

## The scenario after June 2013: crossed perspectives on political participation and resistance

Antonio Euzébios Filho<sup>a\*</sup>  
Raquel Souza Lobo Guzzo<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of São Paulo, Institute of Psychology, Department of Labor and Social Psychology. São Paulo, SP, Brazil

<sup>b</sup>Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas. Campinas, SP, Brazil

**Abstract:** We investigate young people's views on the political situation, especially in Brazil, after the so-called June protests. In a scenario marked by the social and economic crisis of capitalism, we wanted to understand how students of a working-class university preparatory course related to the current political context. Interviews were carried out and interpreted based on dialectical and historical materialism. We noticed that participants do not see a concrete path to overcoming the problems of the present conjuncture, namely: the existence of a conservative wave and government corruption; both associated to attacks on social rights. Generally speaking, political parties and social movements do not appear on the horizon of participation. Similarly, elections were not seen as a path to achieving popular demands, corroborating the notion of a crisis of political representation, aggravated by the lack of alternatives to the political establishment.

**Keywords:** conjuncture, youth, consciousness, political representation.

### Introduction

Brazil's current political moment is certainly not lull. A storm of facts and events emerges from a backdrop of social and economic instability, intensified since the June 2013 demonstrations. We live in a moment of intensified labor outsourcing (the practice of hiring third parties that have no direct relationship to the companies they work at), flexibilization of labor laws, criminalization of social movements, fragmentation of trade union struggles, among other features of the current socio-political panorama that result from years of deepening neoliberal policies (Antunes, 2008; Boito Júnior, 2003; Marcelino, 2008; Pochmann, 2014). On the other hand, there's resistance by social movements and sections of the youth: they rehearse political actions and present proposals that are capable of polarizing society, in contradiction to the logic of capital. Because of all the above, we wanted to understand elements of the political consciousness<sup>1</sup> (Iasi, 2006; Euzébios Filho, 2011) of the

actors in this conjuncture and historical moment, whether they fulfill the roles of protagonists or supporting cast.

This article sought to understand what young people (students from a working-class university prep course and from a public university) think about the present political situation, especially after the June 2013 protests. We reached this goal not only because of the relevance of our current political context, but also because it is important for psychology to offer its perspective on this context and on how specific sectors of society are interacting with it. Psychology must dedicate itself to understanding not only the "private" aspects of consciousness, but also certain mediations that are established between individual and society. To this end, it is necessary to comprehend the nature of these mediations, and specifically the mediations established between consciousness and politics. Having said that, our first task was to grasp the current political scenario with the help of authors that are presently discussing it from the perspective of historical and dialectical materialism (Ali, 2012; Alves, 2012; Antunes, 2008; Frizzo, 2014). We also sought the aid of studies on the political and electoral behavior of young people from different social strata (e.g., Florentino, 2008; Messenberg, 2015; Telles, 2009), to analyze how participants of this study interpreted the present context, and what forms of indignation, and consent, are present in their discourse.

After the so-called June Days of 2013, when thousands of people took to the streets in Brazil, the

\* Corresponding address: [aeuzebios@hotmail.com](mailto:aeuzebios@hotmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> Here we opted for the term "political consciousness", but, to be coherent to the adopted theoretical perspective, it is important to differentiate our use of the term from that of Marx and Engels (1845/2005), who associate it to class consciousness. For the two philosophers, all political consciousness manifests itself, to a higher or lesser degree, through the reified relations between social classes, i.e. through the social relations determinant of the financial and productive system. The understanding of socio-economic relations, and of the effective denial of the theoretical premises of liberalism in different spheres of human life, develops political consciousness, at least when taking as a reference point the ethical-political standards established by Marx and Engels. But political consciousness in an individual sense is in no way synonymous to what the authors termed class consciousness "for itself". This is understood as a historical possibility wherein a class gathers the material, ideological,

organizational, collective conditions that allow it to think and act as a class. Having said that, we believe that the use of the term "political consciousness" is justified by the empirical scope of this study, since it deals with the individual manifestations of the studied phenomenon.

country has seen an undeniable growth in dissatisfaction and acts of popular rebellion. But what do these acts mean? And, once they become ubiquitous, how do the different political demands and slogans approximate or distance themselves from each other?

Of course, it is impossible to attribute these demonstrations, which have been punctuating everyday life since 2013 – and oscillating between left and right<sup>2</sup>, not always in a clear-cut manner –, to a single social or political agent. Examples include the mobilization for the impeachment of former President Dilma Rousseff, as well as demonstrations against the labor and welfare reforms of the Michel Temer government (the latter also being motivated by the corruption scandals revealed by Operation Car Wash).<sup>3</sup>

At first glance we notice that even to the present day political demands continue to present themselves in a pulverized form: moderate claims against corruption, for example, are setting the tone of a play where the actors timidly question state structures or simply do not question the capitalist order at all. From our point of view, capital's political and ideological pillars are not immediately broken, but are increasingly susceptible to popular struggle. As such, openly anti-capitalist slogans are also seen walking the streets. A turning point in their appearance were the anti-globalization movements

now gaining strength in Europe. Those slogans circulate specially amongst layers of the youth (Ali, 2012), but also some parties and trade unions, which are historically tied to left and directly link their demands to socialism.

It is imperative to recognize that the complexity of the current situation is also a reflection of the immense diversity of demands appearing in street and parliament. With demands traditionally attributed to the right or left-wing<sup>4</sup> sometimes appearing simultaneously or in combination, the scenario is characterized by a mixture of social polarization and ideological confusion (Euzébio Filho, 2011). It has been difficult to identify tendencies of programmatic unit on either side.

Popular movements after the 2013 demonstrations were insufficient to overcome, to the present moment, the fragmentation of an ample left political domain, aggravated in Brazil since Lula's first term (Antunes, 2008; Frizzo, 2014; Iasi, 2006). Even so, and despite a conservative wave (Urban, 2004) – which we will discuss throughout this work – we believe that the situation presents possibilities of resistance to capitalism and that they can develop further: given the aggravation of cyclical crises in an economic system that, as Marx and Engels (1845/2005) theorized, generates more and more social antagonisms, inequality, intolerance and human misery.

In seeking the basis for an investigation of the current political moment, we contacted young people, from university and a working-class university prep course, to try and understand if they saw (and how they saw) paths to resistance and social change. Before going into the results of this investigation, we discuss elements of the current political conjuncture, having as a starting point the June 2013 demonstrations.

## The June events and present-day expressions of political consciousness

Neoliberal ideology and practice did not further itself without popular resistance: after all, its implementation came amid social and economic crises. However, neoliberalism can certainly be characterized as a hard blow on workers, since it has been terminating social rights (Antunes, 2008), weakening forms of working-class organization through outsourcing and flexibilization of labor laws (Antunes, 2008; Boito Júnior, 2003; Pochmann, 2014), increasing social

2 The term “left” is used in two senses: a broad sense which, according to Cardoso (2016) and Ricci (2009), has been legitimized through use since the French Revolution, and refers to all sectors of society who struggle for justice and social equality, within and outside Parliament; and a more specific sense, referring to the socialist left, encompassing what Tonet (2005) called the democratic and revolutionary left. Both “lefts” speak openly about socialism, the difference being the way they propose to get there: for the first, it is through gradual reforms, within the state; for the second, revolutionary rupture and the seizure of power by the working class. It is worth noting that there was a reconfiguration of the left after the fall of the Berlin Wall, as pointed out by Kolbrunner (2014) and Cardoso (2016). This reconfiguration is characterized by the weakening of the revolutionary perspective and strengthening of the reformist perspective, or simply dilution into very specific demands (related to ethnicity or environment, for example) rarely associated to the seizure of power. The term “right”, in its turn, has also been legitimized through use since the French Revolution (Cardoso, 2016; Ricci, 2009); we employ it in the same sense as Bobbio (1995). To Bobbio, the right is characterized by its insistence on individual freedom, even when it implies social inequality. This so-called freedom, as we are all aware, anchors itself in the dominance of private property and in the bourgeois way of life. But the right also has its internal distinctions – which, for Cardoso (2016), range from economic liberalism to conservative liberalism. However, it could be said that these distinctions surround tactics, not principles. Given this complexity of definition, we won't go into details. This is also not the appropriate space to analyze how left and right have assumed different formats throughout history, also giving rise to the so-called “center”.

3 Here we are referring to *Lava Jato* (Car Wash), an operation undertaken by the Federal Police, which has been disseminated widely in the news and has been known to arrest or indict traditional figures of the parliamentary and political scenario, among them former President Rousseff (Workers' Party – PT) and the current President, Michel Temer (Brazilian Democratic Movement – MDB). Also mentioned are two reform proposals of the current federal administration (2017). Labor reform (bill no. 6.787/2016) allows collective bargaining to supersede labor legislation. Pension reform (constitutional amendment proposal no. 287/2016) proposes the increase of years of contribution, among other measures in detriment to worker interests. For a critical analysis of both reforms, see Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos (2017a, 2017b).

4 Data Folha Institute (*Instituto Data Folha*) made an interesting characterization of slogans traditionally defended by right and left, during the municipal elections of 2012. There are differences, for example, when it comes to legalization of drugs and abortion, state and military intervention in politics and in the economy, among others. This piece of information is well-complemented by another: a study published by *Data Popular* in August 2014 shows that 59% of young voters between the age of 16 and 33 years believe the country would be better off if it had no political parties (Rodrigues, 2014). In our opinion, this strengthens the thesis that there is no party, whether right or left, able to agglutinate different sectors of society towards a common political project.

inequality and the gap between rich and poor (Shorrock, Davies, & Lluberas, 2014) etc.

In addition, the succession of disappointments and hopelessness brought on by neoliberal governments regarded as left-wing, such as those of Lula and Rousseff, has led workers to question not only of the possibility of structural change in society, but also party and trade union structures (Florentino, 2008). The latter can be observed especially among young people, as shown by Florentino (2008). Instead of formal party structures, sectors of the youth are attracted to volatile movements, with no clear leadership, apparently floating above the necessities of the economic structure (Ali, 2012). These so-called “new” social movements (Prado, 2002) bring together several layers and organizations of the youth around specific demands, sometimes assuming openly anarchist or autonomist tactics<sup>5</sup>, not always linked to a class perspective (Ali, 2012).

This is characteristic, for instance, of anti-capitalist movements like “Occupy Wall Street” and its counterparts around the world. These movements are still motivated by historical demands of the working class, in its opposition to capitalist exploration strategies, unemployment, precariousness of living and work conditions, but also by the marginalization of immigrants, among other social issues historically accumulated by the oppressed and exploited layers of society (Ali, 2012). The change lies in the identification of root causes, which are seemingly associated either to globalization or different aspects of class oppression – and yet these causes, paradoxically, are not necessarily articulated into a universalist project of working class emancipation (Alves, 2012). So, instead of a political horizon so far into the undetermined future (and perhaps so dangerous) as socialism, there are dreams of a non-globalized way of life, a more humane capitalism, and the perspective of isolated resistance.

We have seen these characteristics, to a large extent, in the June 2013 demonstrations in Brazil, a case in point being the actions of anti-capitalist groups – characterized by the defense of direct action against the police and the destruction of capitalist symbols – such as *Movimento Passe Livre* (MPL) and, even more, directly the Black Bloc groups (Solano, Manso, & Novaes, 2014).

Initially, the demonstrations were driven by MPL, setting off one of the largest popular mobilizations in the country’s history (Frizzo, 2014). However, further development brought to visibility a huge diversity of organized groups, as well as spontaneous demands, in the most diverse possible combinations between so-called right, center and left political tendencies.

5 Here it is important to succinctly differentiate autonomism and anarchism. The first claims to be a spontaneous movement, linked to specific demands, such as those of black men and women, feminism and LGBT. They are present in most of the youth and are not necessarily linked to the historically constituted anarchist movement. Differences of the anarchist movement stem more from the rejection of traditional party structures than from an explicit rejection of communist strategy. For further discussion on this topic, see Euzébio Filho (2016).

Facing this complexity, would it be possible to identify a clear leadership behind the chants and (mostly spontaneous) political demands seen in the streets? Asking precisely this question, Melo (2015) warns that the right’s return to the streets is, to a large extent, due to a political vacuum caused by the fragmentation of left political slogans, especially those of the socialist left. To characterize the new Brazilian right, the author refers to movements such as *Movimento Brasil Livre* (MBL), which advocates, for instance, privatization of state-owned companies, as well as harder repression against working-class strikes and left-wing organizations. In this sense, we can corroborate that there is indeed a conservative wave, and thus we have to recognize that it has reached its current stage, in Brazil and worldwide, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, especially with the emergence of the ideology of the “end of history” (Fukuyama, 1992), which emphasized the collapse of so-called real socialism as a vindication of liberal democracy.

We must remember, however, that this conservative wave coexists with a relatively widespread dissatisfaction over the political and institutional system, and, more specifically, representative democracy, as shown by studies on the political and electoral behavior of young Brazilians (e.g., Florentino, 2008; Messenberg, 2015; Telles, 2009). The crisis of institutionalized democracy<sup>6</sup> comes from the fact that it hasn’t been able to fulfill the expectations attached to it since its first inception in the country, especially considering that, under neoliberal dominance, less and less parts of society are being contemplated by social assistance policies.

As such, there’s a growing popular distrust of “solutions” proposed by right-wing parties (and, why not, also by a few so-called left-wing ones) to perennial economic crisis. This opens a path for delegitimization of the instituted political representation system. Delegitimization occurs in various spheres and processes, such as trade union bureaucratization (Marcelino, 2008), skepticism in relation to *any* perspective of social change (Kolbrunner, 2014), and even distrust in the democratic system itself, as shown by a study of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (2015), which indicated lack of confidence in democratic institutions among all age groups, including young people. This disillusionment (which does not correspond to a simple lack of political

6 It is important to note that our use of the term “crisis of democracy” refers to the crisis of the institutions of bourgeois democracy. However, in similar fashion to our example regarding the different forms of left and right (and the internal differences in each of these poles), there are several conceptions of democracy, including of bourgeois democracy. For example, Urban (2004) discusses nationalism as a political perspective that does not question capital and the bourgeois state in its essence as an instrument of class domination. Nationalism can develop into fascist or extreme versions of itself, such as xenophobic nationalism. One aspect of how the crisis of bourgeois democracy manifests itself is the confrontation between nationalism and liberalism, the latter in closer association to foreign capital. However, in agreement with Urban (2004), we understand that the crisis stems, above all, from the lack of prospects for change and improvement of living conditions, given the cumulative logic (and social and economic exclusivity) of private capital.

consciousness – on the contrary) is felt especially by Brazilian youth (Florentino, 2008). Considering that institutions are in the hands of a party system, it is only natural that the parties themselves are being identified as the main culprits of an inefficient, formalistic and over-bureaucratized democracy.

According to Iasi (2006), political consciousness is characterized by stable levels of consent and contestation of capitalism. This thesis is supported by today’s intense (and confusing) combination of conservative political tendencies with others that are potentially disruptive of the social order. Thus, a dialectical movement between negation and consent to the established order (Iasi, 2006) becomes clear, especially when we recognize that there’s rarely a direct identity between class origin, an objective determination, and its conscious expression.

Consciousness seems to wander above these determinations, allowing for unlikely combinations, such as members of the petty bourgeoisie with proletarian consciousnesses, proletarians with petty bourgeoisie consciousnesses, peasants more convinced of the proletarian project than proletarians themselves, capitalists with socialist convictions and socialists with strong bourgeois convictions. The fact remains that consciousness itself is one of the determinations of class. (Iasi, 2006, p. 337)

From that, we cannot conclude that the working class is ontologically reformist or ontologically revolutionary (Iasi, 2006). We believe, on the contrary, that there are different levels of political involvement which are demarcated, historically, by the practice of

real social agents. These levels express themselves in the choices, decisions, political positions assumed in the context of life’s different dimensions, in the vast field of economy and politics.

In fact, contradictory movements of consciousness set the tone of the participants’ political discourses, as we shall see below, in continuing to discuss the political conjuncture in dialogue with the young people who participated in our research.

## Participants

Participating in this research were 11 students from a public university in the state of São Paulo, and 15 from a working-class university prep course (both in the same city). This gratuitous prep course only accepts students from free public schools and is subsidized by the aforementioned public university, which, through pedagogical extension funds, provides the prep course with physical space, materials and pedagogical structure.

The main characteristics of the participants were divided into two blocks of information: identification data (which includes age, sex and socio-economic data) and data related to political experience (political participation and information about political life). Data presented in Tables 1 and 2 are *not* differentiated according to the two participating groups: university and prep course students. We opted to consolidate this information because our focus is to investigate the differences and similarities between the participants in general, and not necessarily between the two groups – although general differences between the two groups have, to some extent, appeared in the results. Let us look, then, at the general characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Participants’ initial characterization

Data	Age	Sex	Education level	Household income	Employability
Total: n=26	60% between 18 and 20 years old	65% female	57% university prep course students 43% university students	75% – 1 to 4 minimum wages	5% exercise remunerated activities
	40% between 20 and 22 years old	35% male	85% intend to join or have joined higher education by means of racial/social quotas	25% – above 5 minimum wages	

Table 2. Participants’ political experience

Data	Experiences and political involvement	Access to media
Synthesis. Total: n=26	75% reported not having participated in politics or having any political experience	Internet: 100%
	10% reported participating in political groups (essentially groups from the student movement)	Social networks and blogs, specifically: 40%
	5% did not report	Blogs: 8% (4% identified as being left-wing, others not specified)
		Television: 7%
		Newspapers and magazines: 6%
		Through proximity to political collectives: 5%
		Teachers: 4%
		University: 6%

The data allows us to recognize a young population, which has still not entered the world of labor (96% had no remunerated activity) and has had no remarkable experiences in politics (only 10% of respondents, all university students, reported participating in the student movement, political entities or groups). These characteristics could certainly weigh on their way of seeing the world and the political universe around them. Politics may appear to the participants as a very abstract dimension of social life.

These and other possible generalities notwithstanding, it is important to note that, as Florentino (2008), we do not consider “youth” a valid theoretical category. On the other hand, use of the term is justified if we define it as a generation living in one and the same historical moment. When referring to young people as participants of this research, we mention only the age range of the participants, which was between 18 and 22 years. We refer to individual university students as P1 to P11, and prep course students as P12 to P26.

## **Data collection procedures**

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the university in which it was carried out (CAE number: 54374616.0.0000.5398). After a random choice of respondents, we approached the participants in their classrooms (separately for university and prep course students), explained the objectives of the survey, and asked them to answer, in writing, to questions read aloud and placed on the classroom board. They were given a survey sheet containing identification data and two questions, related to the objectives of our research: (1) how do you see the current political context after the June 2013 demonstrations? (2) what outcomes do you see for the negative and positive aspects of the current political scenario?

## **Data analysis procedures**

We do not seek to identify traits of individual consciousness, or compose a mosaic of opinions, as traditional psychology would prefer. As stated by Martins (2006), while consciousness also appears in discourse, language itself is a particularly social and singularly generic phenomenon, which develops through dialectical unity between subjectivity and objectivity. Also, considering our challenge is to deal with a dynamic phenomenon, we are aware that the obtained information does not allow us to reach a definite “truth” regarding what young people think about politics today. With this information we bring only a few elements to the scientific debate on a specific, but historically important series of political demonstrations. By following these methodological procedures, we propose a theoretical analysis within the bounds of empirical data on a particular historical moment.

Initially, political discourse was discerned and grouped by similarity of themes. This grouping allowed us to theoretically interpret the particular issues of our object of study. To do this, we identified central and secondary aspects of each discourse (Jacques, 1993). Hierarchization of content was based not only on recurrent information, but on the qualitative relevance this information assumed in the construction of the participants’ political thoughts.

As such, we were able to distinguish three categories of analysis, named according to our interpretation of discourses. They were: (1) “population and young people have more interest in politics since the June 2013 demonstrations,” as thought 65% of the students of the university prep course; (2) “conservative wave as the predominant characteristic of the present conjuncture,” as thought a large number of the university students; (3) “limits and possibilities of resistance in the current context,” referring to participants who discoursed on strategies of struggle against the conservative wave or simply against corruption.

## **Population and young people have more interest in politics since the June 2013 demonstrations**

According to Romão (2013), the June 2013 demonstrations were driven by a combination of at least four factors: (1) an organized movement, the MPL; (2) the absurd police repression that, at some point, shifted the position of the mainstream media in favor of the protesters; (3) the concomitance of a worldwide sporting event; (4) the context of widespread discontent with the political system.

As we will discuss further, all four factors were present, in one form or another, in the analyses of the participants. Still, we would like to point out a factor both the author and participants have not considered: in spite of the protagonist role of the MPL and youth in general, left-wing trade unions – although struggling with flexibilization of labor laws, criminalization of strikes and trade union deconstruction (Antunes, 2008; Boito Júnior, 2003; Marcelino, 2008; Pochmann, 2014) – also had an important role. Thus, it is important to remember that in 2013 Brazil registered a record number of strikes, including in the industrial sector (DIEESE, 2015).

In fact, 2013 introduces a new conjunctural element: more people started going to the streets to express themselves politically. Participants are well aware of that fact: for example, 65% of the students of the working-class college prep course agreed that one of the characteristics of the current situation is the increased interest of young people in politics. According to P14: “After the demonstrations, the vast majority of the population discusses and participates in politics.” Still according to P14, “demonstrations have shown that people, largely, are interested in taking part more actively”. Some university students seem to agree: “The vast majority

of the people is more willing to discuss and express its interests. It is more open to political dialogue” (P6). Similarly, P13 says: “After the rallies of 2013, Brazil is more actively participating in politics, more frequently seeking information on the current situation of the country, and even organizing new demonstrations, such as this year’s.” As P5 puts it: “And the main thing is that we see young people increasingly invested in political matters, refusing to stay passive.”

P10 believes society is more involved in national affairs, while pondering that the “media” has been acting to stop or minimize political participation. As the respondent points out: “After the demonstrations, I noticed that people lend greater importance to politics. Even though the media wants to show the situation has changed for the better, people gravitate towards the most convenient media outlet, and this influences political participation” (P10).

In the same direction, P1 associates the increase in political participation, especially of young people, to June 2013, and P15 analyses the negative influence of mainstream media to call attention to what he names the “archaic concepts of politics”. P15 believes that the “masses” are acquiring “critical thinking,” but does not provide an explanation.

We cannot ascertain what P15 considers “critical thinking”. However, if “critical thinking” appears in opposition to “archaic concepts” broadcast by the mainstream media, it is possible to somewhat infer an analysis. We can, for example, understand that social networks (accessed daily by almost all the participants) have in some way contributed to divide the political attention of specific sectors of the population. Although this does not mean the monopoly of mainstream media is broken, it would be absurd not to recognize that, in many cases, independent social networks can have great influence, as in the case of *Midia Ninja* – an independent, explicitly left-wing, youth-oriented media outlet – which surpassed *Veja* magazine as well as the *O Estado de S. Paulo* and *Folha de S. Paulo* newspapers, in regard to coverage of the 2013 demonstrations in the “Facebook engagement” category (*Midia Ninja ultrapassa grandes veículos em engajamento no Facebook*, 2016).

For these and other reasons, we cannot rule out that the people may indeed have “awaken” (P15), although we haven’t seen to date a rupture with the “ideology of the end of history” (Kolbrunner, 2014). This ideology is still able to portray a hegemonic scenario in which capitalist society figures as the only historical possibility.

### **Conservative wave as the predominant characteristic of the present conjuncture**

The perception of a conservative wave appears in the discourse of some of the university students. In 55% of the analyzed replies, university students see polarization and ideological confusion as key attributes

of the current political situation. Another 55% of the answers corroborate the existence of this conservative wave. According to P6, for example: “It is possible for change to come, yes, however there are many conservative forces on the rise that can slow down or even stop this change in political participation”.

In the same direction, P1 believes that the current scenario is “marked by a climate of cuts and precarization and intense backwardness in the different spheres of society.” This occurs, according to P10, because “political demonstrations were directed to support false proposals for change that came from conservative, reactionary and neoliberal political groups. The context is of fierce political and social antagonism, with increased repression and austerity measures.”

This statement puts into perspective an important aspect of political struggle in recent years: post-2013 mass demands were in a sense appropriated by nuclear sectors of the bourgeoisie that we identify as part of the traditional right, but authors like Melo (2015) characterize as the “new right, proponent of economic fundamentalism and a neoconservative agenda, based on the defense of traditional customs, steadfast opposition to so-called minorities and to environmentalist agenda” (p. 9). Their mobilization has been championed not only by party centers traditionally identified with this agenda in Brazil, but also by movements such as *Vem Pra Rua* and *Movimento Brasil Livre*. This new impulse of the Brazilian right – which reassumed the tactic of street demonstrations with the support of the mainstream media (Melo, 2015) – had some electoral expression, especially in the 2016 polls and during the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff.

To some students, the conservative wave has been prevailing. P8 says: “conservatives are coming out ahead, just look at the impeachment.” This means that the conservative wave can be associated with the impeachment, which would be yet another sign of rising political conservatism. This is evident, for example, when P8 says: “In 2016 I see a critical movement of attacks on social rights, retrogression and favoring of certain groups” (P8). P4 confirms this perception by saying: “I think that after the June rallies what actually happened was quite different from expectations about what was supposed to come.”

With the information made available by this research, we were unable to identify what is assumed to be the precise agenda of the “conservative wave.” What we did observe was that, from the perspective of the participants, the June demonstrations were not able to win new social rights. According to Urban (2004), the conservative wave emerges at a time of worsening cyclical crises of capital, crises that had become constant in the decades leading up to the current neoliberal hegemony. In this case, conservatism presents itself economically, socially and politically, as the author notes when analyzing the openly proto-fascist movements and parties of Europe.

Urban says that conservatism presents itself in the form of authoritarianism (including military authoritarianism) – for instance in the defense of military intervention, but also in values associated with the death penalty, anti-communism, xenophobia etc. The author also calls attention to the history of dictatorial governments in Latin America. To Urban (2004), the struggle to overthrow bourgeois military dictatorships across Latin America has been unable to eliminate extreme right-wing parties; in fact, some relatively moderate right-wing parties have come out of this process strengthened.

In Brazil, it was no different. Another important point is that in the current scenario, the growth of conservatism has also been attributed to the election of parties the public opinion sees as ‘leftist’. The lack of answers to social issues, characteristic of PT governments – especially during the mandates of Dilma Rousseff, which went through a more dramatic economic scenario (Singer, 2015) – opened an avenue to manifestations of conservatism in politics and society at large. These of course have always been present, within and outside state, but to some extent they have become more explicit. Examples are the reduction of the age of criminal responsibility, the family statute and the high school reform – considered by one of the participants as “absurd” (P4) –, among others.

### Limits and possibilities of resistance in the current context

The institutional setting is still a stage for popular demands, even though these are usually of a limited, particular character. The electoral process remains legitimate, despite the media apparatus’ capacity to influence electoral results. Thus, P6 reveals: “We live in a democracy and, in this way, choose our representatives . . . we ought to know more about who we elect, to effect change to the current political framework.”

Elections, however, figure as only one of the participants’ concerns. The majority of university respondents (85%) believes resistance can be carried out outside the institutional sphere. As P6 puts it, “with a popular organization with clear objectives, it is possible [to resist].” But what popular organization would that be?

According to P7, a possible path would be “debating actual facts, presenting statistical, historical, political data.” Here, knowledge and access to information appear as the main challenges of popular organization. On the other hand, there’s also criticism of a democracy that does not debate in terms of “actual facts”. This suggests that insecurity in relation to information, contributes, to some extent, to distrust in the political system. A comfort zone might be to reject politics (often confused with the realm of parliamentary action); however, this doesn’t seem to be the case, especially among university students.

Popular distrust in democratic institutions seems to contribute to distancing from political institutions,

as noted in certain strata of the youth. Transcending institutional and political party logic, “education” (P10) emerges as one of the possibilities of resistance: “Maybe we can act through education, clarifying aspects of what is a ‘left-wing or right-wing perspective’, but I find that extremely complicated in the current context” (P10).

What should be defined as either a “left-wing” or a “right-wing perspective” remains unclear. The fact remains that the defense of a critical education is recurrent in university students’ discourse, as revealed by P10, who states: “We have to multiply critical discussion and formative spaces, and strategically organize increasingly intensified demonstrations against current state policy.” Thus, the absence of a “critical” knowledge of “actual facts” (P7) appears as a hindrance to popular organization, necessary for confronting “current state policy” (P7).

Of course, critical knowledge is indeed necessary to advance political consciousness. Marx and Engels (1845/2005), in *The German Ideology*, sustain the importance of overcoming idealism and obtaining a scientific understanding of the inner workings of capitalism, beginning with the logic of the historical development of class society. However, consciousness, as Marx and Engels (1845/2005) saw it, is not a synonym of knowledge (even scientific knowledge). In fact, putting knowledge of reality into practice is a fundamental task of science. The application of scientific knowledge becomes *praxis*, that can be characterized as *revolutionary praxis* when its horizon is human emancipation as understood by Marx and Engels.<sup>7</sup>

The lack of a radical mass movement is felt sorely in moments of fragility of the union struggle (Marcelino, 2008), flexibilization of labor laws and productive restructuring (Antunes, 2008), ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie, among other factors, including a commodified and technified education, distanced from popular interests (Frizzo, 2014) – the opposite of the education model defended by university respondents.

Political identification processes are important not only for a conjunctural analysis, but also for political resistance itself; these processes constitute fundamental aspects of political consciousness (Iasi, 2006). Identification with the working class can be seen in the discourse of participants in the form of solidarity to workers being affected by austerity measures and reforms. That is, there is awareness of who is the main target of the conservative wave: the working class. As such, we see an empirical, immediate, recognition of class struggle. Even so, it is not clear what should accompany further public investments in education and access to information. As P8 puts it: “I see that discussion has an important role but understand it’s not enough.” What would then be enough?

<sup>7</sup> In 1871, when asked about the purposes of international proletarian association, Marx replied: “The economical emancipation of the working class by the conquest of political power. The use of that political power to the attainment of social ends” (Marx, 1871/2004, p. 32).

To a few of the university students, the answer would be “identity movements” against the “conservative wave” (P9). This and other assertions appear to be aligned with the phenomena identified by Euzébio Filho (2016) of a growing membership among young people to identity movements or student groups. According to the author these movements and groups are generally autonomist, but do not necessarily deny adoption of clear methods of political organization. They claim to be left-wing, but not necessarily classist (Euzébio Filho, 2016).

### **Final remarks**

Several questions remain unanswered. However, there’s reason enough to stand for the notion of a conservative wave, which would coexist with a clearer and clearer tendency of sectors of the youth towards transformative political engagement. The combination of these two tendencies is an expression of the contradictory character of political consciousness, at least in present conditions. This is also revealed in the discourse of the participants, especially when: (1) they speak of a conservative wave, but do not necessarily identify it with bourgeois democracy; (2) they speak of social transformation without establishing a perspective of political confrontation with conservatism.

It is worth noticing that, on the one hand, university students emphasize the conservative wave, while university prep course students emphasize the greater participation of the population in politics. We have no elements, however, to understand the reasons for this difference in emphasis.

In any case, it is reasonable to assume that the inability of bourgeois democracy to provide answers to its own crisis – with capital advancing increasingly devastating anti-environment and regressive social policies – has been producing a crisis of political representation. This is clear to the participants, although they do not seem to visualize a concrete path to overcoming the problems of the present situation, namely: attacks on social rights, corruption and a conservative wave. References to the student movement, student entities or political groups are vague at best. Surely, current parties and social movements do not present themselves as credible means of opposing the conservative wave or the corrupt political system. (Trade unions are an even less palpable alternative, since none of the young participants had immediate labor experience.) So-called democratic institutions and popular vote are also not seen as valid means of achieving popular demands. All the more reason to believe in a crisis of political representation, and that it could lead to questioning capitalism itself.

### **A conjuntura após junho de 2013: olhares cruzados sobre participação política e resistência**

**Resumo:** Buscamos compreender o que pensam jovens sobre a conjuntura, especialmente no Brasil, após as chamadas manifestações de junho. Em um cenário marcado pela crise social e econômica do capitalismo, quisemos entender como estudantes universitários e de um cursinho popular relacionam-se com o contexto político atual. Foram realizadas entrevistas e o conteúdo foi interpretado com base no materialismo histórico e dialético. Com isto, notamos que os participantes não enxergam um caminho concreto para superação dos problemas identificados nesta conjuntura, a saber: a existência de uma onda conservadora e corrupção, associados à retirada de direitos sociais. Em geral, partidos e movimentos sociais não estão no horizonte de participação, assim como as eleições não foram citadas como um caminho para alcançar demandas populares, corroborando a existência de uma crise de representatividade política, que é reforçada pela falta de alternativa política ao que está posto.

**Palavras-chave:** conjuntura, juventude, consciência, representatividade política.

### **La situation après Juin 2013: Crossed semble sur la participation politique et résistance**

**Résumé:** Nous cherchons à comprendre ce qu’ils pensent les jeunes au sujet de la situation actuelle, en particulier au Brésil, après les appels de manifestations Juin. Dans un scénario marqué par la crise sociale et économique du capitalisme, nous voulions comprendre comment les étudiants et un cours préparatoire populaire sont liés au contexte politique actuel. Des entrevues ont été menées et le contenu a été interprété sur la base du matérialisme historique et dialectique. Avec cela, nous notons que les participants ne voient pas de façon concrète pour surmonter les problèmes identifiés dans la situation à l’heure actuelle, à savoir l’existence d’une vague conservatrice et la corruption associée à la suppression des droits sociaux. En général, les partis et les mouvements sociaux ne sont pas à l’horizon de la participation, ainsi que les élections ne sont pas cités comme un moyen d’atteindre les revendications populaires, ce qui confirme l’existence d’une crise politique de représentation, qui est renforcé par l’absence d’une véritable alternative politique.

**Mots-clés:** environnement, de la jeunesse, la sensibilisation, la représentation politique.



## La coyuntura después de junio de 2013: miradas cruzadas sobre participación política y Resistencia

**Resumen:** Buscamos comprender lo que piensan jóvenes sobre la coyuntura actual, especialmente en Brasil, después de las llamadas manifestaciones de junio. En un escenario marcado por la crisis social y económica del capitalismo, quisimos entender cómo estudiantes universitarios y de un cursillo popular se relacionan con el contexto político actual. Se realizaron entrevistas y el contenido fue interpretado con base en el materialismo histórico y dialéctico. Con esto, notamos que los participantes no ven un camino concreto para superar los problemas identificados en la coyuntura en la actualidad, a saber: la existencia de una onda conservadora y corrupción, asociados a la retirada de derechos sociales. En general, partidos y movimientos sociales no están en el horizonte de participación, así como las elecciones no fueron citadas como un camino para alcanzar demandas populares, corroborando la existencia de una crisis de representatividad política, que se ve reforzada por la falta de una alternativa política concreta.

**Palabras clave:** coyuntura, juventud, conciencia, representatividad política.

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