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The Neo-Conservative Attack on Brazil's Federal Universities*

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the offensive against Brazil's federal universities autonomy and financing, engendered by Bolsonaro's government. The undermining of the democratic practice in the leadership choice process and the chronic underfinancing, create an atmosphere of uncertainty in these institutions. The review of literature; the primary sources (laws, decrees, decree-laws, House of Representatives website) and universities electronic portals consult subsidized the current working procedure. It was concluded that is functioning now a dismantling and refunctionalisation process in federal universities, based on the radicalization of neoliberalism and the rise of the neo-conservative agenda.

KEYWORDS

Neoconservatism. Federal universities. Federal institutes. Autonomy. Financing.

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A Ofensiva Neoconservadora Contra as Universidades Federais no Brasil

RESUMO

O artigo analisa a ofensiva contra a autonomia e o financiamento das universidades federais no Brasil, engendrada pelo governo Bolsonaro. O esvaziamento da prática democrática no processo de escolha dos dirigentes e o subfinanciamento crônico, criam uma atmosfera de incertezas nessas instituições. A revisão de literatura; a consulta de fontes primárias (leis, decretos, projetos de lei, site da Câmara dos Deputados) e a consulta aos portais eletrônicos das universidades subsidiaram a elaboração do presente trabalho. Concluiu-se que está em curso um processo de desmonte e de refuncionalização das universidades federais, sedimentado pela radicalização do neoliberalismo e ascensão da pauta neoconservadora.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Neoconservadorismo. Universidades federais. Institutos federais. Autonomia. Financiamento.

La Ofensiva Neoconservadora Contra las Universidades Federales en Brasil

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza la ofensiva contra la autonomía y financiamiento de las universidades federales en Brasil, engendrada por el gobierno Bolsonaro. El vaciamiento de la práctica democrática en el proceso de elección de los dirigentes y la subfinanciación crónica, provocan una atmósfera de incertidumbre en dichas instituciones. La revisión de la literatura; la consulta de fuentes primarias (leyes, decretos, proyectos de ley, sitio de la Cámara de Diputados) y la consulta en los portales electrónicos de las universidades subvencionaban la elaboración de este trabajo. Se concluyó que se ha puesto en marcha un proceso de desmonte y de refuncionalización de las universidades federales, sedimentado por la radicalización del neoliberalismo y ascenso de la pauta neoconservadora.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Neo-conservadurismo. Universidades federales. Institutos federales. Autonomía. Financiamento.

Introduction

The contradictions of the contemporary crises of capitalism are sharpened during the most serious health crisis of this generation, felt, and managed differently between countries at the center and the periphery of capitalism. This crisis has exposed the pusillanimity of a societal structure built on the logic of profit and individualism. The collapse of economies, resulting in the monumental growth of unemployment, the deepening of the recession, and the worsening of poverty and inequality, has weakened, even if only temporarily, the neoliberal austerity theses. The State and the public fund have been decisive in reducing the damage of the systemic crisis that has been installed, the duration of which is still unknown. The particularities of the crisis in Brazil assume an even more serious proportion because it is governed by the extreme right, supported by different conservative sectors, including parliamentary parties, armed and security forces, Christian religious segments, and sectors of the bourgeoisie. The denialist stance taken by Jair Bolsonaro and the deliberate ineptitude in crisis management by the top echelon of the federal government resulted in thousands of lives lost and the worsening of the economic crisis, faced by the country before the pandemic.

Since his first year in office, Jair Bolsonaro has systematically disregarded the democratic practice exercised in federal public institutions regarding the appointment of the first placed on the triple list, built from the consultation with the university community and subject to deliberation in its Higher Councils. By the end of August 2021, twenty-six (26) Federal Institutions of Higher Education – FIHE were targets of intervention. In these institutions, the authoritarian, intimidating, and persecutory method directed to professors, administrative staff, and students' sediment an autocratic atmosphere and the curbing of the university ethos; a movement typical of the irrationalism and obscurantism defended by the ideological wing of Bolsonarism. Investigating the mediations and contradictions of this phenomenon, imbricated by economic, political, and ideological interests, is essential for the field of higher education policies, in addition to instrumentalizing the collective organization to confront this conservative and authoritarian offensive.

The research procedures used included a literature review; consultation of primary sources (laws, decrees, bills, government programs, and the website of the Chamber of Deputies); and consultation of the electronic portals of universities, movements, and entities. The method of data analysis is anchored in the contributions of dialectical historical materialism.

The text was developed in three parts with emphasis on the following aspects: a) the features of neoconservatism and neofascism that sediment the ideological wing of the Bolsonaro government and the attack on universities and federal institutes; b) the brutal cut in the budget of these institutions as part of the policy of destruction by the federal government; c) the appointment of rectors in the FIHE that were targeted for intervention and the actions of social, political and union movements and entities in defense of the public university.

In the final considerations, we conclude that the ongoing process of dismantling and re-functionalization of federal public universities, especially through the appointment of interim rectors and the brutal cut of resources for their funding, needs to be urgently confronted by the academic community. It is essential to organize immediate collective actions, at the national level, by unions, the student movement, and parliamentarians from the progressive camp, to confront the crisis installed in these institutions and in radical defense of autonomy, democracy, and public funding for public education.

1 Neoconservatism and Neo-Fascism in Bolsonaro's Government: the Public University Under the Crosshairs of the Culture War

Capitalism, the hegemonic system of production of this era, must be interpreted based on its crises and the consequent effects on broader social relations. In this first quarter of the 21st century, we observe the deepening of neoliberal theses, mediated by austerity policies and the reduction of public spending on social policies. The repositioning of the state in the field of social agreement is associated with the prominent role of the financialization of the economy, in the wake of the integration of global financial markets (HARVEY, 2011), a phenomenon that illustrates the dispute over the public fund, between capital and labor.

The irrational search for new forms of valorization, imposed by the structural crises of capitalism, establish societal reconfigurations, with substantive implications for the social reproduction of the working class. The constitution of the proletariat of the era of "computerized and financialized capitals in an ingenious form of digital slavery" (ANTUNES, 2020, p.34) are characterized by the broad flexibility of the labor market.

The dismantling of social protections, the unrestricted deregulation in the forms of contracting, the compression of the real gain in labor income, the expansion of unemployment, informality and expansion of the *service proletariat* sediment the historical ground of the rise of neoconservatism in Brazil. The effects of this phenomenon for the public university, for the exercise of autonomy in its different forms and the maintenance of the public-state character through the guarantee of public financing, will be developed further below.

The pandemic of COVID-19 aggravated different crises that had been brewing in recent years. The effects, brutal and regressive, are imposed against the workers, who are subjected to the hardship and discouragement of unemployment and hunger. The deliberate omission of the public power in the management of the pandemic has resulted in the death of the population, deprived of vaccines and adequate hospital care. Without any embarrassment, big capital reinforces the governments' actions, by defending the primacy of the economy, in detriment of public health and the preservation of lives. The privileges of the big bourgeoisie, its interests kept unscathed, reveal the cruelest feature of the capital accumulation system, in this historical time.

Semeraro (2020, p.9) understands the advance of neoconservatism in Brazil as a serpent's egg, fed by "coercion apparatus, big media oligopoly and economic rapine structures", supported by fractions of the middle class. The agglutinating mobilization of these factions is directed towards a diffuse agenda, including the fight against corruption, communism, and the defense of a moral agenda of customs.

The new kind of fascism that has taken hold in Brazil, with the seal of impunity stamped by the "normal functioning" of cowardly "republican" institutions and the complicity of considerable parts of the judiciary, has been eroding the 1988 Constitution without many obstacles, dissolving workers' rights, devastating public services, universities and research centers, the environment and cultural freedom, with a destructive fury never before seen in these lands. (SEMERARO, 2020, p.9)

The particularities of neo-fascism in Brazil are associated with a greater subordination of the country in global geopolitics. The economic policy conducted by the market's confidence man, Paulo Guedes, based on privatizations, fiscal austerity measures, reduction of public investments in strategic areas for social development (public policies, infrastructure, employment, and income) has promoted the shrinking of the Brazilian economy, marked by deindustrialization and the predominance of financial rent.

The most evident contradiction of this phenomenon is the increase in wealth of the country's billionaires and the incorporation of new billionaires to the Forbes list, during the greatest health crisis known in the last century (CALAIS, 2021). The country that manufactures new billionaires, assists more than half of its population in facing food insecurity. The economic degradation of the country, in the framework of a subordinate and dependent capitalism (FERNANDES, 2009), denotes the abandonment of any autonomous development project, sedimenting an even crueller form of capitalism, characterized by spoliation and primitive forms of accumulation.

The conspiracy disseminated by the social base of the Bolsonaro government, which elected the cultural Marxism as an enemy to be fought, is another characteristic of the advance of neo-fascism in Tupiniquim lands. The ideologue referenced in this crusade in defense of the family, private property and individual liberties is Olavo de Carvalho. For him, Antonio Gramsci's thought survived the collapse of socialist systems and exerted influence on the Brazilian *intelligentsia*, particularly in the artistic-cultural, educational, and scientific circles (MELO, 2020), transformed into priority targets of the attacks of the Bolsonaro government and its militant base.

Despite the different analytical approaches about the rise of a far-right government in Brazil, there seems to be a convergence on the identification of fascist elements that guide the thought and practice of the Bolsonaro government. Although an anachronistic transposition of Italian fascism from the beginning of the last century is not appropriate, some methods and ideas signal possible analogies.

In addition to combating cultural Marxism, the defense of the Judeo-Christian tradition in the constitution of Brazilian society is frequently used in Bolsonaro's speeches. The slogan *God above all*, points to a transcendence of political power, justified by divine will. The decisions of the Messiah, even if contrary to the interests of the population, such as the elementary right to life, are neutralized from the political dimension by his most radical electoral base. The mythical figure is sent with the mission of saving the country from internal threats, and especially from communism and the perversion of customs. In this sense, Bolsonaro embodies the figure of the populist leader, charged with saving the nation and redirecting the destinies of the people. In this perspective, the leader's decisions are always justified because taken to operate against corrupt structures, including the republican institutions of representative democracy (MELO, 2020).

The diffuse, eclectic, and contradictory character of fascism is analyzed by Leher (2020), who sees convergences with neofascism, especially in the defense of irrationalism and antiseccularism. In the European fascism of the last century, the attacks on scientific research were selective, due to the occurrence of technological fetishism, based on investments in the military and in infrastructure works. Between classical fascism and neo-fascism, a series of convergences are identified, among which: racism, xenophobia, social Darwinism, refusal to scientific theories, attacks on workers, artists, teachers, journalists, and dismantling the social structure of the State.

Beyond the analytical key, neo-fascism, the advance on democratic principles is understood as a feature of Hayekian neoliberalism that engenders morality and the market as singular ways of meeting human needs.

The contemporary attack on society and social justice in the name of market freedom and moral traditionalism is thus a direct emanation of neoliberal rationality and is not limited to so-called 'conservatives'. (BROWN, 2019, p.23)

In this sense, there is a deconstruction of the idea of social and society, since the conduct of individuals, as to the observance of rules of conduct emanates from markets and moral traditions (BROWN, 2020). Hence the rejection of state intervention and concerted proposals by social democracies, seen as artificial and non-spontaneous actions. The weakening of state institutions, responsible for the political and economic direction of society is a pursued object. The dismantling of society would be an aspect of this phenomenon, which assumes that individuals and family units have survived the reformist disintegrations of modernity. Thus, if the functioning dynamics of markets and life revolve around individuals and family units, there is no room for the action of the welfare state.

The *against the left* of Brazilian education was a campaign promise of Jair Bolsonaro, who holds the Workers' Party governments responsible for the failure of the Brazilian educational system and identifies, without presenting any materiality, the supremacy of leftist thought in schools and universities. In a crusade against the Enlightenment and secular pillars and values that organized the development of modern society, the most radical ideological bloc of Bolsonarism enters the field of dispute for the content and form of the Brazilian educational agenda, rivaling with the bloc represented by big capital, the business reformers (FREITAS, 2018)

The model of public university constituted in the country and its subjects were transformed into enemies. The set of principles of Brazilian education, provided for in the Federal Constitution and the Law of Directives and Bases of Education, and defended by broad sectors of the Brazilian educational thought, are targets of attacks. The current government believes that the freedom to learn, teach, research, and divulge culture, thought, art and knowledge, and the pluralism of ideas and pedagogical conceptions are restricted principles, and can be relativized.

In his inauguration speech, held in January 2019, in the National Congress, Bolsonaro declared, "we will be guided by the sovereign will of those Brazilians: who want good schools, able to prepare their children for the labor market and not for political militancy" (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 2019), demarcating a pragmatic and economistic conception of the social function of the school, anchored in a supposed ideological neutrality. This (ideological) dimension was mentioned in other parts of the speech. On the occasion, Bolsonaro called on congressmen to "restore and re-erect the Homeland freeing it, definitively, from the yoke of corruption, criminality, economic irresponsibility and ideological submission" (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 2019). He promised the valorization of the family, the Judeo-Christian tradition, the fight against gender ideology, and the liberation of the country from ideological ties. In the speech, although the politician declines any conceptual rigor, it is evident that the term ideology is used as a synonym to refer to the thinking of the left.

Bolsonaro's insistence on freeing the country from a supposed ideological domination of the left is much more a tactic to mobilize his support base and maintain the field of dispute of his main opponent in the political-electoral area, the Workers' Party. After all, one of the pillars of its electoral program, fed in recent years by the corporate media, by the Lava-Jato operation, by factions of the bourgeoisie, by the armed forces, by conservative sectors of the churches, and by the parliamentary majority that approved the impeachment against Dilma Roussef, was based on anti-Petism. The resumption of eligibility of the former president, Lula da Silva, may confirm Bolsonaro's ideal opponent in the 2022 presidential elections.

The ideological cleansing promised by Bolsonaro during the presidential campaign and in his inauguration, speech has been the keynote of the actions of the Ministers of Education who have already occupied the post in these two and a half years of office (4 changes until the writing of this work, in August 2021). The names indicated had the backing of the Olavist ideological wing of the government.

The most eccentric and loudest of them, without a doubt was former minister Abraham Weintraub, who held the portfolio between April 2019 and June 2020. The economist and university professor collected controversial actions and stupefying statements, and elected public universities, as the priority target of his attacks, in the wake of the fight against cultural Marxism that supposedly, would dominate Brazilian public universities.

The rejection of any critical position of professors and students to the conservative and neoliberal agenda underway in the country, the historical revisionism of the military dictatorship, the fight against gender ideology and the supposed indoctrination of the left in schools and universities show an authoritarian conception of education, paved by the single thought.

The *modus operandi* of the Bolsonaro government in dealing with the Covid-19 health crisis aligns with the actions directed at federal universities. These social institutions have been transformed into systematic targets of attacks, delegitimization, and dismantling, regimented by the holders of the education portfolio.

The federal system of higher education in Brazil is the focus of a deliberate policy of dismantling. The administrative/regulatory measures imposed by the MEC, associated with a campaign orchestrated by the federal government, call into question the legitimacy, viability, and credibility of public universities, paving a tortuous path for the institutions and an uncertain future. These attacks occur in the wake of a broader political project carried out by the Bolsonaro government and the distinct segments that support it.

After a little more than two years of presidential mandate, the measures adopted represent the progressive undermining of the autonomy of universities and a profound reconfiguration of the administrative structure of the state.

On the other hand, the condition of economic dependence and subalternity of the country assumed by the hegemonic blocks, corroborates the policy of dismantling education, science, and technology. In their short-sighted and anti-popular view, the public university, based on teaching, research, and extension, is a sumptuous, unnecessary, and expensive institution. One can observe the acquiescence of this economic and political elite in the face of the Bolsonaro government's attacks on university autonomy and the maintenance of public funding. This dismantling policy is clearly demonstrated in the cut of public resources for the financing of federal universities, as will be discussed in the following item.

2 The Politics of (Un)Financing Public Universities

The financing of public higher education is one of the main challenges for Brazil, given the adoption, from the 1990s on, of policies of resource containment with compromising consequences on the quality of knowledge production and the training of professionals for the country. It is important to highlight the importance of the role that public universities, especially the federal ones, play in the country both in relation to the training of highly trained professionals as in the production of knowledge and research being responsible, along with state universities for 95% of research in Brazil (MOURA, 2019).

The policy of cutting resources of federal universities begins in 2015, with the economic crisis that affected the country, still in the government of President Dilma Rouseff, however, it is from 2018, that the budget reduction of these institutions is accentuated, as can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Union Revenues

*(Excluding revenues from public debt refinancing) and Expenditures of federal universities (including university hospitals), in the period from 2013 to 2020. (Values in R\$, at January 2021 prices, corrected by IPCA)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Union revenues: current and capital [A]</i>	<i>Total Expenses with Federal Universities [B]</i>	<i>% [B]/[A]</i>
2013	2.198.140.893.199	57.277.607.116	2,61%
2014	2.361.580.162.097	58.384.587.181	2,47%
2015	2.440.339.222.905	55.285.234.406	2,27%
2016	2.479.895.047.624	55.381.788.002	2,23%
2017	2.371.232.603.296	58.335.928.107	2,46%
2018	2.668.992.705.884	58.375.566.943	2,19%
2019	2.796.998.932.889	58.527.466.696	2,09%
2020	3.276.105.379.391	57.141.530.977	1,74%
Δ 2013-2020	49,04%	-0,24%	...

Source: Ministry of Finance (2021). Secretariat of the Treasury. Budget Execution Summary Report. Budgetary Balance. Fiscal and Social Security Budget from 20113 to 2020.

Despite the crisis, it is observed that, from 2013 to 2020, there was an increase in the Union's revenues of 49.04%, however, the expenses with the Federal Universities showed a reduction of -0.24%. The successive cuts in funding for universities have worsened with the Constitutional Amendment No. 95 (cap on public spending) and are linked to the fiscal adjustment to ensure resources for the payment of public debt, increasing the profits of rent-seeking financial capital. When we analyze the percentage evolution each year, the expenses of federal universities in relation to the Union revenues, the percentage of resources for funding these institutions has been below 2.5% on average, however, the situation worsens from the year 2018 (Temer government) reaching only 1.74% of Union revenues in the year 2020 (Bolsonaro government).

In a more detailed analysis of the budget executed in federal universities, by group of nature of expenses, it is possible to verify the gravity of the situation experienced in these institutions, especially in resources for investments and expenses (Other Current Expenses), as shown in Table 2 and Chart 1 below:

Table 2. Evolution of Union Expenditure with federal universities (including university hospitals) by Expenditure Nature Group (GND), from 2013 to 2020. (Values in R\$, at January 2021 prices, corrected by IPCA)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Union Revenues: current and capital [A]</i>	<i>University Funding [B]</i>	<i>Universities Investment [C]</i>	<i>% [B]/[A]</i>	<i>% [C]/[A]</i>
2013	2.198.140.893.199	10.339.659.107	3.844.356.224	0,47%	0,17%
2014	2.361.580.162.097	9.669.595.306	3.067.182.930	0,41%	0,13%
2015	2.440.339.222.905	8.292.834.106	903.434.449	0,34%	0,04%
2016	2.479.895.047.624	8.547.504.743	789.440.005	0,34%	0,03%
2017	2.371.232.603.296	7.945.134.174	573.079.125	0,34%	0,02%
2018	2.668.992.705.884	7.864.065.860	359.828.285	0,29%	0,01%
2019	2.796.998.932.889	7.447.770.028	190.583.990	0,27%	0,01%
2020	3.276.105.379.391	6.514.361.810	258.484.861	0,20%	0,01%
Δ 2013-2020	49,04%	-37,00%	-93,28%

Source: Brazil (2021). Union Budget: Budgetary and Financial Execution of the Union (2013-2020).

In 2013, the Universities received R\$ 10.339 billion to fund their activities and in 2020 they received R\$ 6.514 billion, a reduction of -37.00%. The activities financed with costing resources are necessary for the maintenance of the operation of the Universities such as: payment of electricity, water, telephone, equipment maintenance, classrooms and laboratories, payment of outsourced services (surveillance and cleaning), among others. In the case of investments, the situation is even more serious. The resources destined for investment were reduced from 2013 (R\$ 3.844 billion) to 2020 (R\$ 258 million) by 93.28%. Chart 1 below shows the evolution of the costing and capital resources more clearly.

Graph 1. Evolution of spending and investment with federal universities (including university hospitals): 2013-2020. Values in R\$ billion at January 2021 prices (IPCA)



Source: Prepared by the authors. Cited in Table 2.

It is evident that the brutal cut in the financing of public federal universities shows that the federal government's project is to destroy them as public and autonomous institutions. The two essential pillars for the existence of these institutions, namely, public funding and university autonomy, have been the preferred targets. The Future-se Bill (3076/2020), currently being processed in the National Congress, synthesizes, and symbolizes the offensive against universities. The temporary retreat of the project, due to the pandemic, does not indicate a programmatic change in the ideological agenda of Bolsonarism. The physiological alliance with the Centrão, which guaranteed the election of names supported by Bolsonaro to the presidency of the House and Senate, creates more favorable political conditions for the approval of the agendas defended by the federal government, particularly those that present greater social resistance.

The project that creates the *Entrepreneurial and Innovative Universities and Institutes Program - Future-se*, which, among other aspects, aims to encourage private sources of funding for programs and projects of interest to the institutions, is aligned with the conservative conception of the Bolsonaro government and its base of support. The first versions of the project shifted the prerogatives of university management to social organizations. Besides the privatist conception of the bill, university autonomy was completely mischaracterized in the versions made available for public consultation.

The document, which is in the House of Representatives, maintains the neuralgic points of the initial proposal, without guaranteeing public financing and the exercise of the prerogatives of university autonomy. The managerial parameters of Future-se (management contract, commitment to meet targets in exchange for special benefits, result indicators, dissemination of entrepreneurial culture) grant materiality to the subordination of universities to the mercantile logic (AUTHOR; KATO; AUTHOR, 2020).

3 University Autonomy Under Attack: Bolsonaro's Takeover of Public Universities

The attacks directed to the Universities, Institutes, and Federal Technical Schools through the reduction of public investments, as analyzed in the previous section, is articulated to the emptying of university autonomy. The prerogative of free choice of directors, from processes of consultation with the university community and the respective deliberation in the higher councils is still a field of dispute, marked by omissions and by the maintenance of anachronistic laws that regulate the theme.

The provision contained in Law 9192/95 (BRASIL, 1995), attributes to the President of the Republic the competence for the nomination of university directors, from a triple list elaborated by the respective highest collegiate. In recent years, the first-placed person on the list sent by the institutions has been appointed, in accordance with the principles of democratic management and university autonomy that formally guide the organization of Brazilian education. Bolsonaro, aligned with the authoritarian and conservative bias that guides his government, undermines the meaning of participation and democracy in the FIHE.

The table below lists the federal public HEIs that had their electoral results disregarded. In general, the second or third place winner was appointed. However, even more bizarre, and authoritarian situations have been identified, with the nomination of temporary intervenors. In these cases, there was no consultation with the university community or the Higher Councils, as occurred at the University of Vale de São Francisco and the Federal University of Grande Dourados.

Table 1. Interventions in Federal Institutions of Higher Education Brazil- 2019/2021

Quantity	Public HEIs
1.	Universidade Federal do Sul e Sudeste do Pará
2.	Universidade Federal do Piauí
3.	Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira
4.	Universidade Federal do Ceará
5.	Universidade Federal Rural do Semi-Árido
6.	Universidade Federal do Vale do São Francisco
7.	Universidade Federal da Paraíba
8.	Universidade Federal do Sergipe
9.	Universidade Federal do Recôncavo da Bahia
10.	Universidade Federal dos Vales do Jequitinhonha e Mucurupi
11.	Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo
12.	Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica Celso Suchow Fonseca –RJ
13.	Universidade Federal do Triângulo Mineiro
14.	Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul
15.	Instituto Federal do Rio Grande do Norte
16.	Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia da Bahia
17.	Instituto Federal de Santa Catarina
18.	Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul
19.	Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul
20.	Universidade Federal de Grande Dourados
21.	Universidade Federal de Itajubá
22.	Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro
23.	Universidade Federal de Pelotas
24.	Universidade Federal de Campina Grande
25.	Universidade Federal de São Carlos
26.	Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro

Source: ANDES, 2021. Dossier militarization of the Bolsonaro government and intervention in Federal Institutions of Higher Education. Adapted and updated by the authors.

The strengthening of democratic and representative instances in university institutions has marked the struggle of union entities and social movements in the last decades. The conservative nature of Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government established criteria and limits in the process of choosing university leaders, regulated by Law 9192/95 and Decree 1.916/1996. The final word on the choice of university leaders was left to the political decision of the President of the Republic.

The PT governments did not change the legislation formulated by their predecessors. On the contrary, they improved the current norms, adding new criteria for the composition of the triple list sent to the Executive. Decree 6.264/2007 (BRASIL, 2007) established that only Associate and Full professors could compose the three-nominee lists. The bureaucratic and centralizing conditions, maintained and deepened in recent years, have emptied the exercise of university autonomy and democratic management.

Provisional Measure 914, published on December 24, 2019, whose validity has expired, represented another move by the Bolsonaro government in weakening the pillars of university autonomy. In the proposition of the MP it was established: a) direct voting, preferably electronic; b) weight of votes 70% faculty, 15% technical-administrative, and 15% students; c) consultation for the formation of the triple list will be organized by an electoral college created specifically for this purpose; d) election to choose only the Rector; e)

conditions for designation of pro-tempore rector, f) choice and appointment of directors of campi by the rector. (BRASIL, 2019). The measure was widely criticized by the university community and by the unions representing the teaching and technical-administrative movements and the student organization. The regressive and anti-democratic character of the proposal demarcated yet another offensive of the Bolsonaro government against public universities.

The tactical persistence of the federal government in weakening university autonomy continued with the publication of Provisional Measure 979, of June 9, 2020. The instrument provided for the appointment of directors pro tempore for Federal Education Institutions during the period of public health emergency of international importance, resulting from the Covid 19 pandemic, dispensing with the process of consultation or formation of a triple list. MP 979 was returned to the Planalto Palace by the former president of the Senate, Davi Alcolumbre, in face of the evident violation of constitutional precepts, losing its validity.

The authoritarian and punitive atmosphere has increased in the university institutions under the management of the intervenors. The occurrence of persecution of various kinds, the opening of administrative proceedings (PAD), intimidating complaints to ombudsmen and the Public Ministry, Conduct Adjustment Agreements are instruments used to intimidate critics and opponents.

4 Final Considerations

The work analyzed the features of the process of dismantling the public university, starting with the offensive against two pillars essential to its existence: public funding and university autonomy. This phenomenon deepens within the extreme right-wing government in Brazil, supported by conservative sectors, defenders of a diffuse and clearly regressive agenda. The fight against the supposed cultural Marxism that would dominate public HEIs reveals the ideological aspect of this counteroffensive and is associated with the neoconservative program that guides the Bolsonaro government.

On the economic side, austerity policies based on limits to public spending on primary expenses and the shrinking of the State's role in social areas mark the intensification of the dispute for public funds by big capital, which has repercussions in the reduction of funding for public universities. The policy of scarcity, imposed on all these institutions, puts at risk the implementation of the activities planned for 2021, including actions to serve the population affected by the pandemic. Some institutions have announced that they may suspend their actions, such as the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. The planning of future resumption of classroom activities is compromised, at a time that would require greater investments to ensure safe sanitary conditions for the university community.

This phenomenon should be interpreted from a relentless offensive of capital over labor. The working class has been facing unemployment, hunger, and discouragement in the face of an organic crisis that was already unfolding before the pandemic, and since then it has taken on the character of a humanitarian drama. The most evident contradiction of this phenomenon is the increase in wealth and the ascension of new billionaires to the minority group of owners of the Brazilian bourgeoisie. This segment of the class has earned significant profits in the financial sector, in private health care, and in agribusiness.

The public university, as a social institution, reverberates the contradictions and struggles of its historical time. The rise of an extreme right-wing government, programmatically organized around a conservative, irrationalism, and authoritarian agenda, supported by distinct class fractions, advances over the public university. The dismantling of public funding, the interventions in the choices of the university's administrators, all conform to the same phenomenon, the destruction of the research university, self-managed and guided by democratic principles.

The different maneuvers in the normative field (MP 914/2019, MP 979/2020, PL 3.076/2020- FUTURE-SE), the Constitutional Amendment 95/2016 of the spending cap, the Constitutional Amendment 109/2021, the successive cuts in the budgets, and the appointments of intervenors, conform an authoritarian spectrum against the FIHE and the whole of the federal public service, in particular the sectors in charge of the execution of social policies. The attack needs to be understood, therefore, against the working class, in what is essential for its material and spiritual reproduction, expressed in work and dignified salaries, health, education, housing, culture, and leisure.

The resumption of the organization of the working class, represented by its movements and entities, based on the revision of tactics and strategies of organized struggle is urgent.

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