

## MANIFESTO OF THE OCCUPATION “GUERREIRO URBANO”

Today, Rio de Janeiro is living an extremely worrisome moment. More than 150,000 people are homeless (according to an officially underestimated estimate); and 9 of every 10 people who need places to live earn less than three times the minimum wage (less than US \$900 a month). But even with so many people in need of housing, there are more than 220,000 empty residences in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Many of these units have been unoccupied for decades in a clear violation of Brazilian law. The Federal Constitution of Brazil says that all property, whether urban or rural, must fill a social function. If the owner does not give his property a clear function, he is breaking the law, and the state therefore ought to act in order to validate its Magna Carta. Yet what happens when the state becomes not only negligent its laws, but complicit with those who are violated them? And when the state itself breaks the laws it ought to enforce? The democratic state ought to serve the working people instead of real estate capital!

Rio de Janeiro’s impoverished population is living through yet another attack perpetuated by the state and the spheres of government. Public policies like the “Shock of Order” campaign, the “revitalization” of the port zone, the Police Pacification Units (UPPs) and the program My House, My Life act together to aggravate the “peripherization” of poverty and directly benefit large construction firms and real estate speculators. In the port zone (a location filled with tradition for Rio’s poor population), the pseudo-revitalization does not hide its principal objective: the substitution of the poor population for a middle-class population. Aside from illegal evictions and “blank” expulsions (since, due to the rising cost of living, it’s difficult to stay in the region), poor urbanites, and principally street vendors, are persecuted as though they were thieves. They suffer at the hands of Municipal Guards who are more cowardly, violent, and criminal every day. The state does not hesitate to include street vendors in its statistics to give evidence of employment, but it robs and beats workers with a discourse that criminalizes informal work. How can we accept public policies that expel poor people from their homes and takes away their only form of survival? It is clear that City Hall wants to suffocate the poor workers who live in the city center and push them toward the periphery. And what is the counterpart? City Hall promises houses at the end of the world through the My House, My Life program: houses that are far from all of the services we need (health, work, transportation, education, relaxation). Or else it offers rent assistance of 400 reais which, apart from not being enough for any housing near the downtown, is suspended at City Hall’s whim.

We want housing because it is a right guaranteed by the Constitution! And we say that it must be in the city center because that is where we work. But it’s also because the center has the best public school, the best hospitals, the best nurseries, theaters, cultural centers and libraries. After all, housing is not our only constitutional right: we also have the right to health, education, culture, and work. Besides which, according to the IPP (Instituto Pereira Passos), 1 in every 4 buildings in the port zone are empty. And if that weren’t enough, research shows that many of these empty buildings are publicly owned! Therefore, we don’t want rent assistance, which doesn’t solve the housing problem. And we don’t want houses far from our work: we want quality of life, access to culture, to

education, and to health. We have the right to have access to the city that we help to build!

Thus, today, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, we occupied this building that has been abandoned for decades, cast aside and lifeless. We occupied it because we will make the real revitalization happen! We, the workers, tired of oppression, organized for months so that today, we could join so many other voices in saying: Enough! If the state will not follow the law, we will make it follow the law, because we are the ones whose rights are being violated. We are the ones who suffer from violence everyday, and we are the ones who built and continue to build this city. This city which behind a “marvelous” mask hides the face and scars of poverty and violence. The solutions of state power don’t serve us, since we are still treated with disdain, like criminals, like human garbage.

We are tired of waiting for the state to act! We are tired of seeing the government betray the population in order to benefit the real criminals and speculators! We occupied this building to show that our eyes do not only produce the tears of desperation at injustice that we feel so closely every day. With our eyes, we also see that if the city depends on our hands to work, it is with our hands that we will depend to build together the solutions to our problems. Human rights are our rights too. If no one gives them to us, our only solution is to take them for ourselves.