



**The FNDEP and the social movements around the BRICS: an experience from the past to inspire the struggles of the future**

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***El FNDEP y los movimientos sociales en torno a los BRICS: una experiencia del pasado para inspirar las luchas del futuro***

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**Citation:** CICHACZEWSKI, João Carlos; SILVA, Mariléia da; The FNDEP and the social movements around the BRICS: an experience from the past to inspire the struggles of the future. *Journal of Educational Policies*. V. 18, e95977T. December 2024.



<http://10.5380/jpe.v17i0.95977>

**Abstract:** This article is the result of documentary and exploratory research. It aims to present some of the experiences of the National Forum in Defense of Public Schools (FNDEP) in shaping and contesting educational policies in Brazil, particularly from the late 1980s through the 1990s. Based on this, the study seeks to problematize the spaces of articulation among peoples within the BRICS bloc today, understanding it as an aggregating front for Global South countries in the face of the U.S. hegemonic offensive. The article examines the background of the FNDEP, considering it a relevant private hegemonic apparatus, in Gramsci's terms, and the debates it led during the National Constituent Assembly, as well as throughout the processes of discussing and passing the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (LDB) and the National Education Plan (PNE) in the 1990s. This analysis demonstrates that the FNDEP developed a method of drafting, organizing, and intervening that inspires educational fights in Brazil and other Latin American countries. In this context, BRICS emerges as a potential space to catalyze resistance movements and confrontations, reigniting the struggle for the self-determination of peoples.

**Keywords:** Educational policies, FNDEP; LDB; PNE; BRICS.

**Resumo:** O presente artigo resulta de uma pesquisa documental e de caráter exploratório, e tem por objetivo apresentar algumas das experiências do Fórum Nacional em Defesa da Escola Pública (FNDEP) na

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elaboração e disputa das políticas educacionais no Brasil, especialmente a partir dos anos finais da década de 1980 e durante a década de 1990. Com base nisso, procura-se problematizar os espaços de articulação dos povos no interior do Brics, na atualidade, compreendendo-o como frente agregadora dos países do Sul Global diante da ofensiva hegemônica estadunidense. O artigo apresenta os antecedentes do FNDEP, considerando-o como um importante aparelho privado de hegemonia, nos termos de Gramsci, e os debates que protagonizou na Assembleia Nacional Constituinte e durante os processos de discussão e aprovação da Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação (LDB) e do Plano Nacional de Educação (PNE) na década de 1990. A partir disso, conclui-se que o FNDEP nos legou um método de elaboração, organização e intervenção capaz de inspirar as lutas no campo educacional, tanto no Brasil quanto nos demais países da América Latina, em um cenário no qual o Brics se afirma como um espaço em potencial para catalisar movimentos de enfrentamentos e resistências, reacendendo a luta pela autodeterminação dos povos.

**Palavras-chave:** Políticas educacionais; FNDEP; LDB; PNE; BRICS.

**Resumen:** Este artículo resulta de una investigación documental de carácter exploratoria y tiene como objetivo presentar algunas de las experiencias del Foro Nacional en Defensa de la Escuela Pública (FNDEP) en la elaboración y disputa de políticas educativas en Brasil, particularmente desde finales de la década de 1980 y durante la década de 1990. A partir de esto, se busca problematizar los espacios de articulación de los pueblos dentro del BRICS en la actualidad, comprendiendo este bloque como un frente unificador de los países del Sur Global ante la ofensiva hegemónica de Estados Unidos. El artículo examina los antecedentes del FNDEP, considerándolo un importante aparato privado de hegemonía, en términos de Gramsci, y analiza los debates que lideró en la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, así como en los procesos de discusión y aprobación de la Ley de Directrices y Bases de la Educación (LDB) y el Plan Nacional de Educación (PNE) en la década de 1990. De este análisis se concluye que el FNDEP ha legado un método de elaboración, organización e intervención que puede inspirar luchas en el ámbito educativo tanto en Brasil como en otros países de América Latina. En este contexto, el BRICS se posiciona como un espacio con potencial para catalizar movimientos de resistencia y confrontación, reavivando la lucha por la autodeterminación de los pueblos.

**Palavras-chave:** Políticas educativas; FNDEP; LDB; PNE; BRICS.

## Introduction

We live in a time that calls for deep reflections on the processes of struggle and organization of the working class in face of the current challenges posed by the capitalist order, primarily represented by U.S. interests and their allies, with repercussions across different countries and regions. The solutions require broader political and economic coordination, where Brazil could notably play a unifying, organizing, and structuring role in establishing a collective front within the Latin American context, encompassing other 'emerging' countries.

Thus, in light of the ongoing hegemonic struggles amid imperialist impositions, it is necessary to analyze historically how different fractions of the Brazilian working class have taken the lead in defending their interests. This analysis must consider the country's historical weakness in the bourgeois hegemony, whose most evident consequences can be measured by the inability to carry out a democratic revolution driven by the popular masses, even within the limits of bourgeois constraints, as Del Roio (2023) argues.

In Brazil, during the military-business dictatorship, a significant part of the resistance in the institutional arena occurred through the formation of the National Forum in Defense of Public Schooling (FNDEP). The FNDEP emerged as a historic outcome of the intense struggles and organization of the Brazilian working class within the broader context of democratization. During this period, influential social movements were organized, initially united to fight for the direction of Brazilian society as a whole. Later, they shifted their focus to contest public policies within the Restricted State.

It is important to emphasize that the theoretical and methodological perspective sustaining the analyses in this study draws upon the rich Gramscian legacy, particularly in its contributions to understanding the relationship between the State and civil society, as well as the struggles for hegemony. This involves apprehending the State in its integral sense, where both the restricted and political State, constituted by governmental apparatuses of administration and organization, and civil society, organized through its various private apparatuses of hegemony (PAHs) and their organic intellectuals, are entirely organically present. The role of these organic intellectuals is to formulate and disseminate worldviews in alignment with the PAHs to which they belong. Therefore, in Gramsci's words, it is necessary to understand the State "[...] beyond the apparatus of government, also the private apparatus of hegemony or civil society" (2014, p.258).

In these terms, the 1964 coup d'état in Brazil against then-President João Goulart (1961–1964), which ushered in a period of intense attacks and persecution of Brazilian working-class organizations, is understood as an action aimed at accommodating, within the framework of the integral State, the interests of different bourgeois factions around a hegemonic societal project. This project was expressed through "a civil-military composition, with military predominance and a clear primary objective — the consolidation of bourgeois domination" (FERNANDES, 1976, p.218). This process led to a series of interventions, imprisonments, exiles, kidnappings, disappearances, and assassinations of leaders within the Brazilian labor movement. What was underway was the so-called "economic miracle", which was based on the extraction of high rates of surplus value through a policy of wage suppression, with the workers' movement as its main antagonist.

However, even after 21 years of State terrorism, here understood in its integral sense, aimed at demobilizing and dismantling proletarian organizations — which also organize themselves through their private apparatuses of hegemony, such as unions,

associations, social movements, among others — the very contradictions of class struggle caused this movement to reemerge on new foundations — for instance, the strikes in the ABCD<sup>3</sup> region of São Paulo in 1978 and 1979.

These late 1970s strikes, more than just demanding better wages and working conditions, triggered a political alternative for the Brazilian working class. Along with other factors, it was crucial in initiating the process that would later be known as the "democratic opening."

Regarding the educational agenda, the founding of the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education (ANPEd) on March 16, 1978, became a historical milestone. From then on, movements emerged advocating for the eradication of illiteracy, the expansion of basic education, the promotion of public service exams, and the strengthening of public schools and universities, among other initiatives. In this historical context, the National Forum in Defense of Public Schools (FNDEP) emerged in 1986 as an important private apparatus of hegemony (PAH) for the working class.

Structured in four sections, in addition to this introduction and the final considerations, the present article, which is of a documentary nature and exploratory character, seeks, in view of Gramsci, to understand the process of constituting the FNDEP in the section titled Antecedents of the FNDEP. In the sections The FNDEP in the Constituent Assembly and The FNDE in the LDB, the aim is to capture the movement of the forum in the defense of public, State, and secular education along with its articulation with other private apparatuses of hegemony of the working class within the scope of the restricted State. In the section The FNDEP in the Context of BRICS, through the examination of this forum's experience, the objective is to briefly discuss the current challenges in the field of education in contrast to the (counter)reforms led by the private apparatuses of the hegemony of the ruling classes. These challenges are considered in light of the country's position within the dynamics of capital, both in confronting imperialist hegemony, spearheaded by the United States with strong support from the wealthier European countries, and in the potential to construct a pole of resistance within BRICS with agendas built by and for the working class, such as the 'BRICS of the Peoples'.

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<sup>3</sup>An acronym used to define the industrial region of São Paulo, originally consisting of the municipalities in the Southeast Zone of Greater São Paulo: Santo André (A), São Bernardo do Campo (B), and São Caetano do Sul (C). Diadema (D) is now also included.

## **Antecedents of the FNDEP**

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Brazil experienced significant social unrest, driven by the tangible prospect of defeating a dictatorship that had imposed a regime of terror and repression. In the end, as Del Roio (2023) assesses, the dictatorship aimed to fulfill the commitments made between the owning bourgeois factions and imperialist capital.

Amid this environment of transformation and optimism, marked by the possibility of a democratic transition — though hesitant — the Brazilian working class began to reorganize itself within its private apparatuses of hegemony (PAHs) across various spaces: in labor unions, advocating for better wages and working conditions; in student unions, directories, and academic centers, fighting for freedom of thought and expression; in rural areas, within rural workers' unions and in pursuit of agrarian reform; in the neighborhoods of large cities, seeking basic assistance and opposing the rising cost of living; and in schools, advocating for participatory planning that involved the surrounding community.

It is important to note that the enthusiasm of organized segments of the working class — perhaps more subjective than objective — stems from Brazil's historical struggle to consolidate the bourgeois hegemony. Hegemony, understood as the ability of a class to morally and intellectually lead others, has always been fragmented in Brazil. The bourgeoisie's failure to fully break from the agrarian oligarchy and commit to minimal improvements in workers' living conditions, a key factor in developing productive forces, has led to a weak bourgeoisie (DEL ROIO, 2023). This weakness, in turn, has shaped the dynamics of the working class's struggle.

The military regime's total subordination to imperialist interests shaped educational policies of the period, heavily influenced by the technicist ideology of Human Capital Theory. It was in this context that key educational organizations emerged: the Center for Studies and Contemporary Culture (CEDEC) in 1976, the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education (ANPEd), and the Center for Studies in Education and Society (CEDES) in 1978, the National Association of Education (ANDE) in 1979, and the National Association of Higher Education Teachers (ANDES) in 1981. These organizations, termed Workers' Class Academic Professional Associations (APHs), organized six Brazilian Education Conferences (CBEs) between 1980 and 1991, which

later led to the creation of the National Forum for the Democratization of Education (FNDEP).

Fonseca, Araújo, and Vasconcelos (2019, p. 114) note that the I CBE, held in São Paulo in 1980, sought to “diagnose the state of Brazilian education and counter the dictatorial school model by proposing an approach that linked school and society.” The II CBE, held in Belo Horizonte in 1982, declared the right to education as “a demand rooted in the growing consciousness and mobilization of the exploited population” (ANAIS II CBE apud EVANGELISTA, 1988, p. 91). The III CBE, held in Niterói in 1984, according to Fonseca, Araújo, and Vasconcelos (2019, p.114) similarly emphasized:

The conference advanced in the specific area of educational policy, with the general theme “From Criticism to Action Proposals,” divided into three key topics: Educational Policy and the Brazilian Crisis; The Pedagogical Issue and the Challenges of Social Issues; and Public Management of Educational Affairs.

The IV CBE, held in Goiania in 1986, produced a diagnosis of issues related to “the universalization and quality of education, free schooling, teachers' working conditions, and the scarcity and misallocation of public funds” (FONSECA; ARAÚJO; VASCONCELOS, 2019, p. 114). Taking place at the beginning of the election process for constituent deputies, this edition of the CBE was a precursor in calling for the new constitution to:

[...] ensure the right of all Brazilians to education at all levels, and the duty of the State to guarantee it. These organizations led the fight by pressuring federal and State constituent candidates to adopt the proposed measures to democratize education [...] (FONSECA; ARAÚJO; VASCONCELOS, 2019, p. 115).

Considering this, following the IV CBE, an educational project began to take shape, aiming to influence the direction of educational policy in the National Constituent Assembly, with the FNDEP as its most prominent political actor. Founded in 1986, the FNDEP brought together organizations, movements, and mandates committed to defending public education. It was composed of 15 organizations from the union, student, academic-scientific, and professional fields, including the National Association of Education (ANDE), the National Association of Higher Education Teachers (ANDES), and the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education (ANPed) (BOLLMANN; AGUIAR, 2016).

Two more CBEs were held. The V CBE, with the theme “National Education Guidelines and Framework Law: A Commitment of Educators,” took place in Brasília in 1989. The VI CBE (and final one) was held in São Paulo in 1991, with over 6,000 educators participating (BOLLMANN, 2010, p. 664). No further details on these last two conferences were found in the reviewed texts.

### **The FNDEP in the Constituent Assembly**

Having made significant contributions to Brazilian educational policy through the CBEs during the Constituent Assembly, the entities within the FNDEP played a crucial role in fostering discussions with associations of private and confessional educational institutions regarding the use of public funds. Costa (2018) outlines this debate into three distinct currents advocating for:

- 1) Public funds should be allocated exclusively to public education [...];
- 2) Public funds may also be allocated to non-profit private schools;
- 3) Public funds can be allocated to public and private education, including for-profit private schools (p. 1093).

The major representative entity advocating for the allocation of public funds to private schools was the National Confederation of Educational Institutions (Confenen). Like all Workers' Class Academic Professional Associations (APHs) representing bourgeois factions, this organization adopted a systematic and organized persecution against its opponents, particularly the FNDEP, which defended public and state education (Costa, 2018).

In the field of confessional entities supporting public funding for non-profit organizations, the most prominent was the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB). It is important to note that, despite aligning with popular movements on issues such as land reform, the CNBB opposed these movements in the educational arena during the Constituent Assembly for obvious reasons: a substantial portion of the Catholic Church's resources in Brazil comes from confessional schools. Later, in the 1990s, the CNBB would join the FNDEP, becoming an ally, particularly in disputes concerning the National Education Plan (PNE).

However, the CNBB did not restrict itself solely to financial involvement; it used its extensive network to contest the school curriculum as well, successfully securing the

mandatory inclusion of religious education and the allocation of public funds to non-profit religious schools. This precisely demonstrates its function as a private hegemonic apparatus of the Church in the struggle to promote a specific worldview (COSTA, 2018).

The FNDEP, as a legitimate representative advocating for the exclusive use of public funds for public education, also organized itself for the dispute and, quantitatively, had overwhelmingly more relationships than any other entity (COSTA, 2018). Among the most prominent organizations in this process were ANDES and CPB (now CNTE)<sup>4</sup>.

In a context where public funds were being diverted to support private education, the FNDEP positioned itself as a key actor in major disputes against an educational policy deeply characterized by inequality in access, retention, and student success. Among the numerous demands presented at the National Constituent Assembly, the FNDEP also championed the fight for the appreciation of the teaching profession and:

The FNDEP's primary principle was the defense of education as a universal right and the state's duty to provide free, secular schooling. It also prioritized the allocation of public funds and the democratic management of educational institutions (TAVARES; MARTINS; CHICAR, 2020, p. 13).

Evaluating FNDEP's performance during the constitutional process, it cannot be claimed that it was entirely victorious, nor can its efforts be seen as a complete failure. FNDEP operated within the constraints of institutional limits, advancing as much as the balance of power allowed. As Tavares, Martins, and Chicar (2020) note, although not all FNDEP's proposals were adopted, its actions influenced the 1988 Federal Constitution, which dedicated a specific section to education.

## **FNDEP and LDB**

After organizing itself to influence the direction of the constitutional charter, the FNDEP remained engaged in other disputes within the field of educational policies. In the early 1990s, it mobilized to propose a project for the Basic Education Guidelines Law (LDB) in the Brazilian parliament. This was far more than a simple legal debate; it was a confrontation over the conception of the society that was to be built. According to Bollmann and Aguiar (2016):

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<sup>4</sup>CPB: Brazilian Teachers Confederation, currently named as National Confederation of Education Workers (CNTE).

In this context, on one side stood progressive, popular, and democratic social forces from civil society, composed of organizations—particularly the FNDEP—that advocated for a public, universal, free, and high-quality education for all, deemed essential to building a democratic and socially just society. On the other side were liberal-conservative forces [with] a neoliberal, privatized, and flexible educational project aimed at meeting the demands of capitalist sociability [...] (p. 409).

In this context, the groups that had clashed during the constitutional assembly reemerged, this time within the strict framework of the parliament. Once again, the dispute arose between the defense of a socially grounded, high-quality public education — championed by students, educators, unionists, scientists, and intellectuals organized under the FNDEP — and the defense of private interests, represented by school owners and religious entities, primarily organized under Confenem and the Catholic Education Association of Brazil (AEC). Regarding the balance of power in this dispute, measured by the number of votes each proposal garnered in the federal congress, Bollmann and Aguiar (2016) reveal that, despite adverse conditions, the project supported by the FNDEP was approved on May 13, 1993, in the Plenary of the Federal Chamber through a cross-party agreement, identified as "[...] Bill No. 1.258-C, of 1993" (p. 415).

It is crucial to note the significant progress achieved in this bill concerning national education guidelines. As Bollmann and Aguiar (2016) highlight, the bill proposed a comprehensive vision of education through the creation of a National Education System, integrating early childhood education through high school as part of basic education. It also ensured active societal participation via the National Education Forum and reinforced mechanisms to guarantee democratic governance.

Nevertheless, the influence of private interest advocates (APHs) in the conflict with leading figures and groups from the popular forces' vanguard remained evident. Darcy Ribeiro, a prominent intellectual aligned with the working class—and a senator at the time—took on the task of presenting an alternative bill in the Federal Senate, in what was a move of cooptation. This substitute bill was also signed by Marco Maciel (PFL/PE) and Maurício Corrêa (PDT/MG).

According to Bollmann and Aguiar (2016, p.422), Darcy Ribeiro's replacement bill:

In early childhood education, the law does not specify who is responsible for providing it, omitting the requirement for professionals working in this area to have higher education qualifications; [...] in elementary education, it allows for

division into cycles, with various forms of progression [...]; in secondary education, it does not guarantee its compulsory nature, making its universalization a gradual process; in vocational training, it caters to the immediate interests of the labor market [...]; in higher education, it establishes a new mode of instruction [...] that undermines the integrity of degree programs and limits the roles and autonomy of universities to the available resources.

It is imperative to note that a bill presented in the Senate takes precedence over a bill with the same content presented in the Chamber of Deputies. Accordingly, although the FNDEP's LDB project was approved in the Chamber, it was replaced by Darcy Ribeiro's proposal. Despite facing challenges, this proposal was approved on October 25, 1995, becoming known as the Darcy Ribeiro Replacement Bill (BOLLMANN; AGUIAR, 2016). However, despite the approval of the privatization-oriented project, the pressure exerted by the FNDEP secured important guarantees, such as the establishment of the National Fund for the Development of Education and the Valuation of Teaching (Fundef) and the autonomy of universities.

### **The FNDEP and the Challenges of the Present in the Context of the BRICS**

Following the approval of the Basic Education Guidelines Law (LDB), Law No. 9,394/1996, the political debate regarding a National Education Plan (PNE) emerged, and the FNDEP once again mobilized to engage in this discussion. Composed of broad social sectors committed to defending public education, the FNDEP facilitated democratic debates on conceptions of society, the state, and education by promoting the National Education Congresses (CONEDs).

The First National Education Congress (I CONED) was held in 1996 in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, with the guiding theme "Education, Democracy, and Social Quality" and the central focus on "Building a National Education Plan." Bollmann (2010) notes that the event addressed several subthemes: the state and education, civil society and education, work and education, and basic and higher education.

The Second National Education Congress (II CONED) took place in 1997, again in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, and aimed to consolidate a National Education Plan (PNE) proposal known as the "Proposal of Brazilian Society." The FNDEP entities made significant efforts to promote preparatory debates for this meeting nationwide, organizing local, regional, and national thematic seminars. According to Bollmann (2010, p. 667), this proposal was based on fundamentally "[...] different foundations from those

used by hegemonic social sectors to maintain the perverse and exclusionary logic that subordinates the interests of large speculative capital [...].”

Regarding the organization of the debates, the II National Education Congress (II CONED) was also structured around specific axes, namely:

Organization of National Education, which included: National Education System; Democratic Management of Education; Education Financing; Levels and Modalities of Education, consisting of: Early Childhood Education; Elementary Education; Education for Youth and Adults; Secondary Education and Vocational Education; Higher Education; Training of Education Professionals (BOLLMANN, 2010, p. 668).

Based on a diagnosis of the conditions of Brazilian education during that period, in perspective with past experiences and models developed in other countries, “[...] proposals were presented for the Organization of National Education, particularly for the configuration of the National Education System, for the Democratic Management of Brazilian Education, and Education Financing” (BOLLMANN, 2010, p. 668). Additionally, the issue of training education professionals, whether from teaching or technical-administrative areas, was addressed.

Following the resolutions of the II CONED, the focus shifted back to the Brazilian parliament. Once again, the contention was between proponents of an educational policy guided by market values and the organized sectors within the FNDEP advocating for principles rooted in equality and social justice. It was only after the FNDEP's prompting that the then-Government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) decided to present its National Education Plan (PNE) project to Congress, known as the “Executive Proposal,” which was approved in 2001. The articles studied do not provide further details on how this dispute unfolded within the Legislative Power.

The FNDEP organized three more CONEDs in the following years. The III CONED took place in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, in 1999, reflecting on the context and tactics surrounding the PNE. In 2002, the FNDEP convened for the IV CONED in São Paulo, then with the PNE from the FHC government approved, seeking new pathways for intervention in Brazil's educational policies. The V and final CONED was held in 2005 in Recife, Pernambuco, with the theme “Education is Not a Commodity.” After this, the FNDEP was demobilized.

Addressing the numerous elements relevant to analyzing the FNDEP's demobilization within a limited space is challenging. The ascension of a party rooted in

the working class to the presidency certainly had profound implications for this process. Expectations that workers' agendas would be guaranteed under Lula's government (PT, 2003-2006; 2007-2011) did not materialize. Simultaneously, some organized left factions shielded a government that needed to form alliances with bourgeois interests during electoral battles.

In this context, the FNDEP holds historical significance and relevance, serving as a methodological link among various working-class organizations while advocating for a society genuinely committed to public and state education. This stands in contrast to privatization initiatives that transfer the formulation of educational policies to the organic intellectuals representing large national and international financial oligopolies.

The current economic-political scenery differs markedly from that which shaped the FNDEP, as the capital's offensive now operates without constraints, and social contradictions have become increasingly unmanageable, often leading to a decline of hard-won rights for the working class. The challenges are immense and bear international implications, as the economic-political attack on workers intensifies exploitation and erodes the autonomy of peoples, revealing an imperialist agenda.

From this perspective, two questions arise: Does it make sense to consider establishing a forum, drawing from the FNDEP's experience, in defense of public education and a societal project minimally committed to the cultural advancement of the masses on an international scale? Could BRICS serve as a viable platform for organizing this new forum to confront the offensive of North American imperialist capital?

BRICS is the acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Initially termed BRIC, the acronym was first introduced by economist Jim O'Neill in 2001 to describe a group of developing countries. At that time South Africa had not been included yet. Since 2006, this alliance has sought to promote cooperation among its members through bilateral agreements and engagement in multilateral forums. As of August 2023, Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran have joined the coalition. According to the Tricontinental Institute (2023)<sup>5</sup>, the New Development Bank (NDB), established by BRICS in 2014 to finance infrastructure and sustainable development projects in developing nations, serves as a significant alternative to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

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<sup>5</sup>[BRICS: Uma alternativa ao imperialismo? \(thetricontinental.org\)](https://www.thetricontinental.org/pt-br/brics-uma-alternativa-ao-imperialismo/) Access in: May 20, 2024.

The consolidation of neoliberal policies in global geopolitics over recent decades, predominantly led by the United States, is an undeniable fact. However, the inherent contradictions of these policies have sparked resistance, leading to the emergence of global alternatives aimed at counterbalancing U.S. hegemony. Thus, BRICS can be seen as a vital front in developing these alternatives, advocating for reorganizing the global economy and international governance. While its formal role is to promote dialogue and cooperation among its members, the countries in the alliance share a common interest in establishing a new global force to reshape world politics and challenge the hegemony of the Global North, thereby granting BRICS members greater autonomy.

In this limited space, a comprehensive critical assessment of BRICS is not feasible. Nonetheless, it is crucial to emphasize that its activities are multifaceted. Initiatives like the New Development Bank (NDB) and cooperative policies among member countries, which may indicate increased independence, coexist with competition for natural resources, markets, and low-cost labor (GARCIA, 2017). As Garcia notes, the ongoing challenge lies in the "...articulation of grassroots social struggles: peasants and workers resisting large projects led by corporations from BRICS countries and their financial institutions" (p. 374).

BRICS today extends beyond the governmental sphere. Other movements, though divergent, have emerged within and around BRICS, introducing new points of tension. From the perspective of the working class, initiatives aligned with "BRICS from below," formalized in 2013 at the Durban Summit in South Africa, stand out. In 2014, in Brazil, Fortaleza hosted the "Dialogues on Development: BRICS from the Peoples' Perspective." These groups, formed by social movements, raise issues that do not align with the immediate interests of capitalist accumulation while fostering transnational solidarity in their struggles (Garcia, 2017). It is also important to mention the "Civil BRICS," which, despite being directly linked to the Russian government, was acknowledged by the summit of heads of state, though it certainly needs to clarify its future direction more explicitly.

Currently, BRICS faces a period of renewed energy, with the admission of new members, and, in the specific case of Brazil, the return of President Lula's government (2023-), one of the bloc's original architects. Over its 15-year trajectory, as highlighted by Garcia, Lannes, and Rezende (2023), BRICS has seen a proliferation of institutions and new thematic areas, leading the authors to propose an analysis of the organization

through three lenses: top-down, horizontal, and bottom-up. It is crucial to acknowledge that grasping BRICS' complexity requires understanding both the convergences and the disputes among member countries, as well as the inequalities and differences between them. These disparities are undoubtedly rooted in the same logic of market competition and labor exploitation upon which the capitalist system in its imperialist phase is founded.

For Lênin (2012, p. 124), imperialism,

[...] is capitalism at the stage of development where the domination of monopolies and financial capital has taken shape; where the export of capital has gained significant importance; where the division of the world by international trusts has begun; and where the partition of the entire globe among the most powerful capitalist countries has been completed.

Therefore, there should be no illusion of BRICS as an *a priori* anti-capitalist force. Its disruptive potential could gain relevance in international geopolitics as a force challenging the imperialist hegemonic bloc led by the United States, which, from the perspective of the global working class, would involve exposing the contradictions of capital and its anti-emancipatory nature for humanity.

On the other hand, it is crucial to pay attention to the contradictions of capital in motion. That is, as capital operates to ensure the accumulation of wealth produced collectively through the expropriation of labor, the destruction of nature, and the subjugation of human needs to the voracious control of market interests, it reveals its civilizational limits, which in turn fuels and provokes new struggles. In this sense, there is the potential for organized social movements around BRICS to strengthen the concept of "BRICS from below" (2020), as mentioned earlier, acting as social forces in opposition to corporate interests, whether inside or outside BRICS.

In this regard, the critical question is: to what extent can the movements that currently exist on the fringes of BRICS rise to the category of private apparatuses of working-class hegemony, like the National Forum for the Defense of Public Schools (FNDEP) in the past, considering their potential to formulate and disseminate a worldview? This will depend on the strength of these movements and, crucially, their ability to resist succumbing to the advances of the private apparatuses of the hegemony of the various bourgeois factions, which, through their respective organic intellectuals, create and normalize consensuses to be followed.

Therefore, there should be no illusion of BRICS as an *a priori* anti-capitalist force. Its disruptive potential could gain relevance in international geopolitics as a force challenging the imperialist hegemonic bloc led by the United States, which, from the perspective of the global working class, would involve exposing the contradictions of capital and its anti-emancipatory nature for humanity.

On the other hand, it is crucial to pay attention to the contradictions of capital in motion. That is, as capital operates to ensure the accumulation of wealth produced collectively through the expropriation of labor, the destruction of nature, and the subjugation of human needs to the voracious control of market interests, it reveals its civilizational limits, which in turn fuels and provokes new struggles. In this sense, there is the potential for organized social movements around BRICS to strengthen the concept of "BRICS from below" (2020)<sup>6</sup>, as mentioned earlier, acting as social forces in opposition to corporate interests, whether inside or outside BRICS.

In this regard, the critical question is: to what extent can the movements that currently exist on the fringes of BRICS rise to the category of private apparatuses of working-class hegemony, as the National Forum for the Defense of Public Schools (FNDEP) in the past, considering their potential to formulate and disseminate a worldview? This will depend on the strength of these movements and, crucially, their ability to resist succumbing to the advances of the private apparatuses of the hegemony of the various bourgeois factions, which, through their respective organic intellectuals, create and normalize consensuses to be followed.

A compelling example of these advances and challenges can be seen in the education sector, where large-scale assessment metrics strongly suggest they will continue to serve as crucial benchmarks for defining educational quality. This is underscored by a 2015 document, endorsed by UNESCO (2014), which outlines the investments that BRICS countries are making and should continue to make to enhance their educational standards. Specifically:

BRICS countries invest in national assessments of learning outcomes. These assessments, conducted by independent institutions, are becoming increasingly regular (annual rather than occasional), comprehensive (encompassing all students in specific grades or utilizing broader, representative samples), and

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<sup>6</sup>BRICS from the People's Document.

<file:///C:/Users/81246960982/Documents/Maril%C3%A9ia%20Projetos/CADERNO-ESTUDOS-1-PT-BRICS-DOS-POVOS.pdf>. Access in: June 10, 2024.

sophisticated (employing item response theory instead of merely reporting simple measures like the percentage of correct answers), mirroring established practices in international assessments (UNESCO, 2014, S/P).

The role of large-scale assessments in establishing *rankings* fosters competition among schools and educational networks. Not only do these assessments fail to provide significant pedagogical contributions but treating them as the sole and primary indicator of teaching quality reveals the commodification of education through the expansion of market niches driven by the commercialization of various educational products.

### **Concluding Remarks**

We understand that the significant challenge of the present is to curb the barbarism of capital at national and international levels. Thus, this article sought to recover the historical experiences of the National Forum for the Defense of Public Schools (FNDEP) as an important apparatus of the working class in Brazil while also capturing the recent movements surrounding the peoples' struggles on an international scale within the BRICS framework. The defense of public funding for public schools was the gravitational center of FNDEP's organization throughout the battles fought from its inception until its disbandment in 2005. It represented an experience of articulation among broad sectors of society committed to advancing a civilizational project for Brazil, in opposition to a privatizing agenda that seeks to maintain and deepen the historical inequalities that underpin this country.

Having acted decisively at various moments in Brazilian educational policy, FNDEP bequeathed us a method for development, organization, and intervention in reality. The current historical moment is marked by massive attacks on public education, whether through budgetary restrictions that severely undermine schools and universities in recent years or through the imposition of educational policies focused again on technical training. In this scenario, it is essential to revive the articulations among organizations and entities committed to public education policies in Brazil. FNDEP developed in a very different circumstantial context from what we face today; however, its experience can and should inspire educators and activists in the current and future struggles.

Nowadays, given the complexity of class struggle and the intensification of social contradictions, even though BRICS often represents the interests of the private capital of

the member nations, it challenges imperialist impositions and "disrupts" global geopolitics. This creates an opportunity to reignite experiences like that of FNDEP, catalyzing movements of confrontation and resistance and rekindling the struggle for the self-determination of peoples.

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*Received in June 2024*  
*Approved in August 2024*  
*Published in December 2024*

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