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**HIGHER EDUCATION
AND SOCIAL SERVICE
IN BRAZIL: TRAINING
PROJECTS IN DISPUTE**

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Abstract: The article is a theoretical reflection of the particularities of Higher Education in Brazil in the area of Social Work and the demands of the private logic that imposes a professional profile aligned with the neoliberal logic, in the countercurrent the organizations of the professional category have been resisting in the defense and in the guarantee of professional training linked to a profile forged in the last thirty years called the Ethical-Political Project. Therefore, it is concluded that it is essential to apprehend the main trends that involve the inseparable relationship between professional training and professional work.

Keywords: Education, Social Service, Professional Project.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to analyze the particularities of Higher Education in Brazil in the area of Social Work and the demands of the private logic that imposes a professional profile aligned with the neoliberal logic, against the current of this process, professional category organizations have been resisting in the defense and guarantee professional training linked to the Ethical-Political Project. From this perspective, it is understood that thinking about the recent changes in higher education and their impact on Social Work teaching is essential to apprehend the problem that involves disputes over professional training profiles in their intrinsic relationship with professional work.

This time, this article includes this introduction, two parts and the final considerations. Thus, in the first part we problematize the inseparability of the analytical axis work and education. In the second part, we apprehend some of the main trends that exist in Brazilian Social Work in the context of neoliberal intensification. Finally, we present the final considerations, pointing

out that without guaranteeing the conditions for the exercise of critical reflection capable of deciphering the constitutive elements of capitalist sociability in a perspective of totality, professional training and the work of social workers can reinforce a professional profile that it meets the neoliberal managerial logic, therefore, it conforms professionals to only act as executors of public social policies.

DEVELOPMENT

Within the scope of Social Service, the role of representative entities (CFESS/ CRESS, ENESSO and, above all, ABEPSS) stand out, along with significant portions of the professional category, which built a certain Ethical-Political Project that assumes a perspective of inseparability between the work and professional training. Therefore, academic-professional training is apprehended in its interface with work.

Fundamentally, two important aspects to be considered in the professional profile advocated in the Ethical-Political Project are observed. The first aspect is linked to the Curriculum Guidelines approved in November 1996, which summarizes the following profile of the Bachelor of Social Work:

Professional who acts in the expressions of the social question, formulating and implementing proposals for its confrontation through public policies, business, civil society organizations and social movements; professional endowed with critical generalist intellectual and cultural training, competent in their area of performance, with capacity for creative and propositional insertion in the set of social relations and in the labor market; professional committed to the values and guiding principles of the Code of Ethics for Social Workers. (ABEPSS Curriculum Guidelines, 1999).

The second aspect involves the defense of a set of ethical-political principles through the 1993 Code of Ethics. Namely:

In the ethical-political field, the recognition of autonomy, emancipation and the full expansion of social individuals and their rights stand out; the uncompromising defense of human rights against all kinds of arbitrariness and authoritarianism; the deepening and consolidation of citizenship and democracy; the defense of the socialization of political participation and the wealth produced; the radical position in favor of equity and social justice, which implies universal access to goods and services and their democratic management; the effort to eliminate all forms of prejudice and the guarantee of pluralism and the commitment to the quality of services provided in articulation with other professionals and workers. (ABEPSS, 2004, p.73-74)

These two aspects represent the defense and guarantee of a professional profile diametrically opposed to the dictates of the contemporary educational logic imposed by capitalism and the neoliberal offensive. Dictates that advocate a professional training tuned in framing the qualification level of the work force directed to the permanence of capitalism.

Moreover, in this mode of production and reproduction of capital, the work process presents as one of its main characteristics the increasing fragmentation of the social division of labor and with it the separation of manual and intellectual work.

According to Tonet (2012):

The fragmentation of the work process and the split between the theoretical moment and the practical moment mean that workers, responsible for the production of wealth, are prevented from having access to knowledge that implies knowledge and consequent mastery over the entire process productive. This way, the separation between manual work and intellectual work becomes an instrument of capital's domination over work. (TONET, 2012, p.55).

It is observed that, at all levels of education,

a model of training of the working class is imposed entirely aimed at meeting the demands of the capitalist market.

With regard to Social Work, one of the challenges we face is to understand how the professional profile is configured and what are the main difficulties currently faced in order to guarantee a professional profile in tune with the guiding principles and values of the Ethical-Political Project. To do so, it is necessary to bring the work and education axis to the center of the debate on the agenda of political actions for the professional category.

In this analytical perspective, we will privilege some data about the reality of education in Brazil, mainly, what kind of education is being demanded for the working class. Marx (2008) provides us with an analytical key when thinking about the role of education for the production and reproduction of capital.

In order to modify human nature, so that it attains skill and dexterity in a certain kind of work, and becomes a developed and specific labor power, education or training is required, which costs a greater or lesser sum of commodity values. This sum varies according to the qualification level of the workforce. (MARX, 2008, p.202).

In this aforementioned term, Marx (2008) points out that for capital it is necessary to ensure a certain cost directed towards education or training of the working class, with the purpose of forging an education favorable to the logic of capital. Historically, it is possible to state that there is a profound separation and difference between the profile of an education aimed at training the working class and that education directed at the class that owns the means of production. As Saviani (2007) explains:

Now, this division of men into classes will also cause a division in education. Thus, a split is introduced in the unit of education, previously fully identified with the work

process itself. Since ancient slavery, we will have two distinct and separate modalities of education: one for the property class, identified as the education of free men, and another for the non-owner class, identified as the education of slaves and servants. The first, centered on intellectual activities, the art of the word and physical exercises of a recreational or military nature. And the second, assimilated to the work process itself. (SAVIANI, 2007, p.4).

In this sense, representatives of globalized capital set the rules and establish what they consider effective for education or training to make the workforce increasingly exploited by capital. Coggiola (2001) fundamentally identifies two important elements in the ongoing transformations of the educational system, both in Brazil and in the world. Let's see:

The transformations, proposed or ongoing, in the educational and university area (...) respond to two types of problems: a) the articulation of the educational and university system with the economy and society in general; b) the internal structure of the educational and university system considered in itself, as a specific branch of production, therefore subject to the requirements of profitability (law of value) and the fiscal balance of the State, when education is part of the public sector. (COGGIOLA, 2001, p.7).

Thus, from the perspective of capital, it is necessary to meet the demands of the market. This time, it is essential to let the market act freely, where the supposed "invisible hand" regulates everything and everyone. Over time, capital has been transforming all human needs, such as education, into mere merchandise. In this logic, education is captured by the mercantile logic.

The educational system is not spared by the mercantile logic disseminated throughout the social fabric (Cardoso, 2001), considering its importance in social reproduction. The current requirements derived from

these globalization processes bring about profound changes in economic, cultural and social aspects, with repercussions on global and local interrelations in the world of work and on the processes of inclusion and exclusion present in contemporary times. In Brazil, the university reform, now under way, presupposes expanding and consolidating the debate on the theme of professional training and its spaces. (ABEPSS, 2004, p. 74).

This way, university reform has been strongly orchestrated by central capitalist countries, especially on the threshold of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

Thus, it can be said that the first major expansion of higher education took place in the dictatorial period, with the University Reform of 1968 - associated with the Vocational Education Reform of 1971 -, expressing a clear profile for the expansionist logic: privatist, commodified, pulverized in non-university institutions, with low-cost courses, especially in the humanities. (CFESS, 2014, p.16).

The educational system conforms to the interests and guidelines propagated by supranational organizations, such as the IMF, IDB/World Bank and WTO. This propagation follows an expansionist logic linked to the market and is based on the Bologna Process.

In Brazil, the higher education educational system is mostly private, therefore forming a significant direction in the conduct of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This proves that, to a large extent, higher education has become, over time, a lucrative commodity for "education entrepreneurs". The 2021 census recorded 2,574 institutions of higher education. Of which 87.68% (2,261) are private and 12.2% (313) are public. (MEC/INEP, 2021). In this process, a clear redefinition of the role of universities is observed, especially from 2006 onwards with the enactment of the distance course modality, which, without a

doubt, has had a significant impact on the new design of higher education in the country.

With regard to public universities, we consider important milestones for the implementation of programs, such as: Support Program for Restructuring and Expansion Plans for Federal Universities (REUNI)¹ and PROUNI. Such programs are pointed out as one of the factors responsible for the ongoing redefinition of the new role of Public Universities.

According to some aspects pointed out by Lima (2009) through the analysis of the main documents that support the orientation of higher education in Brazil, we can identify six axes with significant changes in the new conception of educational policy for universities. Let's see:

- 1) the pedagogical restructuring of undergraduate courses, based on the organization of related disciplines or basic cycles, based on the discourse on the need to use the interdisciplinarity paradigm. Therefore, even if they do not explicitly refer to the cycles or the Interdisciplinary Bachelor's Degree (BI), it is this restructuring that the documents deal with;
- 2) the flexibility of curricular structures, by reducing the number of prerequisites and co-requisites and compulsory subjects and increasing the number of optional subjects;
- 3) the intensive use of educational technologies whether through distance graduation courses, blended courses, the use of EAD in face-to-face courses and the use of teleconferences;
- 4) the replacement of the professor by the monitor or tutor student, undergraduate or graduate, considered with "good performance";
- 5) the implementation

¹“REUNI is an intelligent government action insofar as it is presented as a democratization of access, opening vacancies in public (federal) universities and allowing the holding of competitions for professors in these universities. It is important to point out, however, three axes of analysis of the REUNI implementation process: (i) that the increase in the number of vacancies in competitions for teachers has not corresponded to the number of vacancies and courses that are being created in the federal ones, which indicates the materialization of the effective increase in the professor/student relationship in graduation; (ii) that the competitions that are being held do not take into account the expansion of vacancies and courses already carried out throughout the 1990s, therefore, the entry of new professors has not, in fact, changed the already existing work overload in undergraduate courses and (iii) that this increase in vacancies/courses and the hiring of professors, within the framework of REUNI, is giving materiality to the policy of mass education, large-scale certification and deepening of the concept of the teaching university.” (LIMA, 2010, p. 19).

of new itineraries or curricular regimes and a new title system that operationalizes the issuance of certificates of achievement, certificates for short courses and diplomas for completion of undergraduate courses and, finally, 6) student mobility between public and/or private HEIs, operationalizing yet another possibility of blurring the boundaries between public and private in educational policy. (LIMA, 2010, p.21)

It is in this context that education within the scope of Social Work suffers the impacts of the hegemonic direction of the neoliberal offensive. By hegemony it is apprehended through a precise conception formulated by Fortunato (2009) in the light of Gramsci's thought.

Hegemony is the exercise of power through the balance between domination and coercion, also considering the balance between direction and consensus. Thus, Gramsci gives importance to civil society (school, church, universities, unions, political parties, media, among others) for the construction of a critical conscience, leading the working class to form an active sense from a broad debate. (FORTUNATO, 2009, p. 9470).

Taking the particularity of courses in Brazilian Social Work as an expression of reality, the hegemony of the private sector in this area is quite emblematic. In view of this, we identified two orders of concern. These orders of concerns are fully articulated, although they are discussed here separately for didactic purposes.

The first order of concern is found on the qualitative level, we can witness a movement

of continuities and ruptures. Movement that drives continuity with regard to the direction that the market wants to print for a given professional profile. Direction that aims to forge, fundamentally, a professional profile restricted to the technical dimension linked to neoliberal logic.

This commercial perspective has already been identified by Netto (1996) when developing his thesis on the professional emergence of Social Work *indivorcable* (in the author's terms) of the monopoly order that creates and founds the professionalism of Social Work. Furthermore, it is observed that, in recent changes in the world of work with an interface in academic-professional training, to a large extent, the professional profile demanded by the market re-edits the perspective of social workers as "executive agents of social policies". According to Netto (1996):

[...] the nature of technical practice is essentially executive, there is a demand for actors of the most varied order, including those who prioritize the terminal level of executive action – the point at which the various people made vulnerable by sequelae and refractions of the "social question" receive a direct and immediate response articulated in sectoral social policies. In this context, the job market for the social worker is set: *he is invested as one of the executing agents of social policies.* (NETTO, 1996, p.70-71).

Both orders of concerns indicate the same point in common: they are data from reality which bring tensions and implications regarding the guarantee of the values and principles advocated in the Ethical-Political Project. Given the above, the two orders of concern deeply affect the professional profile built from the end of the 1990s and reaffirmed, until then, by the representative entities of Brazilian Social Service, especially by ABEPSS.

In short, professional training and professional work are dimensions that must be seen as inseparably intertwined processes. With regard to professional training in the area of Social Work, there is a radical criticism of representative entities about the current expansion process, under the predominance of the private logic of higher education. Emblematic was the campaign carried out by CFESS "education is not *fest food*", which was harshly opposed by higher education entrepreneurs who filed a lawsuit against the said campaign.

The Observa RH of "Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro" (2012) based on data from INEP/MEC, observed that vacancies in undergraduate courses in Social Work according to the legal nature, in the period between 2000 and 2010, "the private sphere always offered a greater number of vacancies in graduation courses in social work. Over the years, the number of private vacancies grew by 161%, while in the public nature only 12%." (UERJ from Observa RH, 2012)

This way, the representative entities of the Brazilian Social Service ABEPSS, CFESS and ENESSO (1999) position themselves and affirm that, "university education tends to be reduced to training, to the transmission of knowledge, which marks fragmented teaching." (ABEPSS, CFESS, ENESSO, 1999).

The exponential growth of higher education in the area of Social Work reveals a process of massification in professional training with an interface in professional work. Mercantile massification that can be seen in areas of professional academic training, since most courses in the area of Social Work are guided by the mercantile-private logic, and do not excel in the indissociability between teaching, research and extension.

This neoliberal logic for education was attested by the disrespect of the Ministry of Education (MEC) as a result of the

homologation of the ABEPSS Curriculum Guidelines. In an analysis carried out by Ortiz (2013), the author demonstrates that the curricular guidelines approved by ABEPSS in 1996 and endorsed by other representative entities were deeply affected. Fundamental parts were suppressed and others were modified when they were approved by the MEC in 2001, given the elimination of essential sections to support a professional profile linked to the Ethical-Political Project.

Faced with this reality, organizations in the professional category resist professional training linked to a profile forged to merely meet the demands of the job market. This time, they affirm a professional profile rooted in the values and principles of the Ethical-Political Project with affiliation to critical social theory. This theory constitutes one of the fundamental contributions in the struggle to guarantee the values and principles prescribed in the 1993 Code of Ethics.

In general terms, we state that higher education linked to the private mercantile logic tries to boost the training of bachelor social workers framed in a technical-bureaucratic profile that, depoliticizes or in the terms of Iamamoto (2017) politicizes social workers on the right. According to Iamamoto (2017, p. 33), “the massification and loss of quality of university education *facilitate the submission of professionals to the demands and ‘standards of the market’*, tending to a process of politicization to the right of the category.” [emphasis added].

RESULTS

Some of the main trends that exist in Brazilian Social Work in the context of neoliberal intensification are apprehended, such as: loss of effective guarantee of critical reflection; “[...] growing trend of disqualification of the training process and concomitant professional devaluation with

consequent professional reconfiguration.” (CFESS, 2014, p.34).

In addition, there is a deepening of the precariousness of teaching work, especially in the reality of teachers/tutors in the Distance Learning modality; massification aimed at teaching with market (profitability) and government (low cost and statistical indices) interests; mischaracterization and disrespect for the ABEPSS Curriculum Guidelines, especially with regard to non-compliance with the ABEPSS Internship Policy and Resolution 533/2008, among other consequences. This trend shows a clear impact of the professional profile built from the 1996 ABEPSS Curriculum Guidelines. Impact that has profound consequences on the professional profile linked to the Ethical-Political Project. For Barroco (2011), these are forms of reproduction of contemporary neoliberalism:

Forms of training that have been developed through the use of virtual means have contributed to withdraw from teaching the interactive possibility required by critical knowledge. Distance courses, virtual discussion rooms, virtual readings, among others, are some of the forms of reproduction of contemporary neoliberalism: an isolated and passive individual in front of a machine communicating with images and ideas that replace human relations with relations between objects and images fetishized. (BARROCO, 2011, 214)

Therefore, contrary to the professional profile aimed at market demands, it is valid to record pockets of resistance and struggles. Thus, the ABEPSS- Itinerante Project stands out. Another important project is “Ethics in Motion”. Both ABEPSS-Itinerante and *Ética em Movimento* spread the ethical-political principles of the profession. In this countercurrent, the element of criticism of capitalism is present as a starting point, indispensable to decipher the present time.

Furthermore, several moments of reflection by the professional category, such as the Brazilian Congresses on Social Work (CBAS) and the National Meetings of Researchers in Social Work (ENPESS), attest to the political positions that guide professional work. All these moments where a significant portion of the professional category gathers are expressive of the forms of struggle for a certain direction in the conduct of Brazilian Social Work. Direction that follows in a perspective of building a new hegemony contrary to the most varied forms of oppression and violations of rights.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In view of the above, it is apprehended that in the contemporary corporate context, fighting in the perspective of guaranteeing processes committed to the guidelines and principles expressed in the Ethical-Political Project, both in the training process and in carrying out professional work, becomes more and more challenging. These are challenges that instigate subjects individually and collectively to think and forge strategies of struggle capable of advancing in emancipatory processes.

Another important challenge is to politically strengthen the direction of the Ethical-Political Project. Social leadership that keeps alive the daily struggle for political emancipation, but that is not limited to it. Bearing in mind that the Ethical-Political Project is affiliated with the revolutionary cause of realizing the corporate project rooted in human emancipation.

With regard to social workers, the various struggles fostered through the construction of an agenda of resistance driven by the professional category and its representative entities, mainly the CFESS/CRESS, ENESSO and ABEPSS group, stand out. Therefore, these are struggles forged both within the

profession and outside it, as the struggles of social workers converge, to a large extent, with the struggles of other workers who, go against the grain of the ultraconservative historical movement orchestrated by representatives of the capital.

This way, without guaranteeing the conditions for the exercise of critical reflection, the professional training and work of social workers can limit the reinforcement of a professional profile that follows the perspective of mere terminal executors of public policies. Therefore, in this neoliberal societal context of dismantling rights, it is worth highlighting the importance of reflection on critical social theory to decipher the founding contradictions of this social reality.

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