

Accumulation Regime, State Regime and forms of Social Mobilization

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Introduction

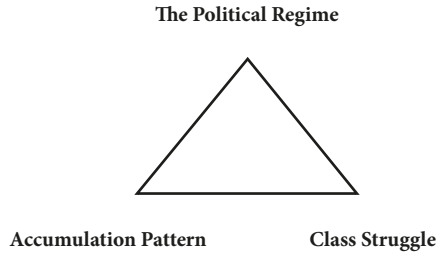
These are basically notes, in the strict sense of the word a sketch of ideas about the relationship between the accumulation pattern, State types, and class struggle, as a complex system that defines conditions and possibilities under which capitalist domination is reproduced and challenged. In pursuit of this goal, I present a preliminary and tentatively comparative review of the form that this triad takes on in two different moments of the historical development of capitalism. Broadly speaking, these two moments could be identified as a “national” phase (second half of the twentieth century) and a “global” phase (the twenty-first century).

Capitalism, as a form of social organization based on the private appropriation of surplus socially generated by wage labor, is characterized by an ongoing opposition between the interests and needs of the capitalist class, on one hand, and those of the working class, on the other.

This opposition, which in general terms is expressed in a struggle over the distribution of the domestic income between wages and profits, has concrete, structured expressions based on what has been called the accumulation regime (or accumulation pattern).

The assumption underlying this argument is that there is a specific articulation between the accumulation pattern, the State forms that domination assumes, and the forms of social struggle that emerge from the form of State domination and gradually give shape to the State. It is a complex system constituted by three mutually inter-defined subsystems: capital accumulation’s characteristics and needs set the conditions and modalities adopted by the State’s political institutions, which in turn configure the specific form in which capitalist accumulation is organized. Both processes condition the characteristics adopted by the struggles of the subaltern classes, which, in turn, contribute to define not only the State’s institutions, but also the characteristics present in the accumulation pattern. In other words, this approach proposes that although the needs and characteristics

of capitalist accumulation constitute the dominant factor of this complex system, its concrete form results from interaction with subaltern classes. This correlation of forces is expressed as social regulation in the institutions that form part of the State. This again modifies both the struggles of the subaltern classes and the forms that capitalist accumulation adopts.



The central hypothesis is that the current time, referred to as neoliberal globalization, constitutes a specific stage of capitalism that is clearly differentiated from the national-Fordist phase. In this phase, both the accumulation pattern and the State form, present concrete specificities, due to which the forms of struggle of the subaltern classes must transform to influence the conditions and possibilities of reproducing and challenging capitalist domination, promoting transformations in institutions, social practices, and collective subjectivities¹.

We will attempt to explain these two complex systems through identifying the three inter-definable subsystems they are constituted by, analyzing their inner logic and intersystem dynamics. The purpose of this is to shed light on understanding the possibilities and demands faced by contemporary social struggles.

The argument is organized as follows: The first part presents a very brief analytical framework, oriented to specify the inner logic of this complex tripartite system: "accumulation pattern/type of State/forms of social struggle". The second part focuses on explaining the dynamics of what can be referred to as the national-Fordist system, analyzing the inner logic and interaction of their three inter-defined subsystems: the Fordist accumulation pattern, the social State, and the national-citizen struggles. The third part examines what we refer to as the global-neoliberal .

¹ This the essay refers to capitalism as a mode of production taking the characteristics that it presents in "central" countries as the main pattern, for several reasons: the first is that it is the one that sets the pattern in the path of transformation of "peripheral" capitalism ; secondly, because the argument of the three interdefinable systems and intersystemic dynamics (Pattern of accumulation-type of State-Forms of social struggles) also applies to countries of dependent capitalism; third, because although with important specificities, the characteristics of what I call the "national-fordist" and "global neoliberal" systems are also present in these societies; and fourth, but not least, because addressing those specifications in the necessary detail would make this essay extraordinarily long. But thanks to the observation of a diligent reviewer, I am preparing a text that will precisely address those peculiarities.

system and its three inter-defined subsystems: the global accumulation regime, the neoliberal State, and social struggles. The final part presents some preliminary conclusions.

Theoretical Framework: The Accumulation Pattern, the Form of the State, and Class Struggle

The proposal's analytical framework is constituted by contributions made by the so-called "regulation school"², the Marxist theory of the State, in its "Gramscian" expression, and René Zavaleta's contributions to an understanding of the intimate link between the economic coercion implicit in the social relations of production and the form of the State.

The regulation school identified that the historical specificities that capitalist accumulation expresses in different moments, result from the transformation of the productive forces, which is comprised of two aspects: transforming the conditions of the work process and transforming the life conditions of wage labor. This articulation highlights the central role played by class struggle in determining the logic of capital accumulation (Aglietta, 1979: 49).

With this perspective, it is possible to stop considering class struggle as a dimension that is alien or "exogenous" to the capital accumulation process, as a process that is marginal to the productive process and that only impacts accumulation via wage negotiation. By looking at the work process as a space of confrontation between the classes, the regulation theory "reinstated" class struggle as a trigger of technological change (real subsumption of labor under capital) and forms of labor remuneration as components of the accumulation cycle. From this came the explanation that overcoming the crisis of overproduction that triggered the Wall Street Crash of 1929 would only be resolved by a transformation of the productive process (technological innovation and the intensification of the workday) and the generalization of the extraction of relative surplus value, which leads to an increase in worker consumption. From the perspective of the regulation theory, the accumulation pattern (as the corporeality of certain social relations) generates a system of specific mediations that are arranged as a normative system and express characteristics typical of the specific form the State assumes. For this reason, the theory's core concept is the "mode of regulation," understood as "the set of mediations that seek to ensure that the distortions created by accumulation remain within boundaries compatible with social cohesion within each nation" (Aglietta, 2001:19)

This perspective extensively coincides with the formulation made by René Zavaleta (2009b) when he sets forth that economic coercion is a system of relationships

² For recent discussion on this approach see Neffa, 2006; Basualdo, 2007; Saiz, 2012.

derived from the characteristics of the relationships of social production that condition the behavior of social subjects and enable domination to replicate through reproducing the conditions of production. In other words, the relationship between those who dominate and those who are subordinate is always questioned by the latter in various forms and degrees.

Another of Zavaleta's (2009d) contributions that is derived from this concept, is his notion of the State as an "apparent form" of the social relations of production, that is, as a "disturbed" form of these relationships in which the value constructs of the dominant class are presented as society's general values and the normative and institutional system is presented as an expression of the needs and interests of all social groups.

Finally, and here we introduce Gramsci's (1980) contribution regarding the idea that domination is constituted by coercion and consensus. This position opens the door to understanding that within the class struggle, the subaltern classes do not always or inevitably fight to end class domination. It should be noted that the ideological hegemony of the dominant class consists precisely in the subaltern classes "adopting" the values and interests of the dominant class to different degrees and forms. Even though their claims may be in opposition in the everyday struggle, this does not necessarily imply that the struggle of those who are considered subordinate is "revolutionary" per se, in other words, that they are consciously and effectively geared to a radical transformation of the social relations of production.

Before concluding with the theoretical formulation, I would like to emphasize that the change between these two "complex systems" is not mainly a change of economic policy, but rather a change in the model of capitalist accumulation. This change implies a new correlation of forces among the social actors that depends on the role they play in the capital accumulation process, both in the surplus generation and realization phases. It is also a new form of the State understood as a systematization of the relationships of domination and a new form of class struggle.

It should also be noted that in capitalism's social dynamic, it is the capitalist social subject that plays a dominant and leading role, not only because wage labor only exists while capital establishes a contract-based relationship to hire labor force, but also because the process is primarily driven by profit-gain, that is, the drive to materialize the interests of the owning class. Lastly, the owning class has the power to direct the process because as a minority group, it has a great leeway derived from its concentrated power that enables it to control most social wealth. Paradoxically, the power of the subaltern social subject lies in subtracting from capital control, that is, resisting to operate as wage labor: the less wage labor there is, the more that capital loses power (capital has no way of extracting surplus value, which is what

constitutes and strengthens it).

The National System

This complex system is characterized by the interweaving of a Fordist accumulation pattern, a socio-political regime (or type of State), as well as forms of national and citizen struggle.

The Fordist Accumulation Pattern

The accumulation model structured since the 1929 crisis and during the Second World War period, placed the bourgeoisie's manufacturing fraction in a central position. This class fraction had been reinforced by the development of the banking system that contributed to financing manufacturing production. Technological development –a result of the application of science to industry– and a modification of production's technical organization –the division and simplification of productive tasks and the setting up of the assembly line– enabled capitalist accumulation to grow in a sustained and accelerated way, supported by a high rate of relative surplus value, based on a reduction of labor force value through cheapening mass-produced wage-goods, which simultaneously allowed a notorious increase in the workers' level of consumption and employment. This not only created conditions to solve the overproduction crises capitalism had suffered earlier, but also broadened the domestic market as a space in which produced surplus value could materialize. It also offered material conditions for the working class to become included in bourgeois society as a social subject entitled to rights.

This inclusion process was neither smooth nor free, but rather was the result of intense social struggle, a disarticulated continuation of those struggles workers had been waging since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries against the effects of the industrial revolution and the development of manufacturing (Thompson, 1977; Tilly, 2005). During the first decades of the twentieth century, these struggles were structured around the recognition of worker organizations (both as unions and political parties) as legitimate representatives for direct negotiation with capital aimed at achieving better working and living conditions

In this accumulation pattern, industrial capital was the dominant fraction, being not only the most numerous fractions, but also the most active one, the one growing more quickly, generating more employment, marking the pace of economic activity through technological innovations, and thus leading the general capitalist accumulation process. The commercial fraction, subordinated to both the manufacturing and financial fractions, occupied a secondary place. Its dynamic depends on the expansion of productive activities and contributes to the expansion of mass con-

sumption via promoting credit earmarked for the acquisition of durable consumer goods by the better paid worker wage.

The pattern of Fordist accumulation was thus founded on an extraction of surplus value that is primarily intensive rather than extensive. This was possible thanks to the accelerated development of technology in the production of wage goods and durable consumer goods in such a way that their unit value was reduced, enabling them to form part of the wageworker's consumer basket, first of the consumer basket of white-collar workers and later of that of the blue-collar workers directly. This technological transformation (Fordism/Taylorism) implied an intensification of the working day. At the same time as the working day was reduced and wages were increased, innovations in the productive process implied greater burnout of the labor force, an increase in their productive capacity which simultaneously drove a relative reduction of the value (price) of such goods enabling them to gradually become part of the goods workers consume.

During this stage, the accelerated development of Sector I (the production of capital goods) is only achieved when its dynamism is conveyed to Sector II (the production of consumer goods), specifically the production of durable consumer goods—that used to be considered luxury goods—which “cheapens” these goods via technological innovation and work intensification. This reduces the unit value of these goods which occurs concurrently with an improvement of real wages and access to credit. The simultaneous development of these two economic sectors enabled capitalist accumulation to evolve in a more stable and accelerated way, such as that which occurred between 1929 and 1973. Under regulation orchestrated by the Welfare State, capitalism did not face a crisis, but instead grew in an accelerated and constant way. Between 1945 and 1971, there were no major economic breakdowns, under state regulation, markets grew in an organized way and imbalances were minimal and manageable. (Quadagno, 1993; Nollert, 1995)

Technological improvement and the intensification of labor force exploitation prompted a modification of working conditions. This encouraged the creation of a Fordist accumulation pattern which throughout fifty years revolved around productivity improvement and increasing wage workers consumption as a foundation for extracting surplus value and achieving both profit and extended capital accumulation via productive reinvestment.

The Social State

The characteristics of the Fordist accumulation pattern which not only intensifies labor force exploitation, but also increases real wages, are insolubly linked to constructing working class collective power through unions and labor-oriented political

parties. This collective power changed the correlation of forces existing between political subjects (those who dominate and those who are subalterns) generating the construction of a Social State (a Welfare or commitment-based State) (McCammon, 1992).

Within this accumulation pattern, “qualified” labor is of central importance, as the technification of the productive process demands that significant sectors of the working class become better qualified. Better qualifications increase their bargaining capacity in relation to their employer, particularly in the context of a strong unionization that -since the forties- was able to impose collective bargaining agreements and through creating national and industrial unions, was able to impose collective bargaining regarding how social surplus is distributed.

Parallel with this, workers’ claims for better living conditions and higher wages, which imposed the creation of government agencies and programs aimed at improving their life situation, enabled wage workers to become recognized as subjects entitled to rights. Thus, the creation of the Welfare State is founded on wage-workers’ organized action within union associations that through demanding improved living and working conditions, promote/demand the creation of state functions ensuring that the working class gain access to goods and services in education, health, housing, retirement, and even leisure and rest (Gough, 1982).

On the other hand, the wage workers’ organized action as electors reinforces the tendency to transform the State apparatus, access labor-oriented political parties (potentiated by the existence of communist parties) and reorient the government’s efforts to create institutions and programs devoted to universalizing a series of services (education, health, housing, leisure, and so on). This makes it possible not only to improve the working population’s living conditions, but also recognizes this social class as legitimately entitled to rights. All this led to a constant improvement of the situation experienced by the working class throughout almost fifty years (1930-1977), due to the distribution of social surplus between capital and labor. In other words, on one hand, the economic process became “harmonious” and “automatic” through the collective action of the working class, organized in unions (and political parties), fighting for a reduction of the workday, better working conditions, and higher wages, drove capital’s interest in technological innovation and was simultaneously able to increase real wages. This made it possible to turn the increasing mass of industrial workers into consumers of the goods they themselves produce (Traugott, 1995).

On the other hand, workers organized in unions and political parties, as instruments to reach their goals to materially improve their lives and influence decision-making within the State apparatus, by expressing their social power through both direct ac-

tion (affecting production through collective bargaining, strikes, walkouts, etc.) and indirect action (as majority representation) reveal a new correlation of forces that pushed the State apparatus to transform in order to respond to grassroots claims and accommodate them to the needs and possibilities of capitalist accumulation, thus creating the “Welfare” State (Jenkins y Brent, 1989).

These conditions result from a correlation of forces favorable to the workers, generated not only by wage workers’ powerful economic and political organization, but also by the characteristics of an accumulation model in which technological innovation, the improvement of productivity, the expansion of manufacturing and mass consumption guided employers’ investment decisions. Although this did not at all imply the elimination of contradictions between the interests of capital owners and wage workers, it did imply an attenuation of social differences since workers were perceived not only as rights-entitled subjects, but were also understood as potential consumers of goods, the realization of which enable capitalists to close the capital cycle and accrue profits.

This highlighting of the importance of wage labor is complemented by the pressure exercised by the ongoing possibility that communist parties come to exercise control over the State apparatus through elections, promoting a radical transformation of society. This “threat” —materialized in the existence of the bloc of countries belonging to the Warsaw Pact and political parties with an ideology and program that, in different degrees and manners, challenge the legitimacy of private property of the means of production and therefore the private appropriation of socially-generated surplus— functions as a “lever” that reinforces wage labor’s bargaining power in the distribution of national wealth. In addition, the technological conditions of the productive processes, as well as the entrepreneurial mindset and the demands for stability and political control over the national State apparatus, hold national borders as a priority field of activity for social agents. This factor also serves as a way of increasing wage workers’ bargaining capacity since the relatively limited mobility of capital enables wage workers to organize on a national level —both as unions and political parties— thus gaining more power vis-à-vis company management.

Formulating union benefits as social rights and consolidating electoral power as a form of exercising both political and civil rights, function as mechanisms to include and reduce social polarization/inequality. All this results from recognizing the subaltern classes as rights-holders (Manza, 1993).

The legitimacy of this State form is based precisely on the fact that exercising social, economic, and political regulation tasks enables an accelerated growth of the domestic product and a distribution that seeks to attenuate social imbalances in order to thus guarantee the stability and order required to ensure the continuation

of the expanded reproduction of capitalist accumulation.

Social Struggles

Let us look more closely at the forms that class struggle adopts within the framework of this complex system formed by the accumulation pattern, the form of the State, and class struggle itself. We have already pointed out that unions (and other labor organizations), as well as political parties constitute the main organizational forms, forged throughout brutal struggles and lengthy decades through which workers became political subjects fighting for better living and working conditions and were able to accumulate enough power to modify the existing correlation of forces. This allowed for a transformation of the State's institutions and at the same time substantially improved the workers' standard of living.

This was made possible because both organization forms (unions and political parties), as well as the main struggle strategies (elections, striking, and street demonstrations) proved to be highly efficient in constructing subaltern power within the context of an accumulation pattern centered on industrial deployment, full employment, and workers' mass consumption. This context is also characterized by a political regime with a legitimacy based on the achievement of a balanced national development, electoral competition, and extending national citizenship.

Within this tapestry, subalterns deployed highly effective actions in the sphere of production. Not only were unions a "counterweight" to all public and private productive and service entities (mainly public services), but also within the context of the national control of capital mobility (which for technical reasons was also limited), strikes, walkouts, slowdowns, and collective bargaining to negotiate better working conditions constituted strategies through which the working class could effectively force employers to negotiate and obtain benefits. Thus, in the economy, union organization -under a nationally regulated capitalism with limited capital mobility- enabled workers to resort to striking as a mechanism for exercising pressure to negotiate costs directly with employers or via pressing the government through the mechanism of job loss (in the context of an electoral commitment to achieve full employment and well-paid jobs), or undermining the ruling group's legitimacy. Within the framework of a Welfare State, the existence of social rights offered a relative "leverage" on the correlation of forces between workers and employers.

At the same time, the electoral strategy functioned not only via the labor-oriented or social democratic political parties actually gaining access to decision-making spheres and promoting government programs reflecting the relative power of the subaltern classes, but there was also the potential threat that communist parties (and their radical social transformation program) might gain access to State power,

promoting a radical transformation of social order.

Within this context, public demonstrations had considerable political-ideological weight. This street expression of discontent was proof of how detached these social actors were from the ruling groups, reflecting a loss of support from at least that segment of the population. This reduced the legitimacy of the decisions that were taken. Secondly, this initially temporary disaffection had the potential to become permanent and translate into votes for the opposition, thus threatening the continuity of the ruling groups in power. Thirdly, by denouncing arbitrary decisions, illegal actions, or mismanagement, this public action impacted how third parties perceived the current administration. This would eventually shift public opinion, thus constituting a potential threat of losing control over the State apparatus, if this discontent were favored electorally. Within this context, the number of demonstrators did matter. Mass meetings demonstrating discontent could mean that the ruling party was in danger of losing its position, if the electorate decided to use their ballots to vote out the ruling fraction for not fulfilling the principles their mandate was based on: for the national society to reach a balanced and stable development³ (Amenta et al., 2002).

Thus, the threat that social discontent might spread, implied by massive demonstrations, within the framework of each country, potentiated the power carried by citizen denunciation and dissent, since it defined what party would rule and what political project would be favored, thus maintaining politicians relatively subjected to electoral approval. The extreme danger for the dominant class was that citizens might vote for leftist-socialist-communist parties and that power be accessed by groups convinced of the need and possibility of eliminating the private property of the means of production, as a necessary condition for society's equitable and balanced development.

All this led to a "context" that generated a correlation of forces in which the rights, social guarantees, and representation forms of the subaltern sectors were recognized, thus to a certain extent reducing the disproportionate correlation of forces between the subaltern and dominant sectors. This context also points to some "functional" mechanisms to potentiate subaltern power: unions-strikes; political parties-votes, and eventually street demonstrations.

Within that "context," the dominant groups were interested in economic (and political) stability, market growth (more employment and greater purchasing power),

³ During the years of the historical PRI regime, this was a remote possibility in Mexico where given corporativism, the weakness of political parties, and multiple forms of electoral fraud, the opposition never had a chance to win. However, displays of popular discontent were considered as the political culture of the State emerging from the Mexican Revolution exalted the idea that the government, and in particular the president, represented the people. In this sense, any display of disaffection toward the government and the president have a specific weight since they reveal discredit and a decrease in legitimacy (Favela, 2006).

as well as guaranteed continuity for their projects and investments. When the subordinate groups raise demands or vindications, compatibles with the logic of the Fordist/national accumulation pattern and the national Welfare State, in different degrees, and with indirect trajectories, they are incorporated, whether through material benefits, government plans, the creation of public institutions or policies.⁴ This of course, does not exclude the possibility that these displays of discontent were often firmly repressed.

Most of the demands raised by the “excluded” sectors were geared to attain economic, political, and social inclusion through legalizing their organizations and representatives, as well as resorting to administrative and legal mechanisms aimed to demand respect for the judicially established guarantees, appealing to public opinion, and the threat of escalating the disturbance to public order—as an expression of political disaffection—until a solution be found to the problem.

We will not delve into the multiple ways in which power faces these strategies. However, based on the real power represented both by union organizations (and their real power over how society progresses) and electoral power, street demonstrations by threatening to defect (to communism as an alternative), became a powerful weapon. Its expression of discontent and its potential to appeal to the public opinion, served as elements of pressure to reveal and increase the deteriorated legitimacy of governmental groups.

We can conclude that although exploitation, domination, inequality, poverty, situations of relative material wellbeing, and relative respect to the political, civil, and social rights experienced by majority sectors of the wage workers have not disappeared, adhering to certain forms of struggle constructed a “subaltern power,” grounded in wage workers’ capacity to use the power of collective action to impose certain conditions on the capitalist accumulation process and the functioning of the State apparatus.

The Global System

Let’s take a glance at what is happening in the present moment in which both the accumulation pattern and the State forms have undergone significant changes, although changes in the forms adopted by class struggle have not yet been notorious. It could thus be stated that we are going through a transition in which new forms of struggle are emerging. The change from one system to another did not occur “automatically,” as a result of the “laws of capitalist accumulation” only. On the contrary, it resulted from a series of decisions taken by large-scale capital and im-

⁴ To see the relationship between social protest and institutional change in the Mexican case, see Brachet-Marquez, 1994 and Favela, 2006; in the case of the United States, see Piven and Cloward, 1979 and McAdam, 1982.

plemented by the States and international bodies (World Bank, IMF, GATT-WTO).

These decisions can be traced back to the seventies/eighties and aimed to destroy the social power that subaltern subjects had been gaining since the mid-nineteenth century. This undermining of subaltern power reached its zenith in the formation and consolidation of the Social Regulator State disguised as a Bourgeois Democratic State.

Thus, the so-called “State’s fiscal crisis” is basically an argument used to demonize the Welfare State and social power, which -sheltered under the Welfare State- had constructed subaltern classes to restructure the accumulation model, eliminating controls over capital operations and mobility in its search for greater profits (Villamar, 2006).

The new “social order,” called neoliberal global capitalism is constituted by articulating a financialized global accumulation pattern, and a neoliberal and subsidiary political regime or State form.

The Global Accumulation Pattern

The new accumulation pattern is characterized by the fact that manufacturing capital has undergone a severe loss of absolute and relative importance, in terms of both its contributions to generating the domestic/global product and the number of jobs it generates, having been displaced by commercial capital, and especially financial capital. Financial capital has clearly become the dominant fraction since the monetary form of capital (whether real or virtual) is the form that guides and organizes the valorization process in the economy. The banking and credit systems ceased to be “pillars” supporting production in manufacturing, services, or agriculture to become a core space for capital valorization through the development of first, second, and third level future markets, stock markets, and credit systems (Tauss, 2012). This possibility is the result of technological development, enabling a virtual management of social wealth, as well as the suppression of control over capital’s free mobility resulting from the elimination of the regulation constructed under the social State.

Globalization is the second characteristic of the accumulation pattern. In other words, the internationalization of the process of capital valorization under any of its forms, whether via the virtual manipulation of moneyed capital, or through the transnationalization of productive investment (in manufacturing, services, and agriculture) becomes feasible because of technological and communication development that enables the fragmentation of the productive processes and the location of various segments in which investment results more profitable (i.e., relocation in

low-wage areas lacking union organization, with cheap infrastructure, tax havens, and so on).

The third characteristic is labor flexibilization, on which labor precariousness is based. The continuation of technological innovation allowed for a fragmentation of the productive process into infinite standardized segments –most of which do not require specialized or experienced labor force– which together with the automation of many areas, as well as the simplification and extreme differentiation of worker functions was able to reduce the presence and relative importance of “qualified workers” and collective bargaining. Through these new characteristics of the productive process, derived from manufacturing techniques associated to “Toyotaism” (functional flexibility, worker turnover, bonuses for “team” work, promoting the rupture of labor solidarity which is replaced by an identification between subalterns and employers, as well as the implementation of a just-in-time system that eliminates stocks), and outsourcing. This gradually undermined the foundation on which union strength had been sustained (Tilly,1995).

Parallel to the erosion of wage workers’ bargaining power within the productive space, the internationalization of production leads to an impressive decrease in manufacturing costs (Sassen, 1993). This “democratizes” consumption even more, paradoxically fading into irrelevance paid labor as a factor for the realization of production and surplus value. Each company’s markets are not only expanded globally, but “planned obsolescence” enables the number of consumers to grow artificially since articles have to be replaced due to their physical deterioration or compulsory updating. Market expansion parallel to its re-stratification and marked differentiation per income segment, where wages are significantly placed at the lowest levels since the transformation of the accumulation pattern implies a replacement of national wage worker’s consumption for global massive consumption, thus suppressing the need for increasing wages as a condition to realize surplus value and reproduce the accumulation cycle. Poverty, which had tended to disappear during the previous stage, in which it was “reserved” for those who were excluded from the wage-earning relationship (migrants, the underemployed, the unemployed, peasants, the elderly, women, and youth), reappeared and grew among formal workers.

Together with flexibilization, extensive labor force exploitation has re-emerged based on the re-appearance of piecework (goal- and commission-oriented), the extension of the workday, the reduction of real wages not only through decreasing labor force’s purchasing power (through inflation), but also through directly suppressing social benefits associated with collective bargaining (holidays, medical insurance, housing aid, pensions, etc.). At the same time, the loss of labor organization has deteriorated work quality (lack of collective bargaining agreements and benefits),

an increase in underemployment (and unpaid labor), as well as unemployment.

Lastly, the financialized and global pattern of accumulation implies a configuration of the global market as a space in which surplus value is realized, opening new spaces for capital valorization. This is achieved through dismantling State property (in strategic sectors such as energy, fuel, communications, central banking, and even prison administration) which has become privatized. Basic services have also become privatized through dismantling the social security system, as well as social services such as education, healthcare, housing, and expropriating natural resources, such as water, recreational areas, biodiversity, mining, and all sorts of virgin natural resources that had not previously been commodified.

The Neoliberal State

Congruent with transformations of the pattern of accumulation, State forms also experience essential modifications (Hirsch, 2003). Apart from the aforementioned privatization of social property, destruction of the social security system, and national deregulation of capital, emphasis must be placed on the political meaning of these transformations, in the sense that the reconversion (non-reduction) of State power is aimed at deepening and strengthening capital's power over labor, as well as promoting resource centralization and concentration (capital, income, property) in the hands of the most powerful agents, using every kind of mechanism available: the government, free trade, capital market liberalization, the use of fiscal resources to finance private debt, liberalizing the rate of exchange as well as the decentralization of central banking. All these policy decisions, rated as efficient, are in fact decisions that favor the concentration of wealth in the hands of capital's most powerful fractions and groups.

In addition, this concentration process substantially pursues the total nullification of the subaltern classes as rights-holding subjects. This is attained not only through dismantling labor organizations, but also through eradicating their consumer rights in view of the absolute freedom firms enjoy and how the strengthening of monopolies and oligopolies is promoted within a context in which there is total freedom for capital and at the same time a decrease of individual rights and guarantees.

In addition to destroying of foundations of organized labor's economic power, through labor precariousness, the State's transformation has also implied an open and clear reduction of the population's political and civil rights (Camou, 2010). This process has two expressions: a direct pathway consisting of the legal modification of the criminal justice codes, the suppression of basic guarantees such as judicial protection (arrests without a warrant, detention for more than 72 hours, extreme interrogation practices, etc.), and criminalizing social protest.

Parallel to this, State forms experience transformations that express a loss of the potential power available to the subaltern sectors. Apart from the blatant cancellation of social rights through reforms that reduce public health, pension, and educational systems, economic reforms tend towards the disappearance of public property and the resulting complete privatization of the productive structure, which implies private capital backing. However, on top of that, labor and criminal justice reforms have a direct influence on reducing labor rights as well as the rights of demonstration, expression, and association, suppressing individual and social guarantees, thus increasingly weakening the relative position of subaltern groups.

The disappearance of the notion of “social rights” implies a radical ideological undertaking since it eliminates the social imaginaries regarding the idea of equality, the idea of social responsibility towards those in greater need, and it establishes the idea of poverty and precariousness as an expression of a lack of capacity, initiative, and drive, blaming subalterns for their own condition of poverty and precariousness. This process constitutes the almost complete nullification of the subaltern classes as rights-entitled subjects within a context of total freedom and guarantees for capital.

The State’s mutation into a neoliberal State has also implied the disappearance of the electoral space as an arena of struggle through the suppression of programmatic differences between right- and left-wing parties and the subsequent disappearance of worker, socialist, or communist parties. With the elimination of these parties and the emergence of “single thought,” parallel to the disappearance of the “communist threat,” there has been an almost absolute reduction of the bargaining power held by subaltern sectors since this alternative has been suppressed even as a mythical reference. In its place, gradually and unevenly the community alternative, based on self-government and autonomy, has been gaining strength increasingly. This process, however, is still at an initial stage.

The State’s mutation and the suppression of differences between political parties has also had a strong negative impact on the influence that public expressions of discontent might have over decision-makers. If during the prior period, the power of non-conformist mass demonstrations could be perceived, the masses’ current attachment/detachment to the ruling group has made their power become irrelevant. While political parties were losing their programmatic identity and in a widespread manner were adopting neoliberal ideas, the difference between them had been reduced to such an extent that the electorate was lacking alternatives and political party alternation only carried the negative meaning of a “protest vote,” rather than the positive meaning of a “change of program.” Thus, party alternation lost meaning for the electors themselves. However, particularly because in spite of political alternation, the emergence of politicians-bargainers (Della Porta and Pizzorno, 1996)

as permanent figures, regardless of partisan preferences, provides continuity to the administration of the State apparatus and to the system's functioning as a whole. Thus, the electorate's "inconstancies," which were earlier potentially harmful, are no longer so and in this sense, expressions of social discontent have lost their capacity to influence the mood of those administering the system⁵.

On the contrary, demonstrations of social discontent have apparently generated a perverse effect since the threatening of civil liberties emerge, uncover as war against terrorism, even in the most celebrated democracy (Evans, 2002).

Glocal Struggles

In the face of these fundamental transformations of the pattern of accumulation and the State form, it is evident that the traditional forms of social protest have lost their effectiveness as mechanisms to influence the decisions and attitudes of the groups in power. We thus repeatedly see mass meetings with the same or different single or cumulative demands that are unable to make any or hardly any change⁶. In other words, social struggles have not yet experienced changes congruent with those modifications to be able to retrieve –and expand– their bargaining power, adjust the forms of domination, and even eventually construct less unequal and unfair societies (Favela, 2019).

So far, most social struggles have maintained a mainly defensive attitude to revert the rights deprivation process, yearning for the Welfare State and public property to return, together with the defense or retrieval of protected working conditions based on the State's regulation of capital. This perspective, seen through the lens of the reconversion of the pattern of accumulation we have here been reviewing, seems to have a low possibility of success. Social struggles have basically maintained the same organizational forms and the same strategies as in the previous period (unions and political parties). Under the new global and financialized accumulation pattern, based on labor precariousness and capital's total freedom of movement, institutionalized in the neoliberal State, these struggle mechanisms have become less effective.

⁵ Specifically, in the case of Mexico, up to December 2018, the indicator of popular detachment from the regime, gradually became irrelevant. Since the sixties, and as neoliberalism and "democracy" moved forward, under which "plurality" and "tolerance" acted as foundational values, the meaning of the expression of discontent was completely suppressed. This was demonstrated by the fact that in Mexico, under the last two six-year administrations, the extremely low levels of citizen approval of the government's administration –that of the president– became completely irrelevant, since they did not translate into real obstacles to exercising government.

⁶ The experience showed by the "occupy" movement confirms that despite, the world massive mobilization, traditional sit-ins and marches did not have a significant impact on public policies. Its main consequence has been experienced among participants and observers. According to Scham (2015) this is because in today's capitalism financiers are shaping public policy.

Not only do strikes seem increasingly harder to organize, since unions have become discredited and have weakened, but when they actually take place, they no longer exert the same pressure as in the past (Gonzalez, 2006). This is because the material conditions of capital valorization have changed drastically (Sassen, 1993; Tilly, 1995). If a firm were to close, the volatility of capital valorization would create a cost/benefit equation highly favorable to the employer, thus eliminating the power striking may have as a means to exercise pressure.

It is true of course that there are movements that transcend the national realm (particularly the anti-globalization movement, some ecological expressions, and specific struggles for the defense of human rights), organizing struggles in two or more national spaces, or in international organizations (ILO, the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, etc.). However, they adhere to basically the same struggle repertoires as in national systems, continuing to mainly appeal to the national State as the stage for social regulation, as if the transformation it has undergone were not evident (Soltz, 2014). They continue to favor demonstrative strategies, as if their “delegitimization” in the view of public opinion maintained its power as a pressure mechanism against policy-making decisions (Graeber, 2013).

It is evident that the forms of social struggle are out of synch with changes in the accumulation regime and the State’s structure of domination. They continue embedded within the logic of the Welfare State, without recognizing that it was a historical form of bourgeois society that has been “surpassed.” To recognize this does not imply surrendering to the advance of the neoliberal State and plunder capitalism, renouncing to struggle for improving living conditions and a more equitable society. On the contrary, it implies recognizing that it does not mean reversing and returning to the Welfare State and Fordist capitalism (in terms of ensuring social, political, and civil rights, as well as worker consumption and governmental regulation of capital).

So, why do I claim that these struggle strategies are inadequate? What struggle strategies am I referring to?⁷

These struggle strategies are inadequate because these repertoires do not fully incorporate the dimension of the economy’s globalization, nor State transformation, nor the subsequent “internationalization of the ruling class,” since apart from having a basically national dimension, they mainly resort to “demonstrating/denouncing” strategies, rather than “forceful”, “offensive”, “decisive” actions, as if by denouncing

⁷ The riots and armed rebellions occurred in Arabic countries (2011-2020) against authoritarian regimes have been called “Arab Spring”, but they are better understood as Arab revolutions. Something similar happened with the so called “Color Revolution” through which authoritarian former soviet regimes were overturned. In Latin America also several presidents were forced to leave power since popular uprising threatened political stability. All these movements are wide beyond the boundaries of “normal” collective action.

they would be able to draw “powerful” stakeholders to their cause (Wallerstein, 2003). If appealing to “international public opinion” had a positive effect during the “democratic transition” phase of the fourth democratization wave (the eighties and nineties), today it does not seem to have an impact on State behavior. Particularly considering the privatization processes in which the power of the State is crucial to grant large-scale capital benefits, as well as the right to plunder and dispossesses, the national States subsequently make “adjustments.” In these adjustments the defense of “democratic freedoms” has been pushed into the background, displaced by the task of buttressing the capacity for intensive and extensive accumulation of capital by large-scale business at a global level (Tarrow, 1998).

Conclusion

In the face of this understanding, it is thus necessary to pick up the initial formulation to realize that from the perspective positing that class struggle, the accumulation pattern, and the form of the State are three inter-defined components of a complex system that defines the conditions and possibilities that capitalist domination has for its reproduction and rebuttal. For social mobilization to be effective, it has to be set forth as a struggle that is not only expressive but is also strategic. Mass mobilization is not sufficient unless it is thought of within scaled, cross-sectional, pro-active, multidimensional, international, and strategic design. Obviously, this does not mean that collective action is useless, on the contrary, it clearly effective when it meets the challenges the changes the State and capitalism have experienced, as Tilly (2003) historical study clearly demonstrates.

It is necessary that this design acknowledge that it is a confrontation in which the party that raises the stakes for its adversary, is the winning party; in which it is necessary to see the adversary’s resources as an arsenal that can be destroyed, and concomitantly improve one’s own position. Conflict must be seen as a war of position (rather than maneuver warfare) that unfolds over the long-term with skirmishes in which there are advances, retreats, and consolidation. However, it is crucial to understand that it is a confrontation in which knowing the adversary’s objectives and resources is the cornerstone to develop a fruitful strategy.

Understanding that at present the “structural conditions” of capitalist society’s economic and political dynamics define a highly unfavorable “playing field” for the subaltern groups, makes it imperative to recognize the need to look at social mobilization through another lens.

The conclusion is clear: if we theoretically understand social protest as an expression of class struggle, then methodologically, we have to draw the necessary conclusions: in order to appreciate the transformative capacity that social protest has,

we must not cease to see the adversary, we must analyze the theme as a process in which a confrontation unfolds and the correlation of forces is constructed and modified step by step, favoring one party or the other, depending on the strategic movements they each carry out.

Attempting to conduct this type of analysis, places us in a new dimension in which analyzing the counterpart (the élites, their international networking and connections, the ruling legal frameworks, the costs of their demise, etc.) rather than only describing the dissident actions, plays a key role in understanding (and estimating) the outcome of social mobilization under globalized liberalism.

In this sense, for example, it seems to me that it is crucial to study the connections of the members of the elite and to make them visible, to identify the association between State officials and employers, as well as study the networks between national and international enterprises/entrepreneurial groups and decision-makers, and evidence them within a discourse that highlights the illegal nature of those connections, as well as their immorality. However, the intention is to not only make these relationships evident, but to first of all identify the subordinate sectors of these enterprises, their consumers and users, and eventually build solidarity networks with them in order to make collective action more effective.

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