

## BACK AND BACK OF THE RIGHT TO ACCESS EDUCATION



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### ABSTRACT

This article presents a contextualization of the education policy in higher education and brings reflections on the insertion of social work in this policy, as a space for professional action. For the development of the study, bibliographic research was used in materials that discuss the theme, and discussions held in the Special Topic Educational Policies and Social Struggles in Brazil: the meaning of human emancipation, attended in the Graduate Program, Master's level PPGSS, Unioeste campus de Toledo. We observe that the studies have as reference the educational process within the contradictory logic of capitalism, more specifically higher education, and its expansion and access is a consensus between the requisition of the current mode of production and also the result of clashes and political struggles for the right to education.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Capitalism, Social Work, Student Assistance.

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## INTRODUCTION

With the development of social policies, which are the basis for the professional intervention of the social worker, the profession of social work began to be demanded in various socio-occupational spaces, aiming at the execution of policies and demarcating the professional ethical commitment to the working class in the defense of their rights having as reference the ethical-political dimensions, theoretical-methodological and technical-operative of the profession.

Iamamoto (2017) implicitly says that the social worker must guide his intervention beyond the "social issue", that is, he must be guided by the search for the visibility of social subjects in order to stimulate the organization for the defense and expansion of their rights. Thus, in educational policy, the social worker can work at different levels of education, and in different spheres.

Thus, it is understood that professional actions should strengthen, include and guarantee rights and rescue of the subject's citizenship (Lara; Araújo, 2021). Therefore, it is pointed out that the socio-historical context of education in Brazil is related to political, social and economic history, so reflecting on higher education in Brazil involves discussing the current mode of production as well as considering the emancipatory character of education in addition to meeting the interests and dictates of capitalism.

As expressed in the subsidies for the performance of social workers in education policy, the education policy is the result of "[...]historically determined forms of confronting the contradictions that particularize capitalist society by social classes and the State, [...]" (CFESS, 2014, p. 19), where the latter responds to the intensification of the social question through institutionalized actions, therefore, it expresses strategies of State intervention, but is also the result of the political struggle of the working class.

Thus, in order to understand educational policy, it is necessary to correlate it with the dynamics and crises of the society of capital, which are cyclical and point to the degradation of wage labor.

Frigotto (2001) analyzes that the determinations that lead to crisis are related to the very essence of which, accumulation, concentration and centralization, generating exclusion from competition and exploitation of the labor force. Linked to these aspects, it is clear that "capital circumvents the borders of nation-states through the installation of multinationals" (Frigotto, 2001, p.77) and later "companies move above the effective control of nations and create their own space of power" (Frigotto, 2001, p.77) through transnational

corporations, and this trajectory leads to the globalization of capital, especially financial and speculative capital. These factors result in the bankruptcy of national states in the face of the loss of the capacity of their currencies, state reforms and the growing monopoly of science and technology.

In this way, "A capitalism that regulates the market and capital does not cease to be capitalism and, therefore, does not overcome the existence of social classes and, therefore, social inequality". (Frigotto, 2001, p. 76). However, to the extent that employment is seen as a right to be integrated with consumption, life and the future, there is the idea that the private market does not offer employment, which is the responsibility of the State. It is noteworthy that in the central countries, this achievement figured as an expectation of a better future for the offspring of the working class.

Therefore, it is important to highlight that there is a correlation of consensus and reproduction of the labor force necessary for the metabolic reproduction of capital, which combines the expansion of forms of access and permanence at different levels and educational modalities (early childhood education, elementary education, high school, professional and technological education, youth and adult education, special education and higher education).

In the case of higher education and technological professional education, it is considered that the "[...]Expanding the access of working-class children to public and quality educational institutions is an important advance, which should not be simplified," [...] because "[...]It is the result of social struggles, but at the same time, it is the consequence of a weakened expansion of education at all levels. [...]". However, "[...] the permanence of the poorest in quality public education is non-negotiable [...] even in the midst of storms" (LESSA, 2015, 480-481).

## **HIGHER EDUCATION IN BRAZIL**

Regarding the Brazilian context, Lima based on Florestan Fernandes (1975) states that (2020, p. 48)

With the development of capitalism in our country, the expansion of higher education became a requirement of capital itself, whether for the training of the workforce to meet the productive changes, or for the dissemination of the bourgeois conception of the world under the image of an inclusive policy. This process has historically been confronted by the pressure of professors and students for the destruction of the monopolization of knowledge by the dominant classes and by the internal democratization of universities. On the other hand, the various fractions of the

Brazilian bourgeoisie demanded the modernization of higher education to meet the changes in the world of capital.

It is observed that the expansion of higher education is linked to the needs of capital, so that its initial phase takes place in the bourgeois-military regime, where there is an increase in access to private educational institutions and the flooding of the university to the control of professors and students who sought to "break the dependent pattern of development and education" (Lima, 2020, p. 53-54).

With the redemocratization of the country, a context of effervescence of the movements culminated in the approval of the Federal Constitution of 1988, where education is characterized as a social right, along with health, food, work, housing, transportation, leisure, security, social security, protection of maternity and childhood, assistance to the helpless, that is, education is a claimable right, according to article 6 (Brasil, 1988, n.p.).

However, in the following years with the advance of neoliberalism in Brazil, and with it the advance of privatization, and consequently the logic of reduction of the State in Higher Education, which implies a reduction in investment, and expansion of the granting of authorization to operate to private institutions; as well as increased incentive for public-private partnerships in educational institutions; and also planning initiatives to transfer funding and payment of salaries to Federal Higher Education Institutions; as well as the creation of bills to deregulate the rights of public servants; establishment of opening for imported technologies, through the Information Technology Law - Law 8248/91; and there is also the proposal to abolish the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) and the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) (LIMA, 2005 apud PEREIRA, 2007, p. 194-195). It is important to clarify that this logic of implementing neoliberal policies remains in Itamar's government, after the fall of the Collor government.

It is necessary to emphasize that in the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) there is a deepening of the neoliberal logic. It is noteworthy that there was the creation of the Ministry of Federal Administration and State Reform (MARE), which fulfilling the objective of reducing the State's responsibility for guaranteeing social rights and executing social policies, implements the Master Plan for the Reform of the State Apparatus (PDRAE), which

[...] it is based on the assumption that there is a crisis, resulting from the inefficiency of the State and/or the excess of functions that should be performed by the private sector - a truly efficient, fast, economic locus, while the public sector would be the sphere of inefficiency, corruption, exaggerated spending, delay, non-fulfillment of social demands. – and/or by the "non-state public" sector, characterized as the space where there would be no interest in obtaining profit, but only in the provision of social services. Thus, because there is no intention of profitability, the State would transfer resources so that this sector – "non-state public" – could efficiently perform social services (Pereira, 2007, p. 210).

Thus, the logic imbued by the Plan is that the University becomes a "non-exclusive" activity of the State, thus favoring the privatization of Higher Education, which took place throughout the 1990s until the beginning of the twenty-first century (Pereira, 2007, p. 211).

Especially in the FHC government, there were strategies used that implied the dismantling of the social rights established in the Federal Constitution of 1988, "[...] With state services largely privatized, it subsidized and strengthened the market, in addition to deepening Brazil's subordination to the world economy" (Poggere, 2017, p. 64).

According to Poggere (2017, p. 64), the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (LDB) - Law No. 9394/1996, translates the "[...] dismantling of the constitutional achievements for higher education in Brazil [...] being the milestone of the counter-reform of higher education in the 1990s. The LDB legitimizes higher education as a mercantile service, no longer as a social right." In addition, it is pointed out that still in the FHC government, the National Education Plan (2001-2010), Law No. 10172/2001, was approved, which follows the same neoliberal logic with several vetoes related to Higher Education, summarily placing it as a non-essential service. Higher Education follows a neoliberal and privatist logic, imposed by international organizations, such as the World Bank, which finances underdeveloped economies.

It is observed that with the Lula government (2003-2010) followed by the Dilma Rousseff government (2011-2016), it is observed that there is a prioritization of the Higher Education agenda combined with the continuity of its expansion, but there is no split with neoliberalism, since there is a "privatization/entrepreneurship of education and large-scale certification" (2020, p.54), due to the

(i) the increase in the number of private HEIs and indirect public funding for the private sector via FIES and ProUni; (ii) the internal privatization of public HEIs via paid courses, university-company partnerships and private law foundations and (iii) the productivism that permeates and conditions the research and graduate policy conducted by CAPES and CNPq

And also the

large-scale certification – can be identified in actions such as EaD and REUNI. These actions effected the expansion of higher education, especially in the second Lula government (2007-2010), intensifying the teaching work and reconfiguring the social role of public universities, particularly the federal ones, reduced, in part, to undergraduate teaching institutions, displaced from research and the production and socialization of critical and creative knowledge. An important reference of this large-scale certification was the REUNI Program presented through Presidential Decree (6096/07), with the following objectives: to increase the number of undergraduate students in federal universities and to increase the number of students per professor in undergraduate courses; diversify the modalities of undergraduate courses, through the flexibility of curricula, distance education, the creation of short courses, cycles (basic and professional) and interdisciplinary bachelor's degrees; encourage the creation of a new system of titles; raise the completion rate of undergraduate courses to 90% and stimulate student mobility between educational institutions. All this within five years (Lima, 2020, p. 56-57).

With this, it is inferred that the main difference between the FHC, Lula and Dilma governments refers to the fact that the latter two meet some demands of the working class, even if based on the market logic of education through the University for All Program (PROUNI), <sup>4</sup>expansion of the Student Financing Fund (FIES)<sup>5</sup>, EAD and the Technological Innovations Law. At the same time, the Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities (REUNI) is being implemented as a strategic apparatus of the federal government to execute the goals of the National Education Plan (2001-2010), regulated by Law No. 10,172/2001. It exposes that REUNI restructured and expanded the federal universities aiming at the democratization of higher education, in order to serve the largest possible number of students. In addition, during the period of the government in question, there was also the implementation of the National Student Assistance Plan (PNAES), "[...] which seeks to ensure the permanence of students in IFES" (POGGERE, 2017, p. 84, 99, 103).

Therefore, it is evident that when discussing education policy, especially higher education, it is not possible to dissociate the categories of work and education, as specifically human and humanizing experiences, which are complex and contradictory in this current mode of production, as well expressed by Lessa (2015) based on Saviani (2007).

The category of work, in its ontological bias, transforms nature and man, and thus, and considering that the human learns to produce his existence to prepare his survival in

<sup>4</sup> PROUNI offers full and partial scholarships (50% of the course tuition fee), in sequential undergraduate courses of specific training, in private higher education institutions. The target audience of the program is students without a higher education degree.

<sup>5</sup> FIES, a program of the Ministry of Education aimed at financing the graduation in higher education of students enrolled in non-free higher education courses, according to Law 10.260/2001. Students enrolled in higher education courses who have a positive evaluation in the processes conducted by the Ministry of Education can apply for financing.

itself, education as a human experience in the sense of teaching and learning, which allows future generations to know elements necessary for the production and maintenance of life.

Thus, for Lessa (2015),

Working, therefore, presupposes some type and level of learning. Educating is a way of working and there is no work without being able to think and learn how to do it, which makes the relationship between both categories interdependent.

In this bias, Frigotto (1993) expresses that Brazil maintains an international peripheral economy, produces and exports simple goods, which influences the educational structure carried out here, so education is organized in order to maintain simple jobs, that is, the schooling of the majority will be restricted to elementary levels, it will be simplified and lightened.

In addition to this prism, Lessa (2015, p. 463) points out that

[...] the access and permanence of impoverished populations, historically doomed to the exercise of degraded and simplified work and to weakened education, in public and quality training institutions, historically occupied by the elite and by the urban middle classes, through Student Assistance and Affirmative Policies<sup>6</sup>, emerge as a recent, complex and contradictory innovation in the experience of educating and working.

Therefore, a critical look is necessary, so much so that Lessa (2015) states that as a result of the class struggle and educational projects in dispute, it results in the elaboration of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education – LDB in 1996, called "*minimalist*" in a decade of hegemony of neoliberal policies.

Thus, observe that FRIGOTO (2001) ponders that

In the federal government's project, the organization of the basic content explained in the LDB and, in particular, in the opinions and ordinances that regulate it, Professional Education is subordinated to the ideas of the market and capital and to an exclusionary, income-concentrating, predatory development model. Market and capital without society's controls – flexible and deregulated that generates unemployment, underemployment and exclusion.

It is about conforming to a **minimum citizen**, who thinks minimally and reacts minimally. It is an education from an individualistic, fragmentary perspective – it does not even enable the citizen and give him the right to a job, to a profession, making him only a mere "employable" available in the labor market under the designs of capital in its new configuration. (Frigoto, p. 80, 2001, emphasis added).

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<sup>6</sup> "[...] Affirmative Policies take shape in Brazilian society in the 1980s,[...]" are characterized as "[...] compensatory actions for the Afro-Brazilian population, due to its history of discrimination. In the 1990s, we have affirmative legislation regarding the reservation of vacancies for the access of disabled people to the labor market" [...] already "[...] at the beginning of the twenty-first century we have experiences of quotas in public universities. Affirmative Action is an important policy in minimizing inequalities of economic, ethnic, physical and intellectual condition.

However, it is necessary to emphasize that education in general, especially professional education, is linked to a perspective of "training, accommodation, even if it resorts to notions such as polyvalent and abstract education" (FRIGOTO, p. 80). This logic is intended to mold a minimum citizen, that is, one who thinks and reacts minimally, based on an individualistic and fragmentary perspective, in which it does not even qualify the citizen and give him the right to a job, to a profession, making him only a mere "employable" available in the labor market under the designs of capital in its new configuration (FRIGOTO, p. 80).

Among the aspects of ideological discourse, they maintain the *telos* of competitiveness. Thus, the pedagogy of competitiveness, which permeates the idea of competencies and skills, exerts changes in the economic role granted to the school and to the process of technical and professional training. Therefore, the acquisition of the economic function of the school is subtended, and consequently the economy of education, in which education is concatenated with economic development, employment, mobility and social ascension, so that the economic function attributed to the school becomes employability or training for unemployment.

Wrapped in ideological aspects, there is a transfer of responsibility from the State to the individual level. Thus, there is no employment policy, no prospect of a career, but individuals who may or may not be employable and requalifiable, that is, it is the appropriate professional education for the new division of labor.

The emancipatory perspective of professional education, in turn, according to (FRIGOTTO, 2001) permeates the criticism of the dominant societal project centered on the logic of the market; as well as signaling the need to have the idea of the subjective right of each individual in the educational field to actually provide human emancipation. Furthermore, the author highlights the need to articulate technical-professional training with a "sustainable" development project that integrates basic education and the ethical-political dimension of "[...] autonomous subjects and builders of radically democratic, solidary and egalitarian social processes [...]" (FRIGOTTO, 2001, p. 83),

However, as pointed out by the author in question, this perspective is different from that carried out by the federal government, because the latter, through the LDB, highlights a regular and a non-regular system, that is, the first encompasses elementary and secondary education (basic education) and higher education, and the second, professional education, which is subdivided into basic, technical and technological. Thus, "[...] professional



education at the technical level or post-secondary level or concomitantly, is effective in a dualism that supposes that the technical, scientific, cultural and political dimensions are separable." (FRIGOTTO, 2001, p. 83) which characterizes an imposition on the popular classes and a form of obstruction to the university.

Another aspect that needs to be analyzed is the fact that Professional Education cannot be usurped "[...] as a policy focused neither on job creation, nor as a prevention of unemployment and a strategy to integrate into the globalized world. [...]" (FRIGOTTO, 2001, p. 83), on the contrary, it is necessary to be regulated in the public sphere, from the perspective of guaranteeing rights so that general or professional education has an organic articulation of social relations of production, educational political and cultural relations, which requires a State that governs for society.

Therefore, to be considered democratic, access to education needs to "[...] objectively to radically expand public higher education, in order to enable universal admission and ensure qualified training, inspired by an egalitarian social construction" (VELOSO, 2015, p. 233, apud, SILVA; VELOSO, 2013, p. 426).

Thus, the bias of education in its emancipatory perspective also depends on

[...] the guarantee of respect for human diversity, the unconditional affirmation of human rights, considering free sexual orientation and expression, free gender identity, without which a non-sexist, non-racist, non-homophobic/lesbophobic/transphobic education is not viable. The processes of constitution of collective subjects and their struggles are, therefore, a condition for an emancipatory education, since they qualify democracy as a process and not as a liberal value. The perspective of democratization is at the basis of the construction of the processes of human emancipation and an education based on this understanding cannot fail to strengthen the processes of socialization of politics, of socialization of power as a central condition for overcoming the bourgeois order (CFESS, 2014, p. 22, apud COUTINHO, 2006).

Therefore, in the professional routine, the social worker needs to be clear about his political and theoretical direction, which must be in tune with the Political Ethical Project, which is favorable to the working class.

Thus, such a direction "[...] aims at the greater well-being and development of human beings. Because of this, the full defender of human and social rights and processes that focus on the expansion of the capacity for human emancipation (LARA; ARAUJO, 2021, p. 2).

## **SOCIAL WORK IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Social Work is an interventionist profession, which with the socio-historical development of the profession, from the development of social policies, was required to occupy different socio-occupational spaces, with the education policy being one of these spaces of action of the social worker.

From the expansion of REUNI, as previously described, and the implementation of PNAES – National Student Assistance Program by Decree No. 7234/2010, which aims to enable the democratization of the conditions of permanence of students in higher education, reducing the conditions of social inequalities, enabling the promotion of social inclusion.

From the expansion of REUNI, there was a demand for insertion in higher education, of professionals who would become part of the technical team, to meet the demands of students, such as professionals such as pedagogues, psychologists and social workers.

Another important signal that needs to be carried out was the materialization by the implementation of Law 12.711, (Quota Law), with the legal requirement from Law 12.711/2012, that public institutions of federal higher education, mandatorily, need to reserve 50% of the vacancies for students entering public schools, subdivided into subgroups composed of black students, low-income students, and students who have some type of disability.

The implementation of the Quota Law and the institutionalization of the National Student Assistance Program, by Decree 7234/2010, represented an advance, as it strengthened the access and permanence of students who previously did not have the conditions to enter higher education, due to the historical and social inequalities that permeate our country, and also did not have the stimulus of the State that, through social policies, It should encourage the entry of these students who, for years, even though they were a significant portion of the population, were not represented in higher education.

Therefore, it is in this context that the performance of the professional social worker in higher education will be demarcated. It is in this context that the reality for the intervention of the professional social worker is presented,

Lessa (2015) expresses that in the face of dynamic reality there are many expressions of class struggle, and student assistance is also characterized as a resistance movement resulting from the precarious expansion of education concomitant with the

recognition of this right beyond access. Therefore, the professional practice of the social worker is involved in this context of contradiction.

Thus, as a result of the debates and struggles for the right to education, the professional performance of social workers in education policy "[...] becomes more expressive as a response to the expansion of access to school and the growth of expressions of the social issue in that space [...]" (LESSA, 2015, p. 466).

Considering that there is class struggle and educational projects in dispute, it is thus understood that social movements, especially student assistance, are circumscribed by this material reality.

Regarding student assistance, the first experiences were related to food and housing, and later requisitions. Currently, student assistance is characterized as a "[...] a policy of permanence, of reducing social inequalities materialized in the university and an instrument to combat dropout" (LESSA, 2015, p. 470).

From 2003 onwards, there was a promotion of affirmative action of quotas in higher education, and it is with the internalization of the teaching of the Federal Institutes of Technological Education - IFETs that the work of social workers in relation to student assistance and quotas increases, however, Lessa (2015) considers that the internalization occurred in a precarious way, both in terms of physical space and work team.

In the service provided by higher education, there will be several manifestations of the social issue, such as "[...] poverty, misinformation, violence, illnesses, family conflicts, fragility of social policies accessed by these groups, among others." (LESSA, 2015, p. 475) so that official responses are needed, and thus, the right to quality education is current. Therefore, it is essential to think about education articulated with social policies that "[...] they must support permanence and learning in educational institutions (income, housing, health, transportation, for example)." (LESSA, 2015, p. 476), because it is based on the understanding that student assistance isolated from other social policies evidences its limited capacity for action.

In this way, to think of social work in education as a space for professional action is also to reflect on the socio-institutional demands posed to professional intervention. Among the actions carried out by social worker professionals in education, according to bibliographic research, with experience reports of professionals who work in higher education, we can describe the activities: carrying out a socioeconomic assessment in

order to identify and assist students who fit the criteria of economic and social vulnerability of the family group, where the assessment aims to bring students closer to the social reality.

In addition to the socioeconomic evaluations for the inclusion of students in aid, it is also noteworthy that the professionals provide individual care and qualified listening, with the student community, listing their demands and needs, to make the necessary referrals, both internally and externally in the institution. Social service professionals provide guidance on the instituted rights, perform dialogue with social equipment available in the municipalities and/or territories.

The difficulties faced by the social worker in the socio-occupational space in question are directly related to the historical dimension and the conjuncture in which the policy in question is developed, that is, the Social Work professional responds "[...] above all to the socio-institutional requests to expand the conditions of access and permanence of the population in the different levels and modalities of education [...]" that result from government programs instituted in response to pressure from social movements. But, on the one hand, there is a response to the demand of the social, on the other hand, there is continuity of subordination to the capitalist logic, and it is in this contradiction that the professional is inserted (CFESS, 2014, p.37). Thus, it is extremely important that the professional is aware of the Law that Regulates the Profession, the Code of Ethics, as these are instruments that guide the professional practice.

From this, it can be inferred that the social worker must guide his action with regard to access, permanence and quality of education, as briefly described below (CFESS, 2014, p. 40, 43, 44-45):

- 1) in access: the search for "[...] effective universalization of access to education and its consolidation as a public policy, as a social right";
- 2) in permanence: to go beyond only technical-instrumental action and to articulate with social struggles to expand the conditions of permanence;
- 3) in the quality of education: to guide the action in the search for an education that contributes to human emancipation, consequently breaking with the logic of capitalist society.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

From the research carried out, it was possible to carry out some reflections and considerations in relation to the inclusion of social assistance professionals in higher

education, this being a socio-occupational space, which has been demanding daily the interventions of social work, which since the period of the REUNI expedition, has been demarcating in this space the professional political ethical commitment, for the defense of students' rights and contributing to the advancement of issues, which will be strengthened through the planning and execution of actions within the scope of student assistance.

The historical context that permeates Brazilian education is directly related to the political, social and economic history of Brazil. Unfortunately, our historical context is marked by wide social, cultural and economic inequalities, and the education policy for many years has materialized with a space for the maintenance of privileges, with minimal representation of low-income students, indigenous blacks and students with some type of disability. It was after the expansion of REUNI, and the implementation of the quota law, that the scenario was later changing.

It is important to highlight that the advances, although with the preservation of the liberal order, and as a demand of the development of capital itself. The achievements only materialize through the struggles of social movements and confrontations for access to the right to education.

It is in this context that the performance of the social worker is also highlighted, more specifically in the Student Assistance Policy, which allows the professional to articulate and formulate new actions beyond those that are recognized as demanded. Thus, it is implied that the professional based on his Political Ethical Project can contribute to education in its emancipatory perspective, since the school space must promote not only cognitive learning, but also promote full development as a subject and citizen.

Therefore, Social Work in the exercise of its competences and attributions must appropriate reality with a view to interventions to guarantee rights and conquered rights.

Thus, the social worker who works in education policy must be clear about his object of work, that is, the multiple refractions of the "social question" that imply the access and permanence of subjects in the educational system, have a consistent analysis of the rights that involve the educational process that transits through a broad conception of education, beyond the mere defense of student assistance (LARA, ARAUJO, 2021). Therefore, when exercising their relative autonomy, the professional must perform it critically, being purposeful and perceiving the totality that involves economic, political and social relations.

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