

An abstract painting with a textured surface. The background is a deep, vibrant blue. Scattered across the canvas are several large, soft-edged shapes in bright yellow and red. The colors are blended and layered, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is reminiscent of a night sky or a colorful, dreamlike landscape.

JUSTICE, EQUITY + SUSTAINABILITY

PROJECTIONS *volume 8*
MIT JOURNAL OF PLANNING

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COVER IMAGE "Untitled" Rebuilding Series, mixed media on wood. Painting + image, Anna Livia Brand.

Professor Marcel Bursztyn

FROM SOCIAL PROTECTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Social policies, such as we know nowadays, are almost as old as the modern state itself. For example, in the 17th century, the British established laws for the protection of the poor (the *poor laws*). While these instruments have evolved since then, their aims did not change substantially and until the late 19th century they focused on basic issues of work, housing, orphanages, and food access (i.e. the *corn laws*). In different moments throughout history, these policies and political doctrines have given more or less importance to the protection of the poor. People living in dire conditions were seen from two different perspectives: as victims and therefore deserving of charity or as threats and therefore deserving of condemnation or control.

Until the 1970s, public policies regarding the poor were characterized by protection by the State. Early in the Industrial Revolution, the poor, the less favored class, were always lacking in assistance. However, since the 1870s, though, the situation started to change, on account of structural reforms adopted in some European countries and in Japan. This opened a period of history that is remarkable for the progressive improvement in general living conditions, particularly in the currently developed countries.

A series of important initiatives was undertaken in these countries, especially as a consequence of politically related issues. These early socially oriented public policies deeply changed the social profile of several societies located in the Northern hemisphere and had important political consequences, since the years that preceded them were marked by revolutionary disturbances (the 1871 Paris Commune, for example). Higher classes feared that the working classes would adhere to revolutionary ideals and in this context, even conservative elites gradually agreed that the State should conduct social protection policies. Paternalism, inherent to the old patriarchal regime typical of feudalism, was no longer enough, and the adoption of public mechanisms aimed at the well-being of less favored classes became the new agenda.

Therefore, the population, especially the poorest, ideally would have some degree of certainty about their existence and the existence of their children, and would be supported by some form of security provided by the government. This happened in many different dimensions. The first was education, which became a universal right. In the dimension of labor, employees in the job market began to have some degree of certainty about job security, unemployment benefits, rights to paid vacations, retirement, and of some type of insurance in case of work-related accidents. None of this existed before 1870.

This was the context 130 years ago, marking the beginning of a phase that ended in the 1970s, in a context marked by an especially traumatic episode: the first oil shock (Rosanvallon, 1981; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Pierson, 1991). The first oil shock opened an era of retreat by the States in terms of policies focused on social well-being. This retreat has been gradual, but in some cases radical, reaching a peak in the Northern hemisphere during the 1980s and in the Southern hemisphere during the 1990s. In developing countries, there was an actual dismantling of governmental public structures, in such a manner that the existing social protections became weaker and weaker and, in some cases, nonexistent. The liberal principle that regulation should be conducted by market forces prevailed as the basis for this retreat (D'Intignano, 1993). Of course, this process occurred in quite different contexts, according to the characteristics of each country.

In spite of the predictions made by some authors that social differences would be reduced during the 20th century (Hobsbawm, 1994), the fact is, after one hundred years of social protection, the

differences between the less included and the well-to-do in each society only increased and the differences between different societies are colossal.

Without doubt, when we refer to the construction of the Welfare State, we need to consider differences among the many groups of nations in the world. Therefore, what we call first world is a group of nations that were able to build an important social protection system during these one hundred years, with varying degrees of consistency. Some countries built a system more focused on regulations that forced companies to organize some sort of protection for their employees. Other countries, notably the ones that adopted social-democracy, made this kind of responsibility an attribute of the State.

The second world – comprised by the former socialist countries – is today practically an empty group. The number of countries that remained in this category is very low. In them, social protection made great advances, but the legitimacy of the economic and political regime did not.

The third world is an interesting group because it comprises a wide range of situations. For example, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Chile implemented many traditional instruments of social protection. Brazil arguably adopted all the typical instruments of the Welfare State, although with varying degrees of coverage: social security, universal public education, labor legislation, unemployment insurance, etc. There are, however, third world countries in which none of these instruments were adopted and others in which some of them were adopted with very little effectiveness.

Between 1870 and 1970 the construction of public regulation instruments focused on the reduction of social inequality and on social protection, not only in developed countries, but also in many developing ones. Beginning in the 1970s, there has been an inversion of what is called protection. People and society are no longer the main focus. Protection is now aimed at the general context – namely, markets and resources used in production - in which society is inserted. In the context of a more integrated and globalized world, the rules concerning the relations between people and processes seem to be more important than people themselves.

The resources that have become the object of protection, as defined by economists, are the resources necessary for production: land, capital and labor. Capital includes technology and financial resources and the land comprises all natural features. Capital is protected by a complex network of rules and mechanisms that are deeply rooted in national legislations since the times of the Industrial Revolution. With the emergence of neo-liberalism in the 1970s, labor, protected since the late 19th century, was relegated to a lesser status as an object of protection. The major innovation is that the land, taken as a representation of natural environment, acquired importance exactly when labor protection was reduced.

The protection of nature, concern with the environment, and concern with the quality of life are remarkable traits of the end of the 20th century. In the context of environmental concern, the major objects are water, sources of raw materials, climate, and energy. It is important to remember that the energy crisis of the 1970s – the first oil shock – was at the center of the process that defined this transformation.

In reference to the protection of capital, during this period a series of multilateral organisms and institutions have been consolidated, such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and other international mechanisms and conventions, including legislation about intellectual

property, which protects knowledge. This knowledge is not the result of social-cultural historical processes (which have only use value), but knowledge directly or indirectly associated to market relations (which have trade value).

In the case of labor, this period has been a time of retreat for protection instruments. Labor laws suffered reversals and there was a decline in the modes of organization and of generating pressure by the working classes, traditionally centered around unions. Job security deteriorated, as did the direct correlation between economic growth and employment. In contrast with the preceding decades, when the rhythm of economy also dictated the rhythm of job creation, the last years have shown that it is quite possible for economic growth to happen as employment levels fall.

The net result of the period that begins with the energy crisis of the 1970s – with strong effects on public policies in general – is a change of focus in the State's regulatory actions. On the one hand, the protection of capital is maintained; but, on the other hand, the protection of work decreases and concern with the environment grows.

Therefore, a major question to be considered in the context of globalized environmental governance is: How can we expect success in environmental protection without previously or simultaneously assuring social protection? This question can be extended to the behavior of individuals: How can we expect that they develop visions and expectations about the future when they are not sure about the present?

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank to Capes-Brazil and Fulbright Foundation.

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