormous hypertrophy of the state, since both the USSR and the other post-capitalist countries maintained the basic constitutive elements of the hierarchical social division of labor. The 'expropriation of the expropriators', the 'juridical-political' elimination of property, carried out by the Soviet system, 'left the edifice of the capital system intact'" (Antunes, 2009, p. 24).

"Given the inseparability of the three dimensions of the capital system, which are completely articulated – capital, labor and the state – it is inconceivable to emancipate labor without simultaneously overcoming capital and also the state. This is because, paradoxically, the fundamental material that sustains the pillar of capital is not the State, but labor, in its continuous structural dependence on capital" (Mészáros, *apud* Antunes, 2009, p. 24).

limits; and 6) the constitution and structuring of social regulations aimed at the totality of social beings, in connection with the other determinations and primary functions of mediation. (Antunes, 2009, p. 22)

³ Second-order mediations are: 1) the dissociation and alienation between the worker and the means of production; 2) the imposition of these objective and alienated conditions on workers, characterizing an autonomous power that exercises control over them; 3) the personification of capital as a selfish value – whose subjectivity and pseudo-personality were appropriated – oriented to satisfy the imperatives of capitalist expansion; 4) the corresponding personification of labor, i.e., the representation of the workers as mere labor power, destined to create a relationship of dependence in relation to historically predominant capital; this personification reduces the identity of the subject of work to its fragmented productive functions (Antunes, 2009, p. 23-4).

Given this point, Antunes (2009) works with Mészáros' conception that treats capital and capitalism as different phenomena. For him (*apud*, Antunes, 2009), the system of social metabolism of capital ("the complex characterized by the hierarchical division of labor" – p. 25) spread socially even before the industrial revolution, when capitalism ("commodity production system" – p. 25) was initially established in the global north and, later, around the world. Capitalism, for him, is one of the "historical variants" for the realization of capital. "[T]he system of capital's social metabolism was configured as a system, ultimately, ontologically uncontrollable" (*idem*, 2009, p. 25).

WORK AND REGULATED CITIZENSHIP

According to Santos (1987), the idea of structuring society based on the criteria of the "market", which began to gain strength with generalized commodity production in the eighteenth century and materialized during the industrial revolution in the first half of the nineteenth century, did not aim to create a society in which everyone had equal access to the same goods and services – just as Antunes (2009) defined the functioning of the metabolic system of capital. The objective was that each person would receive an amount of goods and services proportional to his or her abilities – "meritocratic utopia" – "the assumption of a natural inequality between men and the value judgment that such inequality appears in the 'market' should not [...] be disturbed by interventions of political power" (Santos, 1987, p. 15 and 16).

The author (1987) states that when the State begins to intervene in social regulation, there is an inevitable tendency to expand the scope of this intervention. However, who is interested in state interventions? Santos (1987) continues in this reflection, recalling the process of implementation of social policies in Brazil. In 1824, the constitution of a national state began, inspired by progressive liberalism, which gave rise to the Federal Constitution of 1824, the first step towards modernity.

However, it was out of step in the "advances" in the non-regulation of professions, compared to other countries, because it still did not give up the organization of slave labor. In other words, even before liberalism and capitalism arrived in the country, the order of capital was already part of the interests of the ruling class. Even after the abolition of the slave system on May 13, 1888, the Constitution of 1891 established the principle of non-regulation of professions, ratified in the 1926 Constituent Assembly, which Santos (1987) calls the "anti-corporative ideology of the eighteenth century" (*idem*, 1987, p. 16).

THE ACHIEVEMENTS FOR THE SOCIAL PROTECTION OF LABOR IN BRAZIL

The non-regulation of the professions promoted the emergence of private associations restricted to trades, such as the Musical Beneficence Society in 1834 and the Animating Society of the Goldsmith's Corporation in 1838, according to the author (1987). It is in 1888 that the first law that protects the employees of the state's railroads appears – the Relief Fund, offering a little help in case of a period of illness and funeral assistance.

One of the achievements of the union struggle even before the Federal Constitution of 1934 was Decree-Law 3,724 in 1919, which considers the risk of the production process, then the obligation to compensate the injured worker. With the isolated achievements in some professional categories over the years, it is in the 1934 Constitution that the State recognizes its social obligation and that it will guarantee the regularization of professions by right. And in 1943, the Labor Laws were consolidated. The government was obliged to bear the costs and benefits (Santos, 1987).

"The impact of this legislation [...] is yet to be reliably established, both in terms of the number of organizations that were created, and in the effective scope of the organizations – [...] what had already been recognized for the actors in a privileged position in the accumulation process, that is, the owners of capital, since the first half of the nineteenth century – caused an important fissure in the *Laissez-Farian legal-institutional order*, *strictu sensu*, by admitting legitimacy of collective demands, rather than strictly individual ones." (*idem*, 1987, p. 18)

Following what the author (1987) portrays, once the right of professional categories to organize themselves into unions⁴ in order to defend their collective interests without the interference of the State was recognized, the demands were quickly established and began to be prioritized by the urban industrial working class. These included the regulation of working hours, working conditions (including accidents and hygiene issues), weekly rest and vacation rights, as well as the inclusion of minors and women in the production process.

For the social protection of professional categories, the CAPs (Retirement and Pension Fund) are created and, later, the IAPs (Retirement and Pensions Institute). The CAPs were private, certainly "[t]he was not a right of citizenship, inherent to all members of a national community, when they were no longer in a position to participate in the process of accumulation, but a strictly private commitment between the members of a company and its owners" (Santos,

⁴ It is important to emphasize that all the effort for regulations demanded by the workers' unions was focused on the conditions under which accumulation occurred, showing little interest in measures associated with the welfare state, that is, those that aim to ensure an income for those who, for various reasons, no longer participate in the accumulation process (such as pensions due to length of service, age or disability; pensions for dependents in the event of the death of the family ombudsman; among others). (Santos, 1987)

1987, p. 22). The IAPs, as state-owned and with tripartite funding, had the presidency and the administrative council of the institutes chosen by the government.

The author (1987) mentions that the competition between IAPs and CAPs took place throughout the Vargas government. And, in 1953, finally, the CAPs and IAPs were unified, favoring the government institutes. The problem was the diversity of services and benefits provided to its members, which varies due to the resources that each IAP had. To solve this, in the 1960s, the National Institute of Social Security emerged, with the enactment of the Organic Law of Social Security, which standardized the benefits and services provided, however, they maintained differentiations in retirements, pensions and savings depending on the professional category belonging.

It is necessary to highlight that in this historical process, according to Santos (1987), the legislation guaranteed a uniform regime of benefits for all workers under the regulation of the Consolidation of Labor Laws, without considering the professional category of each individual. Thus, rural workers, domestic workers and self-employed professionals, who, despite representing a significant part of the economically active population, contributed indirectly to the accumulation effort, were excluded from legal protection.

The author (1987) goes on to argue that, although protection legislation had emerged, prior to the 1934 Constituent Assembly, for rural workers, it was "more of a façade than an effect, due to the resistance of oligarchic landowner interests" (*idem*, 1987, p. 19). According to Kerstenetzky (2012), the State focused on the interests of large rural landowners and industrial businesses, an example of which is not having carried out agrarian reform to the present day. Social protection was restricted to the urban-industrial segments.

Over the years after the consolidation of Social Security in 1960, rural workers, domestic workers and self-employed workers were included, through individual contributions. Thus, other welfare policy actions emerge, such as the Guarantee Fund for Length of Service (FGTS), solving the problem of job stability; the Social Integration Program (PIS), which did not participate directly in the company's profits, but attributed to the increases of the economic system as a whole. Almost all urban work is covered by social protection, the informal labor market, that is, those not regulated by the CLT, were left out.

SOCIAL POLICY AND CITIZENSHIP

"In capitalism, social policy is, like the State that regulates it, a relationship that transits between antagonistic interests of capital and labor to, contradictorily, meet them, in accordance with the firepower of each in an everlasting process of correlations of forces –

not least because both the State and social policy would not be sustained if they worked, exclusively, for the dominant classes. (Pereira, 2020 p. 4)

Fleury (1998) understands that social policy is meta-politics, since the criteria it establishes include or exclude individuals "in the political community of citizens" (p. 5). Still on social policy, the author deals with the fact that it represents the consequence of the historical interrelationship between the State and society with regard to the inequalities generated by capitalism, configuring itself as a standard of citizenship that depends on the specific conditions of each society. It is also the result of the confrontation and struggle of the most organized population groups in search of improving their living conditions and guaranteeing their rights.

What we clearly witness in Brazil is the deliberate exclusion of a certain population since the beginning of liberalism in the country, especially the freedmen and their descendants, which ends up differentiating citizens and non-citizens ("pre-citizen", according to Santos, 1987). Kerstenetzky (2012) analyzes that in Brazil the Social State implemented was the Developmentalist (*welfare developmentalism*), which uses social policy as a mechanism to ensure the reproduction of the industrial workforce, contributing with part of the costs and promoting social stability, considered fundamental for the success of the development project in a capitalist structure. "The multifunctionality of social policy, especially its role in supporting a state-led economic development project" (*idem*, 2012, p. 134).

The author (2012) highlights that a common characteristic among the experience of the Developmental Welfare State is "productivism", which alludes to the shared goal of expanding productive capacity and stimulating economic growth. Such an approach has often manifested itself through initiatives aimed at industrialization, urbanization, and economic modernization, with strong state leadership mobilizing social policies to achieve these goals. The main distinction between the experiences of welfare states in different countries lies in the way social policies are structured: some adopt a selective character, targeting specific groups, while others are inclusive, encompassing universal social investments. In the Brazilian context, the model implemented was selective because not all workers had access to social rights; Only those who worked in the sectors considered a priority for the country's industrialization project received social protection.

Kerstenetzky (2012) points out that both South Korea and Brazil implemented an economic development project under authoritarian regimes. However, there is a significant difference between these countries: social inequality in South Korea was less pronounced than in Brazil; The South Koreans promoted land reform before the implementation of economic development. This initiative dismantled the agrarian elites, modifying the rural way of life and

enabling social mobility through migration to urban areas, among other actions. In Brazil, a considerable portion of the population did not participate in the transformation of modernization and, as we have already shown, agrarian reform was never carried out here, as the author (2012) discusses.

Fleury (1998) points out that the various social protection systems, which emerged in specific historical contexts, resulted in the creation of various political and institutional practices aimed at ensuring the rights of citizens and offering services. Thus, the concept of social policy became closely linked to the condition of citizenship. However, the incorporation of social rights in the scope of citizenship represents a relatively recent historical construction within the evolutionary process of citizenship. The author (1998), based on Marshall's study, deals with the existence of pillars or dimensions of citizenship, defining it as the full belonging of individuals to a political community through the granting of a *status* that ensures rights and duties, freedoms and limitations, powers and responsibilities.

Santos (1987) brings in the book "Citizenship and justice: social policy in the Brazilian order", reflecting on the post-30s, the concept of regulated citizenship. For the author, regulated citizenship is "citizens all those members of the community who are located in any of the occupations *recognized and defined* [emphasis added] by law" (*idem*, 1987, p. 68). Citizenship was intrinsically connected to occupation and the position in the productive process defined the rights of the citizen. The author (1987) defines that pre-citizens are all those who exercise professions not recognized by law. This was the institutional conditioning factor for what was understood as marginality and the informal labor market; and this group includes the unemployed, the underemployed, the unstable employees, as well as any and all occupations that, however stable and regular, were not regulated.

Santos (1987) states that citizenship was composed of three parameters: the regulation of professions, the professional card and the public union. In this way, he says that "the professional card becomes, in reality, more than a piece of labor evidence, a civic birth certificate." (*idem*, 1987, p. 69). Even though the concept of regulated citizenship refers to the pre-64 period, for the author (1987), citizenship still remained far from "any public and universal connotation. A large part of the population is pre-civic and there is no fundamental agenda of rights inscribed in it" (*idem*, 1987, p. 104).

Brandão (2002) highlights the existence of a considerable informal tertiary sector in our society. During the second half of the twentieth century, this sector was seen as a significant residue of an economic duality composed of two segments: a modern and capitalized one linked to industry, and an archaic one, lacking capital and related to the supply of unqualified services.

According to the author (2002), the decapitalized part would act, on the one hand, as an absorber of the working masses not inserted in the formal urban market, guaranteeing their minimum standards of reproduction and exerting numerical pressure on the formal labor market, which would contribute to the maintenance of a depreciated wage structure. On the other hand, this sector would also provide the urban masses – both those integrated and those excluded from the formal market – with goods and services arising from production processes that require modest initial investments and result in reduced final costs. This qualitatively inferior market dedicated to the consumption of urban workers would favor the perpetuation of a lowered wage logic.

In 2022, the proportion of informal workers was 46%, while formal workers accounted for 45.2%. Among the informal workers, it was observed that 44.5% were white women, 47.9% white men, 52.5% black women, and 54.5% black men (Fundo Brasil, 2023). Only 26.3% of this group made contributions to Social Security. Therefore, the profile of the informal worker in Brazil reveals a predominance of young men, mostly black and with low educational level. About 75% of this contingent has at least incomplete or lower elementary education (CNN Brasil, 2022).

DISMANTLING OF SOCIAL POLICIES

Before dealing with the dismantling of social policies in Brazil, after the democratic setback that led to the *impeachment* of President Dilma Rousseff, let's reflect on a perspective that Fleury (1998), based on Marshall's study, works on the typology of citizenship rights, which is configured by three elements:

- The civil element encompasses the rights essential to individual liberty, including freedom of movement, expression, thought and belief, as well as the right to property and the conclusion of valid contracts, as well as the right to justice.
- The political element must be understood as the right to participate in the exercise of political power, either as a member of a body endowed with political authority or as a voter of those members.
- Finally, the social element refers to the rights that range from the guarantee of a minimum of economic well-being and security to the right to full participation in the social heritage, allowing a dignified existence according to the standards in force in society.

For the author (1998), "[t]he institutionalization of social relations has the function of ensuring their predictability and ensuring the necessary security for citizens" (p. 20). According

to Lobato (2016), social policies, by making goods and services available independently of the individual's insertion in the market, ensure autonomy and, in this context, Welfare States would regulate the labor market. On the other hand, the more social relations are decommodified⁵, the greater the empowerment of workers to claim their rights.

However, in the composition of citizenship (Welfare State) in Brazil after the Federal Constitution of 1988, for the author (2016), the social policies implemented were not able to establish completely decommodified social relations. Measures such as the granting of rural retirement and the determination of a minimum wage for all social security benefits had a more significant impact on decommodification. The precariousness of employment, the low level of education, the uncertainty regarding obtaining benefits in situations of vulnerability and the insufficiency of universal services show the fragility of the process of decommodification of our social welfare system.

So, following the rights of citizenship presented by Fleury (1998), within this scenario presented by Lobato (2016), do we live a full citizenship?

"The bottom line is that since the enactment of the CF-1988, there are in Brazil, roughly speaking, two political projects in dispute in the current debate. On the one hand, conservative sectors of society, political communities (parties, unions and other associations) and the bureaucracy itself, as well as the media and business community – are once again putting on the agenda the liberal, privatist-oriented path, which had seen better days in the 1990s.

On the other hand, although it has rarely had sufficient political strength on the national scene, the path of full universalization of social protection remains a possibility – defended by sectors of the progressive field, inside and outside the government structures. To this end, given the particular structure of social and economic inequalities in the country, it is not enough for social spending to be redistributive in order to advance the effectiveness of public policies; It is also necessary that its form of financing has a high dose of progressivity in taxation, especially on the assets and the real and financial income flows of the collectivity." (Junior, 2016, p. 39 and 40)

Santos (1987) states that:

"It is the organizations and institutions of power that convert their occupants into an elite, detaching them from the social base or the public to which they should theoretically obey, and not the other way around. The institutions of power become elite institutions not because they come to be occupied by particularly distinguished beings, but because they distinguish them [...] It is by imposing their plans on the collectivity, sanctioned by the legitimacy of the institutions they control, and often also justified by criteria that they themselves formulate, that the elites become a strategic variable in the determination of public policies" (p. 59 and 60).

⁵ "The concept of decommodification was proposed by Esping-Andersen, 2009, based on Polanyi's thesis, that the self-regulated economy implies the transformation of labor into a commodity, and T.H. Marshall's, by which citizenship implies equal social rights, regardless of the employment contract. Thus, the central characteristic of the democratic welfare state would be the high degree of decommodification of labor produced by social transfers. For a debate on the activation of decommodification policies in contemporary social democracies see, Huo, Nelson & Stephens, 2008. For a critique of the concept and its use, see Bambra, 2006." (Prado, 2013)

In view of this, Lobato (2016) argues that after the 1988 Constitution, Brazil's well-being model had a significant impact on the living conditions of the population. However, the structural elements necessary to support this model have not been sufficiently altered or have been modified in a limited way. In the face of contexts repeatedly unfavorable to the consolidation of the model, its development has focused on state dynamics, especially at the federal level, through the implementation of sectoral policies, services and benefits; Such an approach does not provide the necessary robustness to face periods of economic downturn.

The author (2016) goes on to highlight that the emphasis on state dynamics can also be seen as a form of 'defensive strategy' that aims to protect social policies against their disconnection from the economic models that have been adopted over time. However, even with the advent of neodevelopmentalism, which occurred between 2002 and 2014, there was not enough room for the expansion of universalization in social areas, with this approach being more focused on stimulating consumption and markets, and prioritizing income transfer programs.

AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM

In 2016, Brazil experienced the *impeachment* of President Dilma Rousseff. However, what we need to keep in mind is that the democratic setback we face does not occur only here. The world has been experiencing a wave of authoritarian populist governments. The 2024 Democracy Report by the V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg points out that 42 countries in 2023 went through a process of autocratization and 71% of the world's population, about 5.7 billion people, lived in autocracies.

To explain this phenomenon, Fleury (*et al.*, 2024) use some authors, such as Eatwell, Goodwin, Rockman, and Piketty. Thus, the rise of authoritarian populism is closely associated with four resentments:

- Hopelessness about economic security, as well as explicit resentments directed at racial minorities, women, immigrants, and other marginalized groups.
- Frustrations with the belief that the authorities are corrupt, indifferent and distant from popular desires; a belief that turns especially against state bureaucracies.
- Current plutocratic concentration of income and wealth of some societies.
- Citizens' distrust of the redistributive results of the policies implemented.

But what is populism and how does it become a threat to democracy? According to Nadia Urbinati (*apud* Fleury *et al.*, 2024), populism is a movement of "disfigurement of constitutional democracy" (p. 295). In the aspiration to obtain unanimity in decisions and homogeneity among

the members of society, authoritarian populism, together with the plebiscitarianism that is inherent to it, emerges in the context of democracy. And this is a great threat, because the populist identification between the leadership and the people makes it possible to erase the distinction between state and society (Fleury *et al.*, 2024) – and this is the great objective of authoritarian populism: to extinguish the division between political and administrative power.

Fleury (*et al.*, 2024) reflect on how bureaucracy, in its relationship with politics, can represent a destabilizing element in democratic processes, giving rise to actions that are aligned with anti-democratic and authoritarian principles. Such dynamics can favor social groups that hold a concentration of power, thus compromising the results of elections. An example of this is Operation Car Wash, which promoted a judicial persecution (*lawfare*) of some political leaders. From this operation it triggered numerous social demonstrations until the final *impeachment* of President Dilma Rousseff – it is important to highlight the involvement of the STF⁶. The authors (2024) deal with that in these situations, the bureaucracy that would function as a "stabilizer of the masses" in democracies, becomes a political tool in the hands of oligarchies that operate in opposition to electoral majorities. The State only maintains its link with society if it sustains democracy and government action, as well as bureaucracies and public policies.

What Fleury (*et al.*, 2024) point out is that as much as populist governments attack bureaucracy and public policies, proposing to promote their dismantling, and talk about the deconstruction of institutions, these governments end up facing the cumulative legacy of bureaucracy and public policies – it is authoritarian populist governments that have contributed to the deepening of existing inequalities. According to the authors (2024), populist attacks are excellent in the discourse in the electoral dispute, but without success for governability.

⁶ According to the analysis made by Almir Megali Neto in his book "The *impeachment* of Dilma Rousseff before the Federal Supreme Court", contrary to what was the *impeachment* process of then-President Fernando Collor, the process of Dilma Rousseff had a series of contradictory

"However, a closer look at the performance of the STF in the exercise of jurisdictional control of the *impeachment* process of President Dilma Rousseff reveals exactly the opposite. Taking as a parameter for the study developed here the theoretical assumptions assumed by the Court itself in relation to the matter throughout its institutional history, it was possible to glimpse that a series of violations of the due process of the *impeachment process* and the rights, not only of the accused, but also of the parliamentarians responsible for conducting this political process of accountability were tolerated, contradicting, therefore, the premises assumed by the Court itself, as well as those that placed in the STF's performance the guarantee of the integrity of the processing of the fact.

Thus, it was found that the decisions rendered by the STF and its members in the cases arising from the *impeachment process* initiated against President Dilma Rousseff indicate a change in the Court's posture throughout the entire chain of decisions involved in this case. At first, it was understood that the issues that arose around the process of holding the President of the Republic accountable for a crime of responsibility would produce direct reflections on the presidential mandate and that, precisely for this reason, it would exceed the merely regimental or internal interest of the Legislative Houses and, later, as the process developed, assume a more self-contained posture, to the point of deciding not to decide, or to let the course of the process be entirely in the hands of the political actors responsible for conducting it." (2021, p. 521 and 522)

The authors (2024) point out that the anti-elitist rhetoric of these governments, which inflames part of the population, is a strategy that overshadows the true interests of plutocracy and anti-regulation. Let's remember the scenes of Bolsonaro eating bread and drinking coffee at the bakery wearing a soccer team shirt or him signing documents with a common pen. "Passing the herd" is what they want. The abolition of environmental legislation, the revocation of social and labor rights, as well as the reduction of taxes on the richest are the commitments of such governments, which they assume to remain in power, supported by certain segments of society that see the authoritarian populist context as an opportunity, according to Fleury (*et al.*, 2024).

Thus, according to the authors (2024), contemporary authoritarian liberalism emerged in the context of democratic society as a derivation of economic liberalism and expressed itself as a response to the society of the post-war period and as a disguised reevaluation of an alternative to the programs of the Welfare State. Thus, as Santos (1987) treats about times of scarcity:

"As scarcity changes, the world appears differently to decision-makers, especially in relation to the type and quantity of resources available, thus allowing them changes in orientation on specific policies, which are not necessarily accompanied by changes in the composition of elites" (p. 63).

The interaction between a set of constitutionalized austerity norms and authoritarian populism, which characterizes Bolsonaro's administration, constituted the strategy adopted by conservative segments of Brazilian society to implement an agenda aimed at the erosion of rights and de-democratization. This approach allowed for the continuity of democratic procedures while decreasing the costs associated with cracking down on predatory behavior. It is important to emphasize that since the 1930s, with the emergence of the bureaucratic-interventionist State and social legislation, conservative groups in Brazil – which encompass agrarian, industrial, and financial interests, as well as a significant part of the middle class – have always faced difficulties in seeing the State as a collectivity of citizens, even though they have benefited considerably from government policies (Fleury *et al.*, 2024).

The authors (2024) point out that the dismantling of social policies promoted by the elites was a reaction to the previous expansion of democratic rights and social inclusion. Bolsonaro's authoritarian populism had a social base and presented a relatively articulated project to reverse the expansion of social rights, while reaffirming traditional sociocultural hierarchies.

Therefore, Fleury (*et al.*, 2024) mention that Bolsonaro acted in an attempt to attenuate the population's perception of the need for the State and public policies, intentionally promoting a process of residualization and commodification of social policies. Because the strategy of

dismantling social programs aimed to replace universal benefits with more focused interventions. In addition, the reconfiguration of the social protection system was linked to a project of cultural transformation of society, in which elements such as entrepreneurship, family responsibility for care, religious morality and privatization of services tried to take the place of the social protection system.

POST-2016 COUP AND THE DISMANTLING OF LABOR PROTECTION POLICIES

The reflection launched so far is to understand the path of work in Brazil. So, if it is capital that hierarchizes and subordinates labor, and from regulated labor we have access to social rights for a long time, what happens to individuals when, due to the current neoliberalism, there is the dismantling of social policies and, more specifically, the lack of protection of labor?

"The interplay between neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and the dismantling of redistributive policies in favor of selective business interests. These interests compete for public funds and aim to promote market domination in the organization of social relations" (Fleury et al., 2024, p. 304).

Gomide, Silva, and Leopoldi (2023) describe that this process began with Michel Temer (who assumed the presidency after the *impeachment* of Dilma Rousseff) in the enactment of the Spending Ceiling Law (Constitutional Amendment No. 95/2016), characterized by an austerity policy that resulted in budget reductions and the underfunding of various policies, especially social ones. In addition to PEC No. 95/2016, the social security reform (2019) and the labor reform (2017) also constituted mechanisms to restrict social protection for workers.

The labor reform, instituted by Law No. 13,467 on July 13, 2017, brought significant changes, among which the flexibility of working hours and remuneration, as well as the extinction of union contributions, stand out. A new contractual modality was established: intermittent work; it was allowed to outsource any area of the company, even those considered essential to production; In addition, it has become difficult to recognize the employment relationship for self-employed workers, even when they maintain an exclusive relationship with a single contractor.

The social security reform (Constitutional Amendment No. 103 of 11/12/2019), on the other hand, introduced a complex set of rules and progressives over time. The main changes include: the extinction of retirement by contribution time – now requiring a minimum contribution of 15 years and a minimum age of 62 years for women and 65 years for men; setting the floor of death pensions at one minimum wage; in addition to restrictions on the accumulation of pensions resulting from the death of the spouse or partner.

According to Gomide, Silva, and Leopoldi (2023), other initiatives were implemented during this period. When examining the programs contained in the Multi-Year Plans (PPAs) between 2020-2023, an active dismantling process was observed covering five sectors: basic sanitation, housing focused on social interest, higher education, technical training, and science, technology, and innovation (ST&I). These changes reflect a clear reduction in government policies implemented; however, while in the sanitation sector there seems to be an attempt by the government to replace its performance with the private sector, in the areas related to housing and ST&I – as well as in technical and higher education – there was a budget retraction without a clear indication of replacement by new financial sources.

Fleury (*et al.*, 2024) understand that the radical policy of fiscal austerity adopted in the country has altered the very essence of state action for three main reasons:

- 1) from a macroeconomic perspective, austerity is the very obstacle to economic growth and prevents the countercyclical action of the State;
- 2) in the social sphere, it results in the ruin of the 1988 Constitution and in an impoverishment of social services;
- 3) from a political point of view, it diminishes the authority of Congress and civil society to determine the dimensions of the public budget, imposing, in an undemocratic manner, a new arrangement of political forces – lacking social legitimacy – in defense of a minimal State.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The world has been threatened by de-democratization, social unprotection, and the digitalization of the economy. These events combined promote a "new morphology of work" (Antunes, 2013, p. 14). According to the author (2013), the current productive context, especially as a result of the broad restructuring of capital, which began at a global level in the 1970s, is characterized by a multiplicity of aspects. One of the aspects that are shown as global trends is about the new labor relations, which are presented in an increase in informality in the workforce and a growing precariousness of working conditions.

On the other hand, as Antunes (2023) discusses, there are currents that signal "optimism" by pointing to the greater intellectualization of work, particularly in sectors that have a significant technological, informational, and digital impact. Lanzara (2023) says that, as in other countries, the dismantling of social policies as part of the processes of global liberalism has disseminated the conviction that social protection compromises the productivity of economies, by enabling a

significant increase in labor costs and social expenditures. Thus, the author (2023) calls individuals who have been or are excluded from social protection outsiders.

"Since the last decades of the twentieth century, the share of capital income over total income in national economies, including labor income, has increased exorbitantly, meaning that a considerable part of the product of these economies is retained by the richest through profits and dividends, increasingly exempt from taxation" (*idem*, 2023, p. 3).

Lanzara (2023) points out that the production of new works becomes increasingly scarce as the skills associated with the mastery of new technologies increase. This dynamic results in the current tendency of the most favored families to make a "hyper-investment" in their children's education, establishing a strategy to limit the opportunities available. Moreover, with the privatization of public services, only a small fraction of the elite will be able to secure their social protection.

"Modernly, the relationship between active citizenship and the domain of information has been increasingly strongly established, from the studies of Tocqueville (1969) who identified the existence of the well-informed citizen as one of the virtues of American democracy, to more recent studies on the social distribution of knowledge and on opinion leaders. It is increasingly clear that citizenship requires access to the information necessary for the exercise of rights and duties." (Fleury, 1998, p. 12)

Lanzara (2023) suggests as a possible solution to mitigate this situation the implementation of aid to unemployed or underemployed individuals. The discussion about the problem of "outsiders" in the new economy, considering the Brazilian context, which historically presents a significant residual of individuals who live in informality, in precarious formality (such as a MEI), and/or who already survive on government aid (Bolsa Família or BPC), who are often excluded from "regulated citizenship", what will be, therefore, the future of work and social protection for this group? Could it be that in this current context we can consider that we live under a "deregulated citizenship"? A citizenship revoked of its social rights unless these services are purchased.

For this, we sought some answers in some authors. For Antunes (2013), given the accentuated character of capital that emphasizes waste, it is the centrality of abstract work that results in the marginalization of work by the exclusion of individuals who perform living work. These individuals, when they are (de)socialized and (de)individualized due to labor exclusion, desperately seek ways to reconstruct their individuality and socialization in isolated spheres outside the scope of work, such as in training activities, solidarity and services provided.

Fleury already in 1998 directed some reflections. The historical dimension in question leads us to reflect on the contemporary challenges and dilemmas related to the expansion of citizenship, especially when considering issues such as: economic globalization and the political limitations imposed on the power of the national State; the reduction of the centrality of work as a unifying category; the weakening of the values of solidarity; the public sphere and gender implications; the search for equality versus uniqueness; as well as the dichotomy between social policies aimed at consumption or those that promote emancipation; individualism or collectivism/diffusion; and inequality or exclusion. Only a new theory of citizenship is able to adequately address the urgency of its expansion in the current context.

What Lanzara (2023) points out as a prognosis is that the basis of democratic political economies lies in protection and promotion, which constitute the main objectives of social policy. However, if governments around the world begin to rely uncritically on the spontaneous dynamics of the free market, exacerbated competition could become a relevant factor of stagnation, imprisoning nations in a vicious cycle of technological dependence, unsatisfactory economic growth, and increased poverty. That seems to be the fate of some nations that want to enter the 21st century – the age of the digital economy – while simultaneously backtracking on trying to perpetuate the failures of 19th-century free-market policies.

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