

Deconstructing Neoliberal Hegemony

State and health: maintenance of capitalism

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Abstract

Nowadays one of the fights of the working class is maintenance and/or construction of a good public health care – and by public we mean a health care provided by state. Generally, it is a struggle that working class fight because the underlying thought is that state is a neutral element in capitalist mode of production and that it must comply with demands of all citizens – from the poorest to the richest, without discrimination. We are going to discuss here that the state is not a neutral entity, but an instrument created by the capitalist mode of production and necessary for its maintenance. In this line of thought, public health is a way for maintenance of the body of workers, a commodity that have use value for capital and its exploitation is fundamental to capitalism. It is provided by the state because health, although is considered a private issue, is central to capitalism, so it needs to be taken care of, and the instrument to do that is the state.

Introduction

Nowadays one of the fights of the working class is maintenance and/or construction of a good public health care – and by public we mean a health care provided by state. Generally, it is a struggle that working class fight because the underlying thought is that state is a neutral element in capitalist mode of production and that it must comply with demands of all citizens – from the poorest to the richest, without discrimination. In a way, we agree with this fight, but is the state really a neutral entity? We are going to discuss here, briefly, that it is not. So, is hoping that everything is provided by the state the solution for working class struggles?

In this paper we are dealing with the relationship between state and health, but we think that the arguments brought here can be used to discuss state in general and the

different fights that exist inside the working class that have as goal state providing things that are considered rights of every person.

State and health: intertwined

It is in the middle of the eighteenth century that doctrinal social discourses on health arise as a form of disciplining bodies and constitution of interventions on subjects, and good health is circumscribed to the moral sphere or to a State Medical Policy. This discipline is necessary, since the body acquires a new social meaning, of “anatomophysiological structure” (Schraiber, 1989, p. 67) – different from previous modes of production – but a structure amid reified social relations, a structure that has certain social uses, a body that expresses itself as a work force, “whose maintenance and recovery is central to guarantee its productive activity”, that is, “it acquires the meaning of a use value for capital” (Schraiber 1989, p. 69).

The disciplining of this commodity labor force occurred in a variety of ways, such as a new education (school becomes the place of education), a new hygiene, a new morality, among others. In the words of Thompson (2015), it was sought to create a new culture that allowed the consolidation of a new rhythm of work coming from the Industrial Revolution – that must be based on the machine of industry – as, for example, paid weekly, causing workers to have certain hours and certain days working in the factories to get what is necessary to survive. According to Rubin (2014, p. 45):

The brutal measures against vagabondage and laws determining the maximum value of wages were attempts by the governments of the time to convert these disqualified social elements into a disciplined and obedient class of salaried workers who, for a pittance, offered their work to a young and growing capitalism.

Moreover, as Rubin (2014) shows, at that time classical economists, seeking to decipher the functioning of capitalist society, come to the conclusion that labor is the generator of wealth (Adam Smith) and that the increase in wages generates a fall in profits (David Ricardo), with profit being achieved in the last hours of the day of each day. Based on these conclusions, capitalists always seek to increase working day more and more, keeping wage as low as possible (the minimum necessary for worker to

survive physically), since they understood that the higher the journey and the lower the wage, the greater the profitability¹.

According to Hobsbawm (2011a), industrial expansion at this time – especially, in that first instance, the cotton industry – did not occur linearly, leading to the first general crisis of capitalism in the late 1830s and early 1840s, with more serious social issues, such as increasing misery and discontent, leading to the outbreak of revolutions in 1848 on the European continent. According to Thompson (2015, p. 294):

The first generation of factory workers learned from their masters the importance of time; the second generation formed its committees for less working time in the ten-hour movement; the third generation went on strike for overtime or for paying an additional percentage (1.5%) for hours worked off-hours. They had accepted the categories of their employers and learned to counter the blows within these precepts. They had learned their lesson very well, that time is money².

Even if there was a confrontation by workers, capitalist organization of life production managed externally and internally to make workers and the whole production of life organize from the time of factory, from the time of the machine.

State and its capitalist roots: necessity of a public health

According to Vieira-da-Silva et al. (2014), only in mercantilism and with development of modern state would it have been possible to establish a state medicine, as well as a systematization of population information for the formulation of national health recommendations. This is because, prior to the capitalist mode of production, the feudal mode of production was organized in a stratified fashion, with peasants living in servitude to the owner of the land to which the individual belonged, being obliged to supply most of its production as a tribute, based on a religious or genealogical legitimacy. The feudal lord, on the other hand, owed suzerainty and military aid when necessary to a more powerful feudal lord (that is, one who owned more land, for the

¹ Marx (2013) will show that labor generates wealth from the exploitation of the worker, because the wage does not correspond to the whole produced by him/her, with the surplus-value staying with the capitalist. In this way, even by reducing the journey, it is possible to increase the extraction of surplus-value through the intensification of labor, allowing an increase of capitalist's profit.

² And time really is money, because the value of a commodity is quantified by the socially necessary time for its production (Marx, 2013).

mode of production was based on land); this lord, owed suzerainty to another, and so on, being that the last lord of the chain differed from the former not in kind, but in degree. Since land is the source of wealth and as it does not increase naturally, feudal lords – and hence feudal regime – depended on war to re-divide existing lands, increasing and decreasing seigniorial power (Anderson, 2013). “Warfare was not the ‘sport’ of princes, it was their fate” (Anderson, 2013, p. 32), that is, the feudal lord’s movement was always toward the war to increase the area of land dominated, so that his efforts and duties were directed towards this task, with the maintenance of health not constituting an obligation of the lord to his servants.

With the rise of capitalism, and the labor force becoming a commodity, a use value for capital, it became necessary to create another instrument of domination by the ruling class, the state, to meet the new social relations that were arising³. According to Mascaro (2015, p 57):

The state political form derives from the commodity form. It is only possible that there are bonds in production between capitalists and wage earners if there is also a third apparatus to the agents that has sufficient political materiality to make yoke the nexus in negative cases and also to guarantee the capitalist’s hoarding. Such an apparatus is not incidental or directly belonging to the bourgeois or the bourgeoisie.

In this way, the state (as a modern class domination), because it is based (as it were to guarantee) on the circulation of commodities, does not present itself directly and immediately as domination like in previous societies, “requiring, on the contrary, a device which presents itself as an impersonal power that does not function at the service

³ This does not mean that before capitalism there were no instruments of class domination, however, these instruments were (and needed to be, since there was no equality between individuals) personal and immediate. “In pre-capitalist societies, political power, in a variety of ways, was immediately linked to economic explorers. Such direct political imposition is based on bonds of slavery or servitude, sustained by force, by contiguous and non-circulable ownership of the means of production, or by tradition” (Mascaro, 2015, p. 57). Only with capitalism and the consolidation of equality as the foundation of society (for without equality there is no exchange of equivalents) an instrument was necessary that was not personal and immediate, but impersonal and mediate. According to Marx (2013, p. 136), “the secret of the expression of value, the equality and equivalence of all works because and insofar as they are human labor in general, can only be deciphered when the concept of human equality already possesses the fixity of a popular prejudice. But this is only possible in a society where the commodity form [*Warenform*] is the universal form of the product of labor, and therefore also the relation between men as possessors of commodities is the dominant social relation”. In this way, the state emerges as a new form of class domination, a specific form of capitalist society.

of the private interests of a class, but which sets itself as a public authority, distant and above classes” (Naves, 2008, p. 80). Thus the state political form is derived directly from capitalist relations, since it is the third being in the relation between capitalist and wage-laborer (a relation between equals), which will ensure capitalist accumulation, making the state not bourgeois because it is controlled by the bourgeoisie, even if this is generally the case, but because the state is a mirror of commodity form, since both forms are crossed by exploitation, contradiction and antagonism (Mascaro, 2015). The pre-capitalist societies did not demand that centralized political power (which existed before capitalism) appeared outside society itself as an abstract and neutral representative of the collectivity, and did not distinguish between economic and political, public and private – “political power is not yet a public power, it is not affirmed as separate from the private relations to which it applies” (Kashiura Júnior, 2009, p. 91). The state needs to appear neutral, on the one hand, because the new dominated class is seen as equal before the new ruling class (all are equal – before the law), because only then it is possible to sell and buy workforce; on the other hand, it must appear neutral because the new owners of the means of production are no longer hierarchized like feudal lords (also before the law).

According to Kashiura Júnior (2009, p.95):

The form of the state, as a form of political power “withdrawn” from society and precisely because of its presentation as an “exteriority”, appears socially as an embodiment – without body – of collective interest, an interest that it cannot find and cannot find shelter in civil society. For what concerns the good of the social whole cannot be the object of concern of isolated individuals, then the good of the social whole is entrusted to something that rises beyond, as an image of the collective projected to “outside” the collective itself. For this reason the state is understood, even by traditional juridical theory, as an incarnation – without flesh – of the public interest, guarantor of the order without which society composed by the sum of selfish atoms would be no more than “chaos”.

In the words of Marx and Engels (2009, p. 75), “to modern private property corresponds the modern state”⁴, and this private property is now organized from the

⁴ Marx, at certain moments, considers that the state already existed before capitalism and that only conforms differently in this society, corresponding to it. We consider these statements to be due to the era in which Marx lived, in which much of capitalism was still forming, but today, with the conformed state and also after the experience of another type of state (U.R.S.S.), it is possible to go besides what he

interests of the bourgeoisie, which is constituted as a class and no longer as a estate, being forced to organize itself nationally and give a general form to its particular interest.

In this way, with the state, the notion of nation arises, which, after the French Revolution, until about 1880, identifies it with state itself, and does not exist for all peoples and regions, only for the central ones at the time, necessary for the development of capitalism. The criteria of its constitution were its relation with an established state, the existence of an established cultural elite and a proven capacity for conquest (Hobsbawm, 2013). “The development of nations was unquestionably a stage of human progress or evolution from the small to the large group, from family to tribe, to region, to nation, and ultimately to the unified world of the future” (Hobsbawm, 2013, p. 54). Although one of the needs for the creation of nations is the existence of a state, this creation was a necessary step towards the consolidation of the state, for, at a time when the democratization of politics became inevitable (transforming subjects into citizens for everyone to be equal – before the law), the state machine needed a large contingent of people, that is, it needed people of the dominated class within the state itself, seeking to defend the interests of the ruling class. “The necessity of the state and the ruling classes competing with their rivals for the loyalty of the lower orders has thus become acute” (Hobsbawm, 2013, p. 118). In addition, the state now requires a degree of participation of ordinary citizens that did not exist previously. It was necessary that these people willingly serve the government with their workforce. Thus, the nation seeks to remedy, on the one hand, the question of the need for state workers to speak a common language⁵, due to the need for each inhabitant to be linked to the state government, as well as the loyalty and identification of citizens to that state, allowing it to exercise power in their name (Hobsbawm, 2013).

And different from feudalism, which had the basis of its wealth on land, capitalism has the basis of its wealth in exploiting the surplus value of workers (Marx, 2013), which necessitates a much greater domination of nature as a form of

thought about that instrument. One of the great thinkers of law and state is Evgeni Pashukanis, who lived between 1891 and 1937 in the former Soviet Union and who laid the foundations for a Marxist thought about state that is currently studied by the authors used in this work.

⁵ For Hobsbawm (2013), the question of languages is pragmatic, but one that is not seen in this way by the ideologists of nationalism, who identify the national language with the soul of the nation and the crucial criterion of nationality.

accumulating wealth and power, since this exploitation is realized only from the transformation of nature in the production of goods (for the production of value). For this dominion of nature, the means of production are constantly being revolutionized and the machine is being used more and more, the knowledge produced by humanity becoming more and more enclosed in it, making the worker increasingly an appendage of it. From the need for everything to have value⁶ in order to become a commodity in order to be changed in circulation, concomitantly with the accentuation of the private character of property and the increasing use of the machine as a form of domination of nature, the world itself becomes understood as a machine and, in this way, we seek to control nature rationally, through the observation, description and classification of things, including the human being itself, as a machine body (Luz, 1988), a commodity body – commodity labor force. This is a commodity whose quantity is fundamental for the maintenance of society, and therefore it is necessary to think about the population, register it and control it (Donnangelo, 2011). Besides that, this commodity body is a private matter of the individual holding the workforce; however, a private matter that cannot be restricted to the private sphere, since the existence of this new society depends on the maintenance of this commodity. That is why the maintenance of this body, despite being a commodity and all merchandise being a private matter, becomes a public matter. For the domination and maintenance of this commodity body, it becomes important to gather population information, including health information, and the instrument used for this becomes the state, since it is the entity that appears to be outside of society in these new social relations, the one that exercises political power, since civil society should be restricted to economic power, to the circulation of goods; the state starts to represent the public, while the economic subjects come to represent the private. The health of the commodity body becomes a public matter (a state matter), since it is an essential factor for the production and circulation of commodities, which must be guaranteed by the state, while the private matter (the economic matter) comes down to purchase and sale of such commodities.

⁶ For as in capitalism all labor is private, value (engendered by the abstract facet of labor) is that which enables all this private labor of the various private producers to be socialized, whose place in capitalism is the market (commodity circulation). Value is the social component of labor – and also of commodity – in capitalism.

In this way, especially after the Industrial Revolution, which accentuated the terrible conditions to which the working class was subjected, which led to its greater political organization, the central capitalist countries of the time (England, France and Germany) incorporated the discourse of health (Paim and Almeida Filho, 1998, 1999; Vieira-da-Silva et al., 2014).

In the same way, the state becomes fundamental in the maintenance of the workforce. Although the body is a private matter of the individual, the state is responsible for its maintenance in a collective way (but without ceasing to act in the individual), since it is the instrument that guarantees the continuous reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. In the understanding that there is a split between civil society and the state⁷ and that the capitalist, part of civil society, should take care only of his private interests, he has no interest (in his individual actions) to guarantee the continuity of capitalism itself, that is, there is no direct interest in maintaining the workforce⁸. According to Marx (2013, p. 342): “Capital therefore has no regard for the health and duration of the worker’s life unless it is forced by society to take this into account”. Therefore, this responsibility shall be public and the responsibility of the state.

Giving with one hand, taking with the other

The 1970s are an important milestone in the history of capitalism, because it is the moment when a major crisis occurs that leads to significant changes in the way capitalism is managed. The great crisis that characterizes this historical moment has as

⁷ “The word civil society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*] arose in the eighteenth century, when property relations had already been liberated from the ancient and medieval community. Civil society, as such, develops only with the bourgeoisie; with this same name, however, was continually designated the social organization that develops directly from production and exchange and which at all times constitutes the basis of the state and of the remaining idealist superstructure” (Marx and Engels, 2009, p. 74).

⁸ The more accumulation increases, the greater is the use of constant capital (machinery, etc.) and the less the use of variable capital (labor power). “The growth of social capital is consumed by the growth of many individual capitals” (Marx, 2013, p. 701), however, individual capitals are competing with each other. Contradictory, on the one hand, capital does not exist without exploitation of labor, on the other hand, it tends to decrease the employment of labor power. “Every capitalist has an absolute interest in extracting a certain amount of work from a smaller number of workers, rather than extracting it at an equal or even cheaper price from a larger number of workers. In the latter case, the constant capital expenditure increases in proportion to the mass of labor set in motion; in the first case, it increases much more slowly” (Marx, 2013, p. 711).

its structural basis the fall in the average rate of profit in the central capitalist countries. Before the 1970s, the other major crisis that occurred was that of 1929, caused by the fall in the rate of profit in the early twentieth century. Overcoming this crisis was possible through the destruction of capital, both commodities and the value of capital itself. This destruction intensified enormously with World War II, making possible in the following decades an extraordinary increase in the rate of profit, mainly of the United States, that did not have its territory destroyed by the war, but used the destruction occurred in Europe. On the other hand, because of this destruction, the workers' movement became much more radical because of the impoverishment they were in because of the war.

From this movement of capital comes the Welfare State, in response to the historical conditions found in Europe at the end of World War II, which had Keynesianism as a theoretical economic base, which, together with other factors, made possible that capitalism lived what Hobsbawm (2011b) called the Golden Age or The Glorious Thirty Years, an unprecedented boom in economic development of mankind. According to the author, after 1945, the priority of most European countries and Japan was to recover from the war, while the US was simply to continue the economic expansion of the war years. The post-war recovery also meant letting go of the fear of the social revolution and communist advance represented by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. With the economy at full steam, many believed that it would "go forth and up forever" (Hobsbawm, 2011b, pp. 254-255).

However, the rate of profit, after reaching its apex after World War II, begins to fall again, which will result later in the great crisis of 1973. This is because, even with the economic development achieved, the average rate of profit tends to fall with increased production, resulting in crises. After the long period of capital accumulation in the first half of the twentieth century, thanks to Taylorism and Fordism, in the postwar period, this fall occur according to Kliman (2012), because both the rise in wages and the decrease in the use of variable capital in relation to constant capital; exhaustion of the Taylorist and Fordist pattern of accumulation due to the inability to respond to the market downturn; and higher concentration of capital (monopolies and oligopolies).

After reaching its apex, the rate of profit begins to fall, but the Golden Age of capitalism is so called precisely because this fall was not felt, since these rates were at a never achieved level. The cycle of increasing the rate of profit is restarted and subsequently falls again. This cycle repeats itself over and over again, until the average profit rate drops back to a plateau where it is felt again. However, this new level reached in the early 1970s is below the level of reproduction of capital. It was therefore necessary, again, to destroy capital. However, according to Kliman (2012, p. 3):

Policymakers have not wanted this to happen again, so they now intervene with monetary and fiscal policies in order to prevent the full-scale destruction of capital value. This explains why subsequent downturns in the economy have not been nearly as severe as the Depression. But since so much less capital value was destroyed during the 1970s and early 1980s than was destroyed in the 1930s and early 1940s, the decline in the rate of profit was not reversed. And because it was not reversed, profitability remained at too low a level to sustain a new boom.

To prevent what happened in the 1930s, governments have successfully used debt financing and debt guarantees to slow and divert capital destruction. And since this destruction is the main factor that restores profitability and is thus largely responsible for the next phase of growth, there has been no growth like the one after the Great Depression and World War II. “On the contrary, *the economy never fully recovered from the slump of the 1970s*” (Kliman, 2012, p. 24).

The fall in the rate of profit can have lingering effects because even if it does not continue to fall until the time of the economic crisis, it can create the stage for the crisis, producing a low average profit rate (this can happen even if the rate remains constant or even grow in a period just before the crisis). However, if the rate of profit falls at a relatively low average, many companies will be in trouble because the rate of profit is less than the minimum needed for them to survive. That is, “many phenomena that are sometimes regarded as effects of a *decline* in the rate of profit are actually effects of a *low rate*” (Kliman, 2012, p. 18).

This new historical moment, when industrialization becomes generalized and universal in the search for new sources of profit for the reproduction of capital, gives strength to the neoliberal theory of state management, being adopted by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, in the England and the USA, respectively, and continually

implanted in the capitalist countries in the following decades. According to Anderson (1995), for neoliberalism the state must be strong in order to weaken unions and control money, and minimum in social spending and economic interventions, with monetary stability being the supreme goal of any government. Together with neoliberalism, at a time when education is criticized unilaterally (in a reproductive way), one of the fruits of the failure of the 1968 movements, coupled with the disillusionment experienced by the so-called real socialism, also gains force what Wood (1999) calls postmodern agenda, being, according to Rodrigues (2006), the cultural expression of capitalism at the end of the 20th century, with its own culture – mainly the culture of the working class – turning itself into a commodity.

Due to the fall in the rate of profit, also gains strength a restructuring in capitalist production, which has as its great expression the Toyotism (but which was not unique), which differs from Fordism, according to Antunes (2009, pp. 56-57), basically by the following: production linked to the demand, singularized, different from the mass production of Fordism; workmanship, with a multivariate function, different from the fragmented character of Fordism; flexible production process that allows the operator to operate several machines simultaneously; has as principle the best possible use of the time of production (just in time); minimum stocks (*kanban*); productive complex with a horizontal structure, “transferring to ‘thirds’ much of what was previously produced within its productive space”; organizes Quality Control Circles, where groups of workers are instigated to discuss the work process to increase productivity; “lifetime employment” for a portion of the workers, as well as wage gains linked to increased productivity. Toyotism sought to increase production without increasing the number of workers, through team work, which consists of an intensification of labor exploitation, both because workers work simultaneously with several diversified machines, and because of the pace and speed of productive chain given by the light system, based on an organizational and technologically advanced productive pattern, which is the result of the use of computer technology in workforce management techniques, in addition to the widespread introduction of computers in the production process and services.

At this historic moment in which the rate of profit is low and capital destruction is not possible, with the change in state management and production management, attacks on public health assurance begin.

This is due to the fact that capitalism is not a rational society, but a society in which everything belongs to the private sphere, and thus the capitalists are always against each other. At a time when capitalist countries lived high profit rates, it was possible to allow the state to maintain the commodity labor force without many barriers (just as there was a need for such maintenance because of the war); in a new moment, where the rates of profit are low, it is necessary to guarantee that state has conditions of maintenance of capitalist society itself, leaving issues that are considered human rights in the background.

What's next?

So if the state is capitalist and its function in providing health is that of maintaining the commodity labor force, should the working class continue to fight for public health? As we asked in the beginning of this paper, is hoping that everything is provided by the state the solution for working class struggles? We consider that the answer is yes and no.

Yes, because within capitalist mode of production, between what is provided by private capitalists and what is provided by the state, the services offered by the latter tend to be better and universally encompassing the population, providing services for all citizens. So it is worth fighting for public health while we don't overcome capitalism.

No, because the struggle of the working class cannot be reduced to getting the state to provide services considered to be rights, because the culture of rights itself is something inherent to capitalism and, therefore, aiming for everything to be provided by the state will only create a capitalism of state, but that will not change the essential basis of this mode of production: the exploitation of the working class.

This means that, while the fighting for public health is important, it needs to be an underlying fought of a revolutionary fight of the working class to take the means of production and overcome capitalism.

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