

ARTICLE

The context of the Coronavirus pandemic and its implications for the Brazilian Social Service

El contexto de la pandemia de Coronavirus y sus implicancias para el Servicio Social brasileño

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Abstract

This article addresses the socioeconomic and political context of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil and its implications on social policies, class sociability and demands to the Social Service. It affirms that the general dynamics of capitalist production relations - the productive economic model

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policies social
service

that destroys nature and environmental balance, the consequence of neoliberal measures in the definition of economic and social policies - are factors that have influenced the emergence and management of the health crisis. The social intervention of the State is questioned, in particular the dismantling of social policies, the withdrawal of rights and the precariousness of social protection systems, in an environment in which the increase in the concentration of wealth is also responsible for poverty and social inequality. Against this backdrop, we identify aspects of the Brazilian reality that have affected and continue to affect the professional practice of social workers at this juncture of the pandemic and emergency professional demands.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda el contexto socioeconómico y político de la aparición de la pandemia del COVID-19 en Brasil y sus implicancias en las políticas sociales, la sociabilidad de las clases y las demandas al Servicio Social. Afirma que la dinámica general de las relaciones de producción capitalista -el modelo económico productivo que destruye la naturaleza y el equilibrio medioambiental, consecuencia de las medidas neoliberales en la definición de las políticas económicas y sociales- son factores que han incidido en la aparición y gestión de la crisis sanitaria. Se cuestiona la intervención social del Estado, en particular el desmantelamiento de las políticas sociales, la retirada de derechos y la precariedad de los sistemas de protección social, en un entorno en el que el aumento de la concentración de la riqueza es también responsable de la pobreza y la desigualdad social. Frente a este cuadro, se identifican aspectos de la realidad brasileña que han afectado y afectan el ejercicio profesional de las/os trabajadoras sociales en esta coyuntura de demandas profesionales de pandemia y emergencia.

Palabras Clave:
pandemia de COVID-19;
neoliberalismo;
derechos;
políticas sociales;
servicio social



Introduction

This essay, written from the Brazilian experience, will broadly address the context in which the coronavirus pandemic arose, its relationship with the capitalist crisis, its implications for social policies and its effects on the professional practice of Brazilian social workers, assuming that the pandemic triggered a health crisis whose manifestations are related to the dynamics of the unequal and combined development of capitalism in peripheral countries. In addition to the greed for the production of private and lucrative wealth at the expense of the exploitation of labour, other processes triggered by and linked to capitalist relations of production are related in a mediate and immediate way to the emergence and confrontation of the COVID-19 pandemic: the destructive production of nature, the concentration of wealth, the tendencies of State intervention guided by neoliberal guidelines that guide economic and social policies and that result in the aggravation of poverty and social inequality.

This conjuncture of social catastrophe, marked by deaths, diseases, social isolation measures and emergency actions, also evidenced the weight of the world market in the production and distribution of vaccines, the priorities of governments, and trade disputes between economic powers such as the USA and China, deepening the historical contradictions and asymmetries between central and peripheral countries. The fragility of public policies after 30 years of neoliberal offensive is inevitable, especially in the peripheral regions, whose most evident results are the dismantling of social policies, the subtraction of labour and social rights and the precariousness of social protection measures. Against this backdrop, new situations have arisen that allow us to identify issues that have an impact on the daily work of social workers and that will be the subject of reflection, allowing us to identify some professional challenges that we will address in the final part of this text.

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Health crisis, public policies and sociability

The COVID-19 pandemic, a phenomenon affecting all regions of the world, has caused the illness and death of millions of people, becoming a humanitarian catastrophe that is spreading globally as a health, economic and social crisis. However, like any human-social phenomenon, its understanding requires a historical contextualization to place it in the macro-social conditions of the capitalist dynamics that govern the production of social wealth and the lifestyles of the world's population.



It is possible to argue the existence of overlaps between the metamorphoses undergone by capitalism in the 21st century and the emergence of the global health crisis which, under universal determinations - concentration and centralization of capital, expropriation of the means of life for the production of commodities, exploitation of labour and accumulation of private wealth - imprints particular characteristics on its manifestations and means of confrontation in each region and country.

Although the dominant discourse attributes the COVID-19 pandemic as the main cause of the economic and social crisis, whose manifestations in the central and peripheral countries are very different, the truth is that the pandemic is not the source of the contradictions of the capitalist world. Examples of this are cyclical crises, such as the one that broke out between 2008-2009 in the USA regarding real estate debts.

On the other hand, it is the health crisis that is seen as the source of the contradictions of the capitalist world: it is the health crisis that is enhanced by the strategies of confrontation of the crisis of capital, carried out by the bourgeoisie to reverse the fall in the rate of profit through initiatives that redefine the international division of labour, establishing renewed forms of labour exploitation, having as main accelerators the financialisation of capital and the transnational predatory action of natural resources to lower the cost of raw materials and expand exports of primary products, especially in countries with large agricultural and mining frontiers, which favour the emergence of environmental catastrophes and the emergence of pandemics in, among others, the Brazilian Amazon region.

Based on this statement, we return to the problematisation of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic at the opening of this article, to put forward the hypothesis of the existence of a social determination of the pandemic if we consider the relationship between the increase in pandemics in recent decades and the transformations linked to the circuit of capital. As Behring states:

A new pattern of reproduction of capitalism is instituted (...) by the acceleration of capital turnover, triggering advertising, marketing, optimal management of stocks of goods, planned obsolescence of goods (...) movements that seek to compensate for the decline in the rate of profit (...) by the increased intervention of the State through the constitution and allocation of the public fund, socializing losses, redirecting expenditures (...) and triggering a series of measures for capital (...) (2021, p.131-132).

While this dynamic acquires particular characteristics in the central and peripheral countries, its effects are overwhelming in the dependent countries -among which are the Latin American ones, including Brazil- already historically marked by subordination to the interests and needs of imperialist capital. The unequal and combined development that articulates the modern with the archaic, sets in motion the historical plundering of their natural resources, the transfer of values and the overexploitation of labour, producing and reproducing inequalities within these countries and in their relationship with the central countries (Brettas, 2020, p.96).

In the case of Brazil, whose social formation has its roots in the colonial system, in slave labour and latifundia, capitalist modernization was historically based on dependence and subordination to imperialist capital, under the domination of bourgeois autocracy, characterized by the political exclusion of the working and subaltern classes, whose ways of being and living bear the marks of gendered, racialized, overexploited and socially unprotected class social relations. As Mauro Iasi systematizes,

(...) Brazil has developed a complete capitalism in the frames of its subordinate and dependent insertion in the capitalist and imperialist order, and this implies its adaptation to the patterns of capital accumulation that now predominate in that order, that is, a so-called "flexible" form to ideologically hide its extremely predatory aspect, precarising labour relations and contract, intensifying exploitation and the extraction of more value, commodifying all spheres of life. (2019, p.423)

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This socioeconomic and ideopolitical context has become fertile for the deepening of the consequences of the pandemic, on the bed of a situation of crisis of capital (Behring, 2021) and of the unprecedented regressiveness of the current extreme right-wing government of President Jair Messias Bolsonaro, organic ally of Donald Trump in the USA, of Netanyahu in Israel and of the Latin American conservative governments. The greatest expression of this catastrophe are the more than 550,000 deaths (July/2021) that could have been avoided if it were not for the insufficient and disastrous measures adopted by the government, among them, the delay in vaccination, the lack of supplies, scientific denialism and its consequent apology for ineffective early treatments; occurrences aggravated by the precariousness of the infrastructure of public health services, subject to budget cuts and dismantling in the last decades of this century, under the sign of usurpation of the public fund (Behring, 2021). As summarized in a recent editorial in the journal *Temporalis*,



In Brazil, the foundations of the financialisation of capital are based on public debt, which explains the huge public fund resources directed annually to state creditors as a way to feed the profit margins of domestic and international financial capital. To enable the channelling of these amounts, the fiscal austerity scenario got a major boost after the legal parliamentary coup of 2016. Through Constitutional Amendment 95, the constitutionalisation of adjustment was made possible, freezing the federal government's primary spending for 20 years. (Irineu et al., 2021, p.9)

Broadly speaking, it can be stated that in the current Brazilian scenario elements converge that give unity to the expressions of this crisis of capital - its economic, social, political and health dimensions - whose ideopolitical spectrum is a true organic crisis². This scenario, I reiterate, is revealing of the entrails of contemporary capitalism in its eagerness to accumulate wealth at the cost of overexploitation of the workforce (Luce, 2018) and the absolute impoverishment of the working classes, in a scenario of barbarization of life: death by the virulence of diseases and living conditions and insufficient health services. According to data from the Brazilian Research Network on Food and Nutritional Sovereignty (PENSSAN, 2021), unemployment reaches over 14% of the working population in the country, with greater impacts on women, black and brown people, while 59.3% of Brazilians (125.6 million people) are not fed in sufficient quantity or quality with the arrival of the coronavirus. As David Harvey (2020) states, COVID-19 presents all the characteristics of a pandemic of class, gender and race.

It is in this environment that the opportunism and strategies of the ruling classes gain momentum: either through the action of the State, under the leadership of a proto-fascist and militarized government, or through the private apparatuses of hegemony in a climate of fierce class political conflict, led by insurgent manifestations although weakened by the social isolation of COVID-19. Indeed, coercive and consensual strategies are unleashed, both in the ideocultural field and in the field of repressive apparatuses. The main highlight of this cultural offensive is the use of social media and robotized communication technologies by the Internet, whether in the form of fake news or advertising appeals, through the action of digital influencers, affecting all aspects of everyday life (Rodrigues and Mota, 2021).

² La The organic crisis is conceived by Gramsci as that which, originating in the economic sphere, transits into the political sphere. Therefore, as it expands to the field of political, ideological and cultural relations, its effects reach the essence of class relations, affecting the content of social struggles. The crisis demands a permanent process of transformation of both the pattern of capital accumulation, including the role of the productive forces, and the strategies of domination that shape the private apparatuses of hegemony. One of the characteristics of the organic crisis is the concomitance between the economic crisis (of accumulation) and the appearance of a political crisis, determined by the intensification of conflicts between classes and, within them, between class fractions. For Gramsci, this organic crisis affects all social relations and is the condensation of the contradictions inherent in the social structure (Voza and Liguori, 2017, p.162-164).

With the acquiescence of the National Congress, Brazil is also witnessing the implementation of changes in the Federal Constitution that, by constitutionalizing fiscal adjustment measures (Behring, 2021), subtracts rights, operates the defunding of public policies, and modifies environmental, labour and social security legislations, in addition to privatizing companies and commercializing public services. In short: capital implements the necessary measures to its ways of operating to face the capitalist crisis, subordinating to its financial and patrimonial interests the means to face the health crisis. It is worth noting that, during the pandemic, the wealth of Brazilian billionaires increased by 34 billion dollars (about 177 billion reais), according to a study by the NGO Oxfam. As Professor Sara Granemann rightly reminds us:

(...) the economic crisis of big capital, in its line of expansion, seems to have found in the eruption of COVID-19 -it must be borne in mind that the planetary pandemic and the economic crisis come from the same capitalist mode of production- the “almost perfect” conditions and justification to impose, on working men and women, more sacrifices, in such depth, that include the very right to life. At present, government policies that oppose “economy” to “life” deepen to the limit one of the structural characteristics of capitalism, with the explicit valorisation of the former over the latter. (...) found in the pandemic a fertile ground to apply the guidelines of its ultraneoliberal government program and build profitable solutions for big capital. (2021, p.4-5)

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Reality shows the effects of this process in the daily life of the subaltern classes with the increase of poverty, hunger, precarious work, in its particular expressions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and generation. The impoverishment of the working classes advances due to the lack of income, in a scenario of suppression of rights and social guarantees. Among other aspects, there is the reduction of social benefits, the insufficiency of emergency aid during the pandemic and the difficulty of access to the means of social protection of social security, reinforcing, for example, the expansion of voluntarist practices, including religious and corporate philanthropy, in the same proportion that transforms public goods and services into commodities.

These social reversals occur alongside measures that facilitate the appropriation of wealth, fuelled by the financialisation of capital, especially through the appropriation of public funds and workers' livelihoods (goods, services, wages and income), taxing, commodifying and financing them. What is clear, among the tendencies of contemporary capitalism and as a determination of the regression of social protection systems and the human abandonment of the impoverished segments is the appropriation of public



funds by rentier capital and international banking; in addition, the commodification of public services (Huws, 2017), through outsourcing, public-private partnerships, and the expropriation of the rights and consumption of public services in its dimension of values of social use for the population (Mota, 2018).

This statement reveals the subordination of the State to the interests of capital - although without annulling the contradictions - and exposes the limits of the political organization of the subaltern classes to fight for the maintenance of their civilizational achievements at this juncture. These limits were determined and aggravated by the genericized and racialized labour precariousness, by the expansion of the relative overpopulation, composed of men and women housed in unemployment, in informality, in paid or unpaid domestic work and in self-employment. This panorama has been aggravated by the pandemic, affecting head-on the political and organizational capacity of workers to resist and fight against the dismantling of their rights and access to goods and services, as evidenced by the slogans of the recent street demonstrations in Brazil: “vaccine in the arm and food on the plate”, demanding vaccines, emergency aid and jobs.

This social environment is mediated by a true cultural war, carrier of a reactionary and ultraneoliberal neoconservatism, shaper of ideologies that are all the rage in the Brazilian present and permeable to the subaltern classes (Mota, 2019), such as the disqualification of social movements and political parties, especially those of the left spectrum, the denial of science, the preventive treatments of COVID-19, the incentive to use weapons as a means to combat violence, the prevarications about the size of the State, the privileges of public officials, in addition to the persecution of critical thinking in public universities, artistic manifestations and alternative media, to mention the main ones.

These ideologies are rooted in the historical conservatism of our social formation, with a clear racist, patriarchal and anti-democratic content, full of prejudice against women and the LGBTQIA+ community, linked to social class relations. These are ideas and customs propagated by the private apparatuses of hegemony of the right and extreme right, in order to subjectivise the objectivity of the demands of capital and the bourgeoisie in the implementation of measures necessary to their ways of operating to face the capitalist crisis (Mota and Rodrigues, 2020) and, within it, the health crisis.

It is worth explaining that the experience of social inequality by the subaltern classes, particularly the failure to meet their most basic needs, pushes these class and lumpen

segments to the search for means of survival (their simple reproduction), where the space for the formation of critical consciousness is restricted and the possibilities of reproduction of the rationality of the dominant classes are expanded (Iasi, 2019).

Thus, the spoils of the capitalist crisis and, within it, the social and health crisis we are experiencing, materially, socially and culturally affect fractions of the working and subaltern classes, bringing to light new demands, situations and contexts that have implications for social policies and the daily work of social workers in Brazil, as we will address below.

Implications and challenges for the Brazilian Social Service

Within the international panorama, the Brazilian Social Service has some particularities inherited from its historical development, whose main characteristics are the political-professional organization of social workers throughout the national territory³, the existence of national parameters to guide professional practice⁴ and a set of national resolutions and directives of a political, ethical and technical nature related to professional training and to ethical-political and professional orientations⁵. Such particularities are not continental exclusivity, but reveal expressions of the professional culture of the Brazilian Social Service in harmony with the socio-historical conditions that determined the struggle to overcome the traditional Social Service, with empiricist, confessional and philanthropic-assistance roots present in the genesis of the profession in Brazil, as well as its previous and current conservative features.

Thus, the development of the profession in Brazil, in addition to its status as a technical-professional area, responsible for the existence of a consolidated professional labour market, constituted an area of knowledge production, strengthened by the development

³ We refer to the "political-professional organizations of Brazilian social work - the Federal Council of Social Service (CFESS), the Regional Council of Social Service (CRESS), the Brazilian Association of Teaching and Research in Social Service (ABEPSS) and the National Executive of Social Service Students" (ENESSO) -, who have a strong legitimacy rooted in their democratic decision-making procedures and in the definition of a broad agenda of professional struggle linked to the demands of the progressive wing of Brazilian society" (Behring, 2021b, p.63).

⁴ Parameters for the Work of Social Workers in Health Policy (http://www.cfess.org.br/arquivos/Parametros_para_a_Atualizacao_de_Assistentes_Sociais_na_Saude.pdf), Social Assistance (http://www.cfess.org.br/arquivos/Cartilha_CFESS_Final_Grafica.pdf), Grants for the Work of Social Workers in Education Policy, (http://www.cfess.org.br/arquivos/BROCHURACFESS_SUBSIDIOS-AS-EDUCACAO.pdf), Social Workers' Work in Socio-legal Policy - Grants for Reflection (http://www.cfess.org.br/arquivos/CFESSsubsidijs_sociojuridico2014.pdf), Work of Social Workers in Urban Policy (<http://www.cfess.org.br/arquivos/CFESS-SubsidiosPoliticaUrbana-Site.pdf>), Health and Social Service Residency - Grants for Reflection (<http://www.cfess.org.br/arquivos/CFESS-BrochuraResidenciaSaude.pdf>).

⁵ Code of Ethics of Social Workers (1993), in the Law of Regulation of the Profession and in the Curricular Guidelines of the Brazilian Association of Social Work Teaching and Research (Behring, 2021b, p.63).

of graduate programs in the area and by the existence of researchers recognized by federal and state agencies for the promotion of research and undergraduate and graduate education. Such particularity, indicative of political and theoretical-methodological pluralism, reveals the permanent effort to overcome the pragmatism and empiricism that mark the origins of the profession, endowing its objects of direct intervention (practice) with the status of objects of research and knowledge production in a critical and prospective perspective (Mota, 2013). This investment allowed the profession to advance in the construction of a critical political and professional culture, preserving the unity between its different dimensions: theoretical, ethical, political and technical-operational. It is from this unity that it will be possible to ensure resistance to conservative, technicist and modernizing thinking, both in research and in professional training and practice, consolidating values and contributions that guide the ethical-political-professional project of the Brazilian Social Service.

It is worth noting that the confessional and anti-modern origins of the profession were challenged by the insurgence of social workers during the exhaustion of the military business dictatorship in the late 1970s, initiating what was called the process of renewal of the profession (Netto, 1991): either challenging the traditional Social Service or pretending to break with conservatism. It opposed the place that monopolistic capitalism had reserved for it, embracing a social direction opposite to that for which it was created, as inscribed in the code of ethics in force, in the training guidelines and in the trends of knowledge production, where the Marxist orientation predominates in opposition to the dominant hegemony (Mota, 2016).

We do not deny practice as a function of prioritizing theory. It invests in the theoretical and historical treatment of the singularities of practice, referring them to the totality of social relations as a means to glimpse strategies of articulation with the social struggles of the working and subaltern classes in their social relations of gender, race and sex (Cisne, 2014); in the expansion of policies and the exercise of rights and the formation of sociabilities and respect for diversity.

Thus, since the 1980s, the profession has been building a progressive professional culture in organic articulation with the agendas of struggle of the subaltern classes. This process, however, does not include any linearity since it is related to the historical context of each period, as was the case in the post-military dictatorship period and the events derived from the political processes that have taken place since the 1990s, more precisely, the context opened by the social-liberalism (Castelo, 2013) of the Latin American centre-left governments and the neoliberalism of the past decades.

Not without reason, since the mid-1990s, the struggle of the professional collective is based on the defense of this legacy of struggles and achievements facing the “new reason of the world” (Dardot and Laval, 2016, p.30-31), permeated by neoliberal attacks that “far exceed the mercantile and financial sphere in which capital reigns [...] extends the logic of the market far beyond its borders, extending to the formation of subjectivities”. This context is deepened in the current situation by the ultra-conservative thinking of the extreme right and by the expedients used to implement the ultra-neoliberal agenda of the current Bolsonaro government, which deepens the pre-existing labour and social protection precariousness and greatly aggravates the economic-social consequences of the pandemic of the new coronavirus in a clear process of barbarization of social life.

In this environment, social workers, especially the organized and vanguard segments, have participated in both the more general resistance movements and those directly affecting the profession, in tune with the social, partisan and professional struggles of the progressive sectors of Brazilian society. In the context of more general struggles, they have positioned themselves in defense of public social security, social and labour rights, democratic freedoms, against neoliberal adjustments, in defense of agrarian and urban reform, against structural racism and LGBTQIA+phobia, women’s rights and the rights of native peoples, among others. In the professional field, social workers have positioned themselves against private, commercial and distance education, responsible for the formation of a professional reserve army with very low salaries and at the mercy of professional unemployment. In the ideopolitical sphere, they have confronted conservatism and postmodern thinking that affects theoretical frameworks and professional ideologies, in addition to denouncing and confronting the transformations in the work environment that affect the working conditions and relations of social workers.

Thus, the Brazilian Social Service, which even before the pandemic was involved in the resistance and struggle against neoliberal threats, changes in work and theoretical, political and cultural conservatism (Mota and Rodrigues, 2020), is now doubly threatened by ultraconservative and ultraneoliberal mandates, derived from the extreme right-wing leadership of the current government and by the implications of this context in the health crisis, with reflections in the daily professional work.

The implications of the health and social crisis on the profession affect social workers at two main levels: at the level of daily demands, whose volume and nature of the situations demanded are directly related to public social unprotection, violence and deficiencies in meeting the basic social needs of workers and their families; and at the



level of professional activities involving conditions, labour relations and singularities of professional practice in times of catastrophe and social isolation.

As for the professional work, in addition to the situations already mentioned, it is observed that the improvisation and mistakes in the conduct of the measures to face COVID-19 greatly affected the professional performance, marked by the pragmatism of the emergency measures and the dependence on the market moods, in a regressive and conservative cultural environment.

As for the demands originated in the pandemic catastrophe and the human-social abandonment, we witnessed, within the Brazilian Social Service, the reappearance of experiences that we considered overcome, particularly in the care of material and immediate needs of the population, such as hunger and lack of income that reach the health and social assistance units and socio-legal agencies as unusual, urgent situations of unpostponable solution, directly linked to the lack of livelihood, violence and disease.

They are demands directly related to changes in the protocols for access to services/benefits and aids and in the operability of policies, such as: administrative referrals for the qualification of users to various programs, regularization of civil documentation and identification, resolution of difficulties caused by the lack of access to computers and cell phones, as well as guidance and monitoring of families during treatment and hospitalization for COVID-19 treatment. Most of these demands are pandemic-related. However, these demands occur simultaneously with other pre-existing demands, which were enhanced in the health crisis, linked to violence against women, racial discrimination, protection of the elderly, children, street population and LGBTQ+, among others. Activities to address these situations are largely carried out remotely, under health protocols and with extensive use of communication and information technologies, through interactive platforms or via cell phones.

This set of situations and processes has greatly affected professional activity, either due to the insufficiency and precariousness of the means and services available, or due to the increase in the demands of the population -whether or not submerged in the health crisis, and not always identified as such due to the context of social emergency. But, in any of the possibilities, the insufficiency of policies, means and social teams has gained visibility, even in the bourgeois media, bringing new elements to the professional universe. The aftermath of the lack of funding and the dismantling of policies, especially Social Assistance (Carneiro et al., 2021), whose specificity accounts for a huge range of



actions, no longer being addressed, reveals the lack of responsibility of the State. Also in the field of health and social assistance there was a kind of centralization of professionals working directly with the population, such as doctors, nurses, psychologists and social workers in the public sector, who were forced to cover the shortcomings of the services with the precarious means at their disposal, in a scenario of discouraging helplessness.

From the countless accounts of experiences, coexistence with professionals, publications and impact research carried out in the field of Social Service⁶, it is observed that the professional universe of social workers has been affected by the restructuring of public institutions and the creation of emergency services implemented under public-private partnerships, in which: the supply, management and execution of services are transferred to for-profit or non-profit entities; changes are made to the content of professional work through the standardization of routines, goals, protocols and activities that may detract from the relative technical-political autonomy of the profession. In addition, in the professional labour market, it has become recurrent to hire people to perform specific tasks, such as socioeconomic analysis, social studies, individual consultations, interviews, home visits, preparation of reports and social opinions, with pre-established norms and standards.

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This context is directly related to the counter-reforms of the State and the tendencies towards new expropriations, given that part of the public services can become spaces of mediation for the valorisation of capital.

The impact of these circumstances of catastrophe and health crisis on the work of Social Services professionals is very worrying, either because of the lack of working conditions and the precariousness of services and equipment that overload the social services provided by these professionals, or because many of these activities, episodic in nature, may become permanent.

There are ample possibilities that this type of action subtracts the pedagogical dimension of the profession, whether in the mediation of the exercise of rights, or in the instrumentalisation of access to goods, services and policies, or even in the identification of needs (subsumed or not to the pandemic) that require new means of protection and public action by the State. These aspects are related to the commoditization of public services and the socio-technical fragmentation of work, restricting professional action to the performance of pre-established procedures, with the help of communication and information technologies, the ICTs.

⁶ Among recent publications, we highlight the thematic issue of the journal *Temporalis*, v. 21 n. 41, 2021.



This reality, presented here in general terms, has been the subject of discouragement on the part of professionals; however, the possibilities of overcoming and facing this situation are contained in the reality itself. The impacts on professional attributions and working conditions are the most significant in terms of the daily work of social workers, but they may make invisible other issues involved in this totality of phenomena.

The professional reality changed by the pandemic and by ultra-liberalism is the starting point of our discouragement and, dialectically, also the starting point to face this reality, as long as we can identify, in the capillarity of demands, needs that require new actions and initiatives - the result of the exercise of new professional competences, tuned to the real needs of users, in line with the ethical-technical and political commitments of the profession.

The issues that arise in the singularity of the demands require a more precise and totalizing referral to the field of State counter-reforms, common sense ideologies, rights, public policies and other issues, such as racism, prejudice, discrimination and violence of all kinds. Apparently individual and punctual, the phenomena in course (they have conjunctural and structural dimensions) must be worked prospectively and pedagogically in the countercurrent of the “pedagogy of hegemony”⁷ of the dominant classes that unload in the Coronavirus pandemic all the justifications of the social and economic crisis, presenting the real historical process in the pandemic pauperization. If, from an objective point of view, this warning may sound “abstract” in the face of the real process that crosses the daily practice of social workers, from another perspective, that of rational and political-professional confrontation of this contextuality, in the bed of our ethical-professional protagonism, radically critical and restless, it offers other possibilities: that of moving away from the routes of professional catharsis that socializes discouragement, from the fatalism of impotent professional practice and/or from professional political messianism.

In other words, our sharpness in identifying new and old issues, underlying the capillarity of the demands in the current pandemic and which have implications on professional competencies and attributions, may be carriers of needs that justify new proposals, beyond the context of the emergency.

In the statements of social security and social assistance professionals, there are frequent references to the demands of users, such as: lack of registration and civil identification

⁷The new pedagogy of hegemony aims to obtain the passive consensus of a broad contingent of the population to the project of bourgeois sociability and to conform more directly massive segments of the urban proletariat to the ideas, ideals and practices of bourgeois expropriation and domination (Neves & Sant'Anna, 2005, p.37).

documents; situations related to functional and digital illiteracy; inability to use computers, insufficient data transmission packages through the Internet, necessary for registration on digital platforms to receive aid, benefits, etc. These situations cannot be characterized simply as bureaucratic and out of reach of professional attributions: it is necessary to recognize them as signs of the inexistence of public programs that could be proposed in states and municipalities, such as free document services related to the exercise of citizens' civil rights; the implementation of free public offices for access to computers with available technical follow-up, universal and free access to data networks (internet), as part of the services that are at the heart of the sociability of this century and that are inaccessible to the impoverished population. This context is prodigal in the emergence of intermediaries who usurp the meagre salaries, incomes and benefits of the elderly and illiterate population, to dispose of the realization of these activities. We need to gather new research to reflect on this new contextuality that contains ongoing trends.

Final reflections: professional challenges in the face of the health crisis

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Our knowledge of reality can contribute to the criticism and formulation of public policies and mechanisms that respond to the real needs of the population, as part of the initiatives and the creation of new policies and programs in the period of the health catastrophe. It is in this sense that we need to carry out a pedagogical counter-offensive that confronts the attempts to endow the Social Service with a mere technical-operational action that can extend beyond the pandemic. It is a matter of exercising this pedagogical dimension through the investigation of concrete situations, the systematization of data and information, the commitment and involvement in the struggles of social movements, as well as the information, training and instrumentalisation of resistance and denunciation, whether in the institutional sphere or in alternative media, which allows the theoretical and pedagogical unveiling of the relationship between the macro-dimensions of reality and the fragmented professional demands.

Although health crises contain emergency demands of their own, they entail an enormous paradox: they reveal pressing needs that require rapid measures, but in the process they can also perpetuate merely instrumental and pragmatic professional practices. They are initiatives that solve problems on an ad hoc basis, although their origin is earlier and is not due to the pandemic, as we pointed out earlier. The means to legitimize the social irresponsibility of the State are carried out through the use of schemes aimed at the exercise of the pedagogy of bourgeois hegemony.



As has already been said on other occasions, the ideocultural bed of these measures of adjustment, dismantling and counter-reforms is that of the formation of a culture of crisis⁸ (Mota, 2019). Under certain relationships and using some mediations - in this case, the health crisis - the pedagogy of the culture of the crisis carried out by the dominant classes and their State consists of metabolizing objectively and subjectively the production of active and passive consensuses of the subaltern classes, required in the implementation of measures necessary for their ways of operating to face the capitalist crisis and, in it, the health crisis. Among its axes, now redefined, we highlight the idea that poverty, lack of protection and hunger are determined by COVID-19, affecting the entire population, regardless of their class status and the measures of barbarization of life that preceded the pandemic, implemented by the ultra-liberal and conservative project.

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