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**THE HISTORIOGRAPHY
OF POPULAR
EDUCATION: THE BASIC
EDUCATION MOVEMENT
IN THE 1960'S**

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INTRODUCTION

In the early years of the 1960s, there were significant changes in the political, social, educational and religious spheres. Such transformations occurred from initiatives led by intellectuals, politicians and students who affirmed themselves as subjects committed to the formation and autonomy of a repressed/subordinated “mass”, being, this way, sympathetic to the causes of the less favored, which caused a greater openness to discussions related to equal rights and the expansion of the concept of popular education. However, this did not mean that there were no opposing forces, since there were clashes between social groups – conservatives/progressives – with different conceptions and interests, that is, representing sectors/segments concerned, on the one hand, with maintaining the current structure, on the other hand, those who aspired to transform and break paradigms.

In this context of political effervescence, the Basic Education Movement (MEB) was created, linked to the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) and financed by the Federal Government. This Movement began its activities in 1961 and intended to teach literacy to adults in the Northeast, Midwest and North regions. The idea of creating radio schools to develop the activities of the MEB came about when the candidate for the presidency of the Republic Jânio Quadros made an electoral visit to Sergipe and got to know the actions developed by the radio school of the Diocese of Aracaju. The MEB was intended to teach peasant adults to read and write. On the occasion, Jânio Quadros and Dom José Távora, responsible for the radio schools, discussed the possibility of creating an educational program via radio, in order to provide the less favored classes with the right to education (Kadt, 2007).

In this article we deal with popular education in Brazil, in the 1960s. catholic and State and the challenges that this movement faced from the beginning of the military period. Our objective was to present a historiographical discussion about the practices of the Basic Education Movement, as well as to highlight its conceptions and tensions that occurred throughout the 1960s.), Kadt (2007), Jannuzzi (1979), Lovisolo (1990), Paiva (2009), Scocuglia (2003), Soares (1995), Skidmore (1982), Wanderley (1984), among others.

THE ACTIONS OF THE BASIC EDUCATION MOVEMENT

At the beginning of Jânio Quadros' mandate, an agreement was signed through Decree nº 50.370, of March 21, 1961, between the Catholic Church and the Union. This Decree established a five-year work plan (1961-1965), which could be extended. For the execution of activities, the federal government would provide about one hundred and fifty million cruzeiros every two months for the CNBB to create around fifteen thousand radio schools (MEB, 1966). The government of Jânio Quadros was brief, Jânio resigned with only seven months in office. After the resignation, Vice President João Goulart assumed the Presidency of the Republic, who remained from September 1961 to April 1964, when he was deposed. (Skidmore, 1982).

In João Goulart's government, the “basic reforms program” sought to achieve the “political emancipation” of the country and, for that, it was necessary for Brazil to progressively disassociate itself from dependence on foreign countries and their financial agencies. The president of the republic defended structural reforms in his speeches and that their weight did not fall only on the so-called “less fortunate”.

Such reforms must stimulate industrial development, the restructuring of agrarian production, the integration of the internal market, thus combining economic development with social development, that is, justice and peace. In the conception of João Goulart, the basic reforms would transform Brazil into a “strong and dependent nation”, and this would expand and strengthen the internal market, depending less and less on other countries. To achieve these objectives, some measures would be necessary, such as electoral, tax, banking, exchange rate, administrative, university, urban and agrarian reforms (Silva, 2019).

It was in this context of political effervescence that the CNBB elaborated an educational plan and sought to develop basic education via radio schools, with the less favored population, thus prioritizing the regions whose social and economic indicators showed more vulnerability and social inequalities (Wanderley, 1984). In an interview given to the newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, Dom Távora, representative of the Church and the presidency of the MEB, revealed a friendly relationship and partnership between the Church and the State. In the article, published in 1963, Dom Távora praised the work of the Ministry of Education and Minister Paulo de Tarso:

[...] he is seeing the problems very seriously, with the decision of a young statesman who has commitments to the people and his Christian conscience, and wants to be faithful to these dictates. With balance, without extremism, with our eyes fixed on our Christian traditions, we will have confidence in our future. The Basic Education Movement [...] is committed to the eradication of illiteracy, helping to prevent it from continuing to be a powerful negative element in the development of our people (*Correio da Manhã*, 07/20/1963, p. 2).

The MEB gradually expanded its area of operation, going from 11 systems in 1961 to 60 systems in 1963, the course of these years being considered one of the most promising. For Duarte (1972), the Movement reached the highest point in the statistical curves in 1964, reaching approximately four hundred thousand students. At this time, in addition to activities carried out in the Northeast, North and Midwest regions, it also operated in some municipalities in the state of Minas Gerais.

The data presented in the annual MEB report in 1963 reveal that the systems, for the most part, were located in the states of Pernambuco, Bahia and Minas Gerais and, of the 60 instituted in the first years, about 50% were created and started their work in 1963, as is the case of Minas Gerais, Rondônia and Amazonas. For a MEB system to be implemented in a Diocese or Prelature, the local bishop must express interest, together with the state government. This was, for example, the case of Minas Gerais, which was not located in a region considered underdeveloped, but which had 14 systems created in 1963. It was from a fruitful climate and alliance between Church and State that the discourse was developed that a broader human formation was necessary, that is, in the development of its various dimensions: scientific, political, ethical and aesthetic. According to the MEB annual report in 1961, basic education must provide man with:

[...] a conception of life that makes you aware of your physical, spiritual, moral and civic value; a lifestyle that, through techniques and personal, family and social habits, guides the practical behavior of each one; a mystique of life that, acting as an inner force, ensures effective dynamism and enthusiasm in the fulfillment of duties, in the exercise of rights and, in general, in achieving the ends of existence (MEB, 1961, p. 01).

Regarding the role of the Catholic Church in conducting basic education, Kadt (2007) points out that it was linked to the following reasons: on the one hand, the Church that assumed the function of educating and evangelizing and, on the other, political interests such as the expansion of the electoral contingent and the reduction of illiteracy. Thus, Dom José Vicente Távora, Archbishop of Aracaju, formalized to the Presidency of the Republic, on behalf of the CNBB, the proposal to create a basic education program using radio schools. The MEB began its activities based on the structures left by successful initiatives in education in the late 1950s, in the Northeast region of the country. According to Paiva (2009),

[...] the implementation of an educational system based on radio stations shortened distances, facilitating peasants' access to education, giving them possibilities to develop as members of a larger community. The radio meant, in a concrete way, the technology at the service of the education of the peasant man (2009, p. 51).

The existence of Catholic stations was essential to reach the populations of rural areas, since the difficult access to the most distant regions and the lack of resources left the peasant population on the margins of society. The MEB, in the first years of operation, was intended to offer the rural population an education of an awareness-raising nature. In his work, he sought to form the individual within the context in which he was inserted, valuing the cultural reality and showing the possibilities of choice, as well as the most viable paths for its realization. According to the 1961 annual report, basic education must “[...] aim at and ensure to each person a minimum of knowledge, judgment, conduct techniques and well-being, which make him or her capable of to realize oneself to the fullest, surpass oneself, progress in all accessible directions” (MEB, 1961, p. 01).

To achieve this purpose, the work developed by the MEB was carried out by monitors, accompanied by supervisors who visited the local contexts where the MEB undertook its actions. With this, they sought to learn about the challenges and possibilities to collectively seek solutions to problem situations, providing students with the opportunity for action and engagement in different activities. In its pedagogical practices, the MEB sought to sensitize men towards society through motivations and changes in attitudes, leading them to the process of politicization. According to Paiva (2009), for the individual to be politicized, it was necessary to be aware of his role as an active subject in society, as well as to act critically and collectively to change it.

As of 1964, the State's relationship with the Catholic Church, mainly with the so-called progressive group, began to be shaken due to political and ideological issues, which had a direct impact on the work that was being developed by the MEB. According to Scocuglia (2003), the Catholic Church, until then, assumed a certain role in relation to education and popular culture, however, political divergences caused it to lose strength and give space to other religious denominations. This is the case, for example, of Protestantism, which made the Crusade of Basic Christian Action (Cruzada ABC) official, with the support of the military government, the United States Agency For International Development (USAID) and under the command of North American Protestant religious.

This group, which represented Protestantism, reacted against the pedagogical actions of adult education that were based on the conceptions of the educator Paulo Freire and the political-ideological position that was being disseminated by progressive Catholic groups. Thus, “[...] the

support and convergence of purposes that the 'progressive' adult literacy movements had found in the João Goulart government, the ABC Crusade would find in the military governments, in the second half of the 60s" (Scocuglia, 2003, p. 83). However, a wing of the Catholic Church sought a conciliatory dialogue, arguing that it was not partisan, that is, the Catholic Church presented itself as exempt from ideologies and political issues. The article published in *Diário de Notícias*, in 1964, follows this direction:

The church of God, in the exercise of its mission, is not bound by regimes or governments. In what is within its reach, it collaborates for the common good, ground trodden by the Civil and Religious Powers. The rulers are replaced, but the duty to work with diligence and courage for the objectives of the Public Power persists. It is not identified with defeats or victories, but only with the Gospel [...] (*Diário de Notícias*, 04/15/1964, p. 7).

In view of the new order in force, the MEB systems were temporarily suspended and the booklet "Viver é Luta" was seized. According to Fávero (2006), around 50,000 copies of this booklet were printed and distributed, in early 1964, to the systems in the Northeast, some in the North and Minas Gerais. Of these forms, approximately 3,000 copies were seized by the police from the print shop in the state of Guanabara. In this context, all education and popular culture movements were closed and only the MEB managed, after many negotiations with the State, to get around the situation and resume its activities. The newspaper *Correio da Manhã* published an article about the seizure of MEB teaching material and the Catholic Church's discontent with the government's authoritarian attitude:

[...] police commanded by the head of the DPPS himself and guaranteed by 3 shocks of the Military Police invaded, in the

dawn of yesterday, the publishing house of the Companhia Editora Americana, [...] in Lapa, from where they removed three boxes with commissioned booklets by the Basic Education Movement [...]. In the arrest report, the booklet is identified as 'subversive' [...]. The firm's lawyer will take the steps required by the case, because 'a fascist act cannot go unpunished' [...]. The act was an affront to the population, as part of 'a man who swears to defend private property, but orders an attack on it at the first opportunity' (*Correio da Manhã*, 07/23/1964, p. 01).

From 1964 onwards, the MEB began to face difficulties not only as a result of its more awareness-raising activities, but also due to the divergent relationship established in the political sphere and the cuts in financial resources essential for the continuation of the work. Such divergences accentuated the level of distrust of the State, which was withdrawing the autonomy of the Church and undermining the agreements established in favor of adult education. For Kadt (2007),

The April 1964 political upheaval brought MEB activities to a complete halt in almost all systems, ranging from one week to over three months. The military invaded or closed offices, employers closed schools, material was destroyed or confiscated, members of almost a dozen local teams were arrested for short periods or called to give evidence to the Military Police. Monitors have been threatened, arrested or fired from their positions in half a dozen states and large numbers of supervisors have resigned due to accusations leveled against them by civil and military authorities (2007, p. 219).

The clashes, at this juncture, made part of the episcopate reflect on its role, giving in to pressure from the government, redefining the objectives and guidelines of the MEB. However, not all MEB bishops and systems were open to changes, which was understood as confrontation and resulted in punishments that the State deemed necessary. Thus, the

newspaper *Correio da Manhã* reported in 1964 the dissatisfaction of a portion of the episcopate:

[...] many of the Catholic instructors of the Basic Education Movement [...] remain in prison [...]. 'Attention with due urgency, that the situation imposes, to the difficult conditions in which most of our brothers live, deprived, by the social conjunctures in which we live, of the enjoyment of essential or inalienable rights of human nature. No one can assume that such an order is a Christian order. That everyone, therefore, make an effort so that there is no slowness in executing what is urgent, hardness in not accepting what is obvious, pertinence in wanting to maintain what is unsustainable. Despair is capable of anything. It could very well be that the failure to take advantage of a new order initiated without blood led us, due to the despair of many, to the outbreak of violent reactions and regrettable and dark days (*Correio da Manhã*, 05/16/1964, p. 6).

From the analysis carried out, we found that the MEB systems willing to adapt to the new order in force modified the concept of awareness created previously and began to have as purposes “[...] evangelization; then literacy, catechesis, religious training, transmission of general knowledge [...], leadership training, pedagogical guidance and appreciation of criteria” (Fávero, 2006, p. 114). Those who refused to change were accused of being communists, Marxists and subversives and punished for it. *Jornal Correio da Manhã* explained the protest of the bishops when they received such accusations:

[...] ‘we do not accept and will never be able to accept the abusive, generalized and gratuitous accusation, veiled or explicit, that bishops, priests and faithful or organizations such as, for example, Ação Católica and the Movimento de Educação de Base are communists [...]. Against this abomination we raise our voice as authentic shepherds’. The persecution of priests and Catholics has been a sad feature

of the obscurantism that pervades some in charge of police cleanup operations. The Church, invigorated by the social preaching of two great Popes, became an integral presence in the lives of the country’s poorest populations [...]. To confuse the beneficial action of its members with that of its materialistic enemies is not only an error, but a demonstration of ignorance and savagery [...]. We will not bow to the injunctions of party politics that intend to silence our voice in favor of the poor and victims of persecution and injustice’ (*Correio da Manhã*, 03/06/1964, p. 6).

Amidst a climate of distrust and accusations, the MEB reformulated its ideas, objectives and methodology to survive this period. According to Kadt (2007), at the height of the military regime, the MEB acted much more from the perspective of catechizing than raising awareness. Kadt (2007, p. 229) adds that “[...] most Movement documents published after the April 1964 coup show enormous resistance to discussing conflicts and injustice, as well as methods of overcoming them, unless in general abstract terms”. This way, the MEB, in some regions, assumed a less committed position with the fights in favor of social inequalities. With regard to the states that did not adapt to the new order, the MEB systems were closed. Regarding this issue, Kadt (2007, p. 153-154) states:

[...] between December 1963 and December 1964, the number of radio schools was reduced by more than a fifth; by December 1964 there were about 4,600 left. With the closure of all functioning systems in Pernambuco, Bahia, Minas Gerais and Goiás - essentially the result of political and financial pressure - the number of radio schools dropped to less than 2,500 in early 1967. The decline was greatest in areas of tension politics, such as the Northeast (2007, p. 153-154).

This context was marked, therefore, by repression and intense inspection.

Censorship, from that point on, was instituted and the siege imposed by the government, little by little, was closing. According to Kadt (2007), the MEB was “under fire” and some bishops decided to ally with those who did not agree with the activities carried out by the Movement in the fight against oppression and inequalities. This way, the climate between Church and State became increasingly tense, at least for a portion of the episcopate. In an article published in the press in 1964, the bishops questioned the concept of “subversive”. According to them, each case was treated in a different way, because

[...] the cautious citizen, who wants to live up to date with the laws of his country, even those that exist only in the subjectivity of the imagination of the rulers, cannot discover whether or not he is one of those abominable subversives that the government newspapers so condemn. precisely. There are, it is true, some indications: the engineer is, apparently, less subversive than the teacher, in turn more harmless than the social worker. Students [...] are a danger to democracy [...]. But it seems that journalists are also viewed with suspicion, albeit less than that which weighs on economists and sociologists [...]. There is, however, one point that seems clear to me [...]. Those who, in recent years, have not wanted to confine their religious experience to the intimate comfort of prayers and frequenting the sacraments, those who have tried to live the social doctrine of the Church, those who have worked in the Basic Education Movement, those who have sought to influence urban union or rural unionization through the instruments of action sponsored by the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil are on the blacklist (*Correio da Manhã*, 10/03/1964, p. 6).

Faced with the divergences between the Church and the State, the situation of the MEB became unsustainable and, from

1967 onwards, the Movement began to lose ground in several Brazilian states, suffering a progressive loss in the number of systems, schools and the number of students enrolled. According to Kadt (2007), peasants in the Northeast region had lost “[...] interest in radio schools, which could no longer discuss the real problems faced by the people, nor ensure the promise of meaningful political participation for the peasants. literate” (2007, p. 154). As of 1967, many MEB systems preferred to close down activities for political, ideological reasons and lack of resources, thus causing the MEB to move to the northern region of the country. Kadt (2007) presents the progression of MEB radio schools in the North of the country:

At the end of 1965, the North contributed with 23% of all radio schools, 20% of students and 16% of local personnel (not counting those who worked at Nacional in Rio). Two years later, after the Movement had shrunk to 21 systems, radio schools in the North made up 75% of the total, students there represented 53%, and the 80 staff in the area made up 44% of the staff working outside Rio de Janeiro. January (2007, p. 234).

In the light of these data, we found that the history of the MEB in the North region walked *hand in hand* with the process of establishing the military regime, adapting to different contexts and rethinking its practices for the sake of survival, at times, giving more emphasis to literacy and evangelization, thus avoiding discussions about politics and social inequality. In the conception of Kadt (2007), the geographical immensity, the natural conditions and the difficulties faced in the field of communication and transport contributed to the displacement of the MEB to the North of the country and made the actions developed in this region different from the others. The author refers to the people of the Amazon region as:

[...] isolated and primitive, poor and even more destitute of education opportunities than peasants in other parts of the country, the inhabitant of the Amazon can only rely on himself to take care of his own survival, without the support of close neighbors. His cultivation techniques are the simplest. He is essentially a collector of products from the rainforest and rivers (wood, nuts, rubber, fish) and he does so with the help of the most primitive instruments. (Kadt, 2007, p. 235).

In the midst of political and ideological divergences, lack of resources and distrust on the part of the State, the Catholic Church had international recognition of the work carried out by MEB. In 1968, UNESCO received about 49 applications for the Mohammad Reza Pahlavi award and, among the competitors, was the Basic Education Movement, which was the winner. The contest judges were unanimous in granting the prize, recognizing its efforts to teach adults to read and write via radio schools, in addition to its contributions to the economic, social and cultural development of less favored regions. the prize was considered by the members of the MEB a stimulus to continue with their actions and, according to Wilson Ferreira Hargreaves, the delegate who represented the MEB in granting the Reza Pahlavi prize:

[...] Since we had the news, in Rio de Janeiro, of the granting of the prize [...] and of the importance that UNESCO gave to our work, the enthusiasm was very great among those who participate in the Education Movement of Base of my country. This movement works thanks to the sponsorship of the bishops of Brazil and with the support of the Federal Government. The award will contribute to forming a national conscience in Brazil that is very determined to promote cultural work in rural areas. We do not limit ourselves to teaching reading and writing, but rather try to integrate less favored populations into cultural and economic life, using the most modern and large-scale teaching instruments, the

radio. There are millions of radio schools in an infinite number of lost locations and pedagogy responds to their needs. I must confess to my satisfaction in seeing that the Basic Education Movement in Brazil won the international literacy award. It is above all a stimulus. The movement's board of directors is made up of two thousand enthusiastic, well-prepared people, dedicated entirely to teaching in rural areas (*Tribuna da Imprensa*, 09/11/1968, p. 6).

Despite this recognition, the last years of the 1960s were marked by a strong financial crisis for the MEB and in the North region it was no different. This aspect was directly reflected in its structure, in the pedagogical work and in the training of coordinators, supervisors and monitors. Thus, the MEB sought some alternatives, such as, for example, the help of international organizations, which sent resources to various MEB systems, including the systems located in the North region of the country.

Challenges were present in all MEB systems and that is why the Movement sought survival strategies such as, for example, partnership with national and international institutions. Since then, it has also received funds from the Catholic Organization for Development Aid (CORDAID) in the Netherlands and the Organization of German Catholic Bishops for Cooperation and Development (MISEREAR) in Germany. These partners were extremely important for the MEB to continue to develop its activities in the areas of education, health and qualification and manpower.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Actions aimed at adult education in Brazil, although they have advanced in recent decades, still have a long way to go, since the population aged 15 or over without schooling is approximately 6.6%, which is equivalent to around 11 million people (IBGE/PNAD, 2019). Discussions and actions on this topic

became more effective from the late 1940s onwards. Since then, the percentage of people without schooling began to fall, but it was in the 1960s that the scenario revealed more progressive changes.

The debates of the 1950s and 1960s resulted in the emergence of various movements linked to education and popular culture, and many of them were supported by the Catholic Church, which, to a certain extent, was rethinking its role in society. In this scenario, there were many changes in the political, social, educational and religious spheres, led by intellectuals, politicians and students committed to the causes of the less favored, but that did not mean the absence of opposing forces.

It was in this context of political and ideological disputes, in the search for the country's economic development, with an index of around 39.7% of the population aged 15 years or more without schooling, that the Basic Education Movement was conceived. This Movement intended to teach literacy to adults in the North, Northeast and Midwest regions of the country via radio schools, especially for rural populations.

The MEB was developed in a scenario of political struggle and, despite the limitations, sought to act in different areas to serve the needy population. In its early years, it sought to consider the socio-cultural reality of students and, through basic education, sought to transform the social structure of the less favored, making them aware of the importance of their participation as active citizens in society. The population did not have access to education, basic sanitation, quality housing and formal employment, in general, the occupation was just for subsistence and, therefore, there is no denying the importance of the work carried out by this Movement.

Like every educational proposal, MEB's had its limits and its possibilities, but we must recognize that there were significant gains both for the needy population and for the Church. The population assisted by the MEB was always forgotten by the public authorities and the Catholic Church, by being at the head of this Movement, gained prestige, visibility and financial resources from governmental and non-governmental bodies.

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