

Editorial

Rio+20 cannot be another lost opportunity

Twenty years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (known as Eco 92), in Rio de Janeiro, another United Nations summit will take place to approach the environmental issue: Rio+20. However, there is not much to celebrate. The commitments made with Agenda 21, determined in 1992, are yet to be achieved. Many diagnostic elements have been aggravated. Overcoming the financial crisis that was triggered in 2008 has been the focus of policies in capitalist countries, with no proposals for changing current consumption patterns, and the social achievement of working classes are destroyed.

The contemporary environmental crisis is characterized by the unprecedented use of natural resources, associated with the degradation of ecosystems, the dramatic reduction of biodiversity, as well as with the generation and intensification of environmental risks, especially those known as global ecological risks. Among the latter are risks related to the destruction of the ozone layer, the transboundary chemical pollution and the global environmental changes resulting from greenhouse gases emitted by the combustion of coal and oil derivatives. The concentration of economic and political power by transnational corporations and the countries in which they are established gives new dimensions for inequalities, precariousness and socio-spatial exclusion that affect rural and urban workers, in times of free circulation of industrial and financial capital. With this perspective, the environmental crisis needs to be analyzed by its social and political dimensions.

Facing the increased dimension of health and its social and economic determination, the sanitary reform movement and civil society organizations that work for the defense of health cannot stop strengthening the environmental cause. It is ethically unacceptable that the capitalist production remains exploiting workers and the society, exposing both to risks and damage to health, which can result in unfair and premature deaths. The working classes are increasingly exploited, and the government has to cover the costs for treating people who are victims of the predatory exploitation of natural resources and workforce; meanwhile, profits are destined to a few, and are more and more concentrated by the agents of global financial capital, who are supported by the national governments to which they are associated.

New global ethics is required to guide the application of prevention, precaution and solidarity principles among societies and generations of the present and

the future. However, in order to properly point to the direction to be followed in Rio+20, it is also important to recognize that global, local or any kind of ethics simply will not be attainable while citizenship is reduced to the dimension of consumption patterns oriented by the wishes of the richer classes.

Our planet can no longer stand the needs of production for the human population: in one year, the production capacity of one planet and a half is consumed; and before we reach the half of this century, if the current consumption patterns remain as they are, we will need five planets. This situation is clearly unsustainable and undelayable: it is necessary to change the current consumption patterns.

However, it is symptomatic to observe that the two main topics of Rio+20 do not perfectly articulate, even though they reflect the speech of rich and developing countries in the environmental fields. In the subject Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, at first there is only the indication of a possible transition to a “green economy”, that is supposedly more eco-friendly, in order to reduce its rhythm of exhaustion; however, it will not simply interrupt the process of exhausting natural resources, or even implement policies to somehow revert it. Far from confirming the lack of opportunity to search for new means of eco-friendly production, it is necessary to emphasize that such search will still be insufficient, as successful as it can be. And this is because consumption patterns in core countries, especially their elite and the elite of developing countries, are still too high. On the other hand, we are left with the ethical duty to implement policies that enable billions of people to step out of extreme poverty – not only for developing countries, but for the entire human kind. In this sense, we are sorry that the articulation to “eradicate misery” in this core subject is placed in a discreet position in relation to the environmental issue, thus revealing the option for solutions and logic that reflect the market for global problems, which are much more complex than the answers of the utilitarian ethics of the capital.

The Institutional framework for sustainable development also does not show the reduction of consumption levels, but again, it only points to discreet changes in the economy’s production models, in order to prolong the use of natural resources according to the logic of the capital. Thus, while the obstacles and contradictions imposed by the capitalist means of production to the implementation of an effective environmental agenda are not overcome, regardless of the instruments of international law, be it inductive or by sanctions, it will not be possible to step forward towards the protection of the human race.

Centro Brasileiro de Estudos de Saúde (CEBES) sees a rare and interesting opportunity in Rio+20 to trigger this discussion. However, since we cannot visualize a clear opportunity for overcoming the capitalist production in the hori-

zon, but only the transformation to a “green-capitalist” production, we are still pessimistic. And this is because even though it seems to be more tolerable and friendly for many, the overexploitation of workforce by the capital is maintained. Let the optimism of the participants in this struggle be enough to save the planet and humanity from the barbarism.

The National Board