

What Do Young Brazilian Students Think About Socialism? Class-Consciousness Past, Present and Future

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With the fall of the Berlin Wall and neoliberalism, we have witnessed the decline of socialism as an alternative model of society. Drawing on Marxist theoretical categories such as class-consciousness, we wanted to understand what young people from a Brazilian university and a low-income preparatory college course in State of São Paulo think of socialism. In this context, we were interested in understanding how students relate to socialism. The information was collected in a small sample - not statistically delineated - and was qualitatively interpreted and theoretically categorized. The results suggest that there are two types of prevailing views of socialism: (1) as a more just society, but utopian, and (2) as a mode of social organization prescribed by a strong state, either positive (tendency to guarantee social rights) or negative (in the form of authoritarianism). While more than half of the participants indicated that they were open to socialist ideas, a number of them were less sympathetic. For many people, both positive and negative elements coexist in parallel.

KEYWORDS

class-consciousness; youth; socialism; ideology; neoliberalism

1 | INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we aim to understand what young students in university and in a low-income college preparatory course¹ think of socialism. While a number of studies explore the political and electoral behavior of young people from different social strata in Brazil (eg. Florentino, 2008; Messenberg, 2015; Segrillo, 2004), they rarely interrogate their conception of socialism, especially in psychology (Lott, 2016).

With the rise of neoliberalism, we are experiencing an intensification of oppression and economic exploitation, outsourcing, a relaxation of labor laws, criminalization of social movements, and a loss of class references (Anderson, 1995; Antunes, 2008; Marcelino, 2008). At the same time, social movements, trade unions and parties, often associated with left-wing movements², also resist and are able to polarize society and ideologically counter capitalism. However, we can understand that, in the last years, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, there was a political and symbolic defeat of socialism (Ali, 2012), with the latter falling into popular discredit, even among the sectors that had historically supported class-based popular and union movements as well as intellectualized middle classes. This phenomenon can be observed despite the electoral victory of left candidates in the Latin America, for example, in the 2000s (Cardoso, 2016; Ricci, 1993).

One factor following the fall of the Berlin Wall that increasingly made socialism a distant, harmful or outdated idea (Segrillo, 2004) was the weakening of union struggles through the processes of outsourcing and productive restructuring (Marcelino, 2008). Another factor in the fragmentation of the left-wing and the accommodation of left-wing parties to liberal politics - as we see in Brazil, for example, with the Workers Party (Euzébio Filho & Guzzo, 2018) - as well as other elements that have shifted the focus of social movements towards defensive guidelines for guaranteeing social rights eroded by the neoliberal state.

At the same time, we are witnessing an increasing isolation of revolutionary organizations from one another - whether or not these organizations are linked to Marxism, which has made it challenging for people to embrace openly socialist ideas in layers of the population who once sympathized with these ideas but who have now become more suspicious and fearful of socialism more generally. In this context, we would like to understand how these aspects, added together, generate action, reaction, or perplexity in the conscience of those who are concerned with social change. We will briefly characterize this situation and attempt to identify elements of an exceedingly difficult scenario for the left, especially for those who declare themselves to be socialists. We adopted the post-fall scenario of the Berlin Wall as the historical starting point, the end of the so-called cold war and the consolidation of neoliberalism (Anderson, 1995).

According to Paulino (2008), the fall of the Berlin Wall was a symptom of the intensification of the processes of oppression and exploitation engendered by capital in the 1970s and 1980s. We understand, on the other hand, that Stalin's Soviet "socialism" - which officially fell with the Wall - was far removed from the process opened by the Russian revolution in 1917. Its complete exhaustion represented a political (and ideological) victory for the bourgeoisie, which imposed itself on a history of confrontations operated by popular struggles of socialist traditions (Antunes, 2018;

¹Low-income college preparatory course is a free course, support by social organizations, that prepares low-income high school students who are preparing to do exams to enter in the Brazilian universities.

²According to Cardoso (2016) and Ricci (1993) the term left-wing has been legitimized by usage since the French Revolution and refers to all sectors of society that fight for justice and social equality, inside and outside the parliament. This is what we refer to broadly as the left field. Within it there is what we refer to as the socialist left or what, according to Tonet (2002), can be divided between the democratic and the revolutionary left. Both speak openly of socialism, but the difference is that the former proposes to get there by gradual reforms within the state, and the latter proposes revolutionary rupture as a way for workers seizure of power. Right-wing, in turn, is also a term legitimized since the French revolution, as pointed out by Cardoso (2016) and Ricci (1993) and it will be used throughout the text as a political configuration that, according to the authors, press for individual freedom, even if it implies social inequality. But it is important to highlight that the right also has its fragmentations and differences, which, for Cardoso (2016), range from economic liberalism to conservative liberalism. However, it is valid to recognize that these differences are tactical, not principled. Still, we will not be able to go into these details, just as we will not have time to analyze how the right and left have taken different forms throughout history and that they give rise to so-called center positions.

Segrillo, 2004).

Stalinism³ started to collapse after the 1930-s. The social achievements that the Russian revolution pointed towards - guarantee of political opposition organization, transient models in economic culture guaranteeing small trade, eg the creation of universal health and educational system, etc. (Paulino, 2008) - were quickly marginalized with Stalin's rise to power in 1924. The economic achievements that the revolution seemed destined to fulfill - based on the industrial planning model, which began to organize and modernize the productive process of a country until then semi-feudal - remained for a longer time, but also at the expense of violent processes such as the forced collectivization of peasant lands (Paulino, 2008; Bettelheim, 1983).

Even so, the complete collapse of the Soviet state represented a reconfiguration of forces in the world geopolitical field. From the 1990s onwards, this collapse transformed the center of political struggles from a fierce antagonism between socialism and capitalism to a more moderate (and sometimes confusing) field of opposition between left, center and right-wing movements. The weakening of this antagonism between socialism and capitalism, which lasted throughout the cold war, represented the strengthening of a neoliberalism movement that began in the mid 1940's (Melo, 2015) in academia (with authors such as Hayek) and in society beginning with the opposition to the strong state in Hitler's "national socialism" and the welfare state - both of which were viewed as synonymous with socialism in general. Thus, the end of the Soviet Union was the fact used by the bourgeoisie to prove the definitive bankruptcy of the "strong state" socialist experiences (Lott, 2016) and the relative victory of capitalism and its way of life (Antunes, 2018; Euzébios Filho & Guzzo, 2018). Since then, social questions have been furnished with new economic and ideological contours which have given shape to neoliberalism (Anderson, 1995).

In a number of ways, the neoliberal turn further reinforces Marx and Engels' (2005) socialist thought⁴. As we know, these authors saw in socialism a historical possibility, the result of the development of productive forces and a universal economic situation posed to the working class, and which may become conscious (or not) of class "itself" (Marx & Engels, 2005). This possibility must always be observed, especially when we recognize that the cyclical crises of capital (Lott, 2016) generate more inequalities and situations of exploitation and oppression, as we see nowadays with increased exploitation and surplus value extraction processes associated with repression and the erosion of social rights (Antunes, 2008; Marcelino, 2008).

To determine whether socialism remains a historical possibility, in the present study we have engaged young people to try to understand if they see (and how they see) paths of social change. But first, it is important to understand a little of the past and present elements of the situation, which still imposes obstacles to the socialist movement, but which, in no way, put an end to history.

2 | NEOLIBERALISM & THE SCOURGES OF SOCIALISM

Neoliberalism inaugurated a scenario in which the market has invaded all spheres of human life. In Brazil, for example, the 1990s represented a milestone in which the so-called free market imposed itself (even more strongly) on the state, on the organization of work and ways of life (Antunes, 2018). At the same time, we witnessed a discrediting

³Reference to the movement led by Stalin after Lenin's death in 1924 in the USSR, which, according to Bettelheim (1983), represented a bureaucratic turn of the Soviet state and a period of repression and physical elimination of the opposition, including in the core of the socialist left itself. According to the author, this movement spread strongly throughout the world through the policies implemented by the Communist Parties between 1930 and 1980, characterized by the defense of coalitions with nationalist or reformist parties. For more on the subject consult the cited author and Trotsky (1932/1989).

⁴It is not possible in this article go into further details about everything that involves the conception of socialism for Marx and Engels, especially about the notion of revolutionary party. Unfortunately, space will not permit us to delve into the debates surrounding the Marxist party, their variations, and deformations. We only advance that the revolutionary party, foreseen in the communist Manifesto itself (Marx & Engels, 2005), is understood as an organization whose task would be the elaboration of a program (theoretical-practical) of change of the economy and of the way of sociability, representing objective interests of the oppressed and marginalized sectors that make up the working class.

of socialism as a model of society (Segrillo, 2004), accompanied by the advance of a dominant ideology that seeks to soften class conflicts and blame individuals for the ills of social inequality (Euzébios Filho & Guzzo, 2018).

The fall of the Berlin Wall was undoubtedly a milestone for the resumption of liberal principles in a more destructive way (Antunes, 2018). This is not only because the fall represented the end of real socialism, as some insist on calling it (Fukuyama, 1992), but because the wall represented, above all, the survival of a political (and ideological) alternative to capitalism (Euzébios Filho & Guzzo, 2018, Paulino, 2008, Segrillo, 2004).

From a Marxist perspective, neoliberalism intensifies the class character of the bourgeois state and the logic of the bourgeoisie through the extension of profits at any cost (Anderson, 1995). During all this, liberalism has found a favorable scenario: reflux of popular struggles, growing disillusionment in social change and strengthening of a philanthropic management model for social policies (Antunes, 2008). Thus, the ruling class found in neoliberalism an old way of managing the cyclical crises of capital (Antunes, 2018) and at the same time weakening class organizations, for example, through privatizations, outsourcing and the loosening of labor laws (Antunes, 2008).

The crisis seems to be not only of socialist ideas, but also of political representativeness along the lines of capitalism, promoting a democracy that has been increasingly explaining its formal limits (Florentino, 2008). The literature shows that there is a relatively generalized process of dissatisfaction in relation to the political-institutional system, more specifically, with representative democracy, as shown by studies on the political and electoral behavior of young Brazilians (Florentino, 2008; Messenberg, 2015). The crisis of an institutionalized democracy arises from the fact that it fails to meet the expectations generated since its implementation.

A study carried out by IBOPE (2018) is emblematic in this sense, as it indicates a distrust in Brazil democratic institutions among all the age groups of the subjects surveyed, including among young people, supporting the thesis of the crisis of political representativeness today, which is further evident from the large numbers of abstentions in the last Brazilian elections (2018).

The crisis of political representativeness is also aggravated by the disbelief (or even disqualification, in some cases) of any type of change that goes beyond isolated initiatives, minimally articulated with universal demands from workers (Euzébios Filho & Guzzo, 2018).

The "end of history" ideology (Fukuyama, 1992) - which, like all dominant ideology, seeks to use concrete reality to alleviate class conflicts - added to the high degree of fetishization of free private initiative and contributes to eroding the political strength of the working class as a class. However, this description of defeats and demobilizations does not show the whole reality. Even though social class is an outdated concept, as the dominant ideology preaches, we have also seen an increase in strikes in recent years (Antunes, 2008; Cardoso, 2016). Despite the dominant ideology's view that structural changes will no longer happen, we instead see anti-capitalist revolts growing in Brazil and in the world (Ali, 2012), perhaps even as a symptom of a resumption of socialist ideas⁵. Even so, the ruling class continues to dominate and show a direction to follow.

3 | MARX & ENGLES' SOCIALISM & CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS

Socialism for Marxists corresponds to the socialization of wealth produced based on a productive and distributive system developed under social control of the workers. It is a planned economy generated from certain historical conditions, which can only be promoted by a working class (therefore wealth-producing). As Marx and Engels (2005)

⁵A 2012 US poll, which surveyed young people ages 18-29, found that 43% of respondents said they had a positive view of socialism. According to the report, the researchers did not specify the reason for this result but pointed out that the economic crisis in the country and the growth of "Occupy" movements this year may have driven this result. Information available at <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/12-28-11%20Words%20release.pdf> (Accessed 03/06/2015).

pointed out in *The German Ideology*, a new mode of sociability became historically possible, only from the universal exchange of industry and commerce, which also universalized poverty, the sale of labor power, and the commodification of social activities in general (Marx & Engels, 2005).

However, one aspect that deserves attention is that the revolution depends decisively on the element of class-consciousness. Class consciousness is not an individual phenomenon, in the first instance (Frederico, 1979), which distances us from a moral or idealistic perspective. Class consciousness is established in the face of a foundation of economic struggle that affects a group and not just an individual. Even so, Lukács (2003) affirms in *History and Class Consciousness* that the legacy of capitalism was to extend the role of consciousness in history so that the possibility of a class and consciousness of class ultimately emancipate all of humanity from exploitation.

We believe that the moment we live in, rather than placing Marxist thought in the past, makes it even more relevant. Neoliberalism makes even more apparent the class character of the bourgeois state in the administration of poverty and the role of the bourgeoisie in the production of inequalities, as Marx pointed out in *Critical Notes* (Marx, 1995).

Undoubtedly, bringing about a socialist revolution is no easy task, since class-consciousness itself does not necessarily (and most often) follow the economic logic of class society (Frederico, 1979). Between people and politics there is ideology, culture, the individual and their singularity. These aspects allow us to indicate three important characteristics of class consciousness: (1) despite being an historical phenomenon as Lukács argued, it is not possible to approach such phenomena without the subject and social groups experiences; (2) by including the political experiences of the subjects and groups, it is necessary to consider the dynamic of social relations. Therefore, the class consciousness is not – as Iasi (2006) suggests – a static phenomenon but rather (3) a dynamic and a complex process in which it is possible to find levels of class consciousness looking at the economic and ideological position of subject in the social relations and in social production.

According to Freire, the levels of class appear concretely in what he called conscientization. As Euzébios Filho (2018) explains:

By the possessor of a dominated consciousness, Freire understands one who “does not take sufficient distance from reality in order to objectify it and to know it critically” (Freire 1981, p. 73; translated from Portuguese by the authors). Dominated consciousness, however, does not have its complete and more perfect antagonist in emancipated consciousness. Without losing sight of the element of contradiction, Freire affirms that the variation of levels begins to be observed through what he calls transitive consciousness, a “naive consciousness, as dominated as the previous one, but indisputably more alert to the reasons for being of its own ambiguity [between being and not being dominated]” (Freire, 1981, p.75; translated from Portuguese by the authors). (...) The transition from dominated consciousness to emancipated consciousness is characterized as conscientization (p.219).

Concretely, the levels of class-consciousness, understood as a historical and dialectical process (Freire, 1981), depend on popular organization, the elaboration of historical memory and class practice, as stated by Martín-Baró (1983). So how is the historical memory of socialism reflected in the experience of young students?

4 | METHOD

4.1 | Participants

We chose university students and students in a low-income college preparatory course both because it is a population that historically has actively participated in the Brazilian context and because it is a population historically associated with Left political movements. The sample was not based on statistical representation. The students who participated were from a public education institution who wished to answer and reflect about the questions raised by the researchers.

This study included 11 students from a public university in the state of São Paulo and 15 students from a low-income college prep course located in the same state. 60% of the participants were between 18 and 20 years, and 40% between 20 and 22 years. 65% were male while 45% were female. 75% of the participants families received from 1 to 4 minimum salaries (approximately US\$ 250) a month, and 35% over 5 minimum salaries. Just 5% are in paid work. 95% of participants have never had a paid job. Only 10% of respondents of all university students said they participate in the student movement, political entities, or collectives.

All the participants used the internet to search for political information. Newspapers and magazines (6%) and television (7%) were rarely used to get this information. Students also rarely relied on teachers (4%) and universities (6%) to obtain political information. Clearly, this generation has a radically different way of relating to politics within contemporary society.

While this may suggest that this generation is a homogenous group, it is important to note that, like Florentino (2008), we do not consider youth as a theoretical category. On the other hand, it is true that this term is justified if we consider a generation that lives a similar historical moment. However, when we refer to young people as participants in this research, we mention only the age group of participants, which is between 18 and 22 years of age. From participant 1 (P1) to P11 we simply refer to them as university students and from P12 to P26 as college preparatory students.

4.2 | Procedures

The research complied with ethical procedures and was approved by the Ethics Committee of the university where it was conducted, based on national legislation. First, we obtained approval from the university and college prep course administration, located at the public university where one of the authors worked as a teacher. We contacted teachers in the proximity, and we were allowed to talk with their students. We contacted the participants in the classroom (separately for university and college prep students) and asked who was interested to respond in writing to a question read aloud and placed on a board.

We provided the participants with a sheet requesting their identification data (gender, income, age, if they participated of any social movement or party, how they search some political information) and that asked two broad questions (which relate to the objectives of this research): What is socialism for you? Do you believe that socialist ideals can be put into practice? They answered freely in their responses.

4.3 | Analysis

The mediation between the theoretical and the empirical data allowed the construction of units of analysis, which have already been demarcated, in some way, by the research questions/objectives: it is about what young people

think about socialism and indirectly what they think about the historical and contemporary political context.

The grouping of these discourses into themes was an important step to theoretically interpret our object of study because it was possible to identify similar and distinct thoughts. In the next step we identified a hierarchy of content (Jacques, 1993) that promoted an analysis not only of the repetition, but also of qualitative relevance that they assume in the construction of their discourses.

The theoretical principles of the analysis respect the principles of historical and dialectical materialism to understand the class consciousness, such as: (1) the dynamic and the complexity of this phenomenon (Iasi, 2006); (2) the link and the contradictions between individual and groups thoughts (Freire, 1981); (3) the relation and the contradictions between class consciousness, ideologies and social position (Lukács, 2003).

The categories of analysis were arranged and discussed below, and were called (1) between vague and formal notion of socialism, when discourses (especially among university students) associate socialism with a fairer and more egalitarian society, sometimes specifying or not terms such as equality, social justice and revolution; (2) Socialism as a "strong state" was a view generally shared by the participants and indicates positive and negative aspects of the state's active participation in society (a tendency of the socialist state to authoritarianism as a problematic aspect, and a tendency of the same state in enforcing social rights as a potential); (3) sympathy with socialism in which we note that, especially among university students, there is an implicit sympathy with socialist ideals, some others who look at socialism as a positive but difficult to achieve utopia (which has to do with the vague notion of socialism) and those who said they had no sympathy.

Our focus is to investigate the differences and similarities of discourses between participants in general. Here we present the topics indicated by the participants.

5 | RESULTS & DISCUSSION

5.1 | Socialism: Fairer & More Egalitarian

Is necessary to consider that most of these students did not experience any socialist system and the majority were born in the 1990-s, (i.e. in the era of neoliberalism). It is therefore not surprising that some of them have an abstract view of socialism.

We have identified content that reveals abstract - and to some extent formal - notions of the State control and power, which University students perceive as a synonymous with socialism. For example: "Socialism for me is a democratic, participatory society, whose principle is collective organization aiming at a fair and sustainable organization." (P10).

Considering, however, the polysemy of the concepts of justice and political sustainability, it is not possible to specify what P10 and other participants mean by socialism. What seems to be evidenced in general is a positive view of the socialist regime, considering a more just and egalitarian society as two fundamental characteristics, even if these terms are ill defined. Other conceptions going in this direction are from participants 21 and 23, when they say: "Socialism can be understood as an opposition to capitalism and the consequences of such system that also involve the social way of life." (P21). "Socialism is a form of structuring and guiding political governments towards securing rights for groups excluded from governments and forms of production." (P23)

There are also, especially among university students, more elaborate positions that seem to go in the direction of the differentiation proposed by Engels (1999) between utopian and scientific socialism. The author considers that the fundamental element of scientific socialism is the overcoming of the capitalist way of production on a global scale, which would not happen through isolated experiences of wealth distribution and production. This is what P10

seems to indicate when he notes that: "Socialism is very much disliked by those who do not know its proposals. It is associated with poverty and lack of goods ("She is a socialist, but she has an iPhone"). This, according to the participant, contrasts with the notion of "(scientific) socialism" (P10).

Some students present not just a vague notion of socialism, but also a formal and precise description. For example, according to P6 socialism is "a political and economic system in which proletarians would take power to build a new society".

Similarly, P9 draws attention to overcoming private ownership of the means of production as an essential feature of socialism: "Socialism is a proposal for a political and economic system in which there is no private ownership of the means of production. It is generally associated with equality/equity guidelines and greater possibility of access to cultural heritage by all (...). Or, as P4 states: "For me socialism is a political system that aims to guarantee the real equality of all subjects (in rights, access to production, education, etc.) as opposed to the current capitalist regime, which is not capable (nor interested) in guaranteeing this equality." (P4). Once again, P9 considers that "Socialism is an economic system that opposes capitalism".

In the case of college prep students, 45% seem to have a notion of socialism as a society that promotes equality of social rights. For instance, P15 states: "Socialism for me is a utopian ideal of a world (society) equal to all who live in it". But equality "for all" may seem like a utopian idea, as P15 reveals, especially if one of the characteristics of the current scenario attests to an even greater distance between rich and poor (Shorrocks, Davies Lluberas, 2016). On the other hand, it is not strange to consider that utopia is one of the forms of disqualification of socialism.

Campaigns for the disqualification of socialism (as a utopian or equally oppressive system) highlight what Martín-Baró (1983) called *institutionalized slander*. In general terms, the author refers to a slander spread by the state apparatus directed at actors who provide political resistance against the social order imposed by capitalism.

Martín-Baró (1983) observes that, as any ideology, institutionalized slander has a material basis – specifically, the Stalinism dictatorship. But he also notes that this kind of slander acts to construct the enemy image and specially contribute, historically, to create a negative image of 'communists' and dehumanize these characters. This ideological slander, therefore, has one target: strengthen the level of dominated consciousness and obscuring power relations – a process that as Friere (1981) notes runs counter to the process of conscientization.

Thus, the utopia of socialism often accommodates itself to the idea of the naturalization of social inequality, while at the same time it may coexist with a kind of moral acceptance of a fairer society, but with a lack of knowledge or disbelief of socialism in practice. As P7 states, for example, "Socialism is a stream that seeks to integrate and equal the same services to everyone, regardless of social class". And P8 seems to go in the same direction when he notes that: "It is social equality, without class superiority or inferiority." (P8). However, it is difficult to envisage a "total equality" when neoliberalism is moving in the opposite direction and when there is no concrete historical reference, feeding the idea of utopia. As P5 puts it: "(...) the fact that socialism (...) has had no real expression, and the socialisms that took place were flawed, negatively interfere with its social representation" (P5).

5.2 | Socialism: The Strong State

Socialism as a "strong state" is a relatively widespread conception between right-wing and left-wing sectors. In the first case, this conception serves to criminalize socialism as a system that represses human individuality and inevitably brings with it all forms of authoritarianism, especially that promoted by a state insensitive to human particularities (Melo, 2015). In the second case, we see typical readings of Stalinism that advocate for socialism in one country (Paulino, 2008), underscoring the necessary submission to a sovereign project undertaken by a supposedly workers' state, which, however, crushes the different political currents and the cultural and ethnic particularities of peoples and

nationalities (Trotsky, 1989) for the future enjoyment of a common good, which, however, has never been observed in practice.

In general, both University and college prep-course students do not value as positive or negative the view of "strong state." P18, for example, states: "For me socialism is the destruction of the private ownership of the means of production by the state". Or as P22 says: "Thinking about its theory, it would be a form of political organization in which one of the main guidelines is the equality of rights, the "strong" presence of the state".

For P25, socialism is characterized by "(...) a greater force of the state". This major force, according to P8, has one direction: ending private property. As the participant states: "For me socialism is the destruction of the private ownership of the means of production by the state". Also, as P3 says, "Socialism is the idea of a strong state with the function of avoiding and reducing social inequalities". These are visions that contextualize socialism within a conception of the strong state.

With the persistence of this conception, some considerations are necessary: (1) socialism, in fact, goes by the notion of a strong state as it is based on the planning of the economy under state control; (2) it is also reasonable to consider that the idea of the strong state was confirmed in all historical experiences, which in one way or another carried the slogans of socialism; (3) it is also possible to understand that the "strong state" is vulnerable to bureaucracy and authoritarianism, as revealed in the Soviet case; (4) still, we understand that socialism, according to Lenin (2004), involves the statization of private property of the means of production. However, the Russian revolutionary is emphatic in stating that the socialist state has a practical function of carrying out the collective administration of things (production and distribution of use-values) and not of people (way of life)⁶.

5.3 | Sympathy for Socialism?

Among university students, 92% did not explicitly state whether or not they are sympathetic to socialism. It follows from these responses, however, that there is an implicit but unspecified sympathy with a system that they describe as more just and egalitarian. For example: "Socialism for me is a democratic, participatory society, whose principle is collective organization for a just and sustainable organization" (P10).

At other times, the implicit sympathy with socialism manifests itself more in opposition to the capitalist system: "For me socialism is a political system that aims to guarantee the real equality of all subjects (in rights, access to production, education, etc.) as opposed to the current capitalist regime, which is not able (nor interested) to guarantee such equality" (P5).

P23, in turn, considers that "Socialism is a political and social ideology, mainly, which is based on class struggle, greater economic equality among the population (...)". In this direction, some agendas appear associated with socialism, as P3 indicates: "Some agendas such as public services, education and health, transportation are associated with it".

In the case of college prep students, only 7% explicitly stated that they have no sympathy with socialism. This is evidenced in P12's speech, for example: "It is an economic political system in which all means of production are collective, that is, the means of production are not private they belong to the state. I have no sympathy with the socialist system".

⁶This is not a simple discussion; it is even more complex if we consider that both Lenin and Trotsky did not fall prey to the dispensation of military apparatus and the use of state police force. However, we consider that the politics of persuasion is the hallmark of the Leninist project, as it is clear when Lenin proposes the NEP - New Economic Policy, which granted small properties for commercial activities, in response to claims by the peasant and urban sectors (Bettelheim, 1983). Trotsky (1989) was also concerned with the working class's way of life and culture. On matters of life, after the October 1917 revolution, he published interviews with workers and concluded that habits do not necessarily change with the changing economic plan of the Soviet Union. He thus has definitively concluded that a society would not be revolutionized without political involvement.

In contrast, there are those who are explicitly sympathetic to socialism, for example: "Socialism is a movement that aims to equalize social layers, both in the economic and cultural spheres, among others. I have sympathy with socialist ideals" (P21). This participant is part of the 21% of college prep students who explicitly stated to have sympathy with socialism. 49% said they have sympathy, but with some restrictions. They generally believe that socialism, while promoting more equality and social justice, ignores human ambition, tends to restrict individual freedom, and bureaucratize the state, making it even less democratic.

In this way, almost half of the college prep students perceive socialism positively, but as a utopian regime or with a tendency to fall into totalitarianism. So P15, for example, states: "I agree with some things, I consider myself a center-left person". Or, as P2 says: "The socialist idea is interesting, but it seems like a great revenge on the bourgeoisie, which should not be the case. Despite being an interesting view, I don't like it, just some aspects of it".

Finally, we were interested in whether being sympathetic or not to socialist ideas means that students narrative can be characterized as some level of class consciousness. To characterize some level of class consciousness, Freire (1981) affirms that it is necessary to thoroughly understand the individual's life context in their concrete relationship with the groups and the social classes, which was not possible in this study.

In any event, a lack of sympathy with socialism does not necessarily characterize a dominated consciousness (Freire, 1981), considering the complex history surrounding the slander process of socialist/communist ideas (Martín-Baró, 1983).

The students of preparatory course are more suspicious of socialism and some of them tend to reproduce the hegemonic speeches about socialism, but not without a historical basis. Distrust can also be characterized as a critical posture to face the historical facts (Lott, 2016).

The narratives indicate that students are thinking about the political reality and they have some sense of social injustice. They want to change the current political situation without necessarily knowing how to go about doing so. Perhaps they are part of those millions of Brazilians who do not feel represented by current democratic institutions (Florentino, 2008; IBOPE, 2018; Messemberg, 2015).

6 | CONCLUSION

What do young people think about socialism? They think many things even when those things are valued as positive and negative - often simultaneously - as P7's speech reveals, "Socialism is a stream that seeks to integrate and equalize the same services to everyone, regardless of social class. I have no sympathy with socialist ideals".

There are those who either did not know or chose not to make their opinions explicit. It is, of course, a complex theme, with many crossings (social, political, economic, and cultural) which explain the most varied understandings of the theme. The fact is that socialism has been treated as a taboo by society, either by those who have been disillusioned with the so-called real socialism or by others who have never shown sympathy or even those who directly fight the proposal. Clearly, it is a controversial matter. But, to what extent has socialism been defeated?

We do not have this answer either; there is only evidence that views on socialism are not homogeneous. The economic and ideological crisis of capital makes people constantly question themselves about the insecurity of their lives, of work and reflecting on the fragile democracy in which we live. Will there ever be a limit to labor exploitation? To what extent will nature survive the fierce attacks from the housing market, large industrial corporations, etc.? We do not know for sure. Ultimately, we ended up with more questions than answers. Perhaps the limits of this research are prescribed in the absence of captured discourses about alternatives and modes of resistance. For this reason, the right thing to do is to continue to study the complex movements of class consciousness today.

Our work makes us wonder whether, despite ideological campaigns of defamation (Martín-Baró, 1983), socialist ideals still resonate, especially among young people. We do not know whether socialism will succeed in the twenty-first century, but there is little doubt that capitalism is going through a structural crisis. Following Freire (1981) and Martín-Baró (1996), we must never forget that class-consciousness depends not only on popular organization, but also on the elaboration of historical memory.

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