



## The Expansion of Distance Education and the Contradiction Between Capital and Labor

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### ABSTRACT

The article analyses the phenomenon of expansion of distance education (DE) in Brazil, as determined by the private-mercantile sector. The Brazilian State has encouraged such expansion through deregulation and flexibilization of the rules referring to the opening of poles and courses, thereby taking into account the private sector lobby that sights in DE a business alternative for the economic crisis Brazil has faced throughout the last decade. The economic rationality that seeks to associate rapid training and lower monthly fees is imposed upon workers, who are subjected to the deepening of the process of exploitation and the dismantling of labor's social protection structures. A project for the mass education of the working class is fabricated, via distance education in private-mercantile Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) whose long-term developments are uncertain and demand the continuity of studies. The methodological approach is based on the contributions of historical-dialectical materialism. The research procedures were guided by bibliographic review, documentary analysis, consultation of the statistical databases of the National Institute for Educational Research (Inep), and the websites of the HEIs. The results evidence that corporate businesses act to minimize the effects of the economic crisis on the financial performance of these institutions; in addition, they seek to build consensus around the economic, pedagogical and formative feasibility of distance learning courses, whose target audience is young people excluded from access to public institutions of higher education.

### KEYWORDS

Higher education. Private-mercantile privatization. Distance education. Deregulation.

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## A Expansão da Educação a Distância no Brasil e as Contradições Entre Capital e Trabalho

### RESUMO

O texto analisa o fenômeno de expansão da educação a distância (EaD) no Brasil, comandado pelo setor privado-mercantil. O Estado tem incentivado essa expansão por meio de desregulação e flexibilização das normas para abertura de polos e cursos, atendendo, portanto, ao *lobby* do setor empresarial que enxerga, na EaD, uma alternativa de negócios para a crise econômica enfrentada pelo Brasil na última década. A racionalidade economicista que procura associar formação rápida e custos menores das mensalidades é imposta aos trabalhadores, submetidos ao aprofundamento do processo de exploração e desmonte das estruturas de proteção social do trabalho. Forja-se um projeto de formação em massa da classe trabalhadora, pela via da EaD nas Instituições de Ensino Superior (IES) privado-mercantis, cujos desdobramentos a longo prazo são incertos e demandam a continuidade dos estudos. A abordagem metodológica está assentada nas contribuições do materialismo histórico-dialético. Os procedimentos da pesquisa pautaram-se por revisão bibliográfica, análises documentais, consulta às bases de dados estatísticos do Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Educacionais (Inep) e às páginas eletrônicas das IES. Os resultados apontam que as corporações empresariais atuam para minimizar os efeitos da crise econômica no desempenho financeiro dessas instituições; além disso, buscam construir consensos em torno da viabilidade econômica, pedagógica e formativa dos cursos a distância, cujo público-alvo são jovens excluídos do acesso às instituições públicas de educação superior.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Ensino superior. Privatização privado-mercantil. EaD. Desregulação.

## La Expansión de la Educación a Distancia y la Contradicción entre Capital y Trabajo.

### RESUMEN

El texto analiza el fenómeno de expansión de la educación a distancia (EaD) en Brasil, liderado por el sector privado-mercantil. El Estado ha alentado esa expansión a través de la desregulación y reglas más flexibles para abrir polos y cursos, por lo tanto, teniendo en cuenta el lobby del sector empresarial que ve, en EaD, una alternativa comercial a la crisis económica que enfrentó Brasil en la última década. La racionalidad económica que busca asociar una formación rápida y tarifas mensuales más bajas se impone a los trabajadores, que están sujetos a la profundización del proceso de explotación y al desmantelamiento de las estructuras de protección social del trabajo. Se forja un proyecto de capacitación masiva para la clase trabajadora, a través de EaD en Instituciones de Educación Superior (IES) privado-mercantiles, cuyos desarrollos de largo plazo son inciertos y exigen la continuidad de los estudios. El enfoque metodológico se basa en las contribuciones del materialismo histórico-dialético. Los procedimientos de investigación fueron guiados por la revisión bibliográfica, el análisis documental, la consulta de las bases de datos estadísticos del Instituto Nacional de Investigación Educativa (Inep) y los sitios web de las IES. Los resultados muestran que las corporaciones de negocios actúan para minimizar los efectos de la crisis económica en el desempeño financiero de esas instituciones; además, buscan lograr un consenso en torno a la viabilidad económica, pedagógica y de capacitación de los cursos de aprendizaje a distancia, cuyo público-objetivo son los jóvenes excluidos del acceso a las instituciones públicas de educación superior.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Educación superior. Privatización privado-mercantil. Educación a distancia. Desregulación.

## The Societal Project of Capital Driven by Consensus Formation

The contradictions inherent in capitalism, in the current phase led by financialization (CHAVES, 2010), have repercussions on the dynamics of the organization of Higher Education Institutions (HEI), particularly in the pedagogical architecture of teacher training projects. In Distance Education (DE), this phenomenon deserves further investigation, considering the intense process of expansion of this modality, observed in the last decade in Brazil. The assumption of this work is based on the understanding of a broad articulation of interests of economic conglomerates that goes beyond the dimension of profit and capital accumulation. The interests are guided by the formation of a certain profile of a worker, subordinated to the ideological references of the ruling elite. In these terms, the formation for consensus is one of the pillars of action of the bourgeoisie that consolidates the higher education market in Brazil. This paper aims to present, in an introductory way, some mediation elements of this process in higher education. It is understood that the expansion of DE in the country is related to different factors, among them, and perhaps the most significant, the rearrangement and re-functionalization of the business corporations that operate in the sector in the face of the economic stagnation faced by the country in the last decade. In general, the project of hegemony led by the business bourgeoisie has been successful both in the mercantile aspect and in assuming a leading position in the mass formation of the working class as a whole?

The Gramscian analytical matrix presents important conceptual contributions concerning ideology and the consequent mediations exercised in the class societal project engendered by the bourgeoisie. For Gramsci (1982), ideology is not inherent to the individual, but derives from a complex social process marked by contradictions. In inter-class disputes, the ideology of the ruling class aims at constituting itself as a force of cohesion and consensus, guaranteeing to the ruling class the political and ideological direction of society.

The organic intellectuals assume the task of leading the process of diffusion of ideas, beliefs and values that are of interest to the class they represent. For Gramsci, every social group, responding to essential roles in the world of production, organically creates intellectuals. The latter, in turn, support the improvement of the intellectual and technical capacity to take charge of society. The construction of consensus around the interests of the ruling class aims to minimize the contradictions and disputes that are inseparable from the way capitalism works.

Intellectuals are the 'commissioners' of the dominant group for the exercise of the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political rule, that is: 1) of the 'spontaneous' consensus given by the great masses of the population to the orientation imposed by the fundamental dominant group on social life, a consensus 'historically' born of the prestige (and therefore of the trust) obtained by the dominant group because of its position and function in the world of production; 2) the state apparatus of coercion which 'legally' ensures the discipline of groups that do not 'consent', either actively or passively, but which is constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis in command and direction in which spontaneous consensus disappears (GRAMSCI, 1982, p.11).

Within this epistemological framework, specialized categories for the analysis of the exercise of the intellectual function are formed in the course of history. These categories establish connections with the most important social groups, in particular with the dominant social group. And, from this, it receives influences that imply the reformulation of the body of ideas that will be disseminated in the different segments, contributing to the construction of consensus.

Hegemony, as a central category for the construction of consensus, refers to the establishment of the political, cultural and ideological command of one class or bloc of classes over another. The sedimentation of an intellectual and moral order carried out by the private apparatuses of hegemony is essential for the legitimation of the ruling class power. For Gramsci, the school is one of the spaces for the formation of intellectuals at various levels. The complexity of this activity is revealed in the specialization and hierarchization of school models, such as schools for the formation of high culture and schools for technical training.

However, for Gramscian thought, the distinguishing factor of an organic intellectual in relation to other social groupings does not reside in the degree of erudition or in the intellectual activity itself, but in the functionality and organicity of the activities performed within the set of broader social relations, demarcated by the interests of the ruling class. Hence the statement: "all men are intellectuals, but not all men have the function of intellectuals in society" (GRAMSCI, 1982, p.18). In this way, the relationship between intellectuals and the world of production is not immediate, but mediated, marked by the organizing function of social hegemony. Thus, Gramsci establishes a dialectical relationship between class and ideology:

He explains the affirmation and diffusion of ideologies as a process, and as a process guided by ideology. A certain class, dominant on the economic, and therefore also on the political level, spreads a certain conception of society; it thus hegemonizes the whole society, amalgamates a historical bloc of social forces and political superstructures by means of ideology (GRUPPI, 1978, p. 90).

The dominant material relations determine a set of ideas prevailing in a given historical time. The attributes of universality, rationality, and legitimacy, are essential for the diffusion and incorporation of these ideas by subaltern classes.

Casimiro (2018) developed studies on the organization of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, detailing the strategies carried out to redefine and update the bases of political-ideological action, in the period between 1980 and 2014. The author points out that a multiplicity of private hegemonic apparatuses, formulators of power projects and disseminators of market ideology, underpin the bourgeois mobilization for the continuity of its condition of ruling class. Casimiro's (2018) analysis, based on Gramsci's conceptual framework, highlights that the construction of hegemony and the worldview of a given social group is a continuous and dynamic process, requiring permanent updating. Thus, there is a concentration of efforts for the production of consensus around the societal project that interests the bourgeois organizations.

We present the hypothesis that this strategy of updating the domination inaugurated in the context of redemocratization does not end with the concretization of the National Constituent Assembly (ANC). In a second moment, already in a self-proclaimed 'democratic' context, after the Constituent Assembly, there was a more significant attack on a new modus operandi of political and ideological organization of the bourgeois classes and factions. Multiplying in an extensive range of diffusion apparatuses, the assumptions of the market economy and of conservative and/or reactionary values gained capillarity and penetration in the most distinct means, acquiring resonance in different spaces of social life, structuring and inaugurating what is conventionally called the 'new right' in Brazil. (CASIMIRO, 2018, p. 26-27).

The analytical framework provided by the author points out that private hegemonic apparatuses assume different functionalities. Thus, they act both in the doctrinal field, spreading the currents of liberal thought and recruiting organic intellectuals, and in the field of formulating public policy guidelines, actions structured within the state, demarcating the classist project of power.

The concept of new right used by Casimiro (2018) is corroborated by Freitas (2018) to refer to the conservative group, neoliberal in nature, holder of economic and political capital, which has been guiding the Brazilian education project, with a distinctly privatist bias. The "new right" and their supporters have been conducting a series of reforms that demobilize the organization and the struggle of workers, intensifying the precariousness of work, in order to ensure the maintenance of profits for the owners of capital:

The question, therefore, does not have only an economic side, as the businessmen would like it to seem. It is also ideological, in the sense of providing guarantees to the defense of private appropriation and its continuous accumulation that, in the liberal democratic forms experienced, would not have demonstrated to be sufficiently protected or would be ineffective to bar the claims of organized groups that promote the co-optation of politicians against the free market. And the free market is fundamental for individuals, thrown into it, to have 'freedom' to build their trajectory from merit and personal effort. (FREITAS, 2018, p. 23).

The emphasis on the crisis in education, particularly in public institutions, is the keynote for the intervention of the national business community in the development of educational policies. The organization of movements/entities led by economic institutions has been influencing the reformist scenario in the educational area.

The disputes around the formation of the working class present a new chapter with the phenomenon of Distance Education expansion, a process commanded by the business corporations that operate in higher education in Brazil.

## The Expansion of Distance Education in Private-Mercket Institutions on the Pillar of Mass Formation

The reconfiguration of the relations between State, market, and civil society has repercussions on educational policies in an emblematic way. The entrepreneurial nature of social policies, with the progressive transfer to the private sector of the execution of works

and services, reveals the efficient *modus operandi* of the country's economic and political elites, representatives of the interests of capital. This process takes place within the new order of reproduction of capital that, faced with the saturation of markets and as a condition for permanent accumulation, needs to expand its field of action. In this sense, the educational area presents itself as an attractive one to be exploited by the market.

The offer of distance education is incorporated as an advantageous economic activity, considering the differentiated requirements of the conditions of course offerings (physical infrastructure, library, laboratories, teaching and administrative staff). Giolo (2018), in studies related to the expansion of DE in Brazil, notes the exponential growth of the educational market that has been consolidating around this modality, whose business strategy is to massively reach the popular segments. The concentration of enrollments in DE in the private-market sector, especially in technological courses and undergraduate programs, proves the corporate plan of the business groups that lead the sector. Involved in intense advertising campaigns that promise fast training at low cost, the country's workers (or those who depend exclusively on the sale of labor power) receive a light training academically limited to the utilitarian and narrow criteria of a precarious, informal and unstable labor market.

The most recent data from the Census of Higher Education indicate the scenario of frank expansion of this modality in Brazil. The number of entrants in distance learning undergraduate courses corresponded to 40% of the total number of entrants in 2018. This percentage was 19.8% in 2008. In the period between 2008 and 2018, enrollments in distance undergraduate courses showed a percentage increase of 182.5% (INEP, 2019). In contrast, in face-to-face courses, the growth, in the same time frame, was only 25.9%. Regarding vacancies offered, for the first time in history, distance education surpassed face-to-face courses. There were 7.1 million vacancies assigned to distance learning courses against 6.4 million in face-to-face courses. (INEP, 2019).

The Distance Education growth movement, in recent years, in Brazil, is articulated to deregulation processes conducted by the Ministry of Education, whose centrality is the loosening of the conditions for opening new Distance Education centers by large business groups operating in the sector. In the interpretative line, which recognizes the power of influence of the ruling class in the political decisions taken in the state structure, there have been a series of changes in the regulation of DE in the country since 2007, when this modality began the phase of greatest expansion. It is not within the scope of this paper to develop a detailed analysis of this regulatory complex. However, it is worth mentioning the most recent measures that make the offer of this modality in the country more flexible, such as Decree No. 9.057 of May 25, 2017, published by the administration of former President Michel Temer and former Minister of Education José Mendonça Bezerra Filho, which changes Article 80 of the Law of Directives and Bases of Education (Law No. 9.394/1996). The main change promoted by the Decree is the granting of greater autonomy to HEIs to open DE poles, which may do so, by their own act, observing numerical limits, according to the performance of the institution in the assessment processes coordinated by INEP, with no need for prior authorization from the MEC.

Another change is the possibility of offering courses exclusively at a distance, without face-to-face activities, relaxing the obligation of face-to-face centers, with physical, technological and personnel infrastructure, adequate to the pedagogical project of the course and the institution. The entire paragraph that indicated the mandatory nature of the poles was deleted; in its place, a new wording suggests greater autonomy for institutions regarding the option of maintaining or not the presence poles in the locations where the Distance Education courses are offered. The Normative Ordinance No. 11, of June 20, 2017, a result of Decree No. 9.057/2017, facilitates the accreditation of HEIs to offer distance learning courses, without the requirement of previous accreditation in face-to-face courses.

The regulation of the modality in Basic Education is another dimension contemplated in Decree No. 9.057/2017. The version initially published by the federal government allowed Distance Education in the final grades of elementary school, high school, special education, youth and adult education, and technical vocational education. The modality could be aimed at students who were deprived of the subjects offered in some of these stages or modalities, without detailing the reasons for this deprivation, for example, the omission of the public authorities in guaranteeing access to school.

The publication of the first version of the Decree was the target of intense criticism from the educational community, a fact that probably influenced the government's retreat at the time. In the "corrected" version, Article 9 of the document imposes more restrictive criteria for the offer of Distance Education Elementary School, defining "emergency situations" as a condition for the offer. It is worth mentioning item III of the aforementioned article, which lists, as one of these situations, students who live in places that do not have a regular school attendance network. There is a clear lack of responsibility and omission on the part of the government in meeting the constitutional principle of universal Basic Education, especially in places of difficult access, where peasants, river-dwellers, quilombolas, and indigenous people live. At the same time, it regulates the conditions for the educational business community to explore this niche of the market.

The flexibilization of the criteria for the expansion of DE is the result of a systematic and organized action of business groups in the regulatory structures of the State. The Brazilian Association of Distance Education (ABED), created in 1995, presents itself as a "scientific society, without profit and ideological ties of any kind. The entity stresses that "supporting the country's 'knowledge industry' by seeking to reduce the inequalities caused by isolation and distance from large urban centers" is one of its action pillars. To this end, it periodically promotes meetings, congresses, courses and exhibitions, in addition to producing and distributing newsletters and magazines. The entity maintains an updated homepage that houses a vast portfolio of documents, legislation, analytical reports, academic productions and media, to subsidize the administrative, pedagogical and commercial activities of the associates (ABED, 2019. Website. Accessed on: Jan. 14, 2020).

In consultation with the documents made available by the Association, called "Censo EAD. BR - 2017. Analytical Report of Distance Learning in Brazil", the advantages of the new distance learning regulation, approved in 2017, are recognized for those institutions already accredited by the Ministry of Education.

For the institution, this flexibility allowed it to attract more students both in the city where it operates and in other regions, expanding its presence geographically. The speed of this expansion leads one to believe that there was a repressed demand that could be met since there was a greater flexibility on the part of the MEC (ABED, 2018, p.7).

The entity shows concern about the continuity of the accelerated pace of expansion in the coming years, considering the need to assess the impact of attracting and retaining students. This is a strategic vision of business planning and management, guided by the cost-benefit logic, that is, investments made today are justified if there is a continuous flow of future demand. This is a concern that assumes centrality for entrepreneurs in the area, considering that evasion is one of the main challenges of the modality in the country. ABED recognizes that distance or semi-attendance courses can cost up to 50% less when compared to attendance courses. Institutions achieve such a significant reduction in the final cost of tuition due to the massive production of the courses. These institutions have invested in business strategies to reduce costs and lower tuition, such as standardizing content and activities and increasing the ratio between the number of students and tutors:

New strategies are taken on by institutions to ensure greater financial balance. With reduced tuition fees, the policies of private HEIs are directed toward cost reduction in the production and offering of courses. Thus, they expand asynchronous actions, increase the reuse of teaching resources and the use of self-instructional teaching strategies, impose the increase of the ratio between the number of students and tutors, in addition to other measures that ensure the attendance of large contingents of students with low investments (ABED, 2018, p.26).

The competition among institutions contributes to the cheapening of courses. They are economically strengthened institutions from the process of mergers and incorporations that began in 2007 (CHAVES, 2010; SANTOS FILHO, 2016). It is evident, therefore, that business management is guided by strategies of competition, cost rationality, productivity and profit. Besides the decisive role of the State in deregulating the sector, an aspect also recognized by the Brazilian Association of Maintainers of Higher Education Institutions (ABMES), the stagnation of the Brazilian economy favors the attraction of more students to Distance Education modality:

Behind the growth in distance learning are changes in the Brazilian economy, such as the rise in unemployment after 2014, which reduced the income of college students to pay the tuition of the face-to-face course, and the tightening of the rules of Fies, the federal government's student financing program for higher education. Besides the shorter Fies money, the Ministry of Education (MEC) has expanded access to DL. Two years ago, the simplification of the rules for opening distance learning centers doubled the number of these units - today there are more than 12,000. In December 2019, the ministry gave another boost by doubling the limit of online classes to 40% of the face-to-face course schedule, with some exceptions (ABMES, 2020. Website. Accessed on: 14 Jan. 2020).



In-class courses were also targeted by regulations that make the use of Distance Education more flexible. Ordinance No. 1,428, dated December 28, 2018, from the Ministry of Education (MEC), made it possible to offer subjects in the modality up to 40% of the total course workload; previously, the limit was 20%. The measures did not apply to health and engineering courses. However, the most recent measure to deregulate the offer of the modality occurred, in December 2019, under the command of Minister of Education Abraham Weintraub, through the publication of MEC Ordinance No. 2,117, December 6, 2019, and revocation of MEC Ordinance No. 1,428/2018. The latest normative instrument established even more favorable conditions for the use of Distance Education in public and private higher education institutions. According to the new regulation, all undergraduate courses, with the exception of Medicine, may offer up to 40% of their course load in this modality. The previous ordinance established criteria related to the concept of institutional evaluation of the requesting HEIs and excluded engineering and health courses, aspects that have been dispensed with in the new ordinance.

One of the main consequences of the measures should be the reduction in operating costs. The flexibility of the criteria for Distance Education offerings is an old agenda of the sector's businessmen, given the economic effects of the crisis faced by the country and the hardening of the rules for student financing. The disclosure of MEC Directive 2.117/2019 was received with optimism by corporations, and had repercussions on the shares traded on the financial market. Shares of private groups traded on the stock exchange rose in the week the legislation was announced.

The expansion of DE, in the country, must be understood within the contradictions of the capital production system that commands and rationalizes social relations. The formation of workers takes on the character of an economic input necessary for the reproduction structure of capital, as well as a commodity, fully managed under the competitive logic of the market. In the first case, it is articulated to the discourse of a necessary factor to increase the worker's productivity. The latter, in turn, convinced by the system that they must invest in education in order to have the necessary conditions for their insertion in the labor market, has the financial resources to buy the educational services made available in different formats and modalities.

In this circuit, the capital profits in different forms and, moreover, takes control in all aspects of the worker's life. In education, it determines the contents, the methodologies, and the competencies that must be developed in the individual. The ideology of the company and the rationality of the market, imbued with the principles of competition, flexibility, efficiency, meritocracy, and entrepreneurship, are the pillars of some formative projects. In this movement, Laval (2019) recognizes a reductionism of the knowledge addressed, prevailing the idea of useful knowledge, linked to the demands of the market.

Teaching reformulated according to the bosses' wishes must enable the worker to assimilate discourses and reproduce them under conditions of interaction with colleagues or in the relationship with customers and suppliers; to adopt mobilizing rhetoric; to seek and use new information; and thus to be able to meet the demand for controlled autonomy that the organization expects from the wage earner (LAVAL, 2019, p.70).

It follows, therefore, that the economic rationality of capital should guide the training of workers, which means that the time and resources spent in this process must be calculated and moderate. It makes no sense, for the hegemonic logic of capital, the expenditure of a prolonged initial training, given the instabilities and uncertainties of the world of work, associated with rapid technological innovations, which demand a permanent state of adaptation and updating. The idea of lifelong learning goes hand in hand with this conception.

Short training programs are built, with contents linked to practice and to the economic world, the development of competencies and skills for the use of technological tools is encouraged, thus intensifying the updating of the conditions for permanent exploitation of the labor force by capital. The promises of economic gains that would be obtained by the worker who invested time and resources in his training, in the wake of the Theory of Human Capital, seem not to have come true. On the contrary, we observe a deepening of labor exploitation conditions, whose core is the cheapening of labor costs.

The economic counter-reforms conducted by the State and regimented by big capital in Brazil reinforce the deepening of the contradictions between capital and labor. Constitutional Amendment No. 95/2016, which establishes the New Fiscal Regime, limiting primary expenditure, i.e., spending and investments of the federal government (including in social policies) to the rate of inflation over a 20-year period, excluding from this limitation spending on the payments of public debt bonds, expresses the orthodox and classist matrix assumed by the country's ruling elite.

The appropriation of public funds by fractions of the rentier bourgeoisie and the consequent retraction of investments in social policies are responses to the crisis of capital on a global scale. Austerity measures promote the emptying of the State's role as social policy operator. The reduction of these actions exacerbates, for the working class as a whole, the conditions of misery and inequality.

The labor and social security counter-reforms are yet another offensive by the country's economic and political elite, resorting to the apocalyptic and fallacious discourse that workers' basic rights represent an obstacle to economic development and the risk of breakdown of the State and the system. Austerity measures have been approved with the broad support of different factions of the bourgeoisie, media apparatuses, parliamentarians, judiciary, and the parsimony of majority trade union centrals. The deregulation of the offer of DE takes place in the context of the stagnation of the Brazilian economy and the deliberate dismantling of the structure of social protection of labor, subjecting the working class as a whole to unemployment, underemployment, and informality, in the wake of the advancement of the conservative agenda carried out by the extreme right in Brazil.

The largest business group in higher education in Brazil, KROTON, which, in 2019, was incorporated by the COGNA Holding, confirms the option of large business groups for the expansion of the offer via Distance Education. The data made available in the organization's quarterly performance reports show that enrollments in the distance learning

modality have already surpassed in-person enrollments. In the second quarter of 2019, 59% of undergraduate enrollments were in this modality, while in face-to-face education, the percentage was 41%.

**Table 1.** Earnings Release. 3rd Quarter 2019 - KROTON

<b>KROTON - - Enrollment. Graduation and Post-Graduation. 3rd Quarter 2019</b>	<b>In person</b>	<b>Online Education</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Graduation</b>	341.951	483.125	825.076
<b>Post-Graduation</b>	8.703	31.886	40.589
<b>Total</b>	350.654	515.011	865.665

Source: Authors' elaboration based on COGNA EDUCATION, 2019.

The expansion of Distance Education enrollments in the corporation coincides with the decrease in student funding (there were 258,794 students in 2014 and, in 2019, 48,450), a reduction of more than 80%. In the third quarter of 2019, 64,000 new students entered the face-to-face courses, while Distance Education courses received 116 new students. The growth in the number of students in the largest corporate group of higher education in the country occurs predominantly in the distance learning modality, highlighting the commercial strategy of the corporation to ensure profitability standards, in the face of the adverse economic scenario and the limits on state financing operations. The mercantile rationality of this expansion, encouraged by the inability of the applicants to get into higher education to take on debt and spend a greater financial volume, calls into question the pedagogical and formative directions adopted by the corporations as the ones responsible for the mass training of workers in the country.

## Final Considerations

The phenomenon of Distance Education expansion should be analyzed in the context of the intensification of the contradictions between capital and labor. The approval of the labor counter-reform, a historic defeat for the working class as a whole, is based on the cheapening of labor costs, an indispensable input to minimize the effects of the accumulation crisis faced by capital. The dismantling of the Consolidation of Labor Laws and of social protections for workers also aims to provide legal security for businessmen, regulating precariousness and instability. The worker, faced with structural unemployment, the high levels of informality in the labor market, and the real need for material reproduction of his existence, submits to unilaterally imposed conditions of exploitation. The field of disputes over different societal projects is becoming more intense. The progressive sectors advocate the defense of school education as a public good, free and state-owned, guided by principles of social inclusion, cooperation and solidarity, respect for diversity, training for citizenship, and encouragement for the full development of the individual, including preparation for the world of work. The humanistic perspective is the compass of educational institutions.

In opposition, the mercantile and profitable logic has served as a compass for the actions of corporations that operate in higher education in Brazil, which, faced with economic stagnation and the intensification of labor exploitation, find in the expansion of DE offerings the alternative for maintaining profitability rates. The performance of corporations that trade securities in the stock market is the object of investors' monitoring, which requires "creative" managerial measures for crisis scenarios. The State continues to play the role of mediator and articulator of corporate interests, deregulating and flexibilizing the criteria for opening new courses and centers. Fast and low-cost training, aimed at individuals who will face extremely precarious structural working conditions, without social and social security protection. The bank owners profit on both ends: they sell the (de)training packages and, later or concomitantly, economically exploit the labor force of the mass of workers, (de)trained in fast food courses.

This process of DE expansion commanded by the State in articulation with the sector's business groups is concomitant with the measures to dismantle public universities in the country. These actions include the blocking and reduction of state funding evidenced since 2014. In addition, by proposing a management and funding model for public universities, provided in the "Future-se", which subordinates them to the regulation and uncertainties of the market and fully compromises the constitutional principles of university autonomy.

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