

ARTICLE

The irrationalism of decadent capitalism

El irracionalismo del capitalismo decadente

O irracionalismo do capitalismo decadente

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Abstract:

Based on the tradition inaugurated by Marxian work, this article analyses the constitutive foundations of neoliberalism that configure it as a strategy for the reproduction of late capitalism. Emerging in the process of the maturing of bourgeois society, neoliberalism reformulates the action of the state to adapt it to the needs imposed by the new forms of management of accumulation, which, in the face of the hegemony of interest-bearing capital, can only guarantee the valorisation of value with uncontrollable destructive power. This movement reveals the barbarism that constitutes bourgeois society, mainly manifesting in the dependent countries. The result of this stage is the reconfiguration of social relations and social beings as a whole, whose new mode of being shows the irrationalism of decadent capitalism. This conception underlies the critique of the enigmatic thought of Dardot and Laval, set out in the book 'The New Reason of the World'. Their theses, which have been echoed in Brazilian social work, propose criticisms of neo-liberalism. Still, by safeguarding the structural logic of the society that makes it emerge, they limit themselves to the epidermis of the problem, representing the typical ideological deformations of the current stage.

Keywords:
Neo-liberalism;
Marxism; Dardot
and Laval; Social
Service

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Intoduction

The following article results from an analytical review of the foundations that constitute neoliberalism. This study, based on a critical review of the literature dealing with its emergence and the movement of this long stage, allows us to characterise it as a strategy for the reproduction of late capitalism, which in its movement reveals the irrationalism not only of decadent capitalism but also of bourgeois social formation.

This synthesis was simultaneous with the work of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, responsible for investigating the coup acts that, on 8 January 2023, sought to give continuity in Brazil to the neo-fascist government of the disqualified former president Jair Bolsonaro at a juncture that suggested the supposed defeat of the ultra-right. However, according to Gramsci (2010), history teaches even if it lacks students. It shows that enthusiastic aspirations are limited to electoral victories and conceal the intrinsic relationship between the preservation of bourgeois relations and violence, which in the current stage is exacerbated by the ruin of social policies.

An analysis, following the “category of totality as the cornerstone of social gnosis” (Netto, 1981, p.41), is proposed, beyond national borders, of the advance of neoliberalism, whose viability increasingly depends on neo-fascist expressions (Boito, 2020), even if they materialise on the margins of democratic regimes. Above all, it is essential to show that it is impossible to halt this advance if we renounce the struggle to overcome class society.

In this sense, a critique will be made of the mysterious thought formulated by the French Foucauldians Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, expounded in *The New Reason of the World* (2023). The book, which identifies immediate manifestations of actuality and sets out to combat neoliberalism, has gained relevance, even in the Brazilian social service, despite denying the anti-capitalist struggle. This aspect will also be considered in this debate

The long neoliberal phase and violence in late capitalism

Bolsonaro’s electoral defeat was the light at the end of another long tunnel in Brazilian history. The attempted coup in Brasilia repeated Donald Trump’s failure on Capitol Hill, and subsequent investigations multiply daily scandals and demonstrate – for those who insist they do not know – that the defunct government



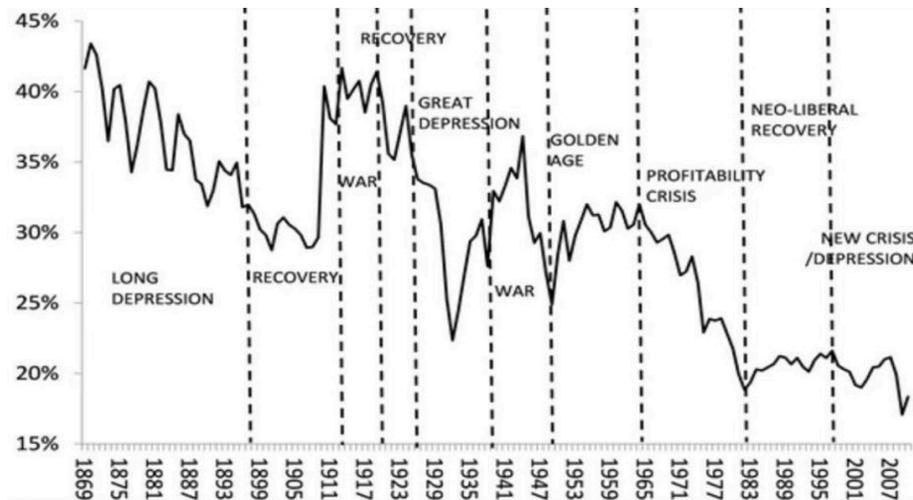
was a scheme of plunder and super-exploitation (Marini, 2022) unprecedented in recent history. The news seems to many to be “compensatory”, given the supposed imminence of justice being done. However, the legacy of destruction left by the “Chicago boys” is perpetuated in different dimensions of our sociability, such as in the subordination of the state to interest-bearing capital. The permanent condition of fiscal adjustment (Behring, 2018) was maintained in the new Lula government, and the draining of public funds was done to pay endless and unaudited debts. The relief, however, is not gratuitous, as the more than 700,000 – and under-reported – deaths from COVID-19 until 2022 did not result only from the reproductive movement of viral RNA but from an irrationalist government, whose extermination project found support for its task in the fight against science, vaccines and social isolation.

However, we must pay attention: irrationalism is not a characteristic of a specific government but a long stage of development of bourgeois society in which the categories forged by Modernity succumb. For liberal thought, there is no room for humanism, concrete historicism, dialectics and reason (Coutinho, 2010). And suppose the virulent reactionaries that expressed themselves politically, economically and ideologically in Bolsonaro will not be buried with him. In that case, neither is the advance of neo-fascism a national particularity that can be considered defeated. On the same channels that report on the smuggling of Saudi jewellery in the name of the Bolsonaro family, we see our Argentine neighbours heading towards the abyss into which we fell less than five years ago.

Indeed, the victory in the electoral primaries of the crude figure of Javier Milei is not sustained by the eccentricities of a candidate so ultra(neoliberal) that he goes so far as to defend the commercialisation of organs to compensate for the stripping of rights. Political projects that radicalise their modus operandi, placing themselves to the right of classical liberals, reflect the “spirit of the age”, even if they bear different, variable traits, depending on the terrain on which they emerge. They may be openly xenophobic in Europe, as they could not be in Brazil; they reveal an explicit militaristic weight here, as would not be accepted in Argentina. They may even call themselves anarcho-capitalists, like Milei, but, ultimately, they always converge on the same destiny: the violent radicalisation of neoliberalism. To this end, they can admit a neo-fascist character, according to Boito (2020). So it was with Milei, who, in the worst and most likely scenario, will be the next Argentine president.

Although this brief commentary is not an analysis of the situation, it supports the debate because it expresses the trajectory of the society in which it is articulated. Instead, we are analysing the movement of the irrational logic of bourgeois society, exacerbated by the late capitalism phase by Mandel (1982), which adds contradictions that go beyond the Leninist notion of classical imperialism (Netto, 2011). These contradictions intensified with the societal transformations that erupted in the 1970s, although they had previously germinated in the metabolic process of the commodity society. Neoliberalism, which in 1973 rehearsed its rise and hegemony in Pinochet's military coup, is an expression of the urgency to accelerate the processes of capital rotation in the course of the inevitable downward trend of the average profit rate, which becomes more acute at this stage. However, the factors that counteract capital (Marx, 2017) can create upward waves in certain historical intervals, as shown in the graph by Roberts (2021).

La tasa de lucro mundial basada en 14 países clave durante el período 1869-2007



Source: MAITO 2018 as cited in ROBERTS, 2021.

The violence characterising capitalism is strengthened in this process of maturation and decomposition of typically bourgeois relations. It imposes the reformulation of the economy and the state's action, which creates the necessary cultural breeding ground for the constitution of a new social being, individualised, atomised, and adapted to the new demands of production and social reproduction of late capitalism.

These transformations under the hegemony of interest-bearing capital take place within the framework of an unsustainable incompatibility between the financial transactions of immaterial wealth and that which can be put into pockets, which not even the war industry and the wars necessary for the realisation of its commodities are capable of balancing.

This scenario leads to a constant search for new niches of accumulation that allow the capture of real values, capable of redressing, albeit temporarily, the imbalance between fiction and the real socially produced value. Hence, the commodification of everything and the conversion of the public fund formed by labour into essential capital for the extended process of capitalist reproduction (Behring, 2021).

The realisation of this “task” imposes the general subordination of the whole of society. It is necessary to turn natural goods into commodities and wage earners into individual entrepreneurs who turn to interest-bearing capital to open or save their businesses. Rights become privileges; employees become collaborators, and solidarity becomes a competition. Decadent values are presented as new, which is only possible through a profound alteration in the morphology of work (Antunes, 2013), transforming the class itself, which, fragmented, is conditioned to an individualised and sterile praxis. To carry out this process, a state is constituted despite the ideology of minimalism, which is stronger than ever. A state that is the maximum for capital (Netto, 2011) and which, only for labour, reserves the minimum state.

This is why new manifestations of neo-fascism, even if they decline in one nation, rise in others, whether through a mandate or the extermination of a people, without violence ceasing to be indispensable if we consider the complex process of totalisation (Lukács, 2003) that characterises bourgeois society internationally. Multifaceted violence is the main driving force behind the permanence of commodity society, be it concrete or intangible, even if its brutality operates within the margins of democratic regimes. If concessions to the working class are no longer allowed, the answer is to harden force.

Thus, we find a common thread that connects not only the features of bourgeois barbarism, which in the 1970s created new and deeper modes of being, with contemporary barbarism. The autocracies, once used by the countries of dependent capitalism to contain rising revolutionary action, were necessary assumptions for the new neoliberal wave, as they managed to eradicate labour organisations and their opponents and the spaces of sociability that nurtured the new generations of fighters. They allowed capital to gain the time it needed to reorganise itself.

In this journey, democratic regimes became regimes sufficient for developing neoliberal violence in all its essence. Neo-fascism, as a new phenomenon (Boito, 2020), does not emerge as a response to a revolutionary threat to be overthrown but as a means to guarantee the advance of capitalist accumulation beyond the barriers of super-exploitation, eliminating the reminiscences of the old social democracy.

Neoliberalism is consolidated as a fundamental strategy for the preservation of bourgeois society, without which it would not be possible to guarantee the increasingly unstable equilibrium of the process of value valorisation and neutralise the revolt, even depoliticised, disorganised and fragmented, that will be expressed in the face of a mode of production and social reproduction that has exhausted its civilising capacities (Mészáros, 2002). This is not necessarily because of its effectiveness but because of the lack of alternatives, given the inability to reverse a crisis that admits a structural character (Mészáros, 2009).

However, this statement does not suggest that the social phenomena typical of contemporary neoliberalism are as they were in the 1970s. On the contrary, in the face of ever deeper and more prolonged crises, facing not only falling rates of profit but also mass profits, as was the case in the 2008 subprime crisis, capital is forced to reinvent itself. And it certainly has all the capabilities to do so, even if it thus reveals its destructive essence.

Like any social product, neoliberalism is transformed in its development. Still, it can only be understood and confronted based on its ontological foundations, not the discourses produced about itself. This is the opposite theoretical-methodological path followed by romantic critique, which denies the existence of class society and modern reason and which, blinded by the immediate, cannot extract the essence of reality but is determined by its movement.

Dardot, Laval and French irrationality

The French Foucauldians Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval's *The New Reason for the World*, published in France in 2009, arrived in Brazil at the time of a coup of a new kind (Demier, 2017), in a country whose idea of nationhood was forged based on successive coups d'état. However, in 2016, we witnessed the renewing capacity of "our traditions" when the removal of a democratically elected government was sustained not on cannons but on the very foundations of the democratic regime. Dilma Rousseff's second term in office was brought to an end under misogynist attacks. The sequence of Petista governments was interrupted, the already meagre gains of that period deteriorated, and

the historic and insufficient rights that preceded it were destroyed. In this scenario, Dardot and Laval's theses find a considerable echo in the critical field of the bourgeoisie's turn, which takes over the management of the state through its direct representatives. They are particularly influenced by the need to think about the transformations of neoliberalism in a context of generalised insecurity and a dizzying deterioration of living conditions.

The French essay proposes to analyse the transformations of neoliberalism from the naturalisation of the theories constituted by the classical liberals of the 18th century. It proposes that the worsening of *laissez-faire* would have been interrupted by what the authors call the "crisis of governability of liberalism", split from the emergence of the "social question". This crisis of legitimacy would have forced a theoretical and interventionist readjustment of the state's role, which needed to provide political responses to confront the dispute processes that, especially since the Paris Commune of 1871, threatened the reproduction of bourgeois society.

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However, the authors do not only declare their intentions to reflect on neoliberalism. They are first and foremost concerned with the critique of Marxists, as already stated in the introduction to the book. At this early stage, they announce their intention to confront what would characterise a misdiagnosis of neoliberalism, according to them.

Dardot and Laval continue to be astonished by the longevity of neoliberalism by identifying its permanence, even amid the 2008 crisis, when famous neoliberals such as Joseph Stiglitz were prematurely announcing the fall of the project they defended. Thus, they pose with undeniable truism the question that never ceases to be asked: how is it possible that, despite the perverse consequences of neoliberal policies, they continue to exist without encountering significant resistance worldwide?

The key to answering this question does not take long to appear in *The New Reason for the World*. It lies precisely in Foucault's biopolitics, which emphasises the influence of power on bodies, which are both targets and agents of these power relations, generating a state of the subjection of individuals to each other and themselves, independently of the state's action. Dardot and Laval discuss neoliberalism through reflection on the mode of government and its strategies, addressing not only what they call the negative aspects, such as the rights it destroys, but also what it is capable of creating in the realm of social relations and which will determine a form of existence, a specific subjectivity produced by the "admirable new world" that is its subject.

It is from the framework of the problem of governability, developed by Foucault in the course *Security, territory, population*, presented at the Collège de France (1977-1978) that Dardot and Laval believe they draw the correct diagnosis of neoliberalism, deconstructing "the limits of Marxism"; or what the pair think they have understood of the currents – multiple, distinct and often divergent – that derive from Marxian thought, but which, like potatoes, are placed by them in the same bag.

Thus, they propose that Marxists are locked into the conception that the 'logic of capital' is an automatic motor of history and that they reduce history to repeating the same scripts. The French also claim that the tendency towards the centralisation of capital set out in *Capital* would characterise a natural law, and they find in Marxism the alleged and overheated determinism of "final ruin" and socialism as the inevitable final destiny of history. In short, according to the authors themselves, it would not be possible to be content with Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg to unravel the mysteries of contemporaneity since it would be insufficient for "the Marxist interpretation, however current it may be" (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.21). The French also affirm that the tendency towards the centralisation of capital set out in *Capital* would characterise a natural law, and they find in Marxism the alleged and overheated determinism of "final ruin" and of socialism as the inevitable final destiny of history. Although they seek an



original position, supposedly standing out from mainstream thought and the Marxist tradition, the authors' "unorthodox" position eclectically combines quite different theoretical and methodological matrices. Regardless of the approaches they derive from them, it is clear that the defence of their thesis is preceded by a critique of Marx, albeit with liberal superficiality. Thus, they incur the same vulnerability used since the 19th century to falsify Marxian theory and, in this way, justify the capital order. And they do so, even if they do not declare themselves defenders of bourgeois society, by considering that this is no longer the central point or by dismissing any horizon that goes beyond it, as is expressed in the fatalism that guides the work.

The state and neoliberalism

The French argue that, contrary to the simplistic view that the markets have conquered the state and, from there, dominated its policy, it was precisely through the state that the universalisation of the entrepreneurial model in the economy took place. They are thus engaging in a discussion similar to the old question of whether the chicken or the egg came first when it has been known for a long time that chickens cannot precede the existence of eggs.

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However, seeking agreement with the authors themselves, who correctly recover the conception that the market cannot act alone, the state being the not-so-invisible hand that guarantees its mobility, we can affirm that neither would the state act as a floating entity above the classes and endowed with its interests. History shows us – and we cannot do without this – that the dispute of societal projects and the correlation of forces established in each particular time and space are the determinants not only of the type of government but also of the type of regime and in specific situations, for the kind of state that will be instituted.

Certainly, we must emphasise the decisive role of the state in the “globalisation of capital” (Chesnais, 1996). Still, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the constitution of surplus-producing societies precedes the state as a social organisation. It should also be noted that the state is not a thing – as Marx (2014) rightly said about capital – nor is it a monolithic entity. According to Harvey (2006), it must be understood as a social relation in process, which materialises historically through a set of forces and institutions that determine and regulate elements of sociability

States do not themselves assume or dictate political or economic guidelines in conflict with those that become dominant in social life. In the presence of the FIESP, it would not be possible to legislate on the socialisation of the means of production, as the



Soviets did, since the state is a historical product inserted in the societal development, which acts on the conflicts of particular class interests, with the premise of protecting those who constituted themselves as dominant. The feudal state thus guaranteed the dominance of the landowners and delayed the development of a mercantile bourgeoisie in several nations. For it to work for the universalisation of the “logic of competition and the business model” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.19), the direction of the state had to be taken over by the bourgeoisie through a revolution. This revolution inaugurated the existence of relative autonomy of the state in the face of new societal dynamics, whose functions, as Mandel (1982, p.333) showed, could not be “purely superstructural”.

In capitalism, economics and politics first appear as separate spheres through the depoliticisation of social life, mediated by the erosion of the old feudalities (Marx, 2017). However, this conformation occurs through separating the juridical-political form and the societal content. The modern state institutes an abstract universality expressed in “equal rights”. The suppression of the legally determined particularism of the estates in feudal slave societies politically emancipated the bourgeoisie. It maintained the concrete inequalities established in the social structure, which became increasingly complex.

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Mandel(1982)alsoshows that the modern state is the organisational form of the bourgeoisie. The age of monopolies reinforces its structure insofar as the constitution of the proletariat as a class for itself (Marx, 2018) imposes the acceptance of new functions which, in addition to pure coercive action, are capable of generating consensus. This expansion also makes the state’s autonomy grow without suppressing its “relative” character.

The depoliticisation of society and the de-economisation of the state cannot, therefore, prevent politics from being the work of society or the economy from being the object of state intervention because this division of tasks conceals relations that intertwine in the totality of social life, even if such articulation is not manifest in the immediate appearance of the phenomena. This was well demonstrated by the wave of nationalisations operated by the US “minimal state” in 2008; despite the defence of non-interventionism, financial institutions such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were rescued from bankruptcy. The state in late capitalism is the state of a form of capital unconcerned with the creation of mass jobs that drive mass commodity consumption. It is the state of interest-bearing capital concerned with facilitating the international migration of capital, selling securities and “junk paper”, and converting the public fund created by labour into capital. However, Dardot and Laval incorporate in their discourse the divorce between form and content that particularises bourgeois society.



They also admit that confrontation with the bourgeoisie is not a contemporary problem since bodies have become companies that dominate themselves and constitute new powers. Here, the theoretical-methodological orientation of the authors is demonstrated, and they invoke Foucault in all his proto-postmodern essence (Rodrigues, 2006).

And what is neoliberalism for Dardot and Laval? For the French, “neoliberal rationality” would have developed from the 1980s onwards and would not be the result of the practical application of the elaborations of the 1930s. It would be focused on the management of a new technology of social control that, beyond the state, would produce what they call the “new subject” and the “rationalisation of desire” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.333). It is interesting to note how, in this synthesis, the authors deny the relevance of the Chilean experience, which, to the south of the world, qualified the rise of Reagan and Thatcher and opened the way to what Dardot and Laval (2023, p.17) call “the set of discourses, practices and devices that determine a new mode of government of men according to the universal principle of competition”. They further state that the *modus operandi* admitted “in this case” would have been a “particular method” of a particular situation (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.20).

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For the French argument, it is no longer necessary today to burn, in broad daylight, the living bodies of their adversaries, as the military patrol did in Chile with Rodrigo Rojas and Carmen Gloria Quintana in 1986. History has shown that, under certain conditions of dismantling working-class organisations, bourgeois democracy is a sufficient terrain for expanding neoliberalism. In dependent countries, even if the neoliberal advance can formally preserve political freedoms, it is not possible to avoid violence as a method for its realisation since the “burning”, not only of the opponents but of the whole set of capital surpluses is an indispensable element for the maintenance of the condition of dependence and the constitution of super-profits.

This movement has implications for natural resources, as shown, for example, by the disasters caused by global warming. It even affects steady capital, as evidenced by deindustrialisation in Brazil. However, the workers, especially those dressed in the fantasy of entrepreneurship, remain the most important kindling of the bonfire of capital. And this burning finds ideal conditions in the successive technological revolutions combined with the deregulation of labour.

The theses on post-work, which go hand in hand with those of Dardot and Laval, for whom classes no longer exist but only atomised subjects, are refuted by reality when,



in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the bourgeoisie implores workers to face death and save the economy. This shows that capitalism is incapable of producing wealth without labour and does so without ever dispensing with physical elimination. It operates whether by hunger, by COVID or by the shootings that, despite democracy, ended the life of Marielle Franco in 2018, as they do with those who, in the countryside, rise against the expansion of the latifundia or in the racial extermination that daily controls in the Brazilian favelas the way of being of the most impoverished workers.

For Dardot and Laval, the new neoliberal rationality developed from artifices aimed at the construction of the “man-business or entrepreneurial subject (...) completely immersed in global competition” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.322). The French even claim Marx asserts that subjection plays a major role in history, but for what? According to the authors, the movement for domination presents itself as a circuit that revolves around itself, in which all dominate and are dominated, without purpose or subjects.

However, we agree with the authors’ assertion that neoliberalism employs unprecedented techniques of power. Unprecedented, however, were also the techniques of classical imperialism, such as the conduct of the first Imperialist War (Lenin, 2005) in human history as a resource oriented to the dispute for markets. The transformations of neoliberalism identified by the French only indicate the gigantic plasticity of capitalism itself, which renews itself to continue to exist. While there is no doubt that the techniques elaborated in its operation could generate particular behaviours and subjectivities, we can also affirm that the capacity to transform the relations and behaviour of social beings is not a novelty inaugurated by neoliberalism.

Let us look at Fordism, which consolidated the era of monopolies at the beginning of the 20th century. The introduction of the assembly line was much more than a production technique. It forged the mass worker, stable, rigid, and fragmented by repetitive work. Workers, on the one hand, projected the American way of life into the fetishised ideology of the working classes and encouraged the mass consumption of commodities; on the other hand, they developed class solidarity through the union of joint and shared suffering in the big factories. It instituted a particular kind of sociability, an ethos that demanded: “a new system of reproduction of labour power, a new aesthetic, a new psychology, in short, a new kind of democratic, rationalised, modernist, populist society” (Harvey, 1992, p.121).

These terms became incompatible with the demands corresponding to the rise of interest-bearing capital. As Dardot and Laval nicely perceive, a new ethos is cultivated, deeply



linked to how labour develops in this new stage, as Marx and Engels (2007) showed us. And it is not by chance that the construction of this new subjectivity, which is the “strong point” of Dardot and Laval’s work, was preceded by profound modifications operated by the successive productive restructurings, the midwives of the various “modes of being of informality” (Antunes, 2013, p.14), which directly implied the way of being of the class.

While it is true that the capacities and characteristics carried by neoliberalism today could not have been foreseen in the 1930s, since anticipating reality is not a skill of neoliberal non-theory, neither can it be denied that the state followed to the letter Hayek’s (1977) guidelines on the need to destroy the lobbying power of trade unions. From there on, and successively, it was possible to create new manifestations unimaginable for the pioneers.

Dardot and Laval state that “the originality of neoliberalism lies in the fact that it creates a new set of rules that define not only another regime of accumulation but also, more broadly, another society” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.24). Surely, the regime of capitalist accumulation admits different forms in the historical process, which will determine modes of regulation that consist precisely of the interchangeable gears that can guarantee the reproduction of the regime of accumulation. Throughout the book, Dardot and Laval alone could not explain what the “new society” they identified would be.

However, the new management of capital accumulation, which characterised the regime of flexible accumulation (Harvey, 1992), accelerated the contradictions of sociability that forges anti-social, unstable, ephemeral and fungible relations, which admit the forms of the commodity as it is presented at this stage; the sociability that is becoming precarious, like the multi-skilled, outsourced, subcontracted workers, depressed by the insecurity of tomorrow, increasingly unprotected, to the point of losing even the “status of wage-earner”. And “if the behaviour of individuals (...) is no longer completely describable and prescribable” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.342), this extreme individuation is split from the exhausting permanent quest for innovation, from the permanent instability of life, which has atomised the class, increasingly heterogeneous, fragmented and immersed in estrangement.



The elimination of the regulation of capital/labour relations, a task to which the neoliberal state is dedicated, catalyses the transformation of social beings into competing enterprises. This is the material basis of an ideological conviction that occurs through the internalisation of social deformations in the psyche of the being, demonstrating that “that which appears inverted in ideology is the expression of an inverted world” (Iasi, 2017, p.108). Only in this way was it possible to turn the working class into “entrepreneurs of themselves”, who are held responsible even for maintaining the means of production used to exploit themselves, operated through apps. The worker is conceived as the “owner of human capital” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.346). And so they continue as mere possessors of their labour power without even finding where to put it up for sale.

If the worker is no longer confined to the factory for 14 hours a day, as in former times, his life has been transformed into a permanent drive towards the work of his company/body. All this is because neither capitalism nor neoliberalism is simply a regime of accumulation but a set of social relations that advance reification and reproduce in the social being the characteristics necessary for the reproduction of decadent capitalism.

Dardot and Laval (2023, p.24) state that “neoliberal society is not a reflection of a logic of capital”. We agree once again. It is not a reflection, for it is the irrational logic of capital in times of social decay, that is, the organisational logic that allows mitigating the existing gap between the immaterial wealth negotiated by fictitious capital and the real socially produced wealth. This mitigation can only occur by capturing absolute values since interest-bearing capital produces nothing (Yamamoto, 2007). Fundamental resources to alleviate an unshakable liquidity crisis are to be found in the labour-based public fund.

The critic of Marxism that did not read Marx and its consequences for social work

Social work is a profession that, in its dual and contradictory practice, serves the interests of both capital and labour (Yamamoto, 1991). In Brazil, the renewal of social work allowed a break with the monopoly of conservatism and the defence of a societal project aligned with the historical interests of the working class to gain hegemony. This project materialised in the ethical-political project of Brazilian social work.

In this process, the adoption of the Marxian framework and the adherence to the struggles of rural and urban workers were crucial aspects of this turn, which has as its horizon the overcoming of capitalist relations and the emancipation of labour as a prerequisite for human emancipation. It is up to those who construct this project to combat illusory

criticism, such as that of Dardot and Laval, who, by limiting themselves to the phenomenal boundaries of social transformations, safeguard bourgeois society. Through a simplistic and mistaken (or misleading) reading of Marx, they feed the breeding ground of professional neo-conservatism, which denies the actuality of the class struggle, dialectics, and the possibility of overcoming bourgeois relations. In defence of the battle against exploitation and oppression, we defend Marx's method and its contemporary relevance.

In Defence of Marxism

One cannot expect from Marx a decoding of neoliberalism or sufficient subsidies for the analysis of contemporary relations as a whole. His work does not configure a total knowledge since epistemology is subordinated to the mode of being of the contradictory and dynamic object it investigates, which determines its ontological character. This methodological conception subordinates knowledge to the continuous investigation of reality, which, to be understood, requires permanent investigative efforts, given its transitory nature. To venture the hypothesis that Marx, Rosa, Lenin or Trotsky would be sufficient to read contemporary relations would be a mutilation of the Marxian method. To deny them is no minor error.

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It is in the very development of bourgeois society that history is consolidated as the indispensable guide to understanding the movement of human sociability over time. Dialectics and history form the backbone of the philosophy of praxis developed by Marx throughout his work. It is precisely materiality in movement that allowed the discovery of the law of value, which governs bourgeois society in all its phases. This sustains the revolutionary perspective that understood the mutability of reality, in which "men make their history, but they do not make it as they wish" (Marx, 1986, p.17). This results from a conception of the world, nature, history and the spirit as a process that is, as a world, subject to constant change, transformation and development (Engels, 1979, in Netto, 2010, np).

This conception runs through Marx's work, and the accusation that, in the eyes of Marxism, history could always look the same is surprisingly vulgar, for nothing could be less Marxist than such a claim. Dardot and Laval's reading of Marx and Marxism objectively drinks more from structuralism, which also influenced Foucault's critique, a reference hors concours of the authors, which prevents them from going beyond the classical detractors of Marxism, who point to Marx but fall into the Manichaeism derived from what Lefebvre (1979) called Stalinist materialist dialectical *dia-mato* Stalinism.



In his time, the logic of capital was not, for Marx, the motor of history; on the contrary, the logic of capital becomes an obstacle to the development of the productive forces, understood as a system that goes beyond the development of technology, encompassing both nature and humanity, in its objectivity and subjectivity. This obstacle will engender a state of crisis, hitherto impossible, which threatens the reproduction of bourgeois relations insofar as it threatens the preservation of human life itself.

This is what Rosa Luxemburg was addressing when she proclaimed “socialism or barbarism”. She was not demonstrating the existence of a teleological character of history in Marx, nor what our authors would call the determinism of “final ruin”. In no hypothesis is it a question of considering socialism as an inevitable destiny that will come someday, which would bring much comfort and rest to the fighters? It is simply a matter of historicising capital, which, like any product of humanity, cannot be eternal and which, if not socially overcome, will still collapse into the barbarism that characterises its civilising force.

We therefore agree with Barreto (2022, n.p.) and say the following: “If by running the monster catches you and by staying the monster eats you, kill the monster”. Whether we will be able to kill the greedy monster of the bourgeoisie, which the more it eats, the hungrier it gets, is another matter. In the meantime, Rosa’s synthesis proves to be true to reality, for, day after day, socialism does not come closer to us, but barbarism is revealed as the only remaining face of a society which, while continuing to exist, is rotting on its foundations.

The fact is that the motor of history would be, for Marx, a contradiction. More specifically, it is about classes in struggle. And what Dardot and Laval – who do not even consider courses – do not seem to understand is that capitalism and its neoliberal strategy are transformed precisely for this society to endure. And it is this transformation that conceals from the unsuspecting the conservative character it entails. A conservatism that has raised a society capable of creating the conditions for overcoming collective suffering but which does not do so since such an overcoming contradicts its very existence.

Unfortunately, when they try to be ironic, our authors get the reality right: the bourgeoisie, and not only for Marxism, is indeed a collective subject that lasts in time, even, we add, on its own. This does not mean that it is an eternal subject, any more than the Tsars were in Russia, a fact that did not prevent them from lasting much longer in time than the bourgeoisie will last as the dominant class, given the deterioration bequeathed to our future generations. For that reason, Marxism remains current, as the authors rightly observed in the introduction to *The New Reason for the World*. It



remains current and more relevant than ever, and whether Dardot and Laval like it or not, neoliberalism and its tragedies continue to be explained by the Law of Value.

The French claim that Marxists reduce “economics to the only dimension of neoliberalism” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.24). Now, the liberal critique of an alleged economism in Marx’s conception is not new and refrains from participating in the rich debate on the process of the formation of consciousness, which will be determined by the relations that are developed in the materiality of life by social beings, who, before satisfying the needs of fantasy, must satisfy the needs of the stomach, as Marx (2014) rightly demonstrated.

If Dardot and Laval had seriously delved into Marx’s work, they would have grasped not only the implications that the materiality of life has on the construction of subjectivity when substantial issues are at stake, such as the threat to the guarantee of biological reproduction of being. Also, they would have understood that “the ideas of the ruling class are, in every epoch, the dominant ideas, i.e. the class that is the dominant material force of society is, at the same time, its dominant spiritual force” (Marx and Engels, 2007, p.47). This means that if the consciousness of the app delivery man, who sees himself as a competitive entrepreneur, makes him nothing more than a reproducer of ideas which do not belong to him and which do not correspond to the materiality of a self-managed super-exploitation, he is nothing more than a reproducer of ideas which do not belong to him and which do not correspond to the materiality of a self-managed super-exploitation.

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Nor would “the strange faculty of neoliberalism to spread everywhere despite its crises and the revolts it provokes all over the world” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.21) seem so strange to them if they had carefully examined Marx’s work. Marx’s work revealed the eminently expansionist character of capitalism, which allowed its constitution to be universal. Neoliberalism is precisely the result and dynamiser of the process of globalisation of capital, as Chesnais (1996) argues.

Neoliberalism is also the most capable of making the state an ideal total capitalist (Mandel, 1982), which at any cost needs to create counter-counters to economic growth and create a new mode of being necessary for its maintenance. All this is only possible thanks to the ability of bourgeois society to spread everywhere, despite its crises and the revolts it has provoked worldwide since the People’s Spring of 1848.



Final considerations

Dardot and Laval believe that their research reveals the true face of neoliberalism and the artifices of power that result in the subjection of individuals, guiding individual behaviour, controlling their souls and bodies and imposing self-control on everyone. Competing individuals/companies, however, result from a “multiplicity of heterogeneous processes” (Dardot and Laval, 2023, p.34) that generate the so-called new rationality of the world, which the authors expose as a teleology-free process. They do not indicate who benefits or is harmed from such processes precisely because, according to them, there is no such thing as “orchestration”. The social process is simply the work of chaos, capable of providing multiple, random engagements independent of a superordinate class interest. Social development no longer carries any meaning and ends, admitting unknowable foundations.

Dardot and Laval, in their post-structuralist neo-idealism, can perceive and describe concrete features of neoliberal sociability and even genuine consequences of this process. They are strengthened, moreover, by the difficulty faced by Marxists, who, under the influence of the Third International, have developed few substantial studies on the movement of subjectivity during the contemporary historical process. However, their ultra-subjectivism does not reach the hardcore, whose response to the undeniable transformations operated in the social being, since they are limited to the epidermis and are oblivious to the causes of the problem on which they float.

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The French do not perceive, above all, that the crisis of neoliberalism is nothing more than its inability to fulfil the task of restoring profit rates, even if the policy of the most diverse governments, of the most diverse countries, has as its main aim the guarantee of transferring the greatest possible *quantum* of real value to incarnate fictitious capitals, and that such a policy cannot be replaced, except by the destruction of this society. And, in this direction, whether to guarantee the appropriation of the public purse, to finance war or to plunder what still resists expropriation, neoliberal irrationality is the logic that expresses decadent capitalism, which only through the mediation of violence and the unrestricted restriction of the self can be maintained.

Suppose neoliberalism seems to them to be the new reason for the world, in which the exercise of power makes no sense, as Dardot and Laval summarise. In that case, such a construction is confused with the elements of irrationalism behind its authors. It is important to note that these, like the neoliberal state, constitute their work perfectly compatible with late capitalism, carrying a conservative content in their authors, even if they present themselves in a transgressive form.



Dardot and Laval discredit Marxism because they are not interested in breaking the margins of bourgeois society; hence, the fatalism that prevents them from identifying the construction of “a new reason in the world” committed to human-generic emancipation. After all, it is neoliberalism that bothers them and nothing else. Therefore, these allies of critique must be questioned: “Who is the enemy? Who are you?” (Russo, 1984, 1m40f). Or, what is the use of critique that does not help construct the complex struggles that must be waged to defeat not only the contemporary form that capital uses to endure but the totality of sociability for which profit is worth more than the chance to stay alive?

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