
The crisis of bourgeois domination in Brazil: How Polop interpreted Jânio Quadros and João Goulart governments (1961-1964)

A crise da dominação burguesa no Brasil: como a Polop interpretou os governos Jânio Quadros e João Goulart (1961-1964)

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Abstract

Born in 1961 and opposing the reading produced by the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB) about the national reality, the Marxist Revolutionary Organization - Worker Policy (ORM-PO or Polop) presented an alternative political strategy to the pecebistas at the time. Despite the recognition that the specialized literature has already been expressing about its innovative role, the history of Polop remains little studied. This article intends to cover part of this gap, demonstrating the interpretation that the organization produced about Jânio Quadros and João Goulart governments and the serious political crisis that preceded the 1964 coup.

Keywords: Polop; Communists; Brazil.

Resumo

Nascida em 1961 e se opondo à leitura produzida pelo Partido Comunista do Brasil (PCB) sobre a realidade nacional, a Organização Revolucionária Marxista – Política Operária (ORM-PO ou Polop) apresentou uma estratégia política alternativa aos pecebistas na época. No que pese o reconhecimento que a literatura especializada já vem manifestando sobre o seu papel inovador, a história da Polop continua pouco estudada. Este artigo pretende cobrir parte desta lacuna, demonstrando qual foi a interpretação que a organização produziu sobre os governos Jânio Quadros e João Goulart e a grave crise política que antecedeu o golpe de 1964.

Palavras-chaves: Polop; Comunistas; Brasil.

Introduction

Born in January 1961, when opposing the diagnosis made by the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB)¹ about the Brazilian reality, the Marxist Revolutionary Organization - Workers' Politics (*Organização Revolucionária Marxista - Política Operária* - ORM-PO or Polop), represented a considerable renewal in the national Marxist field. Understanding that Brazil was already a fully capitalist country and, therefore, did not need a national-democratic stage, on which the Communist Party was still betting, Polop defended that any future revolution should be immediately socialist, thus positioning itself against any national-bourgeois strategic alliance, propelling the idea of overcoming the necessary stages until the socialist revolution.

The opposition to the hegemony of the PCB in the national communist camp bore fruit for Polop, and the specialized literature has already recognized its innovative role (Mattos, 2002; Noberto, 2021). However, historiography continues to give greater attention to the Communist Party. Articles dedicated to the participation of the PCB in the pre-coup period abound, the activity of other communist organizations in this period, such as Polop, still needs further understanding. This article aims to cover part of this gap.

1 Polop, a new reading of the Brazilian reality

To understand Polop's reading of the Jânio Quadros and João Goulart governments (1961-1964), it will be necessary to understand the original interpretation that the organization made of the process of national capitalist development. Both the PCB and Polop recognized that, despite the considerable socioeconomic development it had been undergoing since the 1930s, Brazil had not yet overcome its status as an underdeveloped country. For this evident condition, however, they presented different explanations.

For the Communist Party, the exploitation of foreign monopoly capital through foreign trade, financial loans and direct capital investments, and the agrarian

¹From 1961, the Brazilian Communist Party.

structure based predominantly on the monopoly of land ownership by landowners, which served as the basis for pre-capitalist forms of exploitation, deformed national economic development, hindering the progress of capitalist production relations in the country.

If the conservation of pre-capitalist structures of production and the maintenance of dependence on imperialism blocked the historical possibilities for national capitalist development to assume an independent course, economic development itself was underway, still adapted to imperialist dependence and the conservation of the monopoly of land, aggravated the fundamental contradictions of Brazilian society. Unable to overcome them in a context of dependence on imperialism and the conservation of the landowner structure, another possible course of development corresponding to national and popular interests was demanded by the objective needs of the country's socioeconomic structure.

Allied in the attempt to maintain Brazil's underdevelopment conditions, the permanent interests of landowners and imperialism were opposed to the expansion of productive forces. Interested in this expansion was, however, the so-called “national bourgeoisie”. In other words, the vast majority of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, who “due to their own class interests, were led to clash with foreign monopoly capital, which represented an obstacle to the expansion of their businesses”. Assuming a socially contradictory position, this bourgeoisie had a double character. As a result of its own class nature and economic and political weakness, it sought to defend its interests through agreements and concessions to imperialism, at the same time that, belonging to a nation exploited by imperialism, it “enclosed a revolutionary potential”. “In order to confront imperialism, it needed to rely on the masses and could, to a certain extent, stimulate the action of social movements. Fearful, however, that the independent struggle of the proletariat” would threaten its own interests as a ruling class, “it sought to restrict the movement of the masses, keeping them restricted to the limits convenient to its objectives”. A considerable part of the Brazilian bourgeoisie was, thus, “an inconsequential anti-imperialist force”. At the same time as it was capable of confronting imperialism, it vacillated and tended to compromise with the enemy of the nation.” In this scenario, for the PCB, only a minority sector of the bourgeoisie had “its interests intertwined with those of

imperialist groups in industry, banks and import and export trade”, constituting itself as the “internal social support of imperialist domination”, the rest were allies of the urban petty bourgeoisie, the labor movement and the peasant masses in the bourgeois-democratic revolution underway in the country, making the communist struggle necessary, due to its status as a stage prior to the desired socialist revolution (Political resolution of the 5th National Congress of the Communist Party of Brazil, 1960).

Thus, in that historical period, independent capitalist development became not only possible, but also desired by every Brazilian nation that was not directly associated with imperialism and latifundia. It was to prevent economic development from continuing to occur through “the harm to the true national interests and even the independence of our country”, that it became necessary to establish a government that would “put into practice a firm nationalist and democratic policy” (Jornal Novos Rumos, n. 51, 1960). The commitment to this historic possibility of independent development led the PCB to support the defeated candidacy of Marshal Henrique Texeira Lott in the 1960 presidential election and to become critically closer to the João Goulart government. Explaining what exactly this bourgeois alternative meant, the party stated:

Independent development is that which leads to the material progress of the country without accentuating its subordination to foreign monopolies, but, on the contrary, leads to our economic and political emancipation from imperialism and, as a result, to the rise [sic] of the standard of living of the Brazilian people. Independent economic development is that defended by the nationalist forces and by all patriots, against dependent development, defended by the surrenderers and carried out, to a large extent, by the present government (Jornal Novos Rumos, No. 53, 1960, p. 9).

In this way, starting from a dual perspective, the PCB defended the historical possibility of the existence of two capitalist development projects for Brazil. A development dependent on and subordinated to imperialism, which intended an even greater opening of the national economy to foreign companies without substantial changes to the existing political and social structure; and another autonomous national, which, through changes in the country's backward political, economic and social structures, would guarantee independence in the face of the predominance of great foreign powers. Both projects corresponded to social bases of relevant political

interference in the very composition of the Brazilian State. Representing the interests of landowners and capitalists associated with foreign monopoly capital, but also of the bourgeoisie linked to national interests, the Brazilian State had a heterogeneous character, exposing, within it, contradictions that should be taken advantage of by the political actions of communists.

Polop, however, operated a completely different reading. From his perspective, the so-called “national bourgeoisie” - supposed ally in a bourgeois-democratic revolution - did not maintain a systemic opposition to imperialism. Associated - in a relationship of dependence - and not enemies, of imperialism and large estates, the bourgeoisie led the process of capitalist development in the country in alliance with them. The existing conflicts between national and foreign sectors merely meant the common friction of the struggle for the market. Lagging behind in relation to the industrialized race triggered by the European and American capitalist center in the 19th century, the economic development of countries like Brazil had occurred when the international capitalist economy was already in its monopolistic phase, causing forms of capital domination foreign countries constituted the essence of national development itself. In this sense, in the eyes of Polop, independence for this productive structure, even within the limits imposed by the sociability of capital, has always been out of the question.

Driven essentially by State instruments, due to the historical weakness of the “national bourgeoisie”, Brazilian industrial development was financed by concessions and great economic advantages offered to foreign and national companies, and by the state presence responsible for covering part of the burden of production and of containing the losses caused by capitalist crises. Driven by such assistance, the economic growth rates obtained by the country at the time reached numbers higher than those of the development of international capitalism, pointing to a constant and audacious expansion of industrial production.

Brazilian capitalist development itself led the national industrial bourgeoisie, “the main promoter and conscious beneficiary of this process”, to intensify the association it already had since the beginning of the industrialization project with the latifundium and the foreign bourgeoisie, representative of the imperialist system (Santos Júnior, 1961, p. 80-81). Because, delayed in its development, the Brazilian bourgeoisie, without its own capital to finance itself and implement its industrializing

project, resorted both to foreign capital and to internal productive sectors, which had investment capacity, namely, the large landowners.

Externally, a new phase of imperialism was unfolding, marked by the expansion of large monopoly capital towards direct industrial investment in countries with aspirations and conditions for development, promoting the increasing export of capital for the industry of these peripheral economies. Therefore, taking advantage of a new moment in world capitalist development, countries like Brazil, with the capacity to offer a vast contingent of cheap labor, attracted the interest of large multinational companies.

[...] due to the formation of large monopolies and the unequal development of the different sectors of production in imperialist countries, there is the accumulation of an “excess” of capital that cannot find profitable use on the domestic market. This “excess” capital is exported to backward countries, where low wages and relatively low land prices ensure large benefits that compensate for their decreasing trend in the metropolis. Furthermore, behind the export of capital hides the export of goods, since established companies owned by monopolies work with machinery, raw materials and fuels that they import from the country of origin. Likewise, through economic and political links, monopolies control domestic and foreign trade (*Jornal Política Operária*, No. 1, 1962).

The partnership with foreign capital came from institutional means that had already been established, such as the controversial instruction 113 of Sumoc - Superintendence of Currency and Credit (*Superintendência da Moeda e do Crédito*), which, instituted in the transitional government of Café Filho, “allowed direct foreign investments without exchange rate coverage, ensuring foreign investor the import of industrial equipment according to a priority classification given by the government”. If this device was preserved during the Kubitschek period, it “would force Brazilian industrialists to associate with foreigners, opening up a wide range of facilities for them” (Maranhão, 1985, p. 53-54).

The inseparable alliance of the national industrial bourgeoisie with imperialism was evident in a quick examination of the largest companies in the country. According to Moniz Bandeira, founding member of Polop, of the 66 largest companies operating in Brazil, only 34 were under the control of Brazilians, 32 of which were under the direct command of imperialism. This was not to say that these

34 companies run by Brazilians were not also “linked to imperialist capital”, he was keen to point out (Bandeira, 1979, p. 103-104). In the electricity sector, foreign capital participated with up to 60% of the invested capital. Therefore, for Polop, the “national bourgeoisie” was “[...] essentially cosmopolitan and will never separate itself from its greatest ally - North American imperialism” (O que é Política Operária, 1963, p. 4). Which allowed Bandeira to conclude that:

The fundamental contradiction of Brazilian capitalism is not with imperialism, it is with Brazilian capitalism itself, in which imperialism is integrated. It is the contradiction between the socialization of labor and the private character of capitalist appropriation. It is the contradiction between the thousands of wage-earners, who produce the material wealth of the country, and the half-dozen bosses, who benefit from it (Bandeira, 1979, p. 104).

In these terms, Bandeira reinstated the conflict between capital and labor as a fundamental contradiction of Brazilian reality, explicitly diverging from the pecebist interpretation of the time, which defined it as the contradiction between national emancipation and imperialism. Under conditions of dependence, the so-called “national bourgeoisie” did not have revolutionary potential, and the break with imperialism necessarily involved the anti-capitalist struggle.

Brazilian industrial growth promoted by nationalist development projects also did not question the existence of large estates and the “pre-capitalist” conditions of production and exploitation of the workforce in the countryside, since it was precisely such “archaic” conditions that ended up allowing the drainage of cheap labor for urban centers and the reduction in the cost of reproducing this workforce to be used in industrial production, essential conditions for the industrialization process. It was on the shoulders of rural workers that the double exploitation necessary for the process of capitalist deepening in the country fell.

In this way, distancing itself from the pecebist analyzes of Brazilian capitalism at the time, Polop argued that national industrialization was financed, and therefore made possible, by the entry of foreign capital, and internal capital originating from the currency produced by the latifundia. And, therefore, the process of capitalist development in the country was, from its inception, linked to the latifundiary structure and imperialism. The same ones that also presented themselves, contradictorily, as the main obstacles to the continuity of its development, due to

conjunctural conflicts of economic interests, partially antagonistic, conditioned by market disputes.

Maintaining the alliance with imperialism and not breaking with the latifundia, the development promoted by the Brazilian bourgeoisie had not only preserved dependence on these two partners, but had aggravated it. As Theotônio dos Santos, another founding member of Polop, points out, the absence of internal savings that forced the “national bourgeoisie” to resort to foreign capital, generating an association with imperialism, determined the inherent contradictions of national development.

The first of these was the export of the profits obtained here in greater quantities than the capital sent, which implied a bleeding of the national economy. The second, to the same extent that the national bourgeoisie asserted itself economically, became more dependent on the international big bourgeoisies. We were and are faced with the embarrassing reality that, in order to maintain capitalist development, we have to resort to international capital that decapitalizes and subjugates us (Santos Júnior, 1961, p. 81).

As practically all the economic progress vaunted by the national-developmental project was based on capital investments and loans, it was clear that the more national development was sought and obtained, the more dependence on imperialism intensified. In addition to falling into the trap of imperialism - due to the need for capital, financing, loans and the importation of new techniques, dependence was also based on the latifundia, both by the maintenance of state financing guaranteed by the balance of payments achieved by the exports of agricultural products, and by the working conditions, which allowed the double exploitation that fell on the peasant to guarantee the increase of the exploitation of the working class - by means of the decrease in the value of labour power, due to the reduction in the cost of living in the cities, determined by the low price of agricultural products achieved by this “over-exploitation”² about the Rural Worker - Securing the Rates of Profits of the Industrial Bourgeoisie.

Under these conditions, overcoming the contradictions inherent in the peculiar development of Brazilian capitalism did not involve a “national-democratic” tactic.

²The concept of “overexploitation” was not used by the ORM-PO, even though its general properties were already to some extent outlined. The concept was forged at the end of the decade by Ruy Mauro Marini, when he, already in exile and outside Polop, dedicated himself to deepening his studies on the condition of dependence of Latin American capitalism.

Anti-imperialist and anti-feudal structural reforms³, necessary for its outcome, could not be carried out by the so-called “national bourgeoisie”, but only by the alliance of the worker and peasant movements. Because, having originated and been conducted through a process of dependent development secured by the association with imperialism and large estates, Brazilian capitalism commanded by the bourgeoisie could not go to the extreme consequences to make the necessary rupture against the structures that maintained it. in dependence. As Theotônio dos Santos indicated, the so-called “national bourgeoisie” could not “destroy imperialism and the landowners because they are its allies and because to liquidate them would be to extinguish itself, as it is closely associated with them” (Júnior, 1964, p. 6). The confrontation of oppressed peoples and the revolutionary experiences in the 20th century demonstrated that the anti-imperialist struggle was inextricably linked “to the abolition of the entire system of capitalist exploitation” (Bandeira, 1979, p. 90). Thus, there was no doubt, the anti-imperialist revolution must necessarily be socialist.

Taking all this into account, for Polop, the Brazilian crisis that was approaching the end of JK's five-year industrialization was not the product of a lack of development, but the result of the very process of development dependent on and associated with national capitalism. The congenital inability of the bourgeoisie to carry out the necessary structural reforms meant that the 1960s began under a growing inflationary process, which worried and began to threaten growth, inhibiting investment rates and causing an increase in the cost of living. The exhaustion of the Plan of Goals frayed the party and military alliance, which guaranteed the stability of the political regime in the Kubitschek government; and that, defeated electorally by the populist phenomenon Jânio Quadros, it would be profoundly shaken by the developments of subsequent governments.

2 The Quadros government and its end expose “the feet of clay of the bourgeois regime”

³The texts of the ORM-PO still presented this terminology. The thesis on the non-existence of Brazilian feudalism came from an article by Andre Gunder Frank, a colleague at the time of Theotônio dos Santos, Ruy Mauro Marini and Vânia Bambirra, at the University of Brazil (UnB). The refusal to mention the existence of certain “feudal remnants”, when talking about the pre-capitalist relations of production still present in the national reality, was finally assimilated by Polop only from 1964 onwards. For more information, see NOBERTO, 2021.

For Polop, Jânio Quadros overwhelming victory in the 1960 presidential election could only be understood within the scenario of a structural economic crisis promoted by the contradictions inherent in the national development policy itself. Seeking to contribute to the “study of the social, economic and political conditions that allowed the election” of the former governor of São Paulo, an article published in the magazine *Brasiliense*, authored by the political activist Theotônio dos Santos, argued that the Brazilian bourgeoisie - “To make it triumph its objectives within the people” - sought to present, during the public debate, these inherent contradictions of development as mere “imbalances” to be adjusted through some changes. To this end, he looked for “a popular figure who knew how to channel all the popular discontent that development based on this same group had provoked”, offering him as the agent of the changes to be carried out (Santos Júnior, 1961, p. 79 and 84). Thus camouflaging the true reasons that caused such a situation, the Brazilian bourgeoisie had found its ideal candidate during the electoral process.

Jânio Quadros claimed to have the “solution to all Brazilian problems”: A change of government that would allow “the moralization of public service and the elimination of business dealings” (Santos Júnior, 1961, p. 88). In this way, taking advantage of the national drama, he became the ideal candidate of the Brazilian high bourgeoisie and their imperialist partners, who, by sustaining a broad and expensive electoral campaign, elected him president of the country. “Jânio was nothing more than one of those elected politicians to whom the ruling class handed over the management of its affairs” (*Jornal Política Operária*, No. 1, p. 8), stated the newspaper *Política Operária*, in its first edition, when analyzing his 204 days of government.

Faced with the prelude of a major economic crisis, the bourgeoisie had opted for a change of course in economic policy, replacing the “inflationary policy” that had guided all national growth over the last two decades, to bet on the directions promised by a policy deflationary, which sought to recover the declining average profit rate of the bourgeoisie, retracing the path of development, to avoid the social disturbances already growing due to the deterioration in the population's standard of living. According to Polop, the crisis, however, was fueled by specific conditions in the international market, such as the drop in raw material prices and the overproduction

of almost all agricultural products, which had a major impact on the Brazilian trade balance. Seeking to cut expenses, considered by the bourgeoisie as “superfluous”, the deflationary policy also met the demands of the International Monetary Fund - IMF, which was in line with the needs of the national-developmental policy to access foreign investments.

Polop did not, however, see a rupture between the Kubitschek and Quadros administrations, as the PEC and left-wing nationalists wanted to believe, but rather a continuity to be elaborated under the new methods imposed by the new conjunctural conditions. These are, therefore, normal differences in different phases of the same development project. Such changes in the conduct of the capitalist development process had subsidized, for example, a reorientation in foreign policy, which was naively welcomed by left-wing groups who did not understand its foundations and meaning. For Polop, the so-called reformulation of foreign policy sought to meet the demands of the new times. The Brazilian bourgeoisie was desperately looking for new markets and, therefore, not only announced an interest in reestablishing relations with the USSR and communist countries, but also finally “discovered” Africa, that is, countries that, in a frank process of decolonization, were beginning to get rid of colonial protectionist barriers (Boletim No. 1, March 1961, p. 4). In addition to this practical economic side, political-strategic demands were evident, to request from the USA and historical partners, through a game of pressure and concessions, the fulfillment of specific demands and the expansion of economic aid. Something that had already been rehearsed in the JK government, when the Brazilian president, for example, taking advantage of the Cuban revolution and demonstrations against the visit of the American vice-president, Richard Nixon, to South America, sought to convince the USA of a new policy of assistance and financial aid to Latin America as a strategy to alleviate the social conditions that threatened the continent with communist revolutions. Thus, the Latin American bourgeoisies maintained an ambiguous position with the Cuban revolution. On the one hand, it represented the fear of social upheaval, on the other, it served to increase its bargaining power in negotiations with the United States. Part of this strategy was the refusal of Brazilian diplomacy and US pressure for more direct intervention on the recently revolutionized Cuban island. The Independent Foreign Policy assumed

by the new government, led by the Udenist chancellor Afonso Arinos, was a demonstration that the Brazilian stage of development could no longer be content with just crumbs.

Given this analysis, the ORM-PO defined its role as that of an intransigent opposition to what was, consciously, the “most bourgeois government that Brazil has ever had” (Boletim No. 1, March 1961, p. 1). However, it sought to denounce the class character of the entire regime, and not just the new government elected after a resounding victory over the left-wing nationalist forces and the candidate supported by the PCB communists, as it could not be forgotten that “the cause of the defeat of the Old Left had been its complete inability to understand and judge the political situation” (Idem).

On August 24th, 1961, however, the bombastic letter of resignation that ended the government came to light. Its first interpretation was that of Moniz Bandeira (1979), with the still hot ember of the events in his hands, analyzing the unexpected resignation of the president, offering the thesis that became dominant for the explanation of this relevant historical event.

Having to deal with the deterioration of the relationship with the most reactionary groups that formed an important part of its base, due to its foreign policy measures and dangerously demagogic rhetoric, and losing the popular support it had gained during the electoral election - due to the inability of its economic policy of resuming growth and combating the inflationary spiral, in addition to the delay in the structural reforms he had promised, Jânio Quadros, seeing the support that gave him the biggest vote ever obtained by a presidential candidate disappear, “decided to create a climate conducive to his personalist pretensions” (Boletim Interno SP, 1961).

Still under the cloud of confusion promoted by the act of resignation, Bandeira - against the first impressions of some subjects who claimed that Jânio was yet another victim of a coup perpetrated by the USA, due to the developments of its independent foreign policy - defended the thesis, which was widely accepted nowadays, but innovative at the time, that with the act of resignation, the president sought to promote a “Bonapartist coup” that aimed to increase his administrative powers.

Despite the discomfort that the foreign policy undertaken by the Brazilian government caused to Washington, its economic and financial guidelines followed the IMF's guide, and data on US economic investment in Brazil demonstrated that the Kennedy administration maintained considerable confidence in the government led by Jânio. Thus, Bandeira oriented his analysis in another direction. With a personalist policy independent of political parties and patronage, the president had distanced himself from important allies, such as Carlos Lacerda, and, making no secret of the fact that he longed for reforms of the “Constitution, which he considered too narrow for his movements”, he intended gain more government power (Bandeira, 1979, p. 135). Little by little, his political conduct became increasingly truncated, and his gestures became more aggressive. Since there had been no parliamentary elections in the same period, he complained that congress had not followed the changes promoted in his election, remaining “conservative”. From time to time, he asked the Chamber for more “instruments” to govern, threatening to turn it against public opinion. Tired of the political-institutional obstacles that consumed his initial popularity, Jânio went all or nothing, in a risky maneuver, he scribbled, signed and delivered a letter of resignation. His intentions? According to Bandeira's analysis: Temporarily abandoning the presidency of the Republic, causing “an impasse between the people, the Armed Forces and Congress”, in a political-institutional crisis that “would enable him to demand extraordinary powers as a condition for his return to government” (Bandeira, 1979, p. 9).

His confidence in the probability of success of the plan he was putting into motion resided in the situation of the presidential succession, which, as foreseen by the constitution, determined the immediate inauguration of the elected vice-president of the Republic, João Goulart - at the time, on a “providential” diplomatic trip to communist China. The extremely critical position of the Armed Forces towards the possibility of Jango ascending to the presidency guaranteed a minimum of rationality to Jânio's bold move. As Bandeira indicated, the “military, evidently, would prefer Cadres with extraordinary powers to take over the government than Goulart, against whom sectors of the bourgeoisie, for years, waged a violent campaign” (Bandeira, 1979, p. 42).

His “personal move” was blackmail: Either Jânio with special powers or Jango. His action did not prove to be completely unfounded. As he probably predicted, the same device that moved against the Vargas government in the 1954 crisis, and Kubitschek's inauguration in 1955, moved in 1961 against Goulart's inauguration. But the rapid movement of popular forces, to be brought together by workers' organizations and political forces supporting the vice-president, deterred the Armed Forces from joining adventures that seemed not to find support even in Congress, which at that time was already looking for a way forward conciliatory. Bandeira's analysis makes a point of pointing out that the armed forces, which Jânio made a point of praising in his resignation letter, certainly did not want him out of the government, even more so for the replacement of someone like Goulart, on the contrary, perhaps they were even willing, if they found support, to “do what he ordered”, however, they were not motivated enough to support a Bonapartist dictatorship without a popular base (Bandeira, 1979, p. 52). And, therefore, retreating from the coup initiative, they accepted the conciliation proposal designed by Congress. The parliamentary amendment that would remove government power from the new President of the Republic, the result of the successful maneuver of Pssedistas and Udenistas, ended up undermining the resistance of the PT members and, with their support, was approved, forming the first government cabinet, and determining the failure of the military coup and the “Bonapartist plan” perpetrated by the “personal move” of Jânio Quadros.

Analyzing the political-military crisis of 1961, the ORM-PO argued that the situation “made clear the internal contradictions of the regime, highlighting, mainly, the role of the Armed Forces in the bourgeois regime, that is, its character as an instrument of the dominant classes, now, taken to action ahead of time” (Boletim Interno SP, 1961, p. 2). Considering that Goulart's inauguration was guaranteed both by popular pressure led by the incessant struggle of workers and students for the preservation of democratic freedoms, aided by the legality network established in Rio Grande do Sul by governor Leonel Brizola, and by the dubiousness of the bourgeoisie that was divided between the coup plotters and reconciliation, fearful of the possibility and unfolding of a military dictatorship. In this sense, for Polop, parliamentarism was the “way found by the bourgeois leaders to contain the popular

rise, neutralize João Goulart's action, satisfying the right-wing group and, at the same time, guaranteeing the liberal groups the solution to the crisis within the cadres of the regime". However, the organization was betting, back in 1961, that "in the long term, parliamentarism, under Brazilian conditions, would inaugurate an unstable regime", which tended to demoralize "the dominant classes even more, given that the crisis did not change, but rather deepened the nation's problems" (Boletim Interno SP, 1961, p. 4). The crisis of August 1961 had revealed "the feet of clay of the bourgeois regime" (The tasks of Workers' Politics - approved thesis of the II POLOP Congress, January/1963, p. 2).

The parliamentary cabinet that was born "from conciliation and compromise between political forces, was the result of the agreement that the factions of the dominant classes managed to obtain to avoid civil war and the deepening of the struggle" (Bandeira, 1979, p. 68). But, even for Polop, "Jânio seemed to have been one of the last possibilities for a bourgeois 'solution' to contain the popular revolutionary advance" (Boletim Interno SP, 1961, p. 4-5). Therefore, 1961 presented itself as a new milestone for the Brazilian crisis, which had already been experiencing a structural economic crisis, which had ended up triggering, from then on, a political collapse. An institutional dysfunction, which, as Eder Sader pointed out, induced workers to begin breaking the limits of corporatism, and the institutional docility of the class (Sader, 1962, p. 6).

It could not be denied, and it was noted by practically all political agents, that "the political-military crisis brought about by the resignation of the elected president had brought to light the growing political maturity of the working masses". As Bandeira recalls, retrospectively: "For the first time, the action of workers and students defeated a coup movement, dragging parts of the army itself with them" (Bandeira, 1979, p. 8). Jango's inauguration, even under a "compromise solution", could not fail to be interpreted as a defeat of the coup forces, which indicated a re-oxygenation of popular forces.

This victory of resistance to the coup did not fail to be assimilated, mistakenly, by triumphalist feelings, also by Polop. Theotônio, for example, rehearsing an interpretation of the August crisis, predicted the *coup d'état* that came in 1964, and the civil war and social revolution in response to it, which, as we know, never came.

Also defending the thesis that Jânio intended to return to the presidency after the military crisis to claim greater government powers, the polopist activist congratulated the participation of the urban working class, peasants and the student movement, questioning “the role of left-wing organizations in the crisis”, to argue that August 1961 had demonstrated that: 1) The “band of conciliation” and the possibilities for action of the progressive bourgeoisie had narrowed, which made its accession to the majority of reactionary forces a matter of time; 2) That “the coup continued to be a living force in the country and would soon reappear. Not only because the conciliatory solution allowed its leaders to remain unharmed, but, mainly, because it was the only solution for the capitalist path in Brazil”; 3) And that the “civil war” in response to the future coup was “even inevitable”. Imminent, as never before, he predicted: “We live in a pre-revolutionary period that tends to accelerate more and more” (Júnior, 1961, p. 24-27).

3 The Goulart government and the unavoidable crisis of bourgeois domination in Brazil

The organization argued that parliamentarism - established by prisoners, and through numerous legal and political remedies - had been the solution found by the bourgeoisie to save its domination, after fearing the consequences of a possible radicalization of the popular mobilization carried out against its disastrous coup attempt⁴. In this sense, it became complacent with the criticisms and accusations from labor and pecebistas regarding the idea that the implementation of parliamentarism represented, at that time, just a “white coup” to prevent the advancement of reforms, and placed itself in a position to support to “all measures that represented an advance in the consciousness of the masses and were capable of leading to this solution”. He agreed that the most conservative forces should be

⁴Parliamentarism, presidentialism: The false change. *Jornal Política Operária*, No. 1, January, 1962, p. 3. CEDEM/UNESP. Polop Fund. Bandeira summed up the issue as follows: “Parliamentarism, which, objectively, is a more democratic system of government than presidentialism, was born in Brazil as a reaction of the ruling classes, to avoid, on the one hand, the total demoralization of the military authorities, who wish to prevent the inauguration of João Goulart in the Presidency of the Republic and, on the other, that the masses, intervening directly in events, to make new social and political conquests” (BANDEIRA, 1979, p. 170).

fought, always considering, however, that one should not sincerely accept, as a tribute to naivety, the solutions identified by labor as “salvation of the country”, unless restricted to the conceptual understanding of “bourgeois homeland”. Thus, it would be pure innocence to believe that presidentialism, with labor at the head of the government, could bring about a real change in the uncomfortable situation of workers, and it would be of little benefit for the real struggle to be waged by restricting itself to the impoverishing plebiscitary dichotomy of parliamentarism or presidentialism. And so he concluded: “Parliamentarism is, in itself, neither worse nor better than presidentialism. It is not the form of the political system that matters, but the class at whose service this system finds itself” (*Jornal Política Operária*, No. 1, 1962, p. 3).

Therefore, the organization did not participate in the plebiscite campaign that would decide on the conservation of parliamentarism or the restoration of presidentialism. Unlike the PCB, which supported what it characterized as the “progressive forces” in the fight for presidentialism, Polop critically abstained from the campaign. The understanding that the Brazilian State was nothing more than the political-institutional expression of the “landlord-bourgeois regime” defined his position on the 1963 plebiscite campaign, which discussed changing the political regime in force in the country. A position made clear in the article signed by Pedro Xavier, in the *Política Operária* periodic, which referred to the “Old Left” as one that always ended up acting as an “appendix of bourgeois politics”, a trend once again evidenced in the plebiscite campaign, in which it once again offered its services, creating popular ideological coverage for part of the bourgeoisie engaged in the campaign interested in the victory of presidentialism.

Starting from the answer to an important question, the author would clarify the strategy adopted by the organization during the campaign: “Can revolutionaries take advantage of the reformist wave of the bourgeoisie? Yes, of course”, but to do so would require an autonomous class policy. It was precisely through the refusal to prepare the “proletariat for its own historical demands”, disentangling themselves from the arduous work of “unmasking the mystifying character of bourgeois flags” that, in practice, the reformists contributed to the “circulation of bourgeois ideas

among worker”, preventing “the development of the proletariat as a political force of its own” (Xavier, 1963, p. 13).

And its non-existence as a political force of its own is what always allows the bourgeoisie to abandon its troublesome partner as soon as necessary. [...] Thus, when the reformists, owing to the present political weakness of the working class and the possibility of taking advantage of the reformist needs of the bourgeoisie, support the bourgeois plenums, allow these plans to win over the masses, mobilize the masses for them, hand over the leadership of the process to the “progressive faction” of the bourgeoisie, they precisely fail to take advantage of this reformist wave for the proletariat (Xavier, 1963, p. 13).

By accepting the leadership of the bourgeoisie, “the bourgeois limits of reforms” were accepted in advance (Xavier, 1963, p. 13), harming the formation of the vanguard and the revolutionary program to be forged by the dynamics of concrete struggles to develop in the conditions existing social networks. For the ORM-PO, the return of presidentialism was not a blunt campaign against imperialism as the reformists claimed, but the necessary premise for the implementation of a reformist plan that sought to save the bourgeoisie and Brazilian capitalism in decline, and stop the participation of the masses in the historical process opened by this crisis, through the reinforcement of central power, mainly preventing such reforms from evolving into a revolutionary intervention.

Denouncing this scenario was the task undertaken by Polop, as only through this political-ideological struggle could the first steps towards the autonomous organization of the class be taken, thus building the path to socialism. Since the support of the “left” for the “strengthening of the bourgeois center, without any possibility of participation or control of power, meant docilely handing over to the dominant classes the instrument necessary for their stabilization in power” (Xavier, 1963, p. 13).

For Polop, the fight around the plebiscite was the result of the contradictions of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, which, led by its political factions, involved in their internal conflict, imposed the issue regarding the reinstitutionalization of the regime. As this issue was not of great interest to the proletariat, there was not even room for the workers' dispute for leadership of the struggle in favor of the establishment of presidentialism or the permanence of parliamentarism. The plebiscite victory of

whatever model of political regime would be established would not necessarily be a popular victory, argued the ORM-PO before the result, having resumed the thesis after the plebiscite, because - according to the organization, now attested by the history itself - the campaign had failed to stir the masses, “who remained indifferent to a card that, they knew well, had absolutely no concern for them” (*Revista Política Operária*, No. 5, 1963, p. 5).

Here, one cannot fail to notice that desire supplanted reason, casting cloudy analyzes on concrete reality. The campaign around the plebiscite moved broad sectors of Brazilian society between September 1962 and January 1963. With public debates on the radio, in the press and in parliament, involving opposing theses in defense of the two positions in question, varied protests, “and even coup skirmishes by elements unhappy with the anticipation of the plebiscite, which, however, did not have the desired effect”, the referendum managed to mobilize the union bases, which promoted rallies and various activities in defense of presidentialism (Melo, 2009, p 5).

However, the most relevant aspect of Polop's political analysis was that the crisis of parliamentarism represented more than the crisis of a government regime, it was the crisis of class domination itself. For this reason, practically the entire bourgeoisie took up the defense of the return of presidentialism, uniting, once again, around a “Bonapartist solution”. Thus, the ORM-PO appreciated the result of the plebiscite: “Trapped under the terms of this contradiction, the solution found by the bourgeoisie was to remain on the ground of institutional Bonapartism, represented by the presidential system” (*Revista Política Operária*, No. 5, 1963, p. 5).

Against a parliamentary regime that facilitates the representation of the multiple interests that divide the ruling classes, the industrial bourgeoisie proposes the establishment of a personal presidential or dictatorial power - which will allow it to advance Brazilian capitalism, through the indispensable structural reforms (*Revista Política Operária*, No. 4, 1962).

For Polop, the crisis of Brazilian capitalism had been established since the beginning of the decade, worsening with each new failure of bourgeois adjustment policies, as in the adventures of the Quadros government and parliamentarism. Starting from the premise that the bourgeoisie could no longer give in, and it became evident that it “is preparing to give the starting signal to a frankly anti-popular

economic policy, insofar as it will restrict the already small consumption pattern of the masses”, Polop argued that the bourgeoisie was looking for its new way out of the crisis, reinvesting its last chips in the establishment of a “strong and centralized” government. Such was “the meaning of the presidential manoeuvre carried out by João Goulart”, who had used the victorious campaign of the plebiscite to re-energise his reformist base (*Revista Política Operária*, No. 6, 1963, p. 35).

Obtaining a political truce, the government had sought to establish self-reinforcing measures - such as the return of presidentialism - to “put the finishing touches to the bourgeoisie's plan of action” (*Boletim* No. 3, April 1963, p. 1). Believing that workers would have to increasingly live with the scarcity of living, the rural exodus and massive unemployment in the cities, situations that would be worsened with the next governmental steps, Polop had no illusions about the economic agenda of the new government to be defined by the Three-Year Plan: “Economic planning, monetary stabilization, reformulation of the commitment to imperialism - these are the pillars of bourgeois politics after the plebiscite” (*Revista Política Operária*, No. 6, 1963, p. 37). In this way, like other organizations at the time, Polop made a harsh judgment on the stabilization plan proposed by the federal government which, defeated by resistance to its objective of wage containment, was sunk by the sea of these criticisms.

Dissecting the corpse, Marini argued that its failure was not due to the fact that the government had respected the wishes of the masses who showed dissatisfaction with the plan - as the pecebist leader, Luiz Carlos Prestes, had stated in a speech in Recife - but, because, pressured by its allies (imperialism and large estates), the Brazilian bourgeoisie could no longer negotiate the concessions to the proletariat necessary for the success of the plan (Marini, 1963, p. 5). With the deepening of the crisis harming the institutional conditions for carrying out the bourgeois reforms it envisaged, the Three-Year Plan had become unfeasible, since such an alliance would only be possible if the bourgeoisie offered material and symbolic gains (such as concrete signals about structural reforms, especially agrarian) short-term to the proletariat. However, the Brazilian crisis was deepening and the bourgeoisie was no longer in a position to concede, and was no longer interested in such an alliance. His reformist impetus had been extinguished. In turn,

the conditions for advancing the consciousness of the oppressed class in the country frightened the bourgeoisie, who feared for their own existence.

Under these circumstances, how dare the bourgeoisie isolate itself from its traditional allies, from whom it is separated by clashes of interests, but to whom it is bound by a common commitment in the system of exploitation prevailing in the country? And, above all, in order to secure the support of the masses, would it have to offer them, not simply some economic advantages, but attacks on the regime of landlord private property, which could be used tomorrow as a precedent for its own liquidation? (Marini, 1963, p. 8).

Driven by popular forces, basic reforms were beginning to become the order of the day. The Popular Mobilization Front (FMP) - which united the PCB, Arraes, Brizolistas and more radical labor - believed that Congress, due to its conservatism, did not have the will to carry out the necessary reforms in the country and, therefore, bet on mobilization extra-parliamentary politics (strikes, public demonstrations, strikes, etc.) as a strategy to pressure legislators, or even legitimize a constitutional reform that would make reforms viable as soon as possible. In opposition to the FMP, agents of the federal government, under the leadership of minister San Tiago Dantas, launched a Progressive Front that sought to bring together the center-left forces (called by Dantas the “positive left”) to confront the liberal-conservative advance that began to conspire against the president, and to move the government away from leftist forces considered radical (characterized as the “negative left”). Contributing to Goulart being able to carry out reforms through political channels restricted to the legal precepts of the time, the new front proposed a minimum program.

The relationship between the two reformist fronts was friendly until February 1964, when the FMP abandoned its moderate tone and, finally, repudiated Dantas' proposal. Polop, in turn, established an immediate opposite position, defining adherence to a “minimum program” and the formation of a “front in support of basic reforms”, as a strategy of the bourgeoisie to divide the revolutionary left, contain the movement of masses and promote class collaboration. Because, as Polop identified: “As it stands, the minimum program integrates many of the old demands of popular forces. If João Goulart intends to apply them, he does not, therefore, need any prior commitment of support from these forces”. This made it clear that support for such a program would be offered even without any prior alliance, with such a front being

just another way of preventing the masses from demanding more than the bourgeoisie was willing to give in (Peres, 1964, p. 8).

For Polop, the bourgeoisie sought, through its “left arm”, to take the direction of the reforms, to carry them out without the popular content that interested the proletariat. As stated in an article in defense of a Left Front that promoted revolutionary unity, “the bourgeoisie sought to take over the struggle for reforms, molding them to their interests, [...] expressing profound contempt for the most vital proletarian interests” (Cayo, 1963, p. 60). The organization did not disagree with the basic reform program, but it did not believe that such reforms could be carried out by the new bourgeois government led by Goulart.

The national bourgeoisie wants agrarian reform, reforming article 141 of the Constitution, which only allows expropriation upon prior payment in cash. When, however, the sectors linked to the large estates, which also do not declare themselves, frankly, against agrarian reform, get upset, the others retreat, temporize and delay the measure (Bandeira, 1979, p. 169).

For Polop, the economic crisis of Brazilian capitalism was worsened by the failure of each new stabilization plan or tactic for approving the reform program, making the establishment of a dictatorship increasingly necessary for the bourgeoisie, therefore, in order to return to conditions of economic growth previously experienced would be necessary to restore the previous conditions of capitalist accumulation, which would only be possible if the power relationship in favor of capital were reversed (*Jornal Política Operária*, No. 8, 1964, p. 4). The paths to this were certainly varied, but they narrowed to a few options with each new failure.

Betting that the crisis of Brazilian capitalism would deepen, Polop already had the death certificate from the reformist government. In a text intended to explain “Why would a center-left ministry fail?”, Theotônio recalled that it was not the first time in history that the bourgeoisie handed over “power to reformists in conditions of crisis [...], trusting in their ability to contain the masses and placing the heaviest burden of the crisis on their shoulders” (Júnior, 1964, p. 6). History had already seen the failure of German social democracy between the wars, which resulted in the rise of Nazism, and the failure of the English Labor Party post-1945.

Therefore, by betting on prolonging the crisis, Polop anticipated the inevitable increase in popular dissatisfaction, which could accelerate the process of formation of the revolutionary vanguard, making it possible to prepare a political leadership more aware of its true role towards the class worker, how much could it leave workers at the mercy of the establishment of a dictatorship of capital, since, once the phase of capitalist expansion and the Goulart government's alliance policy had been exhausted, a tactic that led left-wing forces in tow of the government would mean bearing the costs disastrous losses from its imminent failure. "A failure of the left in this task will leave the masses disoriented and discontented, at the mercy of any Bonapartist or fascist adventure" (Political declaration of the II Extraordinary Conference. July 1963, p. 2), warned the organization.

It is inevitable, therefore, that the disappointment that the government is causing, and which is likely to worsen even more, will be reflected directly on the left. If, tomorrow, this betrayed and exploited people were to pass over to any Lacerda who came to him with a so-called formula of national salvation, who will be responsible if not the left? (Marini, 1963, p. 9).

The Brazilian bourgeoisie needed structural reforms that would unlock the levers of development, but it did not have the political conditions to do so, and so the government would wear itself out, consuming every last drop of its political capital. It remained for the working class, organized and conscious of its interests and historical role, to carry out such a program from a socialist political perspective.

Since "basic reforms" are a general necessity of the system, a class that proposes to seize power cannot, under any circumstances, refrain from participating in its solution. What must be discussed, therefore, is not whether or not to exploit the reformist needs of the bourgeoisie, but rather how to exploit them. While the reformists of the workers' camp propose support for the reform plans of the bourgeoisie, the revolutionaries show the need for the elaboration of a socialist workers' programme of social transformations (Xavier, 1963, p. 13).

For Polop, the execution of the decree drafted by Supra, which provided for the expropriation of 10 km of all lands located on the margins of federal highways, railroad trunks and dams, and which, therefore, was of interest to agrarian reform, should be carried out by the struggle of the peasants, since the government continued

to waver. And without being enchanted by the physiognomy and rhetorical charge of the Independent Foreign Policy maintained by the cabinets of the parliamentary phase and by the new Jango government, he maintained his critical reading, sharpening his lens to the perception that each of these legitimately popular aspirations was used “by the bourgeoisie for its own benefit, seeking to induce the masses to burn their fingers to remove from the fire the chestnuts that will complete their banquet” (*Política Operária*, No. 1, p. 3).

Without harboring illusions about the democratic principles of the Brazilian bourgeoisie and about the political capacity of Jango's reformist government to command structural reforms, essential to unlocking national development, for Polop, as seen previously, the crisis of Brazilian capitalism would not find a solution in the frameworks established by the action of the bourgeoisie. Its overcoming depended on basic reforms, which, despite being defended by practically all sectors of the ruling class, and covered by the federal government as its last solution, would not be implemented under the direction of the “national bourgeoisie”, which was unable to break its alliance of class with imperialism and latifundia, lost itself in fruitless negotiations, and prostrated itself in immobility. Thus, the organized working class was left with the task of accomplishing what the weakness of the bourgeoisie did not allow it to do. Therefore, as a resistance tactic to prevent the coup, Polop proposed getting rid of the towing policy led by the reformists, who tied the country's fortunes to the fortunes of the Goulart government - which was definitely destined for failure, reorienting the struggle towards the establishment of a revolutionary government of city and country workers, which, preventing the bourgeoisie's coup escalation, would carry out the necessary reforms to solve national problems through popular resistance.

Final considerations

With the unexpected resignation of Jânio Quadros exposing the “feet of clay of the bourgeois regime” in the national territory, for Polop, the possibility of a socialist revolution in Brazil seemed mature since the beginning of the 1960s, the Brazilian bourgeoisie seemed to invest its last energies in the reformist government of João Goulart. Understanding that this labor experience did not have the conditions for

success and that its failure would open the doors to the rise of “fascism” and the possibility of a bourgeois dictatorship, different from the PCB, Polop refused to give its support to President Jango. Remaining in opposition, he insisted on the need to build popular resistance to the predicted *coup d'état*. As a minority political force, its intention, however, received little social support. Having been deeply impacted by the defeat of April 1964, the ORM-PO became involved in an intense internal crisis, which reached its peak with the holding of its IV national congress, in 1967, at which time the organization gave in to the new conditions imposed by the dictatorship and ended up “cracking”, putting an end to the first stage of its revolutionary experience.

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