

Latin American progressivism between the structural crisis and the pandemic¹

We are basically doing better with the same model of accumulation, rather than changing it, because it is not our desire to harm the rich, but it is our intention to have a more just and equitable society
Ecuador president Rafael Correa, 2012

So that tomorrow will not be yesterday
with a new name
Brazilian rapper Emicida, 2019

Abstract: In the context of worsening economic and social problems during the pandemic, where a Keynesian revival is taking place in industrialized countries, this article questions whether it makes sense to revive progressivism as a civilizing alternative for Latin America. The text addresses this issue in the following steps: it begins with problematizing the ideology of progress itself. Next, an overview of different Latin American countries preceding the Coronavirus pandemic is discussed in order to explore the hypothesis of the exhaustion of progressivism as embodied in the South American Pink Tide. Contrary to explaining the current political moment as a reaction to past governments, it is suggested that the Pink Tide attempt to contain a historical process of de-socialization within the framework of the structural crisis of capitalism, entailed the use of practices, devices and policies that ended up accelerating the same, which is further detailed in the Brazilian case. The notions of "accelerationist containment," "regressive progressivism," and "inclusive neoliberalism" are the proposed keys to examining the contradictions of progressivism and understanding why the Pink Tide has not paved the way for a better world. The text concludes by drawing a parallel between the expectations of a Keynesian return in the context of the pandemic and the limits of the progressive landscape to face the structural problems that this unforeseen situation aggravates.

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Introduction

"We are all Keynesians" now - so goes the adage that has again become relevant during pandemic times. In fact, in Latin America and in the world, an unusual "New Macroeconomic Consensus" has emerged in the critical context of covid-19, which seems to diverge widely and in certain terms, opposes the "New Macroeconomic Consensus" that prevailed in recent decades among mainstream economists. An International Monetary Fund (IMF) report released in April 2020 was symptomatic of this development, as several proposals listed clearly differed from the historical orientation of the Fund: they had a Keynesian flavor, so to speak (FMI, 2010). This revival is not fortuitous. After all, the background to the Keynesian proposal of regulated capitalism was the greatest economic depression of the 20th century, which took place between two World Wars. Keynes foresaw a peaceful and prosperous future, which seemed credible during the "Glorious Thirty" and even prophesized the end of rentier practices. Despite this apparent optimism, his fundamental concern is revealed in his maxim underlining the necessity to save capitalism from capitalists. Therefore, the contradictions of capitalism must be managed if the system were to remain viable.

In comparable but differing terms, which correspond to the peculiarity of underdeveloped capitalism, the utopia of civilizing capitalism in Latin America was embodied in the national-developmental ideology that prospered in the post-World War II period and had the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) as its paramount proponent. Throughout the Cold War, this ideology inspired a plurality of political experiences grounded in the common design to reconcile economic development and social integration, aiming to consolidate nations. Animated by a comparable design, it was not a coincidence that several governments identified with the South American Pink Tide in the 21st century recovered the developmentalist reference, typically exemplified by the neo-developmentalism claimed by the Worker's Party (PT) administrations in Brazil (Mercadante, 2010). Elected in a context of an unfavourable reaction to neoliberalism, the various expressions of this progressive reformism sought the lowest common denominator between globalization and sovereignty in the international sphere, as well as between neoliberalism and integration of the poor at the domestic level. In their own way, they pursued the philosopher's stone of what may be dubbed as an "inclusive neoliberalism," as once a

"dependent development" had been pursued with the expectation that democratic and sovereign nations could emerge from this amalgam (Santos: 2020).

However, when the coronavirus broke out, Latin American progressives were on the back foot. Most countries in the region were led by governments openly aligned with the austerity agenda. These governments are hostile to greater state interventionism, expansionist fiscal policies and capital controls, among other measures closer to the developmentalist ideology revamped by progressivism. In the context of worsening economic and social problems in the region due to the pandemic, in which a supposedly Keynesian revival is underway in developed countries, we question whether a return to progressivism makes sense as a civilizing alternative for Latin America, in the light of an assessment of the recent Pink Tide.

The article follows the following structure. Initially, we problematize the ideology of progress and discuss its resonance in Latin America. Then, we look at the situation of different countries in the context preceding the pandemic. Contrary to understanding the current political moment as a reaction to the Pink Tide, we suggest that the progressivist attempt to contain a historical process of de-socialization within the framework of the structural crisis of capitalism, entailed the use of practices, devices and policies that ended up accelerating this process, which is further elaborated via the Brazilian case. The notions of "accelerationist containment," "regressive progressivism," and "inclusive neoliberalism" are the keys proposed to examine the contradictions of progressivism and to understand why the Pink Tide did not pave the way for a better world. We close the text by establishing a dialogue between the expectations of a Keynesian return motivated by the pandemic and the limits of the progressive landscape to face the structural problems that this unforeseen situation aggravates.

Progress as ideology

The social and economic catastrophes unleashed by the pandemic within the region add to the necessity of questioning the paradigm of progress, which has birthed political ideologies to the right and left of the political spectrum since the 19th century. The philosopher Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) stated that Modernity's notion of progress had become a myth in continuous repetition. In this process, progress ends up implying the opposite of the aspirations declared in its name - aspirations which could only be seriously contemplated if the very concept of progress was put to check (Adorno, 1992).

The actuality of this reflection does not reside only in the fact that the origin of covid-19 and similar pathogens refers to the blind and deleterious way in which men produce goods in the name of progress (Wallace, 2016). Another dimension is also essential. Those who now say that in order to preserve the economy it is “unfortunately” necessary to let the pandemic seize lives, are merely giving voice to a brutality that is repressed in "normal" times. After all, the very economic logic of our society is murderous and suicidal, to the extent that it rejects any social consideration other than the process of endless valorization of capital, which is increasingly precarious and unviable, engulfing everything and everyone. Therefore, despite a widespread feeling that we are approaching the end of the world, progress continues to be erected as an omnipresent force to which everyone must bow.

Perhaps the outrage triggered by the pragmatic cruelty of those who measure costs against lives, blurs the core issue implicit in the concept of progress: the illusion that one could separate the good from the bad - the wheat from the chaff - in relation to the terms in which social reproduction takes place today. The mainstay of this chimera is that well-intentioned and rational conduction of social and economic life would suffice for desirable results to prevail as opposed to undesirable ones. In this way, the fundamental issue inherent in the very nature of progress, which drags and destroys everything, is obliterated.

Historically born of men's conscious domination over nature and their fellow men, progress is reversed into an enormous unconscious power that imposes itself in a heteronomous way on individuals, societies and states. This means that by adhering to the apparently scientific and rational premises of such power, we subordinate society to the uncontrollable character of irrational demands contrary not only to the realization of a good life for people, but also against their own survival. This verdict, if any doubt remains, becomes clear when we confront the technological sophistication of the current forms of production with the difficulties in guaranteeing a minimum health structure for individuals in the face of the global pandemic, as well as with the obstacles to ensure the material subsistence of those who have been left without an income in the face of an economic collapse.

The path of progress, regardless of the ideological color it takes, is the tautological path of accumulation by accumulation, production by production, growth by growth. A civilizing path that subordinates all life to the movement of value and its abstract objectives of endless expansion, obliterating any possibility of subordinating material life

to the conscious designs of society (Kurz, 1993; Menegat, 2019). In other words, the substratum inherent in the concept of progress, its expansive and endless character, is the expansive and endless character of capital itself. Therefore, it does not matter if the dominant pole in each society is the market or the state, as the Soviet and Chinese experiences teach us: regimes equally guided by progress, in this case disguised as the development of productive forces. As István Mészáros (1930-2017) work highlights, the societies produced by the Russian and Chinese revolutions were unable to overcome the mercantilization of labor and life - in short, unable to go beyond capital (Mészáros, 1999). The path of progress, despite the claims of human autonomy in its name, reaffirms the growing impotence of the activity of men and women in the face of the domination of impersonal structures. And it could not be otherwise, since the eagerness for progress implies an adaptation of society to the production of goods and money, as well as to technical, social and environmental relations that converge in the objective of widening indefinitely the scale of this same production.

Progressivism before the Pandemic

A critical appraisal of the Latin American Pink Tide must refer to this universal sense of the concept of progress but must also consider its specific implications for the subcontinent. In the history of the region, there has been a diversity of avatars that resonated with the rhetoric of progress, such as developmentalism, the national project, the quest for national sovereignty, liberal shocks, institutional modernization, the prospect of economic and social convergence with rich countries, among others. However, the dynamic flow of history seems subverted in recent decades. If in the past, progress appeared as a path to build integrated national economies and inclusive wage societies modeled on a Welfare State in Latin America, in the present this trend has been reversed, and it is the typically Latin American ghosts of superfluity and exclusion that are being universalized. This process stems from the capital crisis that has been ongoing since the 1970s, whose nature is not cyclical but structural: a depressive *continuum* incapable of engendering a new round of global and sustainable productive accumulation (Mészáros, 1999). In this context, the tacit bet of the Pink Tide that Latin American history would still be on the side of progress in the 21st century could only be realized as a symbolic north or as a source of legitimization - that is, as ideology (Feldmann, 2020).

To discuss this hypothesis, we will now overview the situation of selected Latin

American countries in the months preceding the coronavirus outbreak. It is observed that a worsening of the social crisis in the region was already underway, which is the background of the exhaustion of progressivism as a way of managing social tensions in the continent. We argue that this is a double exhaustion, to the extent that progressivism has engendered distinct and differentiated perceptions among the ruling classes and among its popular constituency. From the point of view of the ruling classes, progressivism has become dysfunctional to deal with an aggravated crisis, while among those from below, the legitimacy it once had as an alternative civilizing landscape stands drained. In this context, repressive forms of management of explosive social contradictions are being conceived in Latin America, in tune with a global trend where the convergences between neoliberalism and authoritarianism are intensifying. Although the pandemic re-introduces state interventionism and social welfare policies into global political debate and practice, we believe that this fundamental trend will not be reversed: just as a re-edition of Keynesianism is impossible in the 21st century, the developmentalist aspiration that underpinned the Latin American Pink Tide has become a misplaced idea.

We first proceed to examine the situation prior to the pandemic in the two countries where progressivism has taken deeper roots. In Venezuela and Bolivia, constitutions were rewritten at the beginning of the 21st century with the aim of rebuilding nations. In analyzing these countries, we are faced with different paths that have led progressivism to a critical situation in the recent period. Next, we address situations that seem to disprove the end of progressivism: Mexico, Argentina and even Brazil. We suggest that progressivism is not necessarily discarded as an alternative from the standpoint of the establishment, but rather as a landscape of social change. In the latter two cases, as in Uruguay, it is clear that progressive politics has become restorative, because it seeks the impossible revival of an idealized recent past: while the right is changing its skin, progressivism reveals itself, literally, without a future.

Progressivism in Power: Bolivia and Venezuela

We argue that in the crisis of progressivism, political, economic and social aspects converge in different ways in each national conjuncture. In Bolivia, the crisis has exploded through politics. The situation that led to Evo Morales's resignation in November 2019 is a complex issue and a matter of controversy on the left. Without going into the details of the debate, it is essential to clarify some points. First, the

situation that resulted in the overthrow of the president should not be framed as a mere 'left versus right' dispute, as since 2011, the popular base of the government had begun to erode. That year, an indigenous march against the construction of a highway through the TIPNIS natural park and indigenous reserve was brutally repressed, splitting the *Pacto de Unidad* (Pact of Unity) that had brought together the country's main social organizations around the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) [Movement to Socialism] since 2004. At the same time, a significant group of intellectuals, including former top cadres of the government, circulated a *Manifiesto por la recuperación del Proceso de Cambio para el pueblo y con el Pueblo* [Manifesto for the recovery of the Process of Change for the people and with the People].

The government reacted to this fracture in its base in an intolerant manner, persecuting, defaming and dividing organizations and critical leadership. At the same time, it has consolidated alliances with conservative political sectors, agribusiness and multinational corporations that exploit hydrocarbons and minerals. Bluntly put, nobody upstairs was losing money in Morales' Bolivia. In this process, the MAS strengthened its grip on the media, the judiciary, the police and even bolstered the loyalty of the Armed Forces, sealed through high budgets and privileges like full salary on retirement. This power project focused more and more on the figure of Evo Morales, which was devised by Vice President García Linera, the ideologist of the regime, as "evism, the national-popular in action" (García Linera, 2006).

These developments explain the context in which Morales's bid to remove restrictions on presidential re-election through a referendum suffered defeat in February 2016. At that time, numerous popular movements, social organizations and left-wing intellectuals were critical of the government and opposed the proposal. Despite the narrow-margin setback, the president insisted on running. He argued before the country's Constitutional Court that the veto on his candidacy infringed a right guaranteed by Article 23 of the American Convention on Human Rights, to which Bolivia is a signatory. Morales considered his candidacy a human right, above the constitutional norm. It should be remembered that five years earlier, the court had already favored the president by allowing his third candidacy, since the constitution allows for only one re-election. At the time, the argument forwarded was that his first term in 2005 could not be considered under the ambit of said rule as it predated the new constitution. In actuality, Morales ran for his fourth consecutive term in October 2019.

This is the background of the deep unease in various segments of the Bolivian

polity not restrained to the right, as the 2019 elections took place. The counting of votes was suddenly suspended at a time when Morales lead was slightly under 10%, implying the prospect of facing a unified opposition in the coming weeks, as Bolivian law requires 10% advantage of the runner-up to avoid a second round. When the counting resumed Morales was declared victorious in the first round by a narrow margin. However, the malaise burst as the suspicion of fraud triggered an uprising. Although the right was part of it, the streets were swarmed mostly by young people for whom the MAS, in government for the past fifteen years, had become the establishment. Faced with a rebellious police faction, the government appealed to the army which refused to repress the dissidents and "suggested" the resignation of the president. In short, the protests destabilized the government and created a situation that the right wing has been taking advantage of ever since. Looking at the dynamic that led the MAS to its downfall, we see in Bolivia an attempt of progressivism to perpetuate itself in the government in spite of the rules established by itself: we face a mode of monocratic progressivism.

In Venezuela, the origin of the crisis is economic. Its roots go back to the limitations of Bolivarianism to break with what Celso Furtado (1920-2004) described as "underdevelopment with an abundance of foreign exchange" (Furtado, 2008). The path to effect this break proposed diversification of the oil dependent economy, overcoming the "Dutch disease" which essentially disincentivizes national production by making importation an economically sounder alternative. The risk in this scenario is that the country becomes a kind of 'nature parasite', according to the expression coined by Uslar Pietri (1906-2001) in the 1930s.

The economic crisis has three main expressions: inflation, exchange rate mismatch and scarcity of goods. In particular, the disparity between the official exchange rate and the black exchange rate, in an economy that imports everything it consumes, had a disruptive social effect. In a situation of scarcity of hard currency aggravated by the fall in international oil prices, basic items were priced according to the black-market rate, sometimes illegally, because said items were imported by the official rate, which then caused prices to skyrocket. At the time of the elections in December 2015, the black exchange rate was over 100 times the official rate (approximately 1 dollar to 7 *bolivars* in the official and 1 to 800 in the black market) and then onwards, it only rose further. In 2020, the dollar was buying 250.000 *bolivares* in the black market, as opposed to 10 as per the official rate. In this context, an episodic situation, in which many were making money speculating in the retail market became a

reality in which everyone needed dollars to defend their standard of living. For example, people who would fill the petrol tanks of their cars in Venezuela and then proceed to sell the petrol in Colombia daily were earning more than a university professor. In short, the Venezuelan economy faced a reality where work, that is gains from work, was not enough to ensure social reproduction.

This is the background to the corrosion of Bolivarianism's popularity, which became evident at the polls in December 2015, when the government suffered an overwhelming defeat, electing less than 1/3 of parliamentarians. Bolivarianism thus was confronted by a dilemma. If the election results were accepted, an absolute majority would give the opposition room to manoeuvre in order to revoke Maduro's mandate, thereby threatening Bolivarianism. On the other hand, not recognizing the result would imply bypassing the institutionality on which Bolivarianism had relied until then. It should be recalled the past electoral victory record of Chavez where he won 16 of the 17 elections and plebiscites held in the 13 years he was in power. The government undertook the second route and this course ended up dividing even its supporters. Those who believe that the ends justify the means, argued that it was necessary to avoid the fate of the *Sandinistas* [Sandinistas] in Nicaragua, who handed over power in 1990 to rivals who had then proceeded to dismantle previous hard-won advances. On the other hand, others understand that the means contradict the ends and that Bolivarianism had moved away from any aspiration for change with which it originally identified: in Edgardo Lander's synthesis, the longer Maduro remains in power, the less there will be left of *chavismo* [chavism] (Lander: 2019).

In this process, the government has radicalized the alliance with the military, who command the vice-presidency, several state administrations and ministries, but also state oil company *Pdvsa*, foreign trade, food import and distribution, purchase of weapons, mining projects and various forms of smuggling (Jácome, 2018). Meanwhile, the country continues to plunge deeper into crisis: in May 2019, a central bank report estimated inflation for the previous twelve months at 282,000%. In that month, the family food basket was calculated at 1,218,147.82 *bolivares*, while the current minimum wage was forty thousand *bolivares*, implying that a minimum wage per day was needed to properly feed a family. The fall in GDP in the last five years surpassed 50%, which is worse than Poland between 1939 and 1943 in the middle of World War II and Nazi occupation, when the GDP had fallen 44%. At this juncture, it is estimated that more than four million Venezuelans have left the country in recent years (Cenda, 2019;

Prodavinci, 2019; Rivas Alvarado, 2019; Sutherland, 2019; 2020). In Venezuela, the only case across the Pink Tide where elite reaction has reinforced the government's commitment to change, progressivism has lasted longer and taken deeper roots. However, at present, we observe that it has unleashed an unprecedented social disaster.

Progressivist Hope: Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay

The above scenario could be expanded to include the Ecuadorian process, where the conversion of *Alianza País* [Country Alliance] into an austerity party and the internal disputes between its leaders, resulted in a modality of progressive transformism in the Gramscian sense of the term, that is, transformation understood as the incorporation of the opposition, into order. Instead, we will discuss the hope that still lies in progressivism, the most important expression of which is the Mexican episode of late progressivism. In fact, this is an important and interesting case, particularly when contrasted with Brazil. The key question, from the point of view of our analysis, is whether the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) in 2018 should be interpreted as a victory for social change or as an alternative for crisis management.

From this perspective, two observations arise. Firstly, it is important to note that in all countries where progressivism has not yet reached the presidency, left-wing fronts finished second or third place in the last elections (Peru, Colombia, Chile), and in the most recent one in Mexico, the left won. Secondly, it is pertinent to examine the context of this victory, which has as its backdrop the monumental Mexican crisis, explained in the precariousness of labour that drives immigration; in the violence, between drug trafficking and feminicides; in the agrarian drama and the indigenous issue; in obesity and diabetes as major public health issues; and so on (Modonesi, 2018).

Without going into further details, it is possible to grasp the depth of the Mexican challenges in a comparison with the context in which Lula was elected in 2002. Like Brazil, we find all the problems of a Latin American country that has become industrialized, associated with inequality and dependence. But in the Mexican case, it should be added that a high level of penetration of organized crime pervaded in society and politics (as Brazil did not have at the time of Lula), and an official bondage with the United States, in the form of the North American Free Trade Agreement, in force since 1994 (NAFTA, recently renamed the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement). Far from an agreement restricted to the commercial sphere, NAFTA has effected all spheres of Mexican life, from agrarian policy to food standards (subsidized US transgenic crops

that have invaded Mexican markets), security policy (between *Plan Mérida* and the "War on Drugs" enacted in 2006), industrial and wage policy in a *maquiladora* economy, the migration issue, which affects the relationship with Central American neighbours (for which AMLO has been harshly criticised) and so on.

López Obrador made it clear that he will not alter the framework of this relationship, and on the contrary, his team participated in the renegotiation of the agreement even before he took office. It may therefore be inferred that the room for change in the country is narrow. The fact that AMLO's party *Morena* has a majority in congress that the Brazilian PT never enjoyed, does not alter the picture. The Bolivian MAS, Kirchnerism in Argentina and the Uruguayan *Frente Amplio* [Broad Front] also had parliamentary majorities in the past, which nonetheless, did not translate into political radicalization.

What may be seen in Mexico at this juncture is a kind of counter-dance with Brazil. While in the South American country the election of Bolsonaro points to the end of the New Republic that succeeded the dictatorship, in Mexico the pattern of state party domination embodied in the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) [Institutional Revolutionary Party], stemming from the Mexican Revolution in early 20th century, seems to have exhausted itself. Interestingly this pattern has modified itself from 2000 on to include a second conservative party, namely the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) [National Action Party], resulting in an arrangement known to Mexicans as "PRIAN". Overall, the Mexican experience indicates that late progressivism may still be functional from the point of view of the establishment, particularly in countries where it has not yet reached the presidency. However, its room for manoeuvre for crisis management tends to decrease, as we are likely to see in the Argentine case.

In contrast to Brazil, where Rousseff was deposed in the midst of a controversial impeachment in 2016 and Lula was arrested two years later, the *macrismo-kirchnerismo* alternation in Argentina took place within the framework of bourgeois normality. As it lost the elections in 2015, Kirchnerism played the role of a responsible opposition for four years and now is back to *Casa Rosada* [Pink House], although in a vice presidential capacity. Sure enough, the way it lost at the polls and accepted defeat in 2015 facilitated its return in 2019. It is debatable to what extent Alberto Fernandez's victory at the head of a coalition can be understood as a return of progressivism, not in the least because in all the disagreements with Cristina Kirchner during her presidency Fernandez had taken more conservative stands. But from a Kirchnerist point of view, Cristina's retreat to

accept the vice-presidential candidacy was a masterstroke, culminating in the greatest possible victory under the circumstances. In any case, kirchnerism is still alive and active, in the state as well as outside it. In the same vein, when *Frente Amplio* was defeated by a narrow margin in the 2019 elections in Uruguay, then President Tabaré Vázquez rushed to clarify that his party "will not work to bring down this government (Lacalle Pou)" and that *Frente Amplio* "has to demonstrate that it is a serious and responsible political force" (El País, 2019). The left of the order respectfully awaits the moment to return.

Argentina and Uruguay embody in an explicit way a responsible progressivism that presents itself as an alternative for the establishment, a position that the PT aims to recover in Brazil. The party's expectation is that Bolsonaro will dissipate like a nightmare and elections will be held again within bourgeois normality, in which it has always had a competitive candidate. However, this politics tends to lose effectiveness on its own terms because the ruling class approach to the management of social tensions in Brazil has changed, making *lulismo* anachronistic. As it loses ground in reality, *lulismo* risks transmuting itself into a salvific bet: the hope that the popular leader will return before the final judgement to avoid the apocalypse, a *pathos* exhorted by the respected leader of the Landless Movement (MST), João Pedro Stédile: "Lula must be our Moses, convincing the people to cross the Red Sea. There is no other person who can fulfill this role" (Stédile, 2019). In a time of decreasing expectations, different nuances of messianic progressivism channel the expectation of change towards the past, mobilizing a population that prays for the lesser evil, both in their lives and in politics, bowing their heads with resignation to the Latin American version of the end of history.

The contradictions of progressivism

How to understand the misfortune of the progressivists who remain in power as well as the ebb of the Pink Tide? Far from a presumed reaction to social achievements previously advanced, our analysis focuses on the dynamics underlying progressivism and its inherent contradictions. We explain the downfall of progressivism by itself: by the world that the Pink Tide produced, and by its movement. Under this lens, it is explained why instead of opening paths towards a better world, the tide has been succeeded by something worse. Our hypothesis is that despite the subjective intentions and wishes of its leaders, the practices of containment of neoliberal desocialization implemented throughout the Pink Tide do not suspend the collapse and the

contradictions that emanate from it but accelerate them. This approach allows us to understand why the degradation of the social fabric and the convergence between neoliberalism and authoritarianism are not limited to governments like those led by Bolsonaro, Duque or Piñera. Although by different routes, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua have also evolved in an anti-democratic direction, while López Obrador hesitates to disarm the repressive devices of the war on drugs that he inherited. The desocializing movement is universal and progressivism corroborates with it *malgré soi*.

While the Pink Tide was erecting the perspective of a future, intending to settle accounts with past failures (national projects, developmentalism, Latin American unity and so forth), it engendered what can be described as a provisional containment of social disintegration in the present, in which the past and not the future were structurally reinforced. This is not to deny that, in different ways and intensities, the prospect of national recovery was on the agenda. But concretely, this resumption was rather a façade, which provided an ideological rearguard for governments while reality moved in a different direction. Paradoxically, the popularity and legitimacy of the Pink Tide governments were underpinned by its capacity to conduct, in a more democratic and inclusive way, the neoliberal reason.

Judged by objective facts and not by the desired objectives, the attempt to resume the building of nations resulted in its opposite. Thus, instead of reindustrialization and the recovery of what Celso Furtado has called mechanisms of control of the national economic space, we have witnessed a regressive specialization and reprimarization of Latin American economies, the denationalization of key sectors, as well as the accentuation of the dependency on international capital flows (Gaudichaud & Modonesi & Webber, 2020; Svampa, 2013). The subordination of the economy to a short-term rationale is the antithesis of the need for long-term articulation presumed in any attempt of economic planning. At the same time, the structural impossibility for a stable resumption of productive accumulation of capital has meant that attempts to stimulate the "animal spirit" of entrepreneurs have only aroused speculative and dispossession devices that in Latin America, remain as the privileged paths of accumulation namely, concessions and tax exemptions to the private sector, the expansion of land, real estate or resource-based income, profitable mergers and acquisitions of companies, the service of public debt, not to mention direct and systemic corruption.

At the same time, and yet, in another sense, we can say that this national (re) construction was simulated because it was based on the increasingly simulated dynamics

of contemporary capitalism itself. From this point of view, Latin America, for a short time "benefited" from what Lohoff and Trenkle (2014) have called an "inverted capitalism" in which, unlike in the past, it is not the credit that fosters the expanded reproduction of capital: on the contrary, the expanded reproduction is only sparked when there is a previous expansion of credit bubbles. It was this new global *modus operandi* of credit multiplication and fictitious capital that amplified capital inflows into Latin America, and boosted Chinese growth, which in turn boomed commodity exports that gave support to the Pink Tide prosperity.

Accelerationist containment: the Brazilian case

This reasoning does not limit itself to outlining the architecture of progressivism, noting that its foundation was doomed beforehand as it depended on an abundance of cash flows that at some point would flow back. In reality, what enhanced the ongoing collapse is the concrete meaning of what is to "buy time", to use Streeck's term (2013), in Latin America at this juncture. The key issue is that the means by which one can still try to contain the collapse are, at the same time, accelerators of this collapse. In other words, despite any good intentions of progressivist rulers, the administration of the dismantling of wage citizenship today implies practices that accelerate disruptive social dynamics. In short, they imply an accelerationist containment dynamic.

Let us examine some aspects of the issue from the concrete example of Brazil. As president, Lula sent General Augusto Heleno to command the UN peace mission in Haiti. This participation was conceived within the framework of the idea of making Brazil a "global player". However, the general and his troops returned thinking in a different direction that is, how to prevent Brazil from becoming Haiti. It is no secret that the Brazilian military saw the island as an opportunity for training and experimentation. Back home, many were convinced that the army should engage in missions similar to those of the UN, but on a domestic level. On the other hand, the demand for *Garantia da Lei e da Ordem* [Law and Order Assurance] missions grew by politicians who were eager to show a hard hand throughout the country, in turn strengthening the bargaining power of the military (Harig, 2018). Having turned down Bolsonaro's invitation to join his plate as Vice President, Heleno now uses this repertoire to command the Security Office of the Presidency of the Republic, a body directly linked to the presidency and responsible for intelligence services. Another veteran of Haiti, General Fernando Azevedo e Silva, assumed control of the Ministry of Defense, a ministerial office created

in 1999 to reinforce civilian control over the Armed Forces and which, until Michel Temer, had never been occupied by a military man. This was not Azevedo e Silva's debut in a high level civilian position though, as in 2013 he had been appointed by Rousseff to command the Olympic Public Authority.

Between the ambition of becoming a global player and the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, the links between the ideal of a powerful Brazil and the armed management of social life go beyond a civilian endorsement of military action. Its backdrop is the blurring of boundaries between the militarization of life and social assistance, which were mixed like sand and cement in the PT years, in an attempt to hold together a society that is(was) falling apart. According to the penetrating analysis of Paulo Arantes, the Brazilian military operates in a world where war has become an "armed social work," and the key concern is not to win battles but to pacify populations (Bacevich, 2010). In this context, military interventions in Haiti, as in Rio de Janeiro, assume the guise of social work, whose success depends on the residents' perception of the legitimacy of the state, from which assistance but also punishment emanates. The other side of these "counterinsurgency operations revamped as a public policy of pacification," is the conversion of human rights into government techniques and ultimately into public policies as well (Arantes, 2014, p. 368).

Thus, the governability guaranteed by the police and the army in Rio de Janeiro, a laboratory for the militarization of life in the PT years, has as its complement a generation of militants trained for decades in the discussion, formulation and implementation of public policies, acting as representatives of the state, the party, NGOs or the community. In this formative process, which accompanied the sedimentation of a "PT way of governing" after the dictatorship, a potential insurgent citizenship was modeled on the requirements of a regulated citizenship. Modalities of participation founded on state institutions drained the popular and class bias of social activism: popular participation was transmuted into citizen participation, configuring a set of techniques that paradoxically mobilize the citizenry to demobilize. In this context, to say that in the PT years Brazilians have never been so participatory (71 councils and 74 conferences in the *lulista* period alone) implies recognizing that they have never been so governed (Arantes, 2014, p.431). At the same time, the "counterinsurgent pacification" aims to transform the residents (the "community") into entrepreneurs, forging in the process a "simulacrum of an active and propositional civil society", an ambition shared by the State, Business, the Third Sector and communities. Therefore, the simulated

national building corresponds to a make-believe civil society. According to Arantes, this process of endless self- entrepreneurship produces a false commodity, which goes by several names: "citizenship, inclusion, participation, etc.". The novelty is that now, the police actually holds the door open to this "citizenship market" (Arantes, 2014, 374).

In short, coercion and social service have joined hands in PT's Brazil to produce not peace but pacification, which in a world of decreasing expectations, extends the logic of the lesser evil to the favelas. Overall, it is a matter of convincing the population that the benefits of submitting to state authority outweigh the costs, that is to say: that police oppression is preferable to the oppression of drug dealers, or the more organized one which comes from corrupt militias. In any case, what is evident is that the PT inclusiveness was never the opposite of the *Bolsonarista* punitivism, but it assumed it, complemented it and reinforced it. And vice versa. This is blatant in the context of the pandemic, as Bolsonaro extended the reach of the *Bolsa-Família* (cash transfer program from the PT years). Soon after, while under pressure from both Congress and the public his government announced an emergency aid that pays four times more money to four times more people than *Bolsa-Família* itself (Castelani: 2020).

The contradiction of this logic, in which the attempt to contain the desocializing movement does not so much prevent its acceleration as it reinforces what it intends to contain, can be seen on multiple levels. In the Brazilian case, superficial illustrations include for example, the former president of Bank Boston, Henrique Meirelles who resigned as a *Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira* (PSDB) [Brazilian Social Democrat Party] congressman in 2003 to lead the Central Bank for eight years under Lula and later served as minister of the economy under Temer. Another instance is the attempt by the first Lula administration to establish direct connections with opportunistic and corrupt congressmen affiliated to small parties, which unleashed the *Mensalão* (monthly bribe for congress members) scandal in 2005 and could only be appeased by giving more positions to the large PMDB, forcing the party to appoint the future coup-plotter Michel Temer twice as vice-president on Rousseff's plate. The support extended by neopentecostalist religious leaders to the PT administrations resulted in setbacks in the behavioral agenda and the appointment of evangelical ministers like Marcelo Crivella, who in 2016 defeated in Rio de Janeiro one of the few candidates from the left to arrive in the second round in the mayoral elections is yet another instance of this contradiction in practice. The construction companies, who did not hesitate to send to jail through real or fake accusations, the same PT politicians who paved the way for

them to earn money like never before; not to mention the young people who saw their precarious jobs as a transitional phase of a social upliftment that passed through credit and the private university, until they turned their hope into hate when hit by the economic crisis and unemployment; or finally, the social movements involved in policies aimed to neutralize their willingness to change instead of implementing change (such as agrarian or urban reform), ultimately resulted in a popular camp divided, weakened and discredited thirteen years later.

In short, the military, the banks, the PMDB, Vice-President Michel Temer, neopentecostalism, the contractors, entrepreneurship, passivity, have all been nurtured and cultivated, at some point, by the PT's governments. In this context, the most appropriate image of the relationship between the defenestration of PT and the rise of Bolsonaro is not a 180-degree turn, but a metastasis, as corrosive forces and interests whose power was never challenged but seemed contained but under the PT, now spread uncontested throughout the social fabric (Dos Santos & Oliveira & Perruso, 2020).

Analyzed through the prism of accelerationist containment, it is evident that the political change carried out by progressivism has also reinforced a political logic impervious to change. It is not merely a question of denying the importance of overcoming the *Punto Fijo* [Fix Point] Pact in Venezuela, the unprecedented political prominence of the indigenous people in Bolivia, or the significance of a worker being elected to the presidency of Brazil. But it should be noted that by concentrating its drive for change on the realm of parliamentary politics, progressivism renounced its challenge to capital in its "substantive sphere of socioeconomic reproductive operation" (Mészáros, 2003, p. 29).

As a result, the fundamental determinations of capital as a metabolic system have been strengthened. In this context, the dynamics of accelerationist containment ultimately resulted in the deepening of the neoliberal reason (Dardot & Laval, 2010). The economic and social containment aspired to by progressivism, intending to increase the control and generalization of monetary flows in society (via conditional transfers and credit), inadvertently generated its opposite, namely, a greater control and generalization of the imperatives of money for the entire social fabric. Instead of generating an expected collective and national uplifting, the original impulse induced by the influx of money under forms of inclusive neoliberalism unfolded in the competition of all against all, further dissolving any class solidarity, within the framework of a profound desocialization. Hence the reversal: the social processes triggered by the Pink Tide,

despite its antineoliberal rhetoric, resulted in the reinforcement of neoliberal reason, in which relations between individuals are reduced to mechanisms of monetary reward and punishment of increasingly atomized people. The false solution of social antagonisms during the ephemeral prosperity amplifies the intensity of these same antagonisms at the moment when the simulation is dissolved. Then, the process that appeared to be inclusive and egalitarian through a relative widening of access to money, comes up against the superfluity of individuals and the concentration of wealth. As a result of the insoluble impasse of economic reproduction in contemporary Latin American societies, the autophagic dynamic is accelerated: the possible inclusion under neoliberalism aggravates desocialization.

Concluding remarks

In the 20th century, Keynesianism proposed a solution to capitalist crises based on state activism and coordination, a solution that proved to be feasible and lasting in the post-war period in the central countries, precisely because it went hand in hand with a broad process of expanded reproduction and valorization of capital. However, since the 1970's, progress materializes in desperate attempts to "buy time" (Streeck, 2013) that only have some legitimacy because they present themselves as the only and inescapable way to preserve income and avoid even greater destruction. Even an eventual vaccine for the pandemic will not cure the systemic disease that results from the fact that there is no prospect of a minimally sustainable resumption of valorization and expanded reproduction of capital.

Similarly, the Latin American Pink Tide experience is embedded in this structural crisis, which transfigured the possibilities of civilizing capitalism in the periphery. Far from the expectations of a national project pointing to the future, progressivism in the 21st century has become the mere administration of a present that is cumulatively worsening, radicalizing the traits of the "development myth" described in Celso Furtado's work in the end of the 20th century: unviable national societies, increasingly exposed to modern techniques and global patterns of consumption that are constantly changing, and which could only be reproduced by engendering a growing process of social and regional marginalization (Furtado, 1974; 1992).

But this is precisely where the dilemma lies: the success of progressivism in terms of social management and economic inclusion could only be set in motion by making the dynamics of social life more and more dependent on an individualizing logic.

And seen from this point of view, it is a logic that is less and less... social. Hence the vulnerable and ephemeral nature of a process that is fading. It is explained that regardless of the subjective wills of those who governed, what took place was an inclusion for the reproduction of competition and everyone's struggle against everyone in the world of labour. In other words: an inclusion for the true essence of neoliberalism, that is, an inclusion that could only engender new exclusions and all the social resentment that comes from it.

In reaction to the pandemic, we are once again faced with containment policies exhorted as indispensable, but which can only replace and further accelerate the blind and endless dynamics of production by production, of accumulation by accumulation. A dynamic that, incidentally, is never questioned by Keynesians or progressivists, but which is not only economically and socially unsustainable, but also aggravates environmental destruction and the risk of new pandemics. For this very reason, what had been the core of the ideology of progress as a historical landscape, today can only consist of pure appearance, whose content is the opposite of what is advocated. The aspiration to shape and conduct economic relations from an ascending perspective gives way today to a process of downhill descent in which, what appears to be the autonomous and discretionary action of the State is nothing more than its ingrained heteronomy and uncontrollability. Therefore, both in the centre and in the periphery, the State can only act as a fireman in the face of a constantly expanding fire.

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