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**EDUCATION IN
STRUGGLE IN THE
URBAN AMAZON:
THE TEACHER STRIKE
MOVEMENT IN THE CITY
OF CASTANHAL – PARÁ
(1980)**

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Abstract: This work aims to chronologically narrate the strike experience of teachers from the municipal public network of Castanhal, in the northeast region of the State of Pará, in 1980. This teaching strike consisted of the first strike movement in the city of Castanhal and lasted two months. The aforementioned mobilization of public education workers received support from numerous entities and political parties in the capital of Pará. In view of this, using printed newspapers as a documentary source, the study brings important experience of men and women from the urban space of the Amazon in the context of Brazilian redemocratization.

Keywords: Education, Strike, Redemocratization, Castanhal-PA, Amazon.

INTRODUCTION

The city of Castanhal emerged from the colonization process of the Bragantina Zone in the northeast of the State of Pará, at the end of the 19th century. To consolidate this colonization, in 1883, construction began on the approximately 293-kilometer railway that would connect Belém to the city of Bragança. Thus, Castanhal was an agricultural colony founded by immigrants from Ceará, where the Bragança Railway (EFB) train passed through the agricultural village of Castanhal (LACERDA, 2006, pp.66-196).

In 1932, Castanhal received city status. However, at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, the railway was deactivated and the Belém-Brasília highway was opened, which, in turn, passes through the center of Castanhal (BECKER, 1982, pp.115). The opening of the Belém-Brasília highway stimulated the remodeling of the urban space of Castanhal, changing its daily life through a greater flow of goods and immigrants and forming a precarious tertiary sector (CONCEAÇÃO, 2002, pp.236). The urban reform that Castanhal underwent was

intense between the 1960s, 1970s and the beginning of 1980. This way, it led the political elite and economic elite, through the city's press, to construct a discourse that Castanhal underwent a process of "development" and "progress". This same dominant group forged that Castanhal would be a "model city" in the State of Pará. But urban reform was limited to the commercial center of Castanhal, leaving the population on the outskirts without basic services.

On April 16, 1980, the first strike experience in the history of Castanhal began: The Strike of male and female teachers from the Castanhal municipal public-school system. This social movement organized itself to demand an adjustment in salaries and better working conditions. The teaching paralysis lasted two months and the mobilization caused a fissure in the city's political hegemony.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this work consists of a narrative record of the strike movement of teachers in the municipal public network of Castanhal. The writing was based on the analysis of the main newspapers that circulated in the capital of Pará and in the city of Castanhal, at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. The periodicals *Jornal do Interior*, *A Província do Pará* and *O Liberal* provide extensive coverage of the paralysis of teaching in Castanhal, which, in turn, were fundamental in recording the organization, mobilization and struggle of education professionals in the urban Amazon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On April 16, 1980, teachers and lay, regular and normal teachers from the Castanhal municipal network began a strike through a public protest on the main avenue of that city. The Castanhal teaching profession demanded the payment of the minimum wage, the 13th

(thirteenth) salary, the payment of FGTS and the refusal to wear a uniform imposed by the Municipal Department of Education. Teachers considered that work uniforms were expensive and compromised their earnings of six hundred and 10 (ten) cruises.

Six municipal primary schools (elementary education) joined the strike. The following schools were: Padre Severiano Santos, Madre Maria Vigano, Graziela Gabriel, Maria de Encarnação, José João and Emília Gimenez. 199 teachers were assigned to these teaching departments. The interruption of school activities led to six thousand students being left without classes. Some teachers who participated in the protest, such as Maria da Conceição, Catariana Barros and Elizabeth Nascimento, were the most outraged by the ban on teaching in dresses.

As the demonstration passed through various parts of the avenue, several people joined the strikers. Others followed from a middle distance, mostly out of curiosity. Among the striking teachers were students and parents of students. They carried banners and posters with the names of the municipal schools that had joined the strike and protest slogans written on them (BARROS, 2020, pp.90-102). The strikers said at the demonstration that they were indignant with the mayor of Castanhal, because the chief executive created several difficulties for a dialogue between the municipal teaching authority and the city hall. These obstacles led education professionals to decide to fight and resist and declared classes in municipal schools to be suspended.

The protest took over the main streets in the center of the “model city”. In addition to Avenida Barão do Rio Branco, they passed through Primeiro de Maio, Paes de Carvalho, Floriano Peixoto and Cônego Leitão streets. After following these routes, they returned to the main avenue and headed to the Castanhal

City Hall building, where Mayor Almir Lima, who belonged to the Social Democratic Party (PDS), was present.

David de Amorim Sá supported the teachers’ claim was fair. But he disagreed with the stoppage of municipal education. The mayor of Castanhal Almir Lima proposed a 50% adjustment in installments. It would be 25% from March 1, 1980 and the remainder would be from June 1 of that same year. The Secretary of Education of Castanhal reminded the mayor that the first installment was not fulfilled. Anyway, said David Sá, in any case, the teachers did not accept the city hall’s proposal and decided to go on strike.

The demonstration by teachers arrived at Castanhal City Hall bringing a crowd of curious onlookers. The headquarters of the executive administration of the “model city” is located in the old architectural center of Castanhal. Where, in that year of 1980, only the Municipal Market, the Igreja Matriz São José and the city hall building itself remained. With the opening of the Belém-Brasília highway and the demolition of the Castanhal Train Station and other old buildings, numerous commercial establishments were built in these spaces. For this reason, it has become a space for intense circulation of people and goods.

This dynamic of the shopping center facilitated the attraction of more curious people who approached that crowd that raised many banners and posters in front of the Castanhal City Hall Building.

The striking teachers, students and parents of students tried to enter the city hall building, but the military police and city hall employees prevented them from entering the reception. A real commotion broke out at the entrance to the building. That agitation and pushing attracted people from shops, street vendors and passersby to Praça Matriz São José. Until a teacher raised her arms and asked the protesters to remain calm. She suggested

that a committee of five teachers come in to present the demands to the mayor.

The commission met with the mayor and stated that they disagreed with the city hall's proposal and, therefore, pressured the mayor to meet the movement's main demand, which was the payment of the minimum wage to Castanhal's municipal teaching profession. Almir Lima said he could not respond at that time to the strikers' demands and asked for time to study the possibility of paying a minimum wage to teachers in Castanhal. The teachers granted this time and left. Outside, the strikers decided to hold an assembly the following day to discuss strategies for the strike.

On April 17th, at 3 pm, even with the threat of heavy rain, the teachers met at the city hall's Casa de Cultura. They debated about the public event held the previous day and the study time that the mayor requested. At the same time, in the city hall's office, Almir Lima was meeting with David Sá and the directors of the six schools that were suspended. Irritated, the mayor decided not to meet the demands of the Castanhal teaching profession. He also sent notice to the strikers that they must return to work by April 22nd. Otherwise, he would appeal to the Regional Labor Delegate. This is because labor legislation prohibits public servants from organizing strikes. The six directors were against the strike. But they warned the mayor that the earnings of teachers in the municipal network do not guarantee the survival of these professionals. David de Amorim Sá agreed with the directors. Almir Lima fell silent and lowered his head.

Shortly before the end of the General Assembly of teachers, a city hall employee arrived with a message from the mayor announcing the mayor's decision not to pay the minimum wage and the order to resume classes by April 22nd. In view of this, the municipal teaching authority of the "model

city" decided to continue the strike.

On April 22nd, teachers from the municipal network of Castanhal did not return to the classrooms. They reaffirmed the suspension of educational activities. On April 23, at nine o'clock on a cloudy and sultry morning, the strikers held another protest. The crowd was concentrated in Praça Matriz São José, which is next to the city hall building. Through a sound car, they spoke about the reason for the strike and invited the population to join the teachers in the square. Another group of teachers signed a petition in support of the Castanhal education strike. They intended to take the document with the supporters' signatures to the mayor.

The strike committee entered the city hall building and went to the mayor's office. This committee was formed by professors Juventina Alexandre Osório, Raimunda Lima Silva, Nazaré Pantoja Portillo, Maria Luzia Lemos dos Santos, Graça Bezerra, Dubiratan Barbosa and Édson Sousa. PMDB state deputy, Ademir Andrade, accompanied the commission. This was reported by Almir Lima that the striking teachers did not return to classes because they were being manipulated by infiltrated people, by communists coming from Belém. He went on to say that the invasion of the left in Castanhal was causing social disorder in the city. The teachers soon disagreed with the mayor. They said there is no infiltration or any manipulation by communists. But they stated that the Castanhal teaching strike receives support from several entities such as the Association of Teachers of Pará (APEPA), the Pará Society for the Defense of Human Rights (SPDDH), the Central Directory of Students of "Universidade Federal do Pará" (DCE-UFPA), Graphics Opposition, Banking Opposition and the Workers' Party (PT).

On the afternoon of the same day as the meeting between the commission and the mayor, at 4 pm, the General Assembly began

at the Casa de Cultura. In addition to the masters, students from schools on strike, parents of students who supported the strike and curious onlookers were present. At the meeting they decided to continue on strike, because Almir Lima continued to not meet the demands and decided to continue the strike.

On May 2nd, the strikers returned to Praça da Matriz São José. The public square was not only occupied by strikers. Parents of students and students attended, representatives from APEPA, PT, PMDB, DCE-UFPA, Workers' Amnesty Committee, Graphics Opposition, Banking Opposition, SPDDH and some students from the private school Colégio Modelo. The latter was from the city of Castanhal itself. Along with this occupation, onlookers who were attracted by the concentration of protesters approached. Thus, a crowd formed in Praça Matriz São José. Once again, Mayor Almir Lima, who had already returned from Brasília, requested the presence of the military police at the city hall building. He feared that the strikers and/or the crowd would occupy the municipal executive administration premises.

The Castanhal Military Police Battalion sent numerous soldiers who were on standby not only in front of the city hall building, but other military police garrisons were also observing the movement of the crowd in the public square. Military police soldiers spread out across several points in Praça Matriz São José and occupied the curb of Avenida Barão do Rio Branco and the fronts of some commercial establishments. There was a sound car in the middle of the protesters where representatives of various entities were speaking. Shouts of protests and displays of posters and banners by teachers and supporters attracted more and more people to the public square.

The teachers who were part of the commission that negotiated with the mayor

protested the presence of the military and civil police. They then entered the city hall building accompanied by a lawyer for another round of negotiations with Mayor Almir Lima.

The group that went to the city hall office, a few minutes later, returned to the public square and informed the crowd that it was necessary to hold a general assembly in the afternoon to debate the suggestion from the municipal executive branch. This commission agenda was approved by the absolute majority of protesters. At 3 (fifteen) pm, at the Guarani Headquarters, in the Caiçara neighborhood, there was a reduced presence of striking teachers. Heavy rain falls in Castanhal. Reason for the low attendance of teachers from the municipal network. But the General Assembly was held. The commission presented the mayor's proposal to suspend the strike to better study the issue of payment of the minimum wage and the thirteenth salary. In compensation, the city hall would not punish any striker and would pay for the days off. After a brief debate on these topics, the assembly unanimously decided to suspend the strike. There was applause and praise among the strikers. They said that they already considered themselves victorious because they received support from the students' parents and caught the attention of Castanhal society. The strikers had full confidence that the city hall would meet the main demand of the municipal teaching profession for the "model city".

Thirty days passed and Mayor Almir Lima decided again not to meet the two main demands of the strikers: the payment of the minimum wage and the thirteenth wage. On June 2nd, Almir Lima and his advisors concluded that if the city council met the demands, this would affect the municipal budget for that year, 1980. The city hall's decision came to the attention of the Castanhal magisterium. This caused great

commotion among teachers and professors. A true atmosphere of disappointment and revolt took over the six municipal schools in the urban area of the “model city”.

On June 8, the teachers went to the Casa de Cultura to hold an Extraordinary Assembly, but the *paredistas* found the municipal public office completely closed, which angered the teachers even more. The strikers decided to protest right there, in front of the Casa de Cultura. They knew that Mayor Almir Lima was making it difficult to organize the strike. Even outside, there, in the middle of the street, under the unbearably hot sun, they decided to resume the strike.

On the morning of June 9th, at the Padre Severiano Santos Municipal School, where the striking teachers and representatives of the Castanhal City Council met, the advisors and the chief of staff Antônio Jatene tried to convince the Castanhal teaching staff not to resume the strike. Mayor Almir Lima’s advisors stated that he would meet the demands the next year, 1981. But the mayor’s representatives found the masters very confident and determined to continue the strike. Shortly afterwards there was a dispute between some teachers and advisors. Antônio Jatene left school nervous. He wouldn’t know what he would say to Mayor Almir Lima. He called the advisors and they left before the teachers decided to press further.

On June 12, thirty teachers from Castanhal went to Belém. With the support of APEPA, they went to protest at the Legislative Assembly of the State of Pará. The intention was to draw the attention of state legislators to the terrible pay that teachers in the Castanhal municipal network received. Most of the deputies were taken by surprise when the galleries were occupied by teachers who came from the “model city”. Protest shouts, displays of posters and banners were promoted by the strikers in the gallery. Then, the Castanhal

teaching staff went to the Lauro Sodré Palace to pressure Governor Alacid Nunes. The teachers wanted the head of the state executive to pressure Mayor Almir Lima to meet their demands. Alacid Nunes knew about the strike movement that broke out in Castanhal. He also knew that several left-wing entities, unions and associations in Belém supported the strike of municipal teaching in Castanhal.

Alacid Nunes, after the meeting he had with the strikers, presented a formulaic proposal: teachers and lay teachers would have a 100% adjustment on their current earnings. As for teachers and regular teachers, they would receive a 70% increase. Governor Alacid Nunes said that that “formula” was appropriate given the economic crisis that Brazil was going through and ideal for the Castanhal City Council to enable the payment of the minimum wage for teaching staff in Castanhal. The teachers looked at each other and agreed. But they asked if they had a guarantee that Almir Lima would follow this “formula”. Alacid Nunes guaranteed that he would make this agreement with the mayor of Castanhal.

On June 17, 1980, at 10 (ten) o’clock in the morning, at the Taboquinha Bosque dance club, in the Estrela neighborhood, the teachers from the municipal school of Castanhal who organized the strike celebrated the agreement signed between them, the mayor Almir Lima and governor Alacid Nunes. The mayor of Castanhal accepted the “formula” and the proposal from the head of the executive of the State of Pará. This agreement was only possible because there was the organization, resistance and mobilization of teachers in municipal public education.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Strike of teachers from the public municipal network of Castanhal brings the relevance of studying the reflection of the

redemocratization process in the Amazon region, especially in the urban space. The cities of the Amazon were scenes of action for “new social subjects” who claimed their specific interests, but these mobilizations contributed to the process of political opening in Brazil. This movement of men and women from the Castanhal teaching profession were an example of these individuals who created resistance strategies that cracked the political hegemony that predominated in the humid tropics.

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