

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra



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SOCIALISM

João Rodrigues

In the last three decades, there has been an erosion of socialist restraints and counterweights to capitalism, both in the sphere of international relations and in the national spheres of social relations. Capitalists have basically won all the class struggles. The price of these victories is high: capitalisms that are economically financialised, socially oligarchical, environmentally unsustainable and politically post-democratic.

The pandemic crisis, however, has made it clear that society is more than a sum of market-immersed individuals. And in doing so, it has shown the importance of the struggles in defence of the institutional survival, albeit too narrow, of a socialist principle: from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs. After all, the health of each person is also a precondition for the health of all. Those States characterised by less inequality, greater social trust and more robust national health services have also been more responsive to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is thus necessary to ensure the vitality and expansion of socialism at the level of the systems of provision, where everything is decided. This includes notably democratic planning, which nowadays is decisive in addressing the greatest failure in the history of capitalism: climate change.

Socialism is the name given to the democratisation of the economy, which allows the latter to be subordinated to the priorities of States – political communities that must possess the material conditions necessary for ensuring

that all their members are provided with real equality to develop their capabilities, including the ability to participate in deliberations about the broader issues that concern us all. Socialism is based on a hypothesis that is both realistic and hopeful: that people do their best under the circumstances they are faced with, and that it is necessary to develop capabilities on an equal basis and to humanise our circumstances.

This general assumption, which is subject to multiple institutional variations, presupposes, at the very least, sovereign control over the central elements of an economy, including money, which is decisive if a monetary economy is to be able to guarantee full employment. Even if necessary, public ownership of strategic sectors is not enough. It is necessary to stimulate control by workers and to maintain some market mechanisms, promoting incentives and identifying preferences without creating further inequalities or compulsions.

Socialisation of basic goods and services, combined with full employment and carried out within a framework of demand management that does not dispense with either capital control or a national collective negotiation of income policy compatible with external balance, would ensure real freedom for all and the confidence to pursue social experimentation.

All this may entail less globalised economies, but we need to keep our eyes on the goals, that is, to fulfil the revolutionary promise that lies beyond capitalism: freedom, equality and fraternity.