

RESEÑAS

Coronavírus e a Luta de Classes

Mike Davis et al., 2020, Brasil: Terra sem Amos, 48 páginas.

Reseñado por: Raquel Requena Rachid

Estudiante de la Facultad de Educación en la Universidad de São Paulo

Considering the impacts of the pandemic phenomena that is being faced globally, *Coronavirus and the Class Struggle* consolidates articles from remarkable writers who have a peculiar critical perspective about capitalism and shared their considerations regarding this global crisis from the class struggle standpoint. In light of a watershed moment anti-capitalist alternatives such as ecosocialism should be deeply studied for proposals that overcome a vast exploitation mechanism.

Mike Davis – an American writer, political activist, urban theorist and historian – starts his considerations stating coronavirus crisis is a monster fed by capitalism. This economic system makes the catastrophe's spectrum even worse by exposing historical failures from the health care structure, which suffered a decreased of almost 40% hospital beds in the United States between the two last decades of 20th century.

Both private and public health sectors had their composition compromised. In the first one, emergency medicine suffered impacts based on profit expectancy, while the second was harmed by neoliberal austerity and public spending contention.

The current outbreak instantaneously exposed social disparity, making it possible for the rich to work and learn from home also eventually relying on expensive health insurances while low-income workers, unemployed and homeless people are easily forgotten.

Davis also emphasizes the highly competitive characteristic of the private health care industry, which is based on low salaries and lack of staff while cutting all costs possible (questionably, from a strict legal perspective). He defends an international public health structure recognizing the difficulty of dealing with actors that monopolize the health assistance stressing a profit perspective. For him it should be replaced by an international socialist solidarity.

In his turn David Harvey – a large known Britain professor an geographer who works with many aspects linked to urban geography - mentions that considering capital modifies the environmental conditions in order to guarantee its own reproduction, it would be reasonable to understand the virus mutation and the harm it represents depending on human actions that lead to this consequence; it would surely have a connection with the environment in which the virus gained relevancy, a highly dense and reproducible place.

Regarding ways of dealing preventively with COVID-19, for him the pharmaceutical industry would not have interest on researching for a non- profit cause in advance considering the more ill we are (and the more cure they bring), the more money they make.

He mentions this crisis scenario is pumped with commercial chains disruption, unemployment, labor precariousness. A huge part of the capitalist consumerism is not working properly at these conditions and the compensatory consumerism is interrupted (alienated workers seeking for energy recovery thought monetary expenditure). He highlights measures are being mainly adopted in a local sphere by governments that deal with lack of public employees.

Looking at this picture, the convenient legend of a democratic infectious disease does not stand once current inequalities are scandalously evidenced by the class privilege. The working class that is more exposed to the virus damages could soon wake up from the “we are all together” rhetoric verifying that there is something wrong.

Alain Bihr – French sociologist author of many books and known by studies about the extreme-right in France - complements this assertion rejecting the exceptional character used to qualify the pandemic, which remembers us about the public health financial strangulation policy. Public hospitals are victims of the liberal medicine attack, having their spaces reduced in a clear political decision to benefit the private investment. He mentions that the practical failure of the neoliberal policies provides us opportunities to denounce its ideological fundamentals requesting health as a public good through anti-capitalist measures.

Raúl Zibechi – journalist, writer and activist dedicated to social movement’s analysis in Latin America - brings a critic to the surveillance and control aspects intensified by this

crisis mentioning that global elites are using this epidemic as a laboratory of social engineering.

Also reinforcing the non-exceptional situation, Alain Badiou – French philosopher, dramatist and novelist largely known by his militancy and immigrants defense - mentions that this kind of situation shows as especially “neutral” on a political level and the lesson to be taken is that the real changes need to be thought during the quarantine associated with a communist perspective.

For Slavoj Zizek – Slovenian philosopher and professor - the recent occurrences uncovered an ideological virus that were asleep at the society framed by false news, conspiracy theories and racism. He mentions that fortunately this experience will lead society to alternatives against capitalism emphasizing how tragical it is to need a huge scale chaos to think about replacements.

The challenge he points out is the opportunity to rethink industries such as the automotive, which reinforces an obsession for individual vehicles. Zizek concludes supporting a radical shift to the global capitalism, stating civil liberties cannot be appreciated in a system close to its collapse.

Taking some of the arguments highlighted above as incentives to personal considerations, it is significant to debate how the public machine is more and more being coopted to deviate public resources directly to the private sector, which is not a new mechanic. An example of health rights being auctioned by the neoliberal State is Medicaid policy in the United States, based on a partnership between governmental entities for private insurance coverage, whilst premitting the opportunity to strengthen public policies arrangement.

The weakening methods that tear apart collective resources are not innovations and they remind us globally about how capitalism depends on the States to survive. When we are confronted with times of pandemic these non-recent tactics should mobilize our reactions in order to reject profit as part of social right implementation gears.

Specifically referring to private health companies, the text mentions about the risk-based approach they decide to adopt paying eventual penalties while prevent their operations from

costs increase. Also, along with this method comes an idea covered by Alain Bihr regarding Health Capital as a result of Human Capital, bringing the notion of health as an investment.

Regarding the ideological virus mentioned by Zizek and making an analysis as a Brazilian citizen, coronavirus intensified the ultraright movement that has Jair Bolsonaro as its main reference. As a reinforcement of his conservative and authoritarian positions he is denying the virus seriousness while defending a liberal economic stability above all other matters, also clamming for divine archetypes in order to guarantee support from his electorate that gained social media as a dispute environment. His government and supporters (along with social media robots) enhance fake news, use racist metaphors to refer to China, make public demonstrations against the self-isolation, support guidelines favoring labor precariousness among other irresponsible measures.

As a retrospective it is urgent to point out that the country social guarantees are being dismantled direct and stubbornly since the parliamentary coup orchestrated against Dilma Roussef. It shows a phenomena of ultraliberal and misogynist roots dealing with a pandemic in a country with considerable dimensions, betting on the psychological terror while reinforces the shortage of public resources and the necessity of saving the economy from this viral threat (which was depreciated in its destructive power by the president, fact that astonished even to central-right ones).

All in all, this article compendium provides important views and extremely qualified left-wing references to face a moment of uncertainty and to reflect upon alternatives that can disturb capitalism in an instable period. Nevertheless, and as an alert, it is extremely relevant to mention how capitalism survives from crisis context implementing ideas that were not acceptable before a chaotic momentum.

Examples are massive considering the surveillance apparatus built around location-tracking methods that would not be evoked outside this context and, despite of its eventual local based legal legitimacy, remind us about informative auto determination and the vulnerabilities of the personal data flows between government and the private initiative. Concerns permeate the monetary interests on huge data bases and authoritarian tendencies that could manipulate information for censorship purposes.

Considering several experiences which are being implemented around the globe (and questioned by civil society), Google Apple Contact Tracing (GACT) platform serves as an example. Regarding it Hoepman (2020) states:

Instead of an app, the technology is pushed down the stack into the operating system layer creating a Bluetooth-based contact tracing platform. This means the technology is available all the time, for all kinds of applications. Contact tracing is therefore no longer limited in time or limited in use purely to trace and contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This means that two very important safeguards to protect our privacy are thrown out of the window.

Privacy is ‘protected’ using a so called decentralized approach. There is no central server collecting which devices have been in close contact to each other. Instead, each phone over time collects the (ephemeral) identifiers of all other phones (whether an iPhone or an Android) in its vicinity. When a user turns out to be infected by the corona virus, the phone (using the contact tracing app) only publishes its own identifier, so all other phones can locally check that they have been in close contact with this device (using the local database of identifiers they saw recently). However any decentralized scheme can be turned into a centralized scheme by forcing the phone to report to the authorities that it was at some point in time close to the phone of an infected person. In other words, certain governments or companies — using the decentralized framework developed by Apple and Google — can create an app that (without users being able to prevent this) report the fact that they have been close to a person of interest in the last few weeks.

This is a mechanism unthought until now which gains strength and easy legitimacy in times like ours, elevating surveillance levels without a robust transparency and public debate.

Other clear example about this phenomenon of arguments that are legitimated extraordinarily is labor flexibility on the global south. The president of Brazil has decided by decree (n. 936/2020) that the working journey can be reduced during the isolation period accompanied by salary reduction, also giving employers the possibility to suspend the employment contract for 2(two) months – which represents the continuity of the working bond with the prerogative of suspending salaries during this period. Indeed, an evident illustration on how the State can under “exceptional” circumstances exploit the most vulnerable ones in a notorious unveiling of class struggle.

Furthermore, despite the noticeable decrease of pollution through the shutting down industrial activity and temporarily slashing air pollution levels around the world, it does not mean that the environmental exploitation activities are lowered as well. Recent tragical

news in Brazil showed the delay of one of the largest mining companies on suspending its activities when the country declared a calamitous national state also noticing illegal mining in indigenous lands during the quarantine. Both events show us how the ecologic exploitation is well rooted (within capitalism) and will not slow down without struggle.

Regardless of all catastrophic foreshadowing about capitalism and clear evidences about the planet exhaustion an anti-capitalist movement did not rise until now promoting a global new political direction, even though there are national groups worldwide denouncing the economic system unviability. If we assume that the chaos can intensify exploitation it could likewise result in an anti-systemic alternative that associates the Marxist critics and a socialist choice to the ecological critics of the productivism.

There is a very intense academic debate related to the ecological matters and the space they occupy on Marx and Engels constructions, which is certainly a needed discussion on theoretical terms. Some of the specialists stand for a position that neglects ecological matters would represent a central aspect on the Marxist theory assumptions, even assuming Marxism is fundamental to a radical ecological matrix. Others do understand that the incipient ecological worries are condensed by Marx in his critics.

Anyway, apart from a strict theoretical debate, socialism and ecology do have common objectives regarding the questions they pose to the production as an end in itself. Ecosocialism would be a fountain of solutions to the civilization crisis, also denying the “clean capitalism”. It is a current of ecological thought and action that consider the fundamental acquisitions from Marxism refuting the productivism and denouncing the green capitalism as advertising manipulation.

In order to reach an ecologically rational Society based on the democratic control, the collective property of the means of production is necessary. This would be the definition of a new productive forces structure as common good of the society. A scenario in which the profit micro rationality would be replaced by a social and ecological macro rationality, in adoption of a radical ethics that attacks the roots of this capitalist society in order to preserve the responsibility principle professed by Hans Jonas.

This turnaround depends on political decisions benefiting “to be” than “to have” through historical process permeated by an immense educational challenge. Coronavirus exposed the systemic vulnerabilities abruptly: low investment into public health (what reveals the believe on private assistance as access strategy) reinforced by austerity for a long time (time sufficient to the consolidation of health as a monopoly investment) and followed by a novel demonstration of the loss socialization.

While the working class is not helped on the same measure as the huge banks, as an example, it must deal with the public health vulnerabilities without knowing if this bill will be slaughtered in future deprivations. Even in the face of a sanitary dilemma that affects all the globe, there is no systemic change on its way. Capital forces still aggressive on lacerating labor rights and posing profit over life.

The calamity we are facing has direct connections with an abusive treatment to the nature (which permeates a consumption model backed on animal slavery). The dispute at stake indicates that the solutions will be still based on liberal assumptions and human speciesism.

Ecosocialism urges in front of a global and indiscriminate sanitary crisis, that reinforces social and environmental inequalities.

References

- Davis, M., et al (2020). *Coronavirus and the class struggle*. Brazil: Terra sem Amos. Retrieved from <https://terrasemamos.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/coronavc3adrus-e-a-luta-de-classes-tsa.pdf>
- Gudynas, Eduardo (2019). *Nature Rights. Biocentric Ethics and environmental policies*. Brazil: Elefante.
- Hoepman, J.H. (2020). *A critical look at the EU approach to contact tracing apps*. Retrieved from <https://blog.xot.nl/2020/04/19/google-apple-contact-tracing-gact-a-wolf-in-sheeps-clothes/>
- Jonas, H. (2015). *Responsibility Principle. An essay of an ethics for the technological civilization*. Brazil: Contraponto.
- Klein, N. (2007). *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Canada: Random House of Canada.
- Löwy, M. (2014). *What is Ecosocialism?* Brazil: Cortez.