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INTERVIEW

Interview with Ricardo Antunes: the metamorphoses of life and work

Claudia Mazzei Nogueira¹<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0130-7189>**Ricardo Lara³**<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1631-8227>**Caio Antunes²**<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8225-3831>

¹Federal University of São Paulo, Health and Society Institute, Department of Health, Education and Society, Santos, SP, Brazil.

²Federal University of Goiás, Faculty of Physical Education and Dance, Goiânia, GO, Brazil.

³Federal University of Santa Catarina, Socioeconomic Center, Department of Social Work, Florianópolis, SC, Brazil.

Interview with Ricardo Antunes: the metamorphoses of life and work

Abstract: In this interview, Ricardo Antunes discusses his life and studies trajectory and recalls moments of his intellectual buildup, returns to the historical contexts in which he elaborated his main works and links the central concepts of these works and pressing matters of today. In the dialogue with his interviewers, Antunes addresses issues related to trade unionism and the Brazilian labor movement, labor and social classes in global capitalism, the socio-sexual division of labor and contemporary forms of the law of value. Ricardo Antunes is Professor of Sociology at the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences of the University of Campinas.

Keywords: Biography; Work; Social classes; labor; Social Theory; Brazil.

Entrevista com Ricardo Antunes: as metamorfoses da vida e do trabalho

Resumo: Nesta entrevista, Ricardo Antunes discorre sobre sua trajetória de vida e estudos e recorda momentos de sua formação intelectual, retoma os contextos históricos de elaboração de suas principais obras e realiza mediações entre conceitos centrais destas obras e temas candentes da atualidade. No diálogo com seus entrevistadores, Antunes aborda questões relacionadas ao sindicalismo e ao movimento operário brasileiro, ao trabalho e as classes sociais no capitalismo global, a divisão sociosexual do trabalho e as formas contemporâneas de vigência da lei do valor. Ricardo Antunes é Professor Titular de Sociologia no Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas da Universidade de Campinas.

Palavras-chave: Trajetória de vida; Obra; Classes Sociais; Trabalho; Teoria Social; Brasil.

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In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and thereby also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of common wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs! (Marx, 2012, p. 31-2).

Claudia Mazzei Nogueira: Professor Ricardo Antunes, it is a pleasure to have this opportunity to interview you. To begin, we would like you to talk a little about your life paths.

Ricardo Antunes: I was born into a middle-class, lower-middle-class family. My father, who used to work in offices as a broker, during the period in which I was born went to study law. I still remember that, on weekends, he would go to the city of Taubaté — he was studying Law at the *Faculty of Taubaté* — and, when he graduated, he took up a career as a lawyer. He was a professional and, although a very simple figure, he was a qualified lawyer. Before attending Law School, he already had a technical training in economics from *Alvares Penteado Trade School Foundation* (FECAP). My mother was a public employee, she was a civil clerk.

The first house we lived in was in Pompéia, a middle-class area in São Paulo, but as it was for a very short time, I have a vague memory of this house. Later, I don't remember well, we moved to a place in the Perdizes neighborhood, a middle-class one, but at the time it was already highly valued, although the house was relatively simple.

I learned how to write, around 1959-1960, because my mother — and I owe this entirely, or almost entirely to her — would pick up the culture section of the Sunday edition of the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, sit with me, read the article and ask me to comment and to write. And not to forget anyone, I had a cousin who was a teacher, Beth, who taught me handwriting, because at that time you had to have good handwriting. She was a great teacher because she didn't force me to write with my right hand. She said: "Do you write with your left hand? So let's go there with the left hand." And here's a little metaphor: she, even then, kept me on the left and didn't try to push me to the right. That memory remains.

My primary education was at a school called *Day School Assis Pacheco*, which was a private school, two or three blocks away from my house (we walked to classes). This was a very traditional school in São Paulo and it wasn't cheap either, but my mother made a big sacrifice to pay because she thought a good education was important. I only attended a private school during my primary education, later it was impossible to pay for it. So, secondary school, or junior high, as it was called at the time, I attended in public institutions. At the school I entered, *State School Zuleika de Barros*, there was no day lecture (because the school building was still under construction), so I was forced to study at night, at the *Miss Browne School* building, which was a school group that at night freed up its space for the junior high and prep school.

When, in high school, I don't remember if it was in the first or second year, the *State School Zuleika de Barros* building was ready, and we went to the new address, on the corner of Pompéia Av. with Padre Chico Street. I remember there was a bar on the corner called *Dólar Furado*¹, which was frequented by the members of *Os Mutantes* [The Mutants], Rita Lee, Sérgio Dias and Arnaldo Baptista, when they were very young. Perhaps I could mention that, at that time, a subject that had a great impact on me, without noticing it, was history. I remember that the teacher's name was Helena, a woman who had a head far beyond reasonable and that, at a time when the dominant view was the conservative one, she was very "alternative".

I graduated in 1971 and went to college. My desire, at the time, was to be a business administrator. So, there were two alternatives: the *University of São Paulo* (USP) and *Getúlio Vargas Foundation* (FGV). FGV was very expensive, my father and mother would never be able to pay. My father had no resources and my mother would be "busting a gut", as they used to say, to pay the bills, because my father, when he had money, supported, but when he didn't, it was the law of "take it upon oneself". By the way, I must also say that I was only able to take the preparatory course because an aunt of mine, Helena Antunes, my father's sister, paid me the course. Unfortunately, she already passed.

I should also remember that I took the *Cairu Vestibulares*, which was a left-wing preparatory course for the university entrance exam, associated to the Student's Union of the *School of Economics, Business and Accounting* of the *University of São Paulo* (USP). I even remember the history teachers, José Carlos, and

¹ In a literal translation: Perforated Dollar. But the name of the mentioned bar refers to the title of the 1965 movie *Blood for a Silver Dollar*, directed by Giorgio Ferroni.

Joel Rufino dos Santos, the latter was from Nelson Werneck Sodré's group, who participated in the project "História Nova", a Marxist review of the Brazilian history. He had just got out of prison when I had a class with him, in 1971. It was a dark phase and, even though these teachers were very afraid to teach, *Cairu* was a leftist course and certainly that was vital to my mind, although at the time I didn't realize it. If I had realized, I would have gone to USP and tried to save money.

Anyway, when I took the prep course, I thought: "I'm going to try USP, I'm going to try FGV and, just to be sure, also FAP (*Alvares Penteado Foundation*), an economics school located in the Liberdade neighborhood, which is not FAAP. (*Armando Alvares Penteado Foundation*). I got into FAP, in thirtyish place, I got into USP and got into FGV, which was very competitive and, of the fifty spots, I was at the bottom.

It's a good thing I had common sense to choose FGV, but for the wrong reasons... I chose FGV because it was a business school and I wanted to be a business administrator. I had to study public management, which was free of charge, but I thought: "I'm going to leave and work with a company. I want to be a manager!" I also remember that at FGV I even took a test — look how lucky! — to be an intern at the Swedish company *Ericsson*. But the *Ericsson* manager didn't see any managing attributes in me—he must have been right—and I was refused. It was my luck.

But what changed in my mind during this period was that, when I joined FGV, I had to work. So, I went to be a lecturer, teaching history classes. Why did I teach history classes? Because I liked history. And why did I like history? Probably because that high school teacher Helena had given me some clues. And I've always been a terrible hard sciences student.

Also, luckily for me, at FGV I had professors of sociology, politics, economics and history that were amazing, and awaken and brought me to the social sciences. They were all young sociologists who had graduated from USP; most of them had completed their PhDs in Paris because of the repression and, when they returned, they went to teach at FGV. I had classes with David José, who was a TV actor, with Vanya Sant'Anna, who was a teacher and greatly influenced me (wife of the actor Gianfrancesco Guarnieri) with whom I became friends. By the way, Afrânio Mendes Catani and I, who was a student like me and who became friends with Vanya and Guarnieri. It is also worth remembering dear professor Maurício Tragtenberg. Although I was not his student (I was not lucky enough to have him lectured me course), I met him at FGV, attended his lectures and we became great friends until his death. And many others that I won't remember right now. I mentioned Vanya and David because they helped me a lot. David José always told me: "you have to go to Unicamp, at Unicamp there is Décio Saes".

When I graduated at FGV, I already knew I wanted to go to Political Science at Unicamp. And that's what I did. I remember that I was ranked first in the Political Science class at Unicamp, in addition to being the only candidate with a degree in Public Management in a course in which all the other candidates were Social Scientists. Then the story went further.

Claudia Mazzei Nogueira: Professor Ricardo, were the history classes you taught in prep courses?

Ricardo Antunes: Yes, they were history classes in prep courses. And on Brazilian history, which I liked a lot. General history did hurt me. I had to study a lot, because I didn't have a background in general history, but in Brazilian history I did, because of that teacher I mentioned, she gave me a course in Brazilian history — I had read Caio Prado Jr. in high school. And that's how I taught in prep courses until 1976, or 1977.

After I graduated, I was hired to stay at FGV teaching sociology and politics courses. I also continued lecturing at prep courses, which I gradually left. And in 1979 I started teaching at the *São Paulo State University* (UNESP). In 1986, I applied to become a professor at Unicamp. It was a very competitive position, there were 18 candidates and I was lucky to get first place during the exams. And since then, I have not left Unicamp.

Caio Antunes: Professor Ricardo, within your path and your education moments, how and when did you come into contact with labor issues and how was your militancy built?

Ricardo Antunes: In 1974 and 1975, I was already studying Marx's work. At that time, I frequented bookstores that Marxist leftist intellectuals went to. I bought books at a bookstore on Aurora Street and it belonged to a group of Portuguese people who sold left-wing books published in Portugal. I also frequented the *Ciências Humanas* [Human Sciences] bookstore, also on the left, which was located in downtown São Paulo. I went to these bookstores every Saturday morning — I didn't schedule any other errands — and I bought my books there. At the bookstore on Aurora Street, which I believe was called *Avanço* [Forward], they sold everything: there was Lenin, Mao Zedong, Trotsky, Kautsky, Bernstein, Rosa Luxemburg, etc., all in a

pocket format. This helped me a lot to get closer to Lenin's work (sometime later I bought Lenin's *Selected Works* and some issues of the *Collected Works* in other languages). So, I read a lot of Lenin, read a lot of Marx and studied Lukács.

It is important to note that, when I engaged into political sociology and started to read Lukács, I already knew Marx. Therefore, the author who made my head was not Lukács, the author who made my head was Marx! Lukács was very important, as he always showed that to understand Marx, it is not enough to read his most spectacular work, which is *Capital*, so you will only have an idea of Marx. If you study other works, such as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *The Holy Family*, *The German Ideology*, *Hegel's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, you will meet "another Marx", even in quotation marks, you will meet a Marx from the time of his break with Hegelian philosophy, of the construction of dialectics, in which philosophical themes are dealt with in a masterly way. But all this always rejecting the separation between the Marx ideologue versus Marx scientist, this for me is untenable, theoretically speaking. Marx clearly says: the only break in my life — says Marx — is when I fought with Hegel's idealist philosophy. It was in 1843, when his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right – Introduction* was finished, in which he claimed to be no longer Hegelian. Since then, onwards, a new materialism was founded.

Returning to the question about political militancy... When I started teaching, at the same time I was in college, it was a new world. As I said before, FGV, which was very different from the FGV of today, had in its Social Sciences courses several recent PhD graduates, who came back from France — many, in fact, later went to Unicamp, USP, UNESP and so on.

On the one hand, FGV had a politicized Student's Union. It was during the dictatorship and we had a lot of political debates, marches, etc. On the one hand, lecturing, I started to work in the teachers' organization, because our union was a double-crosser and we were in the opposition. In 1974 or '75 I joined a movement called the Teachers' Union Opposition Movement. We held meetings, which were not illegal, but in the midst of the dictatorship, with various left-wing groups, factions from the armed left, groups from the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB). That's when I approached the PCB, which had a cell teachers' organization leadership.

Even earlier, between 1973 and 1974, a friend from FGV and I, Armando De Sante, were talking about that experience at USP, which we knew little about, in fact, from a reading group about *Capital*. He proposed: "Let's do a reading of *Capital*, the two of us?". I immediately agreed! I had already read Josué de Castro, Caio Prado Jr., Marx, Weber, Durkheim, etc., because at FGV there was a good education in the human sciences, with Maurício Tragtenberg and many other very qualified cadres. And we started studying "Capital". We met once a week, usually at his house.

At that moment I was finishing my studies and my dear friend and professor Maurício Tragtenberg, I clearly remember, sitting on a wall in the entrance hall of FGV, said to me like this (he called me Ricardinho [Richy]): "Ricardinho, you study Lukács, right?" (I had taken the course on *History and Class Consciousness* at FGV). "You have to go to the School of Sociology and Politics and take a course with Zézinho [Joey]. Look for Zézinho, say it was me who referred you". I went. Zézinho was José Chasin, an intellectual who, at that time, led the *Ensaio* group, a small group, but with many professors, which included Marco Aurélio Nogueira, Gildo Marçal Brandão, Antonio Rago Filho, Narciso João Rodrigues Júnior and several others... Gradually, I approached this group, which was, shall we say, a group within the PCB, which at the time was illegal. Many of the meetings were in our homes. It was from there that, along with the oppositional movement of teachers, I got to know and started to participate in the metallurgical workers struggle, especially with the burst of strikes in the ABC region, in 1978.

Ricardo Lara: Professor Ricardo, we would now like to address your studies, especially research on the world of labor. It is evident that your biography already placed you face to face with working class situation in Brazil. But what led you, as a researcher at the Brazilian university, to investigate labor, the labor movement, and the working class?

Ricardo Antunes: When I graduated from FGV, in 1975, I listened to David José and Vanya Sant'Anna and applied for a master's degree at Unicamp. It was the best thing I ever did. By the way, when I die, if possible, I want my body to be veiled at Unicamp, even if it's just for a few hours, because Unicamp is part of my biography.

In this process, there were about five or six project titles to choose from and one of them was about "populism and social classes in Brazil". I was hardworking and studious and I read everything that Octavio Ianni, Guerreiro Ramos and others had written about populism. When I arrived for the interview, Carlos Estevam

Martins, a well-known professor of Political Science in Rio de Janeiro, but who worked at USP and Unicamp, analyzed my project and asked me about the reason for the term populism being employed in the project.

In the *Ensaio* group we rejected the theory of populism. And it was already clear to me that I wanted to study the working class. So, I replied: “the other topics of study you have proposed are about ‘middle class’, ‘State and regime’, ‘parties’. So, my dear, I am talking about populism not because I want to, but because you who forced me to address populism, because I want to study social classes”. And I added: “Now if you want to know, I want to do a critical study of populism here at Unicamp”. I was then approved first place between all the candidates.

Unicamp was an amazing school for me. It was new, open, and all the people who taught me at Unicamp were left-wing. I’m not discussing here which left tonality, as there were options for all tastes. And I joined Décio Saes’ group, to whom I am indebted and for which I have great admiration. Especially because Décio, a high-quality, greatly educated Marxist who studied in Europe, is an Althusserian. And he had many reasons to refuse me, because I was never an Althusserian, but, on the contrary, he integrated me into the group.

I was already a militant in the trade union opposition, my embrace of Marxism happened in 1973, and in 1974 I was already a clear Marxist. And Unicamp had just acquired the personal archive of Edgard Leuenroth, a former militant anarcho-syndicalist who lived in Brazil and who had a huge mass of newspapers. I then immersed myself in those newspapers and that is how I did my master’s thesis, which I defended in 1980. I was the first student in my class to do it. I studied a lot! But I also worked too much. I was a school teacher, I had to work hard to survive, to guarantee our sustenance, because by then I was already a father.

In 1980 something important happened in my personal life that was decisive. When I finished my master’s degree, I had two thesis projects in my head. One of them was to make a critical analysis of the theory of populism, which I had tried in my master’s thesis and that resulted in the book: *Working Class, Unions and Parties in Brazil*, a study of the 1930s in Brazil. This was an older idea, but I was immersed in the militancy and struggle of the ABC region, I knew all the workers’ leadership of that time, some of which were very close to us, within the ABC, but more connected to dissidents of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB). We ourselves were already in dissidence at this time. Luís Carlos Prestes had already broken with the PCB in 1979, or 1980, accusing the PCB of soaring reformism. We also had this reading and split with the PCB at this moment.

But at the same time, Márcio Naves, my great friend for decades, told me about a scholarship, for which I should apply, to study in Germany. That possibility shook my head. I was young, 26 to 27 years old, but at that time I had finished my MA, I already had books and articles published, was already writing in the press and was a professor at FGV, I began teaching there in 1976. I had a job. And I loved teaching. By the way, in March 2022 I will complete 50 years as a teacher. I started in 1972, by my 19 years old I was already a teacher.

Studying Marx in Germany would have been wonderful, it was a dream. But I couldn’t go to Germany. I couldn’t go there and come back without work. I had to think about my real life. I had a two-year-old son and a daughter on the way and, in addition to FGV, I worked as a professor and researcher at the *Foundation for Managerial Development* (Fundap), a role that assured, in terms of resources, the payment of my child’s school. Also, my heart pounded when the working class came along. So, I decided to stay in Brazil and study the working class. What was decisive at that moment was militancy and strikes. I followed, for example, all the 1978 assemblies in Vila Euclides.

Ricardo Lara: Professor Ricardo, your speech reminded me of the book *Labor Rebellion: workers confrontation in the ABC region - the strikes of 1978/80*. I think that this book was the outcome of your direct involvement with the working class, as a political and theoretical militancy, because, as Marx said: “one basis for life and another for science is, beforehand, a lie”. Because of this, studying the working class was almost a necessity in view of the theory and the reality you were experiencing in Brazil at the time? Secondly, given the mobilizations of the Brazilian working class in this period, how important was the mass strike for the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat?

Ricardo Antunes: You see, in the ABC cauldron I followed the strikes of 1978, 1979, I did several interviews. In 1980 I had already received an invitation from my dear friend and teacher Vanya Sant’Anna to write the book *What is trade-unionism*. I remember that I went to give a copy to Lula at the headquarters of the Metallurgical Union in São Bernardo, and wrote a dedication to him. I saw, several times, workers who had this book. I remember one day, during a debate at the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper, that a worker had the booklet in the pocket of his jacket.

Ricardo Lara: In your book *Labor Rebellion*, Florestan Fernandes² points out that in his analysis it is evident that a new cycle for the Brazilian working class is beginning. Did this new cycle end with the class conciliation government of the *Workers Party* (PT)? It is possible to criticize the capitulation, that occurred mainly in the PT government, by a labor aristocracy. In fact, can we use this category to think about the working class in Brazil?

Ricardo Antunes: The study that resulted in *Labor Rebellion* was the PhD thesis I developed at the University of São Paulo (USP). It was when I met Paulo Silveira, Heloisa Fernandes, who became dear friends of mine. And it was a joy to receive Florestan's remark on the front flap of my book. At the time, he was already in the PT's parliamentary work. So, I studied the ABC region during the cycle of 1978, 1979 and 1980. You know, I don't like to reread what I wrote, because it is very marked by time. Sometimes, I read texts I wrote and I think: "what am I talking about here?", at other times I think: "gosh, I got it right". Anyway, it's our whole life path and studies.

Of course, at that time there was a lot of optimism. Luiz Werneck Vianna, for example, who is a brilliant, erudite, cultured intellectual, who was from the PCB, although his position was different from ours — we had been out of the PCB since 1979, 1980 —, said that it was being born there the workers' republic. And when studying the strikes of 1978, 1979 and 1980 I interviewed these workers, I went to all the assemblies. I lived it! Of course, there was great optimism, but I could see, there in the strikes, that there were some difficulties.

For example, there was an interview with Lula — it was a group of 4 or 5 people, still at the time of *Ensaio* journal. If I remember correctly, Antonio Rago Filho, Paulo Barsotti, Dolores Prades and I went there to interview Lula to find out what his conception of a party was. We spent two days at Lula's place, 16 hours debating with him, there must be about 300 transcribed pages. It would be nice if we could recover this interview, which is a precious document.

We had a lot of admiration for Lula, but also some differences. Lula had a brother who was connected to the PCB, Frei Chico, I knew him a well. The PCB had a very reformist and conciliatory position, and Lula said: "I don't want to form a party to align itself with the bourgeoisie like the PCB". And he added: "I am against the PCB because I want a class party". But did the PT have to be socialist? Lula said no. For him, the answer was: "the masses will debate". Lula never made a statement that capitalism has to be demolished by a socialist and classless society. And why didn't he? Because he doesn't believe in it. When I asked him if he supported collective property, he replied: "I defend that everyone has their own property". He believes that it is possible for the bourgeoisie to give in a little and the working class to gain a little.

But it is unfortunate that an exceptional conciliator like Lula, from the bourgeois point of view, had imprisonment as his prize for conciliation. Lula himself was tired of saying - and he was right! - that the bourgeoisie never earned so much money as during his governments. And what reward did he get from it? It was 580 days in the Federal Police jail in Curitiba and, I must say again, unjustly! So, this conciliatory attitude Lula already had, its origins are there in the past, it is an ideological compromise, a refusal to have a transforming, anti-capitalist stance.

And during the break from the interview, and this is not recorded, I remember that, with all due respect that I always try to have, especially with figures that we hold in high esteem, without any petulance, I asked him, "Lula, have you read *The Communist Manifesto*?" I knew he hadn't read it. I imagine that, at that time, Lula, who is very intelligent, and by then was even more so, because he had laborer sensibility - and anyone who has been in an assembly knows what I am talking about - studied very little. People close to him say that during the period that he was in prison - which was not easy, because they were many months in prison - he read a lot. I can imagine what it means for a person of his age, with the political life he had, to suddenly, unfairly, end up in prison for a political and criminal decision by a former judge who is a symbiosis between fascism and liberalism.

About reading of the *The Communist Manifesto*, he did not lose his temper and answered me: "I learned surplus value in the factory," which is an extremely intelligent answer. I imagine that he thought: "What does this kid want to teach me about surplus value theory? I am a worker, I know. I had an accident at work and this kid wants to teach me?"

Returning to the time of the ABC strikes, Lula was a spontaneous sort of leadership. Lenin, for example, says that natural leaders are important, they are vital, but for class struggle, spontaneous struggle needs something more. And in *Labor Rebellion* I try to show some constraints, but not through the labor aristocracy

² Florestan Fernandes was a very important Brazilian sociologist and wrote the front flap of the book.

concept. This is very important! There, I even criticize Maria Hermínia Tavares de Almeida, who at the time was studying the working class - today she has become an intellectual more focused on political science issues. Maria Hermínia, who was my professor at Unicamp, and for a short period of one year was my advisor when Décio Saes went abroad, in her PhD thesis *State and Working Classes in Brazil (1930-1945)*, put forward the idea that a pole of working-class aristocracy was, let's say, sprouting in Brazil.

I don't agree with that idea because for there to be a working-class aristocracy, there has to be a core of the working class that is benefiting enormously from the exploitation of the working class in other countries. So, it is possible to have a working-class aristocracy in Sweden or in England, because they are imperialist countries. Sweden has Ericsson, which has companies here. Brazil was never imperialist. Brazil has always been a country of the periphery. See all the discussion that Ruy Mauro Marini has about sub-imperialism, and I will leave that for another moment, but sub-imperialism is not imperialism. So, there is no country of the periphery that has generated a worker's aristocracy.

The problem of the Brazilian working class was not one of favorable conditions for its exploitation, because the Brazilian working class was experiencing wage dumping. In fact, on this point Lula was radical, in the etymological sense of the word: the metallurgical working class was suffering from salary reduction. This is what brought Lula to the national stage. He said: "it is not true that the metallurgical workers earn well, they suffer from salary squeeze". The metallurgical worker earned more than other workers because he was in a top nucleus, but the worker aristocracy is another thing. I have never agreed with the assumption that there is a labor aristocracy in Brazil.

What happened was what Lula underlined, let's say, in his answer: "I don't care about theory, I don't care about Marxism." It is no accident that Lula never said he was a Marxist or that he knew Marx's work - I can't say that about the more recent Lula. You see, we joined the PT in 1983 and I left in 2003, right after Lula's government had carried out the proposal for social security reform. And it was the beginning of the government, huh? That is the proof, and I have written about it many times.

Part three of the book *The Privilege of Servitude*, in which I deal with the Brazilian tragedy and try to analyze, with some care - even if critically - the conciliatory government. Lula is a man of conciliation. But he already was in the past. Only that at that moment in the ABC, the international monopoly bourgeoisie did not want class conciliation. And this, so to speak, leads to my idea that the ruling working class core of the ABC region refused a transforming, revolutionary, socialist, anti-capitalist theory.

And we know that I am not today an advocate of vanguardism, that there is a vanguard that raises the consciousness of the class. Workers' consciousness is formed, in the struggle, from a very complex symbiosis between daily action and reflection on it. It is not a theory that stems from the outside, as in Kautsky's simplified reading of Lenin, for example. In this sense, Rosa Luxemburg was very precious in bringing that the workers' vanguard is born from a symbiosis of actions, of the concrete struggle and the reflective thinking about it. And Lenin, too.

In the book *The Labor Rebellion*, one of my subjects was to investigate the strike and to what extent it moves the workers' consciousness towards a transformative and perhaps socialist consciousness, and when it ultimately obliterates this consciousness. Lenin said that "the strike instills with enormous force the idea of socialism. A victory takes us forward. A defeat can represent years of regression." And it was that theme that triggered me in *The Labor Rebellion*.

I see two spectacular figures of compromise in Brazil, two giants of conciliation: Presidents Lula and Getúlio Vargas. But there is a major difference: Getúlio was an oligarch. For an oligarch to be conciliatory with the working class is curious, it is noteworthy. Now, for a worker to be conciliatory towards the bourgeoisie is damaging. And let's not forget that we are on the eve of a new electoral cycle. The support that Lula gives, for example, today to Geraldo Alckmin is the same that he gave, ten or fifteen years ago, to Temer. If you asked Lula at that time if Temer was or was not a putschist, Lula would say: "never!" A putschist is not born like this, it is real life that makes him a coup-plotter.

However, the labor movement is cyclical. If you think about the strike wave in the ABC region from '78 to '80, it is over. But the class struggle has not. The ABC struggles played an important role, or, to use a word that is not a concept, they had a spectacular "demonstration effect". The ABC strikes stirred the class struggle in the whole country. And I know because I was there. The strikes erupted in the country, rural workers, teachers, civil servants, doctors, garbage collectors. It was a key moment in the class struggle in Brazil. Now, the bourgeoisie doesn't play around. President João Figueiredo himself said: "We are not going to make any

concessions to the ABC strikes, because we have to annihilate this movement. This is a class struggle and it has to be annihilated.”

In short, my criticism points more towards a certain “social democratic” reading, a certain ideology of conciliation, than towards the theory of workers’ aristocracy, that, in my judgment, has no place in Brazil. Leôncio Martins Rodrigues, for example, said that in the working class of the ABC there was no space for a revolutionary and anti-capitalist posture, but Leôncio does not speak of a worker’s aristocracy. Maria Hermínia Tavares de Almeida is the one who talks about workers’ aristocracy. If you look at 1978 and 2022, you will say that, on this issue, Leôncio was right. And he got it right because there was never in the metallurgical unions in the ABC a clearly anti-capitalist, much less socialist, leadership, never!

There was a core, let’s say, a little reluctant to the Marxist ideology. And this rejecting character made it so that the leaderships were well chosen. Lula always knew very well who he chose to put here and there. When he was in the union he did this, and in the PT he continues to do this. Lula is a democratic personality, there is no doubt about it. But no piece is moved in the PT without him guiding it, just like in the ABC in those days.

This brings us to another question, which has nothing to do with the worker aristocracy. When the PT came to power, the serious mistake it made was to remove the top leadership from trade union activism and take it to parliamentary and institutional party militancy within the state. This took the ABC leadership out of the concrete struggle. Lula always had a compromise position, but in the concrete struggle of the strike, with 60 thousand workers, he took this struggle to the front. There was no conciliation - the companies didn’t want it! -It was struggle and reflection, resistance and confrontation. When Lula became a political leader, then the scenario changed.

It is no accident that one of Marx’s most outstanding criticisms is that the state is always, in the last instance, a bourgeois entity. And being a bourgeois political embodiment, it will always be, in the last instance, an organ of representation of the bourgeoisies. In history, I don’t recall an election-winning experience of a state that became an anti-capitalist and socialist state. And even more, this thesis is so intricate and rich that even workers’ states that were born out of socialist revolutions could not make the final breakthrough. These dominating groups of the PT imagined that it was possible to bring workers’ leaderships from the ABC Paulista that were used to the struggle in the factory, to the ministries. But in the ministries, there is money, there are resources. You go to a meeting and get a compensation that you wouldn’t get in a year working as a blue-collar worker.

That’s very messy, but that’s not worker aristocracy! It’s another phenomenon. For Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa, Marx and Engels, the workers’ aristocracy was a core that benefited, within the working class, from the super-exploitation of the imperialist countries in relation to the peripheral countries. This is what typifies the working class aristocracy. Other matters are the ideological deformations.

Claudia Mazzei Nogueira: Professor Ricardo, we would like to highlight two of your books, *Farewell to Labor?*, from 1995, and another remarkable work, *The Meanings of Work*, from 1999. In *Farewell to Work?*, which has already been published in several countries, such as Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, Spain, Galicia, Italy, England, and the Netherlands, you argue with some important authors, particularly with André Gorz, about the thesis of the end of the proletariat, and you also point to other authors who follow the same perspective.

It is also worth mentioning that in this work you are one of the first critical Marxist and Lukacsian theorists to address the very important question of women. In the chapter on *Individual, Class and Human Species: the Moment of Party Mediation*, we have the following paragraph: “Another goal of this text is to reaffirm the pertinence of linking parties and social classes as a fertile analytical ground. It will not be argued here, however, the analytical exclusion of thinking the relationship parties/social classes/human species [remembering the human species as a generic being as a conscious being] as incompatible with the connection of parties/classes and the question of gender/women. It is unfortunate to see that besides the enormous analytical impoverishment present when we study the relation between parties and social classes today (today referring to the 1990’s - CMN’s emphasis), there was also in the theoretical grossification and simplification of this century, the pure and simple exclusion of the gender specific question of women in the interconnections existing between parties and classes-who-live-off-their-labor. In spite of this, the question of classes, parties and women remains” (Antunes, 1995, p. 136). That highlighted quote is very important. And I think you inaugurate this debate of class, party, movements linking it also to the feminine question. Could you comment a bit on this issue?

Ricardo Antunes: I had defended my PhD thesis in 1986 and was writing the book *The Trade Unionism in Brazil*. In 1989, when I went to Europe for the first time, to Italy in this case, it was a shock to notice two aspects: the first is that it was no longer possible to talk about the working class only in Brazil, in Argentina, or in the United States, because we live in a globalized economy. It is impossible to study the Brazilian working class without considering the international landscape; it is no longer possible to discuss only Brazil, because the changes are global. What Marx brilliantly pointed out, together with Engels, in 1847/1848: “the capital has a tendency to constitute a world market”. And because there is a world market, it is necessary to study China, India, England, the United States, Europe, etc., otherwise you will not comprehend what is occurring in Brazil.

The second remark is that after staying a month in Bologna, which was the communist city in Italy, in a kind of a short post-doctorate, I confirmed the hypothesis that there was no more mention of the working class or trade unionism, only citizenship and social justice. And what was the dominant literature there? Claus Offe and the notion that labor is no longer the central category. Habermas had not yet written his *Theory of Communicative Action*, but *Technology and Science as Ideology* and *Towards the Reconstruction of Historical Materialism* no longer passed by the labor category.

Yet it is clear from the title itself that *Farewell to Work?* is a critique of Gorz and his 1980 *Farewell to the Proletariat*. There, Gorz employs, for example, the category of the “non-class-of-non-workers. When I read that I thought, “non-class-of-non-workers? Then it’s nothing!” The non-class-of-non-workers is a conceptualization of absolute indeterminacy. Non-class-of-non-workers is everything that is not working class, but he was saying that this was the working class.

Claus Offe claims that in the Welfare State society, where what dominates is public labor and no longer private labor, there is no longer a positive work ethic. It is a kind of Weberianism, that to discuss the centrality of labor I have to check if there is a work ethic? If I’m going to discuss it “Marxically”, I don’t even have to discuss if there is a work ethic, because, for Marx, there is exploitation of labor and alienated labor results from it. So, the question of ethics is not taken by positivity, but by destruction. These authors had made a huge mistake.

Also, when I was just beginning to draft *Farewell to Work?*, a book on my hands that had just been published in Brazil, Robert Kurz’s *The Collapse of Modernization*. This book was vital for me. For the first few days, I couldn’t read Kurz’s book, I couldn’t see any sense, things didn’t fit together. When I got to about the fifteenth page, I got the nerve of the book and read it all in one night. It is a spectacular book, because it is deeply right and at the same time deeply wrong. How is this possible? The debate appears in an appendix (*The Crisis Seen in its Globality*) to *Farewell to Work?*

In *Farewell to Work?* which is basically my habilitation thesis, defended in 1994 and published in 1995, the primary authors are Gorz, Offe and Kurz. It was then that I realized that I had to confront Habermas, but this was not possible in this book. It turned out that when a position for tenure-track professorship was open in November 1993 and I went to apply, the time frame for the exam was six months, that is, mid-1994. I would then have six months to prepare this text. But in December (1993), Sueli, who was the clerk of the Sociology Department, called me and told that the position already opened and that I would have one month to deliver the thesis, the memorial and all the documentation. What normally takes six months, came out in one month and I had nothing ready. Sueli then advised me that if, after the deadline of one month, there were no other candidates, we could ask for an extension, which, if approved, would give me another month.

My family went on a trip and I stayed working. I worked morning, afternoon, night and dawn at home alone, starting at 10 o’clock in the morning and stopping at 3 or 4 o’clock in the morning. And so, all of a sudden, I wrote 120 pages of a work that was supposed to have 300. Maybe I was even very fortunate, because I think the book has a synthesizing capacity that we normally don’t have. Besides, the last chapter [*Which crisis of the labor society?*], for lack of time, came out like this: thesis one, thesis two, thesis three, thesis four... one brick after another.

But I was very frightened of the examining board. I thought: “How am I going to present a 120-page dissertation? It is a question of size. It is not possible!” So much so that I chose to put together everything I had written since my doctorate, but with an entirely unpublished text. This made up two volumes, almost 350 pages. That is why *Farewell to Work?*, if you look at the first edition, has the text and some seven/eight appendices. That’s literally what I defended in my thesis.

And here I have to remember Maurício Tragtenberg, who was fantastic. The dissertation board was Octavio Ianni, Paulo Silveira, Sedi Hirano, Celso Frederico and Maurício Tragtenberg. Maurício, who was old enough to be my father, and who knew him to be a giant of the social sciences, called me about ten days

before the examination and said, just like that: “Hey, Ricardinho, I just read your book. It is spectacular! Then I said: “Maurício, if you like it, then I am relieved”. And he said: “your text is wonderful. I am thrilled!” Then I thought: “well, I won’t fail it.” And I also joked with him: “So can I count on your support, Maurício, if things get ugly?” And he said: “If things get ugly? You dismantled the toyotist system”. Nobody has done that! And Maurício knew what he was saying. He was so erudite. I can’t say that he read Japanese, but he read French, English, German, he looked up Russian, he was a genius. Afrânio and I, by the way, when we worked at FGV – from 1976 to 1982 – shared an office with Maurício. Every day he had a book on a different language in his hand, which he would later lend us.

So, in the book *Farewell to Work?* I engage in a heavy controversy with Gorz and with Offe, respectfully, but a heavy one nonetheless. And Kurz came in at the end, as an appendix. Even because Kurz’s book gave me an inspiration, because it is one of the most important books of anti-capitalist soul. But in Kurz’s book, the theory of value had disappeared and the Marx of class struggle was pure ideology. But what Kurz was doing so spectacularly was a demolition of capital by the fetishism of capital. But what alternative to demolishing capital? He had none. He clearly leaves the working class aside, because for him the working class is labor power; labor power is commodity; the role of the working class has been to struggle to increase the price of its labor power; so it’s a bourgeois struggle; then the working class is unable to tear down capitalism. To summarize a complex author, that is the kernel of the matter. Except that Kurz is wrong!

And from Gorz and his “non-class-of-non-workers”, “the class-that-lives-from-labor” was born. And what is my originality in that phrase? None whatsoever! The class that lives from the sale of its labor power is, Marx and Engels’ decisive thesis, the working class. Marx never said that it has to be industrial, rural or whatever. It is the class that lives from the sale of its labor power. To the “non-working-class” I counterpose “the class that lives from labor”. And why not “the class that lives from exploitation?” Because there is the author’s thing. I remembered that Marx uses in German - these days I was talking with Jesus Ranieri and we remembered that we had already translated it – “the class of people who only work”, there in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, from 1844. And Engels talks about the “class of those who live from labor,” or something like that.

Claudia Mazzei Nogueira: What about the wording “a meaningful life in and from work”?

Ricardo Antunes: This is an expression that Lukács inspired very strongly. The whole *Farewell to Labor?* is very strongly inspired by Lukács. But if you ask me which author has influenced my work, with all the limits that my work has, the author who inspired me is Marx. The second one that impressed me is Lukács. Then comes several others, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg... Now this “life time within work or out of work” is a very important discussion that Lukács has in his *Ontology*, in fact, since before. For example, in the concept that Lukács brings up in 1923: “the reification of the proletariat”. You see, Lukács develops the theory of the reification of the proletariat without having read the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, which were not published until the early 1930s. In other words, Lukács anticipated a thesis that was already in the *Manuscripts*, but that he did not and could not know. It is astonishing.

Now on the women’s question. First, when I went to England, in 1997, I only confirmed something that I already guessed: the female contingent of the working class had supplanted the male contingent. There were more women working than men. It was no longer possible to say, then, that the working class is male. You will not see a single lecture of mine in which I say “the worker”, it is always “the working man and the working woman”. Why? The working woman knows! Because of the socio-sexual division of labor, the exploitation, the oppression, the double shift, the triple shift. In *Farewell to Work?* this topic entered as an appendix, already in the first edition, when it caught my attention.

I presented this text at the *National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in the Social Sciences* (ANPOCS), invited by two feminists, with whom I had a close contact at the time and whom I like until today, although the relationship is reduced. One is Lena Lavinas, a professor at the *Federal University of Rio de Janeiro* (UFRJ), who always invited me to do seminars on the working class when the working class was being demolished. And the other is Eleonora Menicucci, our friend from the *Federal University of São Paulo* (UNIFESP).

They were part of a strong, important feminist group that was repelled by the old Marxist view that the working class is masculine, only men. Because there are people even today who think that the female question is irrelevant, that the racial question is not important, that the indigenous question is equally irrelevant, that the ethnic question is not significant. Yet the working class is white, black, male, female, LGBT, and ethnically

differentiated, nationally differentiated. It is rare, for example, when treating the working class, for the immigrant to be at the top, he is the so-called scum, no rights and all that. It was then that I started to expose this theme in *Farewell to Work?*, which was later deepened, in 1999 - nine years later - in *The Meanings of Work*.

For there is this interpretation in Marxism, which is not supported by Marx, not supported by Engels, a traditional and crude Marxism that understands that the feminine question doesn't matter. When Marx says in *Capital*, his greatest work of all, "Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin." Marx tried to draw attention to this. But did Marx address all the issues? No. No one is God. In fact, the only certainty that Marx had is that God did not exist - and I need to say that in this I am a completely Marxist. Marx understood that this picture is a human creation, a masterful creation, but a human creation.

But to return to the arguments of the book, traditional Marxism neglected these questions. But not Marx. He says, already in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, when he was 25 to 26 years old, that the first form of class struggle is the domination of men over women, who become prey to men. It cannot be said that Marx did not deal with these issues. Now, he didn't treat them as we would like to treat them today, as Rosa Luxemburg didn't either, and she was a woman. In fact, Rosa Luxemburg has a masterful passage, which goes like this: "women have to fight for a socially equal, humanly just, and individually different society." Imagine if men, women, LGBT people, everyone had to be equal. Mészáros speaks of this very well when dealing with "substantive equality." And I say, in *The Senses of Work*, that it is a basic equality, from which the authentic diversity of the possibilities of emancipation can flourish.

Thus, there is a transversality of class, gender, ethnicity. And when I first sketched the idea, it was not only the sexual division of labor - I incorporate this French concept - but I bring in, in 1999, the socio-sexual division of labor. Claudia, in her books, resumes these questions and has been, in the Marxist analysis of women's labor, the one who has most called attention to this. Because the sexual division is also social. Even if Helena Hirata integrates this, Claudia, by calling it the sociosexual division of labor, is emphasizing that it is not only a sexual construct, it is a socially given and sexually shaped construct.

Claudia Mazzei Nogueira: In the book *The Meanings of Work*, besides expanding on your polemic with Habermas, you raise some aspects that we think are extremely important. One of them is specifically about the gender issue in labor, articulating it with class issues. You say: "Working women, in general, perform their work twice, both inside and outside of the home, or if we prefer, inside and outside the factory. And, in doing so, despite the twofold nature of the act of work, they are doubly exploited by capital. Firstly, by exercising, in the public sphere, their productive labour in the factory. Secondly, in the realm of private life, by dedicating hours to domestic work that secures their reproduction - a sphere of not directly commercial work in which the indispensable conditions for the reproduction of the labour-force of her husband, children and herself are created". (Antunes, 2000, p. 108). Could you address these dimensions of Production and Reproduction?

Ricardo Antunes: In *The Meanings of Work* I approached this theme and I was beaten up by many rugged Marxists. There is a wing of Marxism that even today thinks that the women's question is unimportant, that the question of blacks is irrelevant. If we were black men and women, we would understand what it is to be black in a society where there is an elevator for the rich, for the white, and an elevator for the poor, for the black. And if the black person is rich, then he can take the white elevator. But always with some distrust of the white man.

But Marx notes in 1844 that, "if they could, workers [and working women, I would make that distinction] would run away from work as from a plague." Human emancipation is not just about the emancipation of labor. That is crucial, but emancipating labor does not mean automatically ceasing to have patriarchal oppression, domestic violence against women, against LGBT people. And there is a class feminist movement, Marxist, anti-capitalist, since the 1970s, in England, in France, very significant. But there is a bourgeois feminist movement. As there is a crucial anti-racist and anti-capitalist black movement, and there is an anti-racist movement, but bourgeois.

The postmodern view today wishes to have women acting in all spheres, but without questioning capital. Therefore, the decisive matter is the joint struggle between the feminist fight and the anti-capitalist one, the feminist and socialist strife, therefore, in connection with the class struggle. This I have always tried to show. Hence, the emancipation of labor is a vital starting point which does not solve the problem, it is a stepping stone.

The North American Marxist Wendy Goldman, who I personally met, shows, for example, how many improvements occurred in women's lives in the first years of the Russian Revolution. But patriarchy does not cease to exist with the end of private property. This is very important here. The end of private property

is crucial, but it doesn't eradicate patriarchy, because there was patriarchy before private property. We have primitive communities that had patriarchal societies.

My inspiration for the dimensions of production and reproduction comes, then, first of all from Lukács' seminal *Ontology of Social Being*. Lukács shows, and this is a Marxian thesis, that there is no production without reproduction, and no reproduction without production. There is no Chinese wall between the labor of production and the labor of reproduction. The labor of production and the labor of reproduction have far-reaching connections. The production of life is the labor of reproduction.

There is a certain feminist movement that believes that, let's say, it is very important to define productive female labor in the capitalist sense. I absolutely reject this! And I reject it because productive labor in the capitalist sense is that which extracts the flesh and soul of the worker and forces her to be a mere labor force. So productive labor for capital is destructive. This is why Marx says, and I've already quoted, that, "if they could, workers would run away from work as from a plague." And in chapter 16 of *Capital* he says, "To be a productive laborer is, therefore, not a piece of luck, but a misfortune." Because when you are the labor force that creates surplus value, whether you are a man or a woman, but with differences, the soul, the brain, the body, physicality and the psyche, everything is co-opted and destroyed.

And this pandemic has taught us how much the labor of the reproduction, mainly - but not exclusively - female, is a labor that creates socially useful values. This is the work that has to be valued. This is why I affiliate myself with authors like Lise Vogel and Ursula Huws, who argue that the work that women crave is not productive labor that generates surplus value, but labor that is humanly useful.

There is, therefore, a Marxian distinction that Marxism cannot neglect, otherwise it will lose women. Marx, when he begins *Capital*, calls productive labor everything that is produced that is socially useful. So, what is productive labor in primitive communities? It is the work of the man who hunts and fights, it is the work of the woman who collects fruit and who cooks. But why does the man do the work outdoors and the woman inside, or why does the man go hunting and the woman cooks? Isn't there already a socio-sexual divide of labor embedded there? It is! And it is this form of division that has to be tackled. This has to be confronted and this confrontation goes via Marx.

A parallel would be worth mentioning here: Marx - like no other author in the world! - said that as long as the separation between intellectual and manual labor is not abolished, there is no emancipated society. *Mutatis mutandis*, as long as there is work done by men and work done by women, with men performing what is more valued and women doing what is less valued, there will be no truly human society! And this, a certain traditional Marxism was and has been unable to understand. But Marx and Engels left fruitful clues.

The first Agnes Heller, the one who was Marxist and Lukacsian, Kollontai, Simone de Beauvoir, all the women who fought these struggles, understood this. But I think, and this I never wrote, that the major lead in this comes from Heleieth Saffioti, who, by the way, has to be revisited. Heleieth, an expert on Marx, on Lukács' *Ontology*, created the concept of "ontological node", which is very rich.

She says that there is an ontological node in the human being that encompasses class, labor, and gender. We could add the racial, or ethno-racial, let's call it, because there is a whole complex and important anthropological debate that I am not qualified to engage in. But about this ontological node (now I am speaking for myself), we have to understand that labor is an ineliminable dimension of the human species - and this Lukács grasped and Marx, like no one else, fully understood. The proof is that Marx states that "...labor is a natural and eternal need to maintain the human-nature exchange." This pops up twice, in chapter 1 and chapter 5 of *Capital*.

From the *Ontology of Social Being*, and here I, for better or worse, allow myself the transversality, it is possible to apprehend that there is an interconnection between class, work, gender, race, ethnicity and generation, and if we ignore this it will not be possible to understand the working class. And which is more relevant? It is the whole! It is the "ontological node." I owe this, the first clue, to Lukács, the second to Heleieth Saffioti. We are in debt to women on many issues, and it's time to start acknowledging it. Just as we are indebted to black men and women. This issue is crucial, but I could not expect Marx to have it all figured out. Marx was masterful in creating a conception of the world that made him, Sartre was right, the unbeatable thinker of our time.

The last one who tried to surpass Marx, and imagined he had gone far, was Habermas. For example, the release of *The Theory of Communicative Action* was huge. And for a critical author to have a simultaneous release in several countries at the same time is something quite strange. Who today says that *The Theory of Communicative Action* is an absolutely unsurpassable work? Not even Habermas says that! Time has shown that Habermas' work had more apparent boldness than real boldness. The "lifeworld" does not exist outside

the “system” and Habermas himself realizes this. He has a passage that is very cute, which goes like this, “the world of the system has colonized lifeworld.” But if the system - using Habermasian terms! - has colonized lifeworld, how does work lose its relevance? Habermas couldn’t explain it, and now he’s too old to try to go back. By the way, someone asked Habermas, and this was published in a *Folha de S. Paulo* section³ more than twenty years ago, what he thought about the economic crisis. He, and I remember here from memory, said more or less like this: “look, to explain this I would have to go back to studying Marx. I don’t have the energy to study Marx anymore”.

Claudia Mazzei Nogueira: Professor Ricardo, you are about to release a book that will probably be titled *Pandemic Capitalism*. Could you explain us a little bit what this expression means?

Ricardo Antunes: This is really its title. I was uncertain whether it was *Pandemic Capitalism* or *Viral Capitalism*, but I went for the former. What is this book about? The pandemic has brought us a lot of pain. I was seeing comments yesterday (March 19, 2022) about six million dead people in the world. That’s a lot of casualties! And I really think it is much more than that. We are almost over 600,000 dead in Brazil, but some careful surveys say at least 800,000 to 850,000 dead, at the very least. In India, for example, nobody knows the exact death toll. I have only been once in India, and that was enough to know that it is impossible to quantify there. You only have to be a sociologist with sensitivity to realize that it is impossible to have a real control of deaths in this pandemic period.

I was invited by Ivana Jinkings, head of *Boitempo*, to write a book about labor in the collection *Pandemic and Capital*. I was reluctant, because I had done countless live-streams about the pandemic, I wouldn’t know what new thing I could write, but Ivana asked me to think about it for a couple of days. So, I took my notes - I always write down what I am going to say in the lectures - and started to write, but without worrying, and it was something that surprised me, because the ideas started to germinate. I revisited a key concept from Mészáros, which is original from Marx, social metabolism, that Mészáros calls the “social metabolism system of capital.” Mészáros realized, as a philosopher - Mészáros is not a critic of political economy, he is a Marxist philosopher who does Marxist political philosophy - some trends of Marx, among them that capitalism is corrosive, destructive in relation to labor, nature and humanity.

The pandemic - with its death toll - made it clear that without human labor capital cannot reproduce itself. The Brazilian, Latin American and world corporate sector went into panic when there was lockdown, because with lockdown D does not turn into D’, as D does not turn into D’ unless it is through the commodities. The pandemic showed that capitalism, besides being destructive, is also lethal. And then came the idea of the ebook *Coronavirus: work under crossfire*. Since capitalism is destructive and lethal, I make an adjustment, which I allow myself because Mészáros, besides being a master, was a fraternal friend. I miss Mészáros to this day... Very well, I then freely called the system the “antisocial metabolism of capital” - if Mészáros were alive, I would ask him if he likes it.

And that’s where this small book was born. And I was surprised, because this book was published in Italy in 2020 and has just been published in the German language in Austria. More than once I saw documents from the European left talking about pandemic capitalism, and in some cases referring to me and Pietro Basso. From there I thought I would assemble my “pandemic writings” in this new book.

In such a dark moment, watching loved ones die, seeing the world get into this crisis, witness a genocidal and criminal policy of a scoundrel that makes the president of Belarus look like an enlightened man, in short, this is a book to make my point. It is the essays of a pandemic on the horror of a pandemonium; pandemic and pandemonium, and what bundles it is capitalism. You cannot civilize capitalism, and this the pandemic confirmed.

So, for the book, I take three central points: capitalism is destructive with regard to labor; it is absolutely disruptive, at an almost unrecoverable level, with regard to nature; and with regard to gender - it breaks down women, it breaks down indigenous communities, it breaks down the black community by exacerbating racism, and it breaks down immigrants by exacerbating xenophobia, it breaks down the human species. Capitalism prevents, to remember Mészáros again, substantive equality.

Caio Antunes: Professor Ricardo, based on some leads that you brought in your previous answers, let’s move on to a third block of your works, in which I highlight *The Snail and its Shell* and *The Continent*

³ This interview was published in *Caderno Mais* [Plus Section] of the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper on April 30, 1995.

of *Labor*, which are sets of essays and texts published in magazines, newspapers, contest exams, etc. I would like to focus on the latter. In the Presentation - whose title, by the way, is a very Antunes-like pun, so to speak: *The Open Ways of Latin America* - you announce that, after twenty years of studying labor relations conditions in Brazil, succeeded by twenty years of studying labor conditions in the rest of the world, you turn to Latin America, the continent of labor.

From this you bring an idea, which seems important to us, about the historical confrontations, or new/old forms of struggle that the Andean and indigenous Latin American peoples have brought in relation to gender, ethnic, racial, exploitation and spoliation issues. Also, in some of your lectures about this book, you even mentioned that the revolution will have indigenous features, will have Andean traits. I would like you to develop this thesis a little more because it is very under discussed in relation to the people who deal with your work.

Ricardo Antunes: First of all, *The Continent of Labor*, as well as *The Snail and its Shell*, are a combination of articles. So, naturally, they couldn't have the same thread as *Farewell to Work?*, or *The Meanings of Work*, or *The Privilege of Servitude*, each in its own way. *The Privilege of Servitude* is a middle ground, because it has several pieces that were previously published, but all reworked to give it the structure of a book. About *The Continent of Labor*, there is something very interesting. The idea for this book was born with an exercise we did, Claudia and I, in Mendoza, Argentina, about ten years ago. On a free day, after our activities, the professor who had invited us to the program, Patricia Collado, and her husband, asked us what we wanted to do before we went back to Brazil. So, I asked: "how far is it from here to the Andes Mountains? She replied that it was about an hour's drive. "Then that's where I want to go!" Claudia loved the idea, because we had been to the Andean world several times before, but never by car. And on this trip, we stopped at a place to have coffee and rest a bit, when Patricia said, "here is an exquisite historical place." It's an Inca bridge. That port was the stopover center for the immense migratory flows coming from Peru, Colombia and Chile to Argentina. It was a trading post where the indigenous communities traded, stayed overnight, etc. It was there that I asked myself, "how is it that I, a Latin American, have never written a book about Latin America?"

Another thing that is also very impressive when you arrive in Mendoza is that the entire irrigation system of the city was built by the indigenous people. From the mountains come down canals built for the water to arrive, because Mendoza is a desert. Patricia told us that when the Spanish first came here to dominate, they saw a beautiful valley. On one side of the valley, everything was flowery and beautiful. On the other side, two indigenous villages, with indigenous ways of being and living. It was the first discrimination of the Spanish colonizer when he said: "we are going to live on this flowery side, because the other side is a horror. The Indians are stupid, they don't even have the capacity to understand the beauty of this side and they went to the ugly side. And the Spaniards settled on the beautiful and flowery side. But in the first flood they died, they were simply swallowed up. In other words, it is a millennial indigenous culture. That side that was beautiful and flowery because it was the side that with the rain flooded, while the other side remained dry. In other words, this is a very important cleavage to differentiate pre-Hispanic, Incaic, Andean, Latin American, etc. culture from European culture.

Another of the trips that struck me the most to this day was, in Mexico, visiting those pyramids of Teotihuacan, as they speak it-it's very hard to pronounce because we are not used to the language of the original Mexican communities. There I also thought, "how come I couldn't write a book about it?" I know several Latin American countries, but I had never written a text about labor in Latin America. And when I received Ivana Jinkings' invitation to publish the entry Labor in the *Latin American Encyclopedia*, I understood that it made no sense for me to write the entry Labor with a Brazilian or European gaze only.

More recently, we have a whole debate on the decolonial question, which I won't go into now. But I want to make one thing clear: I reject this idea that Marx is a western, white author, etc. I quote Chico Buarque who once, in a popular phrase, said: "include me out of this". Marx is not a genius of white emancipation, he is the genius of the emancipation of humanity, blacks, whites, immigrants, young people, the peripheral. That is why he is so hated by the bourgeois classes, by the wealthy classes. Now, of course, Marx has a fundamental thesis - that anyone who has studied him seriously knows that he has a key one - that there is a social determination of thinking. Marx could not, in the 19th century, think and solve all the problems of humanity. Marx was a genius, but he was not God. And on this point, if we are to follow one of his pivotal theses, the divine figure was an earthly creation. Superb! Religion - and this is in the *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* - is a form of struggle against the real misery of life. Marx realizes that religion is not a creation of someone who wanted to manipulate, but is the cry of the human being, of humanity, of the individual, who has lost his condition of humanity on earth. It is a stunning analysis. From this, then, I can't expect Marx to have

faced all the problems of feminism, the racial question, etc. He masterfully faced the question of capitalism, which is a system, to remind again my dear friend Mészáros, totalizing and totalitarian. That is: it totalizes and destroys everything. We are seeing there the war in Ukraine.

But we have a university culture where we turn our backs on Latin America and turn our faces to Europe. Then our dream is to go to France, to England, to Germany. And our backs are to the Latin American, indigenous people. It is necessary to do a re-evaluation. There will be no socialism if we don't reclaim the way of life of the indigenous communities! The indigenous communities had no commodities, no human exploitation. In fact, I remember seeing a statement by an indigenous person who said: "I am not thinking about my life, about my friend's life. I am thinking about the life of my children, my grandchildren, and human life. We have to preserve nature not only for our generation, but for the future generations. So this is a key point. The indigenous people hunt, fish and plant, but they do not depredate nature in any of these three activities, because they know how to hunt and fish while preserving the species, how to plant while preserving the fertility of the soil, without depredating. Everything, by the way, that the "white, European, civilized man", who considers himself the supreme of the world, came here to do. What can we say about a society that came here to teach that the *modus operandi* and the *modus vivendi* of a "new and modern" life is to accumulate wealth, exploit the labor force, exterminate indigenous people and enslave African peoples? It is a villainy.

We have to recover the indigenous communal way of life. The indigenous didn't need private property. And in the black revolts, in the quilombos - the most distinguished of all being *Palmares* in Brazil - life was predominantly, not exclusively, communal. There is also the Haitian Revolution of 1792, which was the first Latin American social revolution.

We cannot turn our backs on Latin America. We have to reinvent a socialism based on these two brilliant experiences that we have, which are the fundamental structuring elements: the pre-colonization epoch, with indigenous life, and the post-colonization era, with the presence not only of the white European.

And one of the ways to recover the experiences of the indigenous communities and the black ones is to go in search of the collective life experiences, of the way of life that refused private property, that were not founded on exploitation. But those lives were wonderful, didn't they have limitations? Surely, they did. There is no kind of human life without some sort of estrangement, fetishization, of dissent, of disagreement. But it is not possible to imagine that private property is, by "divine decision," sacred and untouchable. And this is the lesson that Latin America can give us.

Last point, a part of Europe, and I'm talking about the Eurocentric types, dreams of going back to the *Welfare State*. The European's dream is to go back to 50 years ago, when they "were happy and didn't know it. The dream of Latin American humanity is something we didn't have in the past, because it was shattered. What can one imagine that black men and women want to rescue from their life in Brazil? Nothing!

But what about our history? I am teaching a course at Unicamp this semester on the Thinking of Brazilian Society, in which I am going to deal with radical and leftist social thinking in Brazil. As I said, I have been a professor for 50 years and, astonishingly, for the first time I am going to teach a class about the way of life, about how the indigenous people lived. I know little about this. And why is that? Because we didn't learn about it in school. The picture that we learn about the indigenous people in school is a caricature.

If it is possible to speak of a truly sustainable society, at what point was society really sustainable in Latin America? It was in pre-capitalist and indigenous societies. The rest is unsustainable society. This is what the indigenous, Andean, Latin American people teach us. We have to have a look at the past to be able to reinvent a future. I think that this is a contribution that I tried to bring in *The Continent of Labor*.

Ricardo Lara – Professor Ricardo, in your book *The Privilege of Servitude: the new service proletariat in the digital age*, you are facing value theory as only very few face it today to study labor. It is a sociology of labor within the critique of political economy, especially when you pose the questions of "whether services can generate surplus value," or "whether immaterial labor can be productive." Here I highlight a working hypothesis that you socialize for those who study the critique of political economy: social theory is not a categorical/conceptual prescription, but something that enables us to face everyday reality, or what Marx himself always claimed of his readers in one of the prefaces to *Capital*: "I assume, of course, a reader who is willing to learn something new and therefore to think for himself." From this reasoning that thinks about reality, you present us with the following consideration: "For our part, we would add that the so-called fiction that defends the predominance of immaterial production (therefore lacking materiality) in the capitalism of our time is a Eurocentric (or Northern) creation that finds no real ontological basis, when the totality of global production is taken into account. Our hypothesis, then, is that we are witnessing on a global scale the growth

of new forms of realization of the law of value, configuring complex mechanisms of surplus value extraction, both in the spheres of material production and in those of immaterial activities, which are also increasingly constitutive of global chains of value production. Moreover, even not being the dominant element, it is necessary to recognize that immaterial labor has been playing an important role in the shaping of value, not only because it is part of the link between different forms of living labor in interaction with dead labor, but also because it is part of the valorization process, by reducing the circulation time of capital and, consequently, also its total rotation time” (Antunes, 2018, p. 47). I think that this formula makes it possible for us, in keeping with Marxist social theory, to take significant steps towards understanding contemporary social reality. I would like you to comment on this work hypothesis.

Ricardo Antunes: I could open with the following: there is a very interesting discussion between Marx and his daughters, a joke, but the kind where the parents tell their children the truth. They ask him about his favorite author, the most widely read author, and finally about his life motto, and he answers his daughters in Latin: “*de omnibus dubitandum*” - “to question everything”.

Then, Marx says that “the labor of our time is a complex, social and combined labor,” and he says, in chapter 14 of *Capital*, that “it no longer matters whether the labor performed is manual or non-manual labor, what matters is the social complex”. And in this social complex, how do I characterize the work of a teacher or professor in a large network of private, monopolistic schools, such as *Kroton* and the like? This work has an immaterial prevalence, if I understand by immaterial that it does not have the immediate result of a material production.

Yet I have already said that there is no immaterial labor without materiality and there is no material labor without immateriality. Marx even says that, in the limit, capitalist labor, when it embeds an ensemble, has the material precedence. For example, if Chico Buarque, our genius of Brazilian music, is going to perform a concert, besides depending on all the technological resources to carry out the concert, this will also become a CD, or a DVD. The concert, for example, presupposes previous materiality and the resulting materiality. This cannot be disregarded.

Jean-Marie Vincent provided the important hint, in addition to the ideas that are in Marx’s *Grundrisse*, that we need to think that information has become a commodity and that intellectual labor is part of this information world. Marx says that there is a “general turnover time of capital” – “turnover time of capital,” “course time of capital,” or “global time of capital,” I won’t get into the translator debate because I’m not a translator. The “global time of capital” supposes the time of production and the time of circulation. And Marx clearly says that the closer to zero this circulation time of capital is, the more capital is productive. If it takes a year to get the goods and deliver them, production stalls and the company goes bankrupt. But Marx has a second idea in *Capital* - which I think I further explored and at least I think was an original exploration - that says one must understand the time of production that exists within the time of circulation. He mentions the transportation industry and says, “what material product does the transportation industry create? None.” The transportation industry doesn’t create any material product, it transports goods, workers, laborers, ships, planes, trains. Without this time of transportation, of circulation, production does not progress.

Now imagine: what if, in the global cod fishery, there is no storage system - which is another subject that Marx addresses - to preserve the product so that it doesn’t perish, or what if there is no circulation time that allows the frozen cod to reach, for example, Brazil? This industry is global and requires a worldwide corporation that enriches many corporations. And we have to grasp this.

Caio Antunes: Professor Ricardo, from all that you have said with such strength, what do you think is the importance of the critical knowledge production nowadays, and what is the relevance of the new generations, the youth that join the public or private universities to study the labor reality?

Ricardo Antunes: The pandemic was a brutal calamity. It was and still is! Some say that we are leaving a pandemic to enter an endemic scenario, but until they prove otherwise, or until we don’t have a new strain, we are still living in horror. We have in Brazil an average of deaths that is a despicable, and affecting children. But - beware! - it was not the pandemic that caused this horror, it uncovered it. Capitalism is an uncontrollable, destructive, warlike, and murderous system. Either humanity will end capitalism, or capitalism will end humanity!

It is a fact that there were wars and conflicts before capitalism. But it was nothing like today. If Putin loses the timing and presses the red button, there is no humanity anymore, to name just one example. This poses a huge challenge for this youth. The university cannot accept the condition that has been imposed on it for

decades, of a university ruled by instrumental logic, calibrated by the market, to do what Gramsci - I think in 1916 - in *Men or Machines?* cleverly called “an incubator of little monsters”. The public university, the public school cannot be “an incubator of little monsters”. We have to redraw the human, social and emancipatory meaning of research. What sense is there, for example, in doing advanced research to develop and produce nuclear bombs? It only benefits the war industry.

So, the first point is to eliminate the war industry. Is this impossible? I don't know if it is impossible. Is the extinction of humankind impossible? Anyone who says that the extinction of humankind is not impossible does not know what he is talking about. We have never been so close to the risk that humanity will no longer be alive.

The second point is that we have to discuss and develop labor that is endowed with useful meaning. The pandemic has made clear which work we will miss if it stops. The work of doctors, of nurses, of caregivers, of mothers, of fathers, the reproductive work at home - done mostly, we all know, by the patriarchal sociosexual division of labor, by women. Nobody appreciated the work of the delivery men and women, but when we had to ask for medicine, or food, who came to bring it? The delivery boy, the delivery girl, who runs the risk of getting contaminated in a car, on a motorcycle, on a bicycle, or on foot. These are the fundamental jobs of reproduction.

The Third Key Point is that, referring to a central thesis of *The Meanings of Work*, “the labor that structures capital disrupts humanity, and the labor that supports humanity,” that is, vital labor disrupts capital.

The singer Wanderlêa would say - I am a fan of the *Jovem Guarda*: “Mr. Judge, please stop now. No more!” We need to reinvent a new way of life - and here I take up Marx and Engels' term used in *The German Ideology*: “way of life,” not an invention of mine. We need to reinvent a new way of life beyond capital - Marx, Mészáros - in which labor is given meaning and nature is preserved.

We also learned from the pandemic that when there was lockdown in São Paulo the air became cleaner and the levels of lung infections caused by bacteria decreased. Why? You see, it is ontologically elementary: you stop the destructive industry that contaminates to manufacture cars and this digital garbage and the air cleared.

But what about the industry that produces what is digitally important for humanity, such as performing less invasive surgery using artificial intelligence, is that progress? Yes, but this is very different from having a cell phone produced every year. And it is worth remembering, for a cell phone to be made, by whatever company, it requires mineral extraction by the Chinese, Asian, African and Latin American labor force that is mining and dying. This is one of the most awful jobs, the job of mineral exploration. I went into a mine once. When I went down and looked up and saw the size of the mess, I said, “bring the cart, I want to go up. There's no way I'm staying here.” And it was not a dread, or fear of those who have claustrophobia. That is inhumane. Why doesn't the owner of the mine and his family come to mine here and make money?

Pandemic showed us what the vital questions are, and I will close with this point.

There is a passage from Lukács' *Ontology* - which I will be the epigraph, along with two others, for the pandemic book - that goes like this: “life is an endless succession of ifs and buts.” Do I do that? But what if I do that? But when some of the crucial questions of humanity arise, the ifs and buts come together, and there is revolution. Take, for example, the motto of “Equality, Liberty and Fraternity.” This threefold concept of the bourgeois revolution may seem simplistic to us, but under clerical rule, where the Inquisition burned scientists, in a society in which the nobility extracted the body and soul of the serfs, Equality, Liberty and Fraternity stirred humanity. What was the banner of the Russian Revolution? “Bread, Peace and Land!”

What are the most fundamental questions of our time? I think there are three. One: to rescue the human and social meaning of labor, as a vital activity. Work must no longer be performed for the purpose of creating surplus value. Two: to prevent the devastation of nature, even if we have to put an end to the oil industry completely. It is vital, otherwise we will die of new pandemics, lung diseases, more infections, pneumonias, one after the other. Labor, nature, and the third crucial element: substantive equality (Mészáros) doesn't exist without the emancipation of class, simultaneously giving it concrete substance and shape, gender and the racial-ethnic dimension. Capitalism is completely unable to fulfill these three points.

Marx was not genius because he unraveled the women's question. Marx was brilliant because he does not allow one to separate the issues of unique and vital emancipations from the emancipation from a world shaped by social relations that are destroying. If I detach feminism from class struggle and the exploitation of labor, feminism is going to be, at best, a bourgeois feminism. So is black emancipation. As I said before, in volume 1 of *Capital*, Marx emphasizes that the emancipation of the white-skinned being cannot be built on the slavery of the black-skinned being.

Finally, there is something that I never mentioned in interviews, but now I remembered. If you were to ask me “what was your first job?” I would say it was being a teacher in 1972, and that’s 50 years ago. But, before becoming a teacher - and it is not by chance that I am remembering this -, for at least one month, when I was 16, Fernando, my older brother, and I did research for the IBGE to conduct a census. In my first job, then, depending on how many interviews we did - how many people there are in the household, how much each one earns, etc. - we would get a salary, a stipend - we received a salary, a payment. So, let’s say, my first job was as a zero-hour worker at IBGE. And the second was as a precarious teacher, because we didn’t have a registration and we had to struggle to get all this. And with this I would like to mention the IBGE, which has never ceased to be a serious public organ, and that will be run by people who preserve its history, and also see it as a crucial public research institute of Brazilian history.

Claudia Mazzei Nogueira, Caio Antunes, Ricardo Lara: Thank you very much, Professor Ricardo.

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Cláudia Mazzei Nogueira

mazzeinogueira@uol.com.br

PhD in Social Work at the Catholic Pontifical University of São Paulo (PUC-SP)

Associate Professor at the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP)

UNIFESP

Street Silva Jardim, 136 - Vila Matias

Santos - São Paulo – Brazil

ZIP CODE: 11.015-020

Caio Antunes

antunes_caio@ufg.br

PhD in Education at the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP)

Assistant Professor at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG)

UFG

Esperança Av., s/n - Chácaras de Recreio Samambaia
Goiânia - Goiás – Brazil
ZIP CODE: 74690-900

Ricardo Lara

ricardolarauf@gmail.com
PhD in Social Work at the State University of São Paulo (UNESP)
Associate Professor at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC)

UFSC

Reitor João David Ferreira Lima University Campus – Trindade
Florianópolis - Santa Catarina – Brazil
ZIP CODE: 88.040-900

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