Communication AFEP

Panel: Penser le système de santé de demain. Les apports de l’économie politique

Session 1 : « Economie politique des assurances santé »

**The relationship between political support base, economic policies and prioritized social policies: impacts on Brazilian healthcare system**

**Mariana Jansen Ferreira**

**Nicolas da Silva**

**Abstract**

In the second half of the 1980s, Brazil underwent two very important changes: the country democratically elected a president in 1989, the first direct election to the post since 1960, and approved in 1988 its new Federal Constitution, which recomposed democracy and broadened the political and social guarantees in the country. Not by chance, it became known as the “Citizen Constitution”.

Throughout the period between 1989 and 2016, despite a number of challenges, political democracy and social gains from the 1988 Constitution, including the creation of a free, universal public health system (the Unified Health System, SUS), expanded and became part of Brazil.

During the 1990s, mainly during the two mandates of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration (1995-2002), inflationary stability (which was, on average, from incredible 764% per year between 1990 and 1995, to 8.6% per year in 1995 to 2000), the increase of the real minimum wage and the greater diffusion of social policies generated better life, despite the harmful effects of the neoliberal policies implemented by this government, which, through processes of commercial and financial opening and privatizations, increased the unemployment rate and the income inequality, already so high in the country.

In turn, during the 2000s a center-left party, the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT), won four presidential elections in a row with the governments of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), and a new political and social arrangement was stablished. The government expanded social policies, in response to the aspirations of a new base of political support that enabled and guaranteed the PT elections, although neoliberal policies have not been abandoned, especially regarding fiscal and monetary macroeconomic decisions.

This article aims to analyze the relationship between political support base, economic policies implemented and prioritized social policies. During the administrations of Fernando Collor (1990-1992) and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the support base was the upper middle class and the wealthy (including the productive and financial elite) capable of influencing economic policy decisions and elections for their influence in the media. During those governments, the neoliberal precepts dominated the economic and social policy decisions. In this regard, assistance policies were prioritized, with a very limited scope, without changing the poverty in Brazil (which reached about 40% of the population), although expanding access to the public health system – as a result of the constitutional change in the late 1980s, after the country’s redemocratization.

On the other hand, in the PT governments, electoral support became increasingly dependent on the lower-middle class population and the poor, who projected opportunities for better living conditions in the government. During Lula’s administration, a bigger level of economic growth, driven by the external sector, made it possible to expand real minimum wage real growth and the expansion of social policies. That included the healthcare system, without expanding real resources for the sector, but with expansion of primary care policies important mainly for the low-income population.

This is not to say that the governments of Lula and Dilma broke away from the interests of the “big capital”, but that although much of their macroeconomic policy decisions continued to be subordinated to it, at least part of the social policy decisions met the lower income population expectations.

In addition, the article seeks to show how, after Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment process (a “constitutional coup” in our perspective), Michel Temer assumes a reestablishment and deepening of the liberal policies of the 1990s, with possible negative impacts on the Brazilian public health system, especially regarding losses of funding.

Thus, the hypothesis of analysis is that the PT governments extended social policies, although constrained by the maintenance of neoliberal macroeconomic policies, because they were important for their support base of the lower income population. In its turn, Temer (as well as, to a lesser extent, for Fernando Henrique Cardoso), their support base of the richest population does not perceive social policies as an effective priority (given their history of access to health, education, etc. from a private perspective).

**Key words**: Brazil; health policy; government priorities; economic constraints on health public care.