

IT'S THE PROPERTY, STUPID! BUT HOW CAN WE GET RID OF IT?

É A PROPRIEDADE, ESTÚPIDO! MAS COMO LIVRAR-NOS DISSO?

ES LA PROPIEDAD, ¡ESTÚPIDO! ¿PERO CÓMO PODEMOS DESHACERNOS DE ELLA?

ABSTRACT

The purpose of our research is to identify paths that lead us beyond property. It is important to us to do more than criticize private property; it is also necessary to think beyond public property. We would like to reach something that goes beyond both. We are not referring either to the private property of capitalism or to the public property of socialism; we refer to the idea of the common in communism. The understanding of the common requires that we envision a society different from capitalist society. The common is not a third option to the private and the public (and is not equivalent to the latter), but a path antagonistic to capital and its means of production. It is necessary to keep in mind that the 'realization' of the common through state property constitutes the very destruction of the common by the state. The notion of property, in and of itself, excludes the common, not only in terms of the use of goods, but also in the realm of production, given that it ratifies a division between owners and non-owners. The defense of the common carries with it the denial of property, public or private, and also of the State. It is a process. This perspective is of real importance, because the institution of private property and the State itself – which feed each other – is the basis for the support of capitalism. Unlike what it may appear as, State property is not a denial of private property, but a collective form of private property.

Keywords: property; radicalization of democracy; common; communism; production of space; State.

RESUMO

Nossa proposta de investigação procura apontar vias para além da propriedade. Importa-nos caminhar para além da crítica à propriedade privada; é preciso pensar também para além da propriedade pública. Aquilo a que desejamos nos referir passa ao largo de uma e de outra. Não nos referimos nem à propriedade privada ou pública do capitalismo nem à propriedade coletiva ou estatal do socialismo, referimo-nos à ideia do comum no comunismo. A compreensão do comum exige que vislumbremos uma sociedade diferente da capitalista. O comum não é uma terceira opção ao privado e ao público (ou o equivalente a este último), mas uma via antagônica à gestão do capital e à sua forma de apropriação dos meios de produção. É preciso ter em conta que a 'realização' do comum pela propriedade do Estado constitui a própria destruição do comum pelo Estado. A noção de propriedade, por si só, exclui o comum, não apenas no que tange ao uso dos bens, mas também no âmbito da produção, visto que ela ratifica uma divisão entre proprietários e não proprietários. A defesa do comum traz em si a negação da propriedade, pública ou privada, e, também, do Estado. Trata-se de um processo. Tal perspectiva é de real importância, pois a instituição da propriedade privada e do próprio Estado, que se retroalimentam, é base de sustentação do capitalismo. E, diferentemente do que possa parecer, a propriedade do Estado não se configura no comum como negação ou superação da propriedade privada, mas como uma forma coletiva da propriedade privada.

Palavras-chave: propriedade; radicalização da democracia; comum; comunismo; produção do espaço; Estado.

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RESUMEN

Nuestra propuesta de investigación pretende señalar el camino más allá de la propiedad. Debemos ir más allá de la crítica a la propiedad privada; también debemos pensar más allá de la propiedad pública. A lo que queremos referirnos va más allá de ambas. No nos referimos ni a la propiedad privada o pública del capitalismo ni a la propiedad colectiva o estatal del socialismo, sino a la idea de lo común en el comunismo. Entender el procomún nos obliga a imaginar una sociedad distinta de la capitalista. El procomún no es una tercera opción a lo privado y lo público (o el equivalente de este último), sino una vía antagónica a la gestión del capital y su forma de apropiarse de los medios de producción. Hay que tener en cuenta que la "realización" del procomún a través de la propiedad estatal constituye la propia destrucción del procomún por el Estado. La noción de propiedad excluye en sí misma los bienes comunes, no sólo en lo que se refiere al uso de los bienes, sino también en lo que se refiere a la producción, ya que ratifica una división entre propietarios y no propietarios. La defensa del procomún conlleva la negación de la propiedad, pública o privada, y también del Estado. Se trata de un proceso. Esta perspectiva es de verdadera importancia, porque la institución de la propiedad privada y el propio Estado, que se retroalimentan mutuamente, son la base del sostenimiento del capitalismo. Y, contrariamente a lo que pueda parecer, la propiedad estatal no se configura comúnmente como una negación o superación de la propiedad privada, sino como una forma colectiva de propiedad privada.

Palabras clave: propiedad; radicalización de la democracia; procomún; comunismo; producción del espacio; estado



INTRODUCTION

Although perhaps unnecessary, it is fitting for us to begin by mentioning the title of the article. It is “inspired” by a statement by a political consultant to Bill Clinton, during the US presidential campaign of 1992: “it’s the economy, stupid!”. James Carville coined this phrase to explain to a stunned President Bush why he lost the election, ending 12 straight years of Republican government, despite his 90% approval rating during the Gulf War. In our case, the affirmation “it’s property, stupid!” is much more complicated, and has been accompanied by questions such as “but how can we get rid of it?”.

Our intent is to advance in the investigation of paths beyond property. We do not only refer to a criticism of private property, but also of public property. In this effort, we bring the notion of the “common” to the debate. This does not involve understanding the common as a third option to the private and the public (or even worse: the equivalent of the latter), but as a path opposed to the administration of capital and its means of production.

The word “communism” should not be so polemical

There are authors who defend abandoning the word communism, given that it was strongly marked by twentieth century experiences. They defend the use of another word and indicate the expression post-capitalism as a possibility. I do not share this position. Not because of the expression post-capitalism itself, but because the experiences realized in countries like Russia (later the countries in the Union of Social Soviet Republics), China, North Korea, and other shorter experiences in African and Latin American countries, do not effectively represent communist practices. I defend the position that we should explain what communism is, what bases can support it. Moreover, the path towards the idea of communism is a process that carries within it utopian ideas. It is a path to follow, something that is constructed through the valorization of participation of civil society in public activities. And, beyond this, to maintain the word “communism” is an attitude of respect for those who created the expression, when reflecting on and idealizing the possibility of constructing a better and more just world.

Considering the idea of communism creates an opening to a new possibility, to something different than what we have. It involves working for the realization of a different event; only in this way will we be able to make it viable to materialize the consequences of this new possibility. Therefore, we must reflect on the word “communist”, and thus try to place everything in its proper place. It is a movement towards new events that will contribute to the realization of another form of production of space.

The French philosopher Alain Badiou (2010, p. 22) speaks to us of the need to understand that the word “communist” cannot become an adjective that qualifies a certain politics; because expressions such as



“communist party” and “communist state” are completely incongruent. This affirmation contains a criticism of those who established regimes that are often called communist, but that denied the principles of communism. It also contains a criticism of those who, for lack of knowledge, mistakenly classify the Soviet, Chinese, Cuban, or North Korean regimes as communism. Finally, it also contains a criticism of those who purposely classify these regimes as communism even knowing that they are not (and were not), with the objective of introjecting in society a mistaken perspective of what communism would be. That is, “the party form, like that of the state, is inadequate for guaranteeing the real sustenance of the idea [of communism]” (Badiou, 2012, p. 146).

It is important to perceive that the very construction of the state as such contributes to the definition of what is possible and what is impossible. Therefore, by sustaining capitalism, the state helps strengthen the perception in the social imaginary that the idea of communism is impossible. Thus, it is necessary to struggle to reduce the power of the state; we must create and value practices that contribute to the withering away of the state.

Through a similar position, the Belgium philosopher Bruno Bosteels (2010, p. 70) believes that something fundamental to the path towards communism is the mobilization against a series of clear and unquestionable elements that must be fought against: the privileges of property; hierarchy; and authority. These elements have direct effects on the daily life of the population. Through an intense interlocution with Badiou, Bosteels (2010) also affirms that the organization of citizens does not need to involve political parties, although he does not give great importance to this debate.

Bosteels (2010, p. 74), upon referring to the Bolivian political scientist Alvaro García Linera (2008), who was vice-president of Bolivia from 2006 until 2019 (elected along with President Evo Morales), mentions an interview granted by García Linera, when he was Vice President of Bolivia, in which he affirmed that:

The broad horizon of our time is communist. And this communism will have to be constructed on the base of the self-organizing capacities of society, of processes of generation and distribution of communitarian and self-managed wealth (...) And here is where arise the struggles with various companions about what it is possible to do. When I enter government, what I do is validate this interpretation of the current moment and begin to operate at the level of the state in function of it”. Then he formulates two questions that he tries to answer: “so, where is communism? What can be done through the state in function of this communist horizon? Support as much as possible the movement of society’s capacities for autonomous organization. That is the limit of what it is possible for a leftist state to do. To expand the workers base and the autonomy of the world of labor, to strengthen forms of a communitarian economy where there are networks, articulations, and more communitarian projects.

These are important and provocative declarations, although we can question if the Bolivian government realized what García Linera affirmed. We have said a number of times, in various other publications, that many times when leftist parties are able to reach power, they wind up centralizing decisions instead of sharing them



and transferring them to civil society. This is a path contrary to the movement of withering away of the state. It is essential for leftist parties to reinforce and create conditions to shift the capacities for organization and autonomy in the direction of civil society.

It is important to make clear that Marx's proposal had on the horizon the possibility of reaching communism as a process that would be realized through the withering away of the state. For Marx, this in no way meant the maintenance of the state by the proletariat. To the contrary, he believed in the need to destroy the state machinery. It was not a question of a mere change of those who would be leading the government. It would be necessary to construct something else, something new that would allow the birth of a true democracy and with it the idea of community.

The notes Marx made in 1844, entitled economic-philosophic manuscripts, reveal that the theoretical construction of the idea of communism is based on the abolition of private property and human alienation, and gives value to the true appropriation of human nature through and for the human being (Marx, 2004, p. 103). Marx defended the idea that communism would be "the *true* dissolution (*Auflösung*) of the antagonism of men with nature and with man; the true resolution of the conflict between existence and essence, between objectivation and self-confirmation (*Selbstbestätigung*), between liberty and need (*Notwendigkeit*), between individual and genus. It is the resolved enigma of history and the solution is known" (Marx, 2004, p. 105).

The radicalization of democracy is a process that is an integral part of the process of the withering away of the state. Thus, it is essential to support and encourage the creation of popular assemblies and debates. To do so, the creation of permanent popular and thematic councils would be very useful. What appears here to be a type of utopia in the transformation process requires the creation of spaces of dialog that allow the visibility of the countless and different popular demands. To achieve social justice, it is necessary to escape from the idea of the dictatorship of the majority, it is necessary to think of a democracy that considers the respect for minorities.

It seems that something that is fundamental to not reproducing the current state of things would be to escape from the separation between management and property. It is even necessary to rework the notion of property. If we reconsider the need to coexist with property in the way we are accustomed to, other possibilities of conviviality can take form. We can think of lands for collective use and for families, we can think of giving priority to use value, or of how the idea of inheritance can be discarded¹.

1 The example of the Community of Maras in Peru, located 40 km north of Cuzco, points in this direction. The production of mineral salt is shared by the residents of the village and each family has the right to a small parcel to explore salt. The collective negotiates production and divides it among the families who work in extraction. If someone dies or leaves the city to live somewhere else, the portion of land is redistributed to other members of the community. The decisions are made through self-management. If the members of a family get ill or become very old, the other residents of Maras help them by sharing in the extraction of the salt on the land under this family's responsibility.



Why not think in the possibility of management as part of collective work? Why not think in the rotation of top administrators to not “eternalize” certain subjects, thus giving them excessive decision-making powers? It is necessary to think of popular councils that deliberate over questions that afflict the population more directly. It does not involve believing that everything is resolved at a local level, but it is a fact that it is at the scale of place that the population feels more strongly the effects of the inequality of production of space, and that people reflect on the differences of infrastructure between neighborhoods; and on the lack of good quality collective transportation; on the poor working conditions of certain portions of society; on the differentiated valorization of urban space; and on the creation of territories in which the power of drug trafficking and militias controls and scares the population that is submitted to their control. In other words, it is necessary to consider the question of proximity, either in terms of the scale of action, or in terms of the administrative instance.

If we look for that which still does not exist, Marx's reflections point towards the new; the possible impossible, if truly considered as a horizon to be reached. This recalls the affirmation of the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre that to attain the possible we must look to the impossible. Thus, to think in breaking off from the state, the political form propitiated by the formation of community arises once again, and from it, a true democracy together with human emancipation will meet each other and be realized in that which Marx called communism. Evidently, we are speaking of something that has not been realized (yet). When we speak of overcoming the state, we refer to the concept of the modern state and its form of organization, even the way that political action takes place. It does not involve making a revolution to transfer power from one fraction of governing classes to another, but to overthrow the machinery of class domination itself (MARX, 2011).

The idea of withering away of the state, developed by Marx, allows us to presume that there would be a strong tension between state and self-management. Lefebvre (2009, p. 147-148) makes this clear by arguing that there is something essential in the idea of self-management, it is: “constituted as a power that is not statist”. The confrontation between self-management and state is not something trivial, because even during the process of withering away, the state would try to reaffirm itself through its own apparatus. The principle of the state tends to limit the principle of self-management, by reducing its opportunity to be applied. In other words, a state would try to transform the idea of self-management into an ideology of the state, but in this way, in reality it would be repressed. The geographer Mateus Viriato de Medeiros Siniscalchi² (2019, p. 134), working with the ideas of Lefebvre (2017), added that “the capitalist state, by its nature, opposes its own centralizing principle (of control and strategic domination of territory) to the decentralizing principle of self-management”.

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By pointing to self-management, we are valuing the idea of doing together. This understanding leads us to valuing the perception of “doing” as something that is intrinsically social, and always part of a greater social flow than individual doing, because the doing of the other provides the means of my doing; or in the words of the Irish political scientist John Holloway (2003, p. 47), “the precondition of my doing is the doing (or having-done) of others (...). Doing is inherently plural, collective, (...) communal.”

We can affirm that power is primarily the capacity to do, know how to do, and thus, doing would imply power; in this case, the power of doing. Thus, the “power-to do” is always social power. However, Holloway (2003, p. 50) reminds us that “power to now becomes ‘power over’ a relation of power over others. These others are powerless (or apparently powerless), deprived of the capacity to realise our own projects, if only because we spend our days realizing the project of those who exercise power-over.” And it is important to remember that the state is responsible for “protecting” this relationship, which is realized according to law. However, this is a hidden dimension, because it is not perceived that the state is an aspect of fetishization of social relations. Therefore, and this is very important

To criticise the state means in the first place to attack the apparent autonomy of the state, to understand the state not as a thing in itself, but as a social form, a form of social relations (...) [The state] is a relation between people which does not appear to be a relation between people, a social relation which exists in the form of something external to social relations. (Holloway, 2003, p. 140)

Therefore, it is possible to understand why Marx affirmed that it was necessary to struggle for the withering away of the state. This is very different from the struggle for the construction of a counter-power through the conquest of the state. The struggle for the withering away of the state is simultaneously the struggle against the “power-over” and in favor of the emancipation of the “power-to do”. Holloway (2003, p. 61) came close to this position by affirming that “the struggle to liberate power-to is not the struggle to construct a counter-power, but rather an anti-power, something that is radically different from power-over”.

Beyond private property and public property: the common-doing

During the cold war – and even after it ended – it appeared that there were two options: capitalism or socialism. Evidently, as we sought to make clear previously, since the end of the twentieth century, although more strongly at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a strong and purposeful movement of construction in the social imaginary that socialism and communism were the same thing; and moreover, that history proved that they did not work. That is, only capitalism is left. From the capitalist and socialist perspective developed the rule of private property or public property, so that the US literary theoretician and philosopher Michael Hardt (2010, p. 129) affirmed, “the only cure for the evils of state control is to privatize and for the evils of capital is to make them public, that is, to exercise state regulation”. However, what we



would like to refer to goes beyond one or the other; in other words, we are not referring either to private property of capitalism or to the public property of socialism; we refer to the idea of the common in communism. Taking this into account, we oppose the exclusive property rule and seek to “practically and theoretically question the foundations and effects of property rights, opposing them to the social imperative of common use” (Dardot, Laval, 2015, p. 262).

Marx (2004), upon developing his theoretical construction of the criticism of the economy, sought to make clear that, in the final instance, it involved a criticism of property. In the “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts” more specifically, in the “Complement to the II Notebook”, which involves private property and communism, he affirms that communism is the positive expression of the abolition of private property. Marx (2004, p. 105) emphasized the idea of abolition of property (which escapes certain discourses said to be communist) because the group he denominated as “rude communism” or “vulgar communism” in other translations) only perpetuates private property with the justification that it is extended to the entire community. For Marx, it is not sufficient to eliminate private property, it is necessary to think of the elimination of property. This appears to be essential to the German philosopher, and is explicit when he affirms that “property makes us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* if we have it, therefore, when it exists for us as capital or when it is directly possessed by us” (Marx, 2004, p. 108). These observations refer us to the idea of the common, which moves us beyond the relations of property. Marx also emphasizes that communism is the positive overcoming of private property as human self-alienation and, therefore, as we affirmed previously, the true appropriation of the human essence through man and for man. That is, it involves the complete restitution of man to himself as a social being, as a human being.

Therefore, through his concept of communism Marx (2004, p. 108) conceived of appropriation not as property, not as having. Based on this affirmation Hardt (2010, p. 140) defends the idea that “the term ‘appropriation’ leads to equivocal interpretations, because Marx is not speaking of capturing something that already exists, but in creating something new. This is the production of subjectivity, the production of a new sensibility, which is not properly appropriation, but production”. For this reason, we believe it is important to think of the idea of common-doing and of the “common”.

The geographer Julia Vilela Caminha³ (2020, p. 61), based on Harvey (2012, p. 72), offers an important reflection on the difference between the concepts of public spaces, and public and common goods. She believes that the first two are always the “object of state power and public administration and are not necessarily common”. Caminha affirms that “to understand the common, we must think of a society different from capitalist society. So that what is common is not a third option to the private and the public –or the

³ Member of NEPEM (Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisa em Espaço e Metropolização) [The Nucleus for Research and Studies in Space and Metropolization, from the Department of Geography and Environment at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro - PUC-Rio].



equivalent to the latter – but an opposing route to the administration of capital and to its means of production, whether they are private or public”. This is because, as Dardot and Laval (2017, p. 59) affirm, “the supposed ‘realization’ of the common through state property was never more than the destruction of the common by the state”. These authors argued in a publication from 2015 that property excluded the common, not only in terms of the use of goods, but also in the realm of production, given that it ratifies a division between owners and non-owners.

It is very important to not confuse the common with the public. The public is controlled by the state and not by the community. However, this does not mean that we should abandon the defense of public goods, even because a considerable portion of invested labor is contained in public goods, however, it is important to understand that they are not synonymous. The US philosopher George Caffentzis and the Italian philosopher Silvia Federici (2014, p. 92) warn us that “the public is a state institution that assumes the existence of a private sphere of economic and social relations that we cannot control”.

By pointing to the common, we should understand them as shared goods and resources generated through knowledge, practices and norms idealized by the collective. The economists and geographers João Bosco Moura Tonucci Filho and Felipe Nunes Coelho Magalhães (2017, p. 447) corroborate this position by affirming that

The common is not to be confused with common resources, or with the common good. Therefore, we should speak of the commons to designate not that which is, naturally or by law, common, but that which is invested by an activity of sharing. (...) It is the activity that ‘makes common’ a thing, inscribing it in an institutional space through the collective production of specific rules.

The common should be understood as a political horizon beyond the territorial domination of the state and economic elites, which values creative forms of doing-with idealized by the community.

Although there are those who believe and defend the idea that a political recomposition could generate a radical change in social relations and in systems of social reproduction, we believe that these recompositions can create conditions favorable to change, but they on their own are not capable of radically transforming the capitalist social system. However, creating favorable conditions is certainly very important.

It is important to recall, as we have sought to make clear, that a social revolution does not signify taking power, but struggling for the dissolution of this old society and this unequal condition of existence. The social scientist Massimo De Angelis (2016, p. 98) reminds us that “a concept of radical change, of ‘revolution’, (...) is directly related to Marx’s concept of social revolution (and not with Lenin’s political revolution)”. To make this distinction between social and political revolution does not mean to affirm that the social revolution is not political, but to understand that it is found beyond politics in the institutional sense. De Angelis (2016) affirms that “social revolution, is, in the final instance, a process of searching for solutions to the problems that the



capitalist systems could not resolve”. And here it is important to recall the action of the Zapatista Movement, and while recognizing the proportional differences, the Occupy Movement and others, in which the agenda involved the struggle for the defense of traditional communities, for greater participation in decisions, for the reconfiguration of social spending by the government, by self-management of factories, for self-generated public squares and for the radicalization of democracy. In all these demands, the idea of the common was present in some way.

Another important contribution about the concept of common was made by Siniscalchi (2019, p. 143) by looking for the etymological origin of the term. He explains:

Its origin comes from the Latin *communis*, related to *munus* (“task, responsibility, function, occupation”), meaning, therefore, the ‘act of sharing tasks together’ or ‘exercising a function with’. This meaning, which initially was related to a way of doing (doing with) and a circumstance of being (being-together), later extends to things that are shared by all (*res communis*) and to spaces in which all participate reciprocally (*locus communis*).

Continuing his investigation, Siniscalchi (2019, p. 144) also adds that this meaning “is opposed to the notion of *proprius* (‘private, particular’), in a way that the common or the communitarian are not confused with the idea of possession or property”. Here it seems clear that the idea of common is not found to be linked to the idea of possession or property; to the contrary, it is related to collective uses, to community appropriation. The conclusion Siniscalchi (2019, p. 144) reaches is that from its etymological origin

the common carries the idea of actions and objects (material or immaterial) that are experienced and or constructed in a shared manner, denoting a relation of mutual commitment with this action or object. In this perspective, when we propose to ‘think of the common’ in the movement of production of space (...) we refer to relations of communion and reciprocity that are developed among the diversity of social subjects that produce them.

In this first quarter of the twenty-first century, in which we live through times of permanent crisis, which overwhelm us at increasingly shorter intervals, leading to unemployment, lower salaries and cuts to social benefits, the valorization of the commons has often become a strategy for survival. We have observed throughout the world various examples that encourage us to believe that a change is possible: time banking, urban gardens, food cooperatives, occupation and self-management of squares and abandoned buildings, cultural cooperatives, community cinemas, cooperative nurseries etc. In this way, the demand for the common can be perceived through movements of resistance to new enclosures, to movements opposed to privatizations, of some ecology movements and movements in opposition to the rights of intellectual property. This is because the idea of the common encompasses its understanding as a material resource, as an immaterial good, as a political principal, and as a social practice. The common does not only mean providing social services or mitigating the exacerbated growth of inequality generated by capitalism, it also means investing in communal management, in self-management.



The equality of access to the means of (re)production together with the egalitarian sharing of decision making is essential to the institution of the common. If we desire to change the current state of things, we must share and dedicate part of our time to spaces of meetings and demonstrations, we must organize ourselves as a function of our distinct needs and possibilities; all of this without forgetting that it is essential to struggle against the countless forms of exclusion and hierarchization.

The defense of the common carries with it the denial of property, whether it is public or private. Moreover, as Siniscalchi (2019, p. 147) recalls, it is a struggle to

Confront the processes of capitalist appropriation (enclosures, privatizations and other restrictions to uses). When various authors and activists speak of the common, they generally refer to what they are defending from initiatives for private control and projects for commodification that are underway.

This perspective is reinforced by the affirmation of Tonucci Filho (2017, p. 23) that “the common has emerged in past decades as an emancipatory alternative both to socialism of the State and to neoliberal capitalism, and to their respective specific forms of public and private property”. This perspective is of real importance, because the institution of private property is the base of support for capitalism. Unlike what it may appear, public property of the state is not configured as a denial of private property, but as a collective form of use of private property. Thus,

if the socialist criticism to private property in the nineteenth century was based on an indignation of the usurpation of the fruits of labor of wage-earners by the owners of the means of production, this criticism is today combined with the recognition that the extension of the logic of private property, of the natural domain to the intellectual, constitutes a general threat to the common living conditions on the planet. (Tonucci Filho, 2017, p. 95).

The experience of the common would involve the exercise of the right to collective use; something beyond the demand for a type of collective property. We are referring to a break with that which would be the right to property (exclusive) and, as a counterpart, a movement towards the right of the common in opposition to property.

Final considerations... or none of this is simple, but it is essential and necessary

The institution of the common is not something simple, because as a political principle it carries a conflicting dimension and not a type of pacific form of governance. The idea of the “city of citizens”, developed by the Portuguese geographer João Ferrão (2015, p. 219), necessarily presupposes a city with political power, “which can act as an instance for regulation and redistribution with democratic legitimacy, and a *street with citizen power*, that is, with insurgent individuals, groups and communities, carriers of an agenda of progressive transformation of the city”. And, in this perspective, the common carries with it the essence of the political



principle – in the sense of valorization of the political being – because it is realized as a collective activity of deliberation; that is, coactivity is the foundation of political co-obligation.

We understand the difficulty of reflecting on something that points to another future, the desire for a future anchored in totally different values. This reflection, to become vigorous, must be based on theories, but must also be in dialog with the common citizen, with the people who walk through the city, who suffer, who are calling for something better. These people desire the pleasure of living, and this involves much more than only broadening their condition as consumers. For this reason, it is essential that the reflection on the desire for the future is a shared construction; it does not involve the city that I want, but the city that we want.

On reflecting on the construction of desired futures, Ferrão (2023, p. 27) adds the notion of prefigurative practices, moving in the direction of construction of prefigurative practices of desired futures to be invented. By debating this idea, anchored in Wright (2011, p. 03), who emphasizes that “one of the most fertile strategies is to identify already existing configurations that violate the basic logics of the dominant institutions in such a way as to incorporate emancipatory aspirations and prefigure broader alternative utopias”. Ferrão (2023, p. 27) has no doubt that the prefigurative practices to which he refers

must, therefore, conciliate a dual condition: be guided by purposes, principles and values (such as altruism, solidarity or cooperation, which give priority to social use value as opposed to exchange value) and have a potential for socially emancipatory structural transformation, of a sociopolitical and socioecological nature.

We understand that the institution of the common is found in the condition of practices that are prefigurative of desired futures. However, it must be recognized that the institution of the common is a process, and for this reason we will coexist for a long time with hybrid situations, in which articulations with political parties aligned to the ideal of the common can make viable certain advances in this direction.

The production of space, which has been fundamental to the continued reproduction of capitalism, has left increasing marks of increased inequality: impoverishment of the population, growth of unemployment, extinction of certain labor activities, increase in homeless people, unequal access to the benefits of living in cities, etc. All of this points to the need for the conception of reflections and practices that point to the struggle for the construction of the idea of city as common, and this also means working for the realization of self-management. We corroborate Lefebvre's (2017, p. 140) position, in which he affirmed that self-management must be studied through a dual elaboration: as a means of struggle, which offers an opening to new possibilities; and as a means of reorganization of society, that is, allowing the creation of other forms of sociability through the valorization of doing-with.

By proposing the institution of the common, we are simultaneously denying the right of property and all the norms, laws and rules that formalize its management (whether they are exercised by the state or by large



companies and corporations). This perspective is fundamental, given that both public space and private space are guided through the legal right to property, and moreover, property became established as the core of the entire social order. For this reason we affirm that the complete meaning of the institution of the common is found beyond capitalism.

The fact is that there is no commons without a struggle for the commons. By calling for the struggle for the commons we are not limited to a theoretical construction, we are proposing a struggle against the expansion of the logic of private property in all spheres of life.

Some may affirm that this all sounds like a utopia, which is not completely untrue; however, it is not completely true, because Marx always foresaw communism as a process, as a movement in direction to something else, for this reason we cannot understand communism as a state of being, but of coming-to-be; that is, it is a path to be taken.

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