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CONTEMPORARY AUSTERITY IN BRAZILIAN PUBLIC EDUCATION: THE WORLD BANK AND HIGH SCHOOL REFORM

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I aim to think about the current Brazilian political situation and its consequences on education. For this purpose, I analyse the World Bank's *A Fair Adjustment: Efficiency and Equity of Public Spending in Brazil (2017)* Report, in particular the section devoted to the reduction of spending on education, and its relation to High School Reform (*Reforma do Ensino Médio*), which occurred at the same year and currently lies in the implementation stage. In this, I present the World Bank analysis and diagnosis of the problems and proposed solutions to Brazilian basic public education, and demonstrate the factual errors, questionable interpretations and improper guidelines offered by the report, as well as make critical analyses of the High School Reform. With this, I aim to demonstrate the ways in which Brazilian sovereignty and development are harmed by the suggestions offered in and by this report, as well as the reform currently underway. Finally, in contrast, I present the ongoing successful public education policy for Federal Institutes and its fragility in the midst of the present Brazilian political conjuncture.

INTRODUCTION

After the 2016 coup in Brazil and the removal of then-President Dilma Rousseff, the Vice-President, Michel Temer, assumed power with a new political and economic agenda for the country¹. In this shift in Brazilian politics, there was a political understanding based on the idea that the state should restrict its operation areas, bearing in mind, first and foremost, the fiscal balance. Additionally in the same year, after a controversial discussion within the National Congress, and even with substantial popular mobilization – mainly through strikes organized by educational professionals and the occupation of many schools and universities by students – Constitutional Amendment 95 was approved, establishing from 2017 onwards, it would be prohibited to increase any public expenditure for the next 20 years. Namely, all social spending was frozen (taking into account only inflation correction for the previous year), independent of demographic changes, macroeconomic contingencies and any kind of unpredictable events that may occur throughout this time, eliminating the possibility of democratic periodical reviews (which, in the case of this Amendment, would only be allowed after 10 years)².

After the approval of the so-called, “Death Amendment”, President Michel Temer requested a report by the World Bank “with the objective to conduct an in-depth analysis of government spending, to develop options for Brazil to reduce its fiscal deficit to a sustainable level while consolidating the social gains achieved over previous decades”³. This report, *A Fair Adjustment: Efficiency and Equity of Public Spending in Brazil*, was then published in November of 2017.

1 The choice for the term “coup,” rather than “impeachment,” is substantiated, but is beyond the scope of this paper. In this respect, please refer to this article where I argue the political events of 2016 were indeed a coup: M. Tomazella, *L'attuale situazione politica in Brasile: perché si tratta di un golpe*, in “Giovaniemissione”, 2016, url: shorturl.at/ckpsJ. Also see: N. Krawczyk, J. C. Lombardi, *O golpe de 2016 e a educação no Brasil*, Navegando Publicações, Uberlândia 2018. H. Mattos, T. Bessone, B. G. Mamigonian, *Historiadores pela democracia: o golpe de 2016 e a força do passado*, Alameda, São Paulo 2016. C. Proner, G. Cittadino, M. Tenenbaum, W. R. Filho, *A resistência ao golpe de 2016*, Editorial Praxis, Bauru 2016.

2 The Covid pandemic emergency led to the first exception.

3 World Bank, *A Fair Adjustment: Efficiency and Equity of Public Spending in Brazil*, World Bank Group, Washington 2017, p. 5.

The main goal of this report was to suggest a possible way to achieve what was established by Amendment 95 – namely, fiscal adjustment according to the expenditure ceiling (“*teto de gastos*”) – based on the freeze of the federal budget. In addition, this extensive period of time established by the Amendment (20 years), with a spending correction based solely on inflation, as well as the inclusion of this precedent in the Constitution, make the incorporation of this fiscal austerity regime a unique situation in the world⁴.

Considering the important role of tax reforms on income and property⁵ and capital gains and dividends⁶, and despite affirming that no other country in the world implements such high interest rates on public debt, the report clearly establishes, from the beginning, that these issues are not going to be discussed in the text. Instead, the central priorities of the report focus on strategic public services, where it is envisioned that the fiscal balance could supposedly be better achieved. These include: the necessity of pension reform⁷, problems concerning the salaries of public servants, and suggestions for the improvement of public procurement, public education and healthcare.

The 2008 Economic Crisis truly arrived in Brazil in 2014, due to the implementation of strategies in tax reliefs, fiscal incentives for companies, and subsidized credit for domestic consumption. However, dependence on commodity exportation caused a significant decline in revenue, and there, from 2014 onward, began the economical crisis and rise in unemployment. Nevertheless, the report states that the main problem to the fiscal balance does not hinge on revenue decreases or the high interest costs of public debt – despite the fact that the

4 E. Medeiros, *Nenhum país adotou teto de gastos como o da PEC 241*, in “Rede Brasil Atual”, 25/10/2016, url: shorturl.at/IJTU2.

5 World Bank, *A Fair Adjustment: Efficiency and Equity of Public Spending in Brazil*, cit., p. 10.

6 In reference to Brazil as a tax haven, see: ONU, *Brasil é paraíso tributário para super-ricos, diz estudo de centro da ONU*, in “Nações Unidas Brasil”, 31/03/2016, url: shorturl.at/IU026.

7 This reform was approved in 2019 within the Bolsonaro administration, increasing the workers monthly collection, establishing a higher age to receive pensions, and reducing its value. For information on the fake argument of the social security deficit, see: P. P. Z. Bastos, R. Knudsen, A. L. P. Santos, H. S. Earp, *A falsificação nas contas oficiais da Reforma da Previdência: o caso do Regime Geral da Previdência*, in “Sismmac”, 2019, url: shorturl.at/blRSZ.

report itself states this to be the highest in the world⁸ – but rather, the “constitutionally guaranteed social commitments.”⁹ Within these “social commitments,” we find the “widespread earmarking of revenues to specific expenditures, and mandated minimum levels of spending for health and education”¹⁰. The report strongly recommends an elimination of this obligation as one of the ways to ensure “fiscal adjustment,” as the goal of this very report is to offer ways of reducing Brazilian public spending by 25% in one decade. The report’s intention is clear: through this reduction, in order to “bring [public spending] back to the level of the early 2000s”¹¹, the Brazilian state must restrict access to public services, demonstrated by comparing current numbers to data from that period¹².

In this paper, I will draw attention to the relationship between the report’s section on the reduction of spending on education and Law 13.415/2017 (High School Reform/ *Reforma do Ensino Médio*), a law approved in Brazil within the same year, although before the report’s official publication. In this, I present the World Bank analysis and diagnosis of the problems and its proposed solutions to the Brazilian public education system. I aim to demonstrate the factual errors, questionable interpretations and improper guidelines offered by this report, in addition to critical analyses of the High School Reform. With this, I seek to establish the ways in which Brazilian sovereignty and development are harmed by the suggestions offered in and by this report, as well as the reform currently underway. Finally, in contrast, I present the ongoing success of the public education policy for Federal Institutes and its fragility in the midst of the present Brazilian political conjuncture.

8 World Bank, *A Fair Adjustment: Efficiency and Equity of Public Spending in Brazil*, cit.

9 *ivi*, p. 22.

10 *Ibidem*.

11 *ivi*, p. 19.

12 For more, see: B. S. Cerqueira; C. Cardoso Jr, *Reforma Administrativa do Governo Federal: contornos, mitos e alternativas. / Frente Parlamentar Mista em Defesa do Serviço Público*, FONACATE, Brasília, 2019.

THE WORLD BANK AND BRAZILIAN BASIC EDUCATION: REPORT'S DIAGNOSES AND SUGGESTIONS

The report states that public spending in regards to education in Brazil has been growing between 2004 and 2014 at roughly around 6% of GDP, a higher level than the OECD average (5.5%), the BRICS (5.1%) and Latin America (4.6%)¹³. Notwithstanding this increasing expenditure, the number of registered students has decreased (due to demographic changes) and their performance in international examinations (like PISA, for instance) has not improved, reflected in “high repetition and drop-out rates, despite low and falling student-teacher ratios”¹⁴.

The report affirms that Brazilian teachers' salaries are at the same level as countries with similar income *per capita*, but indicate an alleged economic problem in that “teacher salaries in Brazil increase very rapidly [...] such that in 15 years they are more than 3 times the starting salary in real terms”¹⁵. The quality of teaching is also considered a central problem, as well as the number of teachers itself: “Inefficiency in primary and secondary education is related primarily to an excessive number of teachers”¹⁶. Since there are supposedly too many teachers and of low caliber, the report suggests reducing the number of teachers by not filling vacancies opened as a result of retirement and making the selection process for hiring future teachers more difficult. Along this same vein, the report also identifies the teaching time itself as a cause of further inefficiency: “Teachers in Brazil spend part of their time on unproductive activities. On average, teachers spend only 65 percent of their time teaching”¹⁷. Additionally, the report criticizes the country's insistence on an obligatory minimal education expenditure – which increases the spending per student as the number of enrolments decreases – and does not reward the superior performance of particu-

13 World Bank, *A Fair Adjustment: Efficiency and Equity of Public Spending in Brazil*, cit., p.118.

14 Ivi, p. 121.

15 Ivi, p. 123.

16 Ivi, p. 125.

17 Ibidem.

lar schools or teachers. Ultimately, the report highlights these central flaws to Brazil's primary and secondary education system.

REFLECTIONS AND REBUTTALS TO THE WORLD BANK'S REPORT

After three years of discussion, the National Education Plan (*Plano Nacional de Educação – PNE*) was approved in 2014, which would determine the education pathway for the next 10 years.¹⁸ A central goal of these parliamentary discussions was increasing the education spending from 5% of GDP to 10% by 2024. A recurrent argument against this proposal hinged on the fact that OECD countries at that time spent around 6% of their GDP on the education sector, and therefore 10% was too much. Although Brazil has little chance of achieving this anymore, as in Dilma Roussef's second term the education budget was severely restricted in 2015, and in 2017 with the ratification of Amendment 95, a response to its critics was given at the time: "When it comes to the social quality of education, it is essential to consider the cost-student-quality and factors such as the reduction in the number of students in the classroom, value enhancement, decent salaries and the continuation of training for teachers. To guarantee all of this, sufficient resources are essential. OECD countries that today invest between 5 and 6% of their GDP in the sector have already surpassed aspects like this, mainly because, for a long time, they have invested levels well above 10% of their GDP in education. Brazil, therefore, has not yet done its homework."¹⁹ Additionally:

1) Considering the social inequality and economical dependency on commodities, in tandem with low average wages – I could say that Brazil is an impoverished country.²⁰ Thus, when comparing the same percenta-

18 For the twenty PNE goals, see: Brasil, *Plano Nacional de Educação*, url: shorturl.at/hrT7WX
 19 J. F. Soares, *10% ainda é pouco*, in "Portal da Associação Nacional dos Dirigentes de Instituições de Ensino Superior (ANDIFES)", 06/08/2014, url: <http://www.andifes.org.br/10-ainda-e-pouco/>. All quoted materials not originally written in English were translated by the author.

20 O Globo, *Renda média de mais da metade dos brasileiros é inferior a um salário mínimo*, in "Época Negócios", 16/10/2019, url: shorturl.at/hszJ3. Bermúdez; Rezende; C. Madeiro, *Brasil é o 7º país mais desigual do mundo, melhor apenas do que africanos*, in "Notícias UOL", 09/12/2019, url: shorturl.at/wGJRX.

ge of the national GDP with what may be considered to be more developed countries, it generates a data distortion. In other words, the same percentage of a lower GDP *per capita* would actually represent a lower proportion of the budget; for instance, Brazil and Italy have similar GDPs, while Brazil has 3/5 times more inhabitants.

2) Despite demographic changes, Brazil is still a relative young country,²¹ meaning there are still many people within the school-age population, in comparison to OECD countries.²² In addition, already difficult educational conditions do not allow for spending reductions, as reductions made in proportion to the decrease in enrollment would further strain an already overburdened system with stagnation. Moreover, this “solution” overlooks the real problem concerning enrollment decreases: more than half of the young people between the ages of 15 and 17 in Brazil are not attending or completing high school due either to high elementary school repetition rates or to abandoned study.²³ These problems, ignored by proposed “solutions”, require serious reflection and resolution.

3) Furthermore, when we look at the OECD Report, *Education at a Glance 2019*, we can see that the Brazilian cost per student is less than half of that of other OECD members and partner countries.²⁴

4) In contrast to the report written by the World Bank, according to *OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS - 2018)*, the entry-level salary of a teacher in Brazil is one of the worst in the world, and does not double or triple within a 15 year career, as stated by the World Bank report. According to TALIS, the Brazilian teachers on average have a very small salary increase over the course of their careers (similar only to that of Latvia and Estonia), with the lowest purchasing power among the 48 surveyed

21 IBGEeduca, *Pirâmide Etária*, 2018, url: shorturl.at/CHQY5.

22 Even with the real decrease in the the number of enrollments in the basic education, see: Inep, *Censo Escolar*, 2019, url: <http://portal.inep.gov.br/resultados-e-resumos>.

23 M. Lima, S. L. Maciel, *A reforma do ensino médio do Governo Temer: corrosão do direito à educação no contexto de crise do capital no Brasil*, in “Revista Brasileira de Educação”, 2018, url: shorturl.at/hswx6.

24 “Because of the country’s relatively low GDP per capita and the below-average share of total government expenditure in relation to GDP, the absolute amount spent per student at these levels [primary and secondary] is less than half the OECD average (OECD, *Education at a Glance. OECD Indicators. Country Note: Brazil*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019, p. 4, url: shorturl.at/crsxA).

countries.²⁵ Low teachers' salaries directly influence the low cost per student, as this is one of its main calculation motives.²⁶

5) Although high repetition and dropout rates are indeed real and serious problems within the Brazilian educational system, it is inaccurate to say that student-teacher ratios are low. According to *Effective Teacher Policies: Insights from PISA (2018)*, also written by the OECD, Brazil has one of the highest numbers of students per class among the 60 countries surveyed, naturally impacting the quality and the amount of work of teachers, as well as on the students' poor learning results.

6) Problems identified as a direct result of the quality of teachers' qualifications and training are indeed dire; however, the lack of professional valorization, low salaries, crowded classrooms and poor career plans are factors that cannot be disregarded as contributing directly to these problems as well. Rather than investigating the causes and possible public policies enacted at universities and schools, contextualizing the reality of overwhelmed teachers and overcrowded classrooms, and investigating the political, economic and social causes of such problems, the World Bank instead proposes reducing the number of teachers and increasing the classroom time, because "teachers in Brazil spend part of their time on unproductive activities."²⁷ Thus, according to the World Bank, if there are problems with Brazilian basic education professionals, the proposed solution involves the termination of time for research, for preparing classes, for ongoing professional training, for pedagogical meetings and for other kinds of professional development, since 2/3rd of their working time spent in the classroom is considered too little.

7) To top the neoliberal logic at the peak of such cynicism, there lies the critique of the obligatory minimum spending for education envisioned as an obstacle to state efficiency, in addition to the proposed application of incentives and rewards, be they for teachers or schools. In the case of teachers, it seeks to create competition for bonuses amongst individuals – like in a

25 H. Borges, *Professores brasileiros têm os piores salários, afirma OCDE em levantamento feito em 48 países*, in "O Globo", 20/06/2019, url: shorturl.at/enru9.

26 Meanwhile, the present federal government intends to freeze civil servants wages and even reduce them: A. Azevedo, *Paulo Guedes pretende congelar salários do funcionalismo*, in "Estado de Minas", 22/01/2020, url: shorturl.at/CGLQV.

27 World Bank, *A Fair Adjustment: Efficiency and Equity of Public Spending in Brazil*, cit., p. 125.

private company – based on efficiency, which are numerically measured, weakening group solidarity and union bonds. Moreover, this proposal would further strengthen the institutions that are already in better condition, additionally abandoning those schools already disadvantaged and afflicted by significant hardship²⁸. Finally, following the logic of the neoliberal agenda, the current government under Bolsonaro intends to abolish both the earmarking of resources and the minimum level on social spending, since the austerity goal of reducing by 25% is unachievable with 90% of the federal budget allocated to so many “constitutionally guaranteed social commitments” at a “mandated minimum level”.²⁹ Thus, this includes spending on education.³⁰

THE HIGH SCHOOL REFORM: DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Following this critical review, I will briefly explain the most important points of Law 13.415/2017, approved under Temer’s government, which has been called *High School Reform* (Reforma do Ensino Médio).³¹ The main justification for this reform was the low quality of educational results and student outcomes, and the need to make the sector more attractive to students, due to the high levels of repetition and dropout.³² The subsequent section seeks

28 Research budget cuts last year already followed this exclusion logic: P. Saldaña, *Impacto de cortes de bolsas da Capes foi maior no Nordeste*, in “Folha de São Paulo”, 17/02/2020, url: shorturl.at/gxyG2. As well as school resources: L. Martins, *Brasil “só tem espaço para os melhores” diz Weintraub a crianças*, in “Valor Econômico”, 04/09/2019, url: shorturl.at/eluM8.

29 World Bank, *A Fair Adjustment: Efficiency and Equity of Public Spending in Brazil*, cit., p. 22.

30 F. Pupo, *Guedes quer eliminar piso para saúde e educação em estados e municípios*, in “Folha de São Paulo”, 24/12/2019, url: shorturl.at/dhnsP; Corrêa, *Equipe de Guedes estuda desvincular o orçamento para não romper teto de gastos*, in “O Globo”, 29/11/2018, url: shorturl.at/kAM08.

31 In September of 2016, this law was unjustifiably presented by the the government as a provisional measure, consisting in the second Temer’s important measure (at the time still Bill, No. 246/2016), right after the approval of Amendment 95, and was also a cause of school occupations referenced in the introduction.

32 In reference to high school dropout causes, see: A. Salata, *Razões da evasão: abandono escolar entre jovens no Brasil*, in “Interseções”, 2019, url: shorturl.at/grFK5 and M. Volpi, M. de S. Silva, J. Ribeiro, *10 desafios do ensino médio no Brasil: para garantir o direito de aprender de adolescentes de 15 a 17 anos*, Unicef, Brasília, 2014, url: shorturl.at/yz468. These studies demonstrate that the complexity of the problem extrapolates a restrict curriculum notion based on institutional organization of contents, as follows.

to present the main components of this law, while also analyzing present and emerging issues in relation to the World Bank guidelines established by the report in question.

1) Until the ratification of Law 13.415/2017, there was in high school a minimum academic load of 800 hours per year over the course of three years (2400h) of general education in traditional disciplines. Following the reform however, time devoted to general knowledge areas was reduced from 2400h to 1800h, despite the total minimum academic load being increased to 3000h. The law required that the remaining 1200h would be dedicated to what was called “formative itineraries”, namely, specialized fields that students would, in theory, be able to choose. These specialized fields included: math, languages, natural sciences, human sciences and technical education.³³

2) Reforms established through the ratification of this new law were two-fold. On the one hand, it determined that the only mandatory disciplines indicated within those 1800h were math and portuguese. On the other, it also terminated the legal obligation of four disciplines: physical education, arts, philosophy and sociology. Instead, they became prescribed as “studies and practices”,³⁴ meaning their contents would be taught through themes established and incorporated into other disciplines or “interdisciplinary projects.”³⁵

33 These itineraries were already presented in 2013 through Bill (6840/2013), representing an “intense participation of civil society sectors in line with the national business community, that since PT governments, have strong influence on the Ministry of Education, in order of adequating the Brazilian education to their interests, among them, the financial ones” (C. J. Ferretti, *A reforma do Ensino Médio e sua questionável concepção de qualidade da educação*, in “Estudos Avançados”, 2018, p. 26, url: shorturl.at/hkBQR). A vague and open notion of “formative itineraries” was already present in Art. 36 of the law nº 9.394/1996, *Law of Directives and Bases of National Education* (henceforth, *LDB*) from 1996 – the main legislative base for Brazilian education.

34 Brasil, *Lei nº 13.415/2017 (Reforma do Ensino Médio)*, Art. 34-A, § 2º, url: shorturl.at/bdwU3.

35 L. Semis, *Secretária executiva do MEC esclarece pontos do Novo Ensino Médio*, in “Revista Nova Escola”, 03/01/2017, url: shorturl.at/cdpwz. The notion of “studies and practices” is valid for all the disciplines, with the exception of math and Portuguese. The cases of physical education, arts, philosophy and sociology were referenced because these 4 disciplines, together with math and Portuguese, were the only obligatory disciplines until that time, even with the customary presence of the others in the curriculum.

3) Two goals became the formal measurements for high school success as established under these reforms: “Mastery of scientific and technologic principles that lead modern production” and “knowledge of contemporary forms of language.”³⁶

4) Law 13.415/2017 outlined the expansion of full-time high school, with 25% being full-time by 2024.

5) Finally, it established agreements with private (on-site and distance) educational institutions.

Firstly, it is important to question, to what extent the freedom of choice of the teenage students should be anticipated, while general education is reduced. They must decide their specialization at an earlier age, with less experience – both in life and in school – and less institutional time in general studies. Consequently, it can be argued that these legal and institutional shifts result in poorer conditions of student autonomy. Furthermore, the so-called “freedom of choice” is not real, as the availability of different formative itineraries depends almost entirely on the conditions of the regional education system, as well as on the availability in each school in particular. In other words, many schools may only be able to offer *one itinerary*, clearly indicating that the students’ choice in reality is determined by what is offered at their local schools – furthermore, private schools will be able to offer all itineraries, increasing the already existing inequalities between public and private schools in relation to the real possibility of choice and to access to quality education. In addition, it reduces the general and equal access to the historical-cultural human knowledge, creating the illusion of freedom to decide based on the still premature subjective and cognitive conditions of the students, without a solid and integrated previous education to allow for real choice. “In this sense, the current and more egalitarian proposal – which offers the same curriculum to all high school students – falls apart, with the risk of increasing existing social inequalities”³⁷. This kind of fragmented and flexible education, coupled with a school model envisioned without deeper integration and universality of access and content, mirrors capitalism’s flexible accumulation, demanding education based solely on performance and

36 Brasil, *Lei nº 13.415/2017 (Reforma do Ensino Médio)*, cit., Art. 35-A, § 8º.

37 C. J. Ferretti, *A reforma do Ensino Médio e sua questionável concepção de qualidade da educação*, cit., p. 33.

outcomes, not on real knowledge and reflexive capacity:

In the specific case of present-day high school, the general formation will have a generic design, due to the duration of only 1800 hours, supplemented by studies in a specific area or by lightened technical and professional education. [...] However, as the proposal is to substitute rigidity for flexibility, education is responsible for developing skills that allow learning throughout life, a central category in the pedagogy of flexible accumulation, this lightening does not appear to be relevant for the proponents of the new Law. If the worker, along his professional trajectory, will pass through a number of jobs and opportunities for professional education, there is no reason to invest in specialized professional training, as already proposed by the World Bank as a policy for poor countries since the 1990s³⁸.

The exclusion of philosophy, sociology and the arts as obligatory disciplines clearly reflects this approach: the non obligation of knowledge areas dedicated to critical thought and reflection demonstrates the straightforward, usefulness and practical character of this educational perspective. It is intended as an adaptation to any kind of life and labor, being mainly temporary, simple, fragmented and repetitive work, which demands fewer qualifications, at most some poor competences that this kind of school will supposedly provide.³⁹ “The totality is replaced by fragmentation, and the disciplines that can provide elements for the criticism and concrete social relation apprehension in its totality are relegated to a secondary place”⁴⁰.

At the same time, it indicates the restriction of labor markets for professionals of those knowledge areas mentioned in the paragraph above (as well as its weakening as academic fields), and the creation of precarious educa-

38 A. Z. Kuenzer, *Trabalho e escola: a flexibilização do Ensino Médio no contexto do regime de acumulação flexível*, in “Educação & Sociedade”, 2017, p. 339, url: shorturl.at/avGM6.

39 It is remarkable that “the Industry National Confederation released a document in 2010 saying what was required for the Brazilian labor force education: that the students know read and write, that they know the four math basic operations, and understand simple formal logic, it means, that something has a cause and an effect” (A. Kenji, *Em termos de educação pública nunca experimentamos um inimigo com uma força social tão concentrada como esse*, in “Portal da Fiocruz”, 27/04/2018, url: shorturl.at/ceuP3). It is fundamental to remember that Labor Reform was also approved during Temer’s government in 2017, creating a proper horizon to this new kind of instrumental and lightened education. In reference to the Labor Reform, see DIEESE, *A Reforma Trabalhista e os impactos para as relações de trabalho no Brasil. Nota Técnica n. 178*, 2017, url: shorturl.at/aBOW5.

40 Ivi, p. 347.

tional conditions within these areas, potentially indicating that teachers or instructors without proper qualification may be authorized to teach such subjects. Thus, another issue can be “solved” in relation to this: it becomes unnecessary to hire new professionals, since teachers of specific subjects become permitted to teach any knowledge area through so-called “studies and practices.” As a result, these teachers become overburdened on the one hand, and on the other, it becomes commonplace to replace regular teachers with training in a specific discipline in inadequate ways⁴¹.

Futhermore, it is necessary to implement fulltime education (7 hours per day) in order to achieve a higher academic load, which corresponds directly to the sixth goal of the *Plano Nacional da Educação (PNE)* and to Art. 34 of the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional (LDB)*. However, there is no current infrastructure within Brazilian schools which would allow for this; nor in the number of teachers, in the professional career plans, in the working conditions, in the number of schools, in the buildings quality (sport courts, libraries, laboratories etc) or even in the availability of proper food for students, all on top of the fact that Amendment 95 does not allow for an increase in expenses. As the law is currently written, the proposed solution is envisioned in partnership with the private sector, additionally with the possibility of 30% of the academic load being shifted to distance education. In view of the present situation of higher education market saturation in Brazil, it is an amazing opportunity for the private sector to sell distance basic education packages paid for with public resources, in such a way that, for instance, “technical and professional education [can] be offered by large education conglomerates located anywhere in the world.”⁴²

When we face High School Reform, which states that the only goal of education is restricted to the “[m]astery of scientific and technologic principles that lead modern production” and “knowledge of contemporary forms of language”,⁴³ we find exactly the same terms in *LDB*’s Art. 36, with one

41 The lack of teachers in many Brazilian schools is not due to the lack of graduating teachers, but due to the low attractiveness of the professional career (J. M. de R. Pinto, *O que explica a falta de professores nas escolas brasileiras?*, in “Jornal de Políticas Educacionais”, 2014, url: shorturl.at/AJTX2).

42 G. N. Junior, *Articulações entre o Banco Mundial e a Reforma do Ensino Médio (Lei 13.415/2017)*, in “Revista Teias”, 2019, p. 357, url: shorturl.at/dLP18

43 Brasil, *Lei nº 13.415/2017 (Reforma do Ensino Médio)*, cit., Art. 35-A, § 8º.

crucial difference. Despite Brazil's neoliberal context in which this law was originally passed in the 1990s, Law 11.684 was approved in 2008, adding a third matter that high schools must consider: "mastery of knowledges in philosophy and sociology which are necessary to the exercise of citizenship."⁴⁴ Exactly this third goal was excluded with current High School Reform, making remarkable the actual absence of any state interest in the collective emergence of the capacity of interpreting and changing the world.

According to this vision, it is simply enough for future generations to take part in a productive system, responding solely to the innovative demands of an increasingly changing labor market, and to know how to communicate in order to decode and express proper and useful codes. In this new framework, there is no space to think about capitalist contradictions, nor about the reasons for and meaning of life or about the power relations that determine institutions, social conditions, values and preferences. As a consequence, we see the desolving of the ability to experience the strangeness of life in the face of what has already been decided to be the normal, a construction of the world as if it were an unchangeable fatality.

In *Learning for all: investing in people's knowledge and skills to promote development. World Bank Group Education Strategy, 2020*, boosting the education private sector – mainly the technical-professional and the higher education⁴⁵ – was an explicit demand, as well as a strategy of intervention: "Another aspect of political economy is to identify and take advantage of windows of opportunity for significant reform. Reforms are easier to introduce when there is a new government; when there is a demand for broader change, as is the case during crises, and other reforms are also being made."⁴⁶

44 Brasil, *Lei nº 11.684/2008: modifies Art. 36 of the Law 9.394/1996 (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases)*, which establishes Directives and Bases of National Education, including Philosophy and Sociology as obligatory disciplines in the high school curriculum.

45 For more information about the intentions and legislative strategies under the Bolsonaro administration to improve the participation of the private sector in the financing and management of public universities and Federal Institutes, see: T. Pereira, *Livro detalha programa "Future-se" e a ameaça de privatização das universidades por Bolsonaro*, in "Rede Brasil Atual", 23/12/2019, url: <https://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/educacao/2019/12/livro-detalha-programa-future-se-e-a-ameaca-de-privatizacao-das-universidades-pelo-governo-bolsonaro/>.

46 World Bank, *Learning for all: investing in people's knowledge and skills to promote development. World Bank Group Education Strategy, 2020*, cit., p. 75.

This reflects exactly the Brazilian situation: after the coup in 2016 (with the support of a majority of the population), the approval of Amendment 95 followed later that same year. The High School Reform was subsequently published authoritatively as a provisional measure at the end of 2016 and sanctioned as law at the beginning of 2017. Following that, the Labor Reform passed in 2017, while in 2019, the Pension Reform. All of them to the detriment of any idea of common wealth or social justice, and in accordance with public spending reduction.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: BETWEEN HOPE AND REALISM

In this article, I intended to analyze the relationship between the World Bank's *A Fair Adjustment: Efficiency and Equity of Public Spending in Brazil* (2017) Report and Brazil's High School Reform (2017), within the context of Amendment 95; highlighting the strategies of spending reduction, as well as the offer of an utilitarian, flexible and non-reflexive formation, according to neoliberal interests. Following the establishment of the guidelines of education in Latin America in the 1990s, Brazil once again falls under the purview of the World Bank as "the World Education Ministry of peripheral countries."⁴⁷

Although it is important to remember this, in addition to the totality of attacks suffered by Brazilian education, there are two essential institutions in Brazil that represent hope, democracy, resistance and quality of education: public universities and Federal Institutes.⁴⁸ While the central consideration of this article focuses on basic education, I am going to finish this paper with a brief explanation of the Federal Institutes, stressing the basic education level within these institutions (professional education) and the foreseen challenges in the current Brazilian context. The Federal Network of Professional Education, Science and Technology was created in 2008 during the government of then-President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva: "This is a new professional and technological edu-

47 R. Leher, *Um Novo Senhor da educação? A política educacional do Banco Mundial para a periferia do capitalismo*, in "Outubro Revista", 1999, p. 19.

48 For more information on the increasing of democratizing access to public universities, see: A. Souza, *Maioria dos alunos das universidades federais tem renda baixa, é parda ou preta e vem de escola pública*, in "O Globo", 17/05/2019, url: shorturl.at/BCGW1.

cation concept, with nothing similar in the world. The Federal Institutes were thought to play a central and strategical role [...] focused on the promotion of social justice, equity, [and] sustainable development with social inclusion.”⁴⁹

It is an institution that currently has 644 campuses throughout the country, mainly in peripheral and poor regions that have historically lacked quality public educational institutions. These institutions offer different educational levels and arrangements throughout their campuses, including: professional secondary courses, undergraduate programs (mainly, training for teachers), Education of Youth and Adults, and Master’s and Doctoral degrees (particularly focused on scientific teaching, in addition to the improvement of already practicing teachers). Unlike the pessimistic scenario depicted throughout this paper, the professional secondary education quality offered in those institutions is one of the best in the world.⁵⁰ The teachers have higher academic qualifications, decent wages and better working conditions, while the students participate in research and extension projects, and are provided financial assistance and an integral humanist education. Inspired on the Gramscian concept of the Unitarian school, the main goal of these institutions is to “put an end in the separation between *Homo faber* and *Homo sapiens*, recovering the education structuring meaning and its relation to labor and its creative and emancipatory possibilities”⁵¹. Even with existing difficulties and contradictions impeding the realization of the full potential of those institutions⁵², this policy proved possible “a way of professional education devoted to the formation of the entire individual, preparing them for life with freedom, autonomy, conscience and social agency.”⁵³

49 L. E. V. Aguiar, E. M. Pacheco, *Os Institutos Federais de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia como Política Pública*, in “As Políticas Públicas e o Papel Social dos Institutos Federais de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia”, 2017, p. 19.

50 H. Borges, *Estudantes federais têm desempenho coreano em ciências, mas MEC ignora*, In “The Intercept”, 08/12/2016, url: shorturl.at/aPQW8.

51 Ivi, p. 14.

52 J. dos Santos, J. Rodrigues, *(Des)Caminhos da Política de Expansão da Rede Federal de Educação Profissional, Científica e Tecnológica: contradições na trajetória histórica*, in “Revista do NIEP-Marx”, 2015.

53 M. Tomazella, *Apresentação*, in M. Tomazella (ed), *Educação, Cultura e Sociedade*, Editora IFPB, João Pessoa 2019, p. 10.

Unfortunately, this successful public policy only includes 500 thousand high school students, while the total number enrolled in the public school system in Brazil is roughly 40 millions; most of these students fall under the local state administrations, where the majority suffer from the problems outlined and interrogated throughout this paper. Moreover, this singular institution – in the midst of so many difficulties – has been systematically attacked since 2017. Since then, education in general has lost R\$100 billion (US\$19 billion) due to Amendment 95. 2019 itself saw a loss of R\$32 billion (US\$6 billion),⁵⁴ when a dramatic budget reduction was implemented for Federal Institutes and universities, which resulted in not enough money in the budget to pay for electricity and water, the interruption of a significant number of research projects, and the commencement of the current academic school year with only half of the Master's and Doctorate scholarships previously available⁵⁵. Furthermore, the democratic elections and institutional autonomy have not been respected during administration of current president, Jair Bolsonaro, as many Institutes and universities are suffering as a result of serious interventions. For example, Institutes and universities have seen the nomination and appointment for positions such as rector by individuals who had lost the selection process or did not even run for the position in the first place⁵⁶. These anti-democratic nominations have a very strong link with budget cuts, because both are directly related to ideological anti-intellectualism that despises scientific knowledge, and identifies teachers and professors as “left-wing indoctrinators”⁵⁷ and universities as “messy” places with “ridiculous events.”⁵⁸

54 A. Pellanda, *Em 2019, a educação perdeu R\$32 bi para o Teto de Gastos*, in “Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil”, 26/04/2020, url: shorturl.at/byMQ6.

55 R. Agostini, *MEC vai cortar recursos da Capes e Federais terão o mesmo orçamento*, in “Estadão”, 02/09/2019, url: shorturl.at/ghsCW.

56 Among the federal education institutions under illegal intervention currently, are the following: Instituto Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (IFRN), Instituto Federal de Santa Catarina, Instituto Federal do Mato Grosso do Sul (IFMS), Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica do Rio de Janeiro (CEFET-RJ), Universidade Federal dos Vales do Jequitinhonha e Mucuri (UFVJM), Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul (UFFS), Universidade Federal do Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM), Universidade Federal do Recôncavo da Bahia (UFRB) e Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC).

57 G. Alessi, *Plano de Bolsonaro para “desesquerdizar” educação vai além do Escola Sem Partido*, in “El País”, 23/05/2019, url: shorturl.at/nJV01.

58 W. Gomes, *E continua a cruzada de Weintraub contra a educação superior*, in “Cult”, 10/05/2019, url: shorturl.at/aGJQ5.

Nowadays, education professionals are trying not to be completely engulfed by obscurantism and fascism, the main tools of neoliberalism in contemporary Brazil. More than ever, each working day at the school is a way of not losing hope of a better equipped generation that can learn from the mistakes of the past, as well as from the terrible mistakes of the present. But with the way things are going, I cannot foretell to what extent it will still be fully possible in the midst of the ruins that our reality is becoming.

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