

Social Policy and Social Work: the challenges of professional intervention

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Abstract: This article discusses social policy and Social Work and the challenges that their relationship presents for professional intervention. It emphasizes the flourishing and deepening of the debate about this issue in the past two decades of the 20th century, and its consolidation in the early 21st century, which is expressed through the constant production of knowledge and the peculiar insertion of agencies that represent the professional category in the struggle for the institutionalization of public policies compatible with the values found in the Code of Professional Ethics for social workers. The strongest focus is on the issues of the intervention of social workers in the field of social policy, through implementation of the professional project, committed to defending social rights of a universal character. From this perspective, it involves social policy as a contradictory field that is permeated by antagonistic social interests and projects, in which questions directly related to specificity and professional autonomy are revised.

Keywords: Social Work. Professional intervention. Social policy.

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Introduction

Movements within Latin American Social Work since the 1970s have decisively changed the direction of the profession on the continent. This process, denominated the Reconceptualization Movement, shifted the debate from the methodological focus that was dominant until then, to a debate about social relations under capitalism, and in this way came to give greater visibility to social policy as a space for the struggle to guarantee social rights (FALEIROS, 1990).

In this context, according to Campos (1988, p. 13), social policy attained a theoretical status in the realm of Social Work that allowed it to articulate between the analytical perspective of society and that of the profession. In Brazil, in the late 1970s, social workers had already taken a strong position in relation to “the formulation of social policies as a form of state intervention.” This trajectory allowed them to dialog more consistently with those in the Brazilian technocracy who defended “economic productivism”.

This was possible, on one hand, due to the genesis of the profession, which began to link itself to the context of confronting “the social question”¹ through social policies, assuring the conditions needed for the expansion of monopoly capitalism. (CARVALHO; IAMAMOTO, 1982; NETTO, 1992; MONTAÑO, 1998). On the other hand, there was a recognition that social policy has a contradictory nature, because at the same time that it serves the interests of capital, it also serves the needs of the working class. Therefore, its expansion is marked by the struggles of workers to conquer and consolidate social rights (IAMAMOTO, 2003; YAZBEK, 2000; PEREIRA, 2008)².

In Brazil, the debate about the profession, and about the visceral relationship between Social Work and social policy, flourished and deepened significantly during the last two decades of the 20th century and consolidated in the early 21st century. This can be explained by the change that Brazilian social protection systems underwent after the country returned to a state of law in 1985. This was a period of intense mobilization of segments of civil society for the expansion and guarantee of rights in key sectors, or that is, the hard core of social policy – healthcare, social security and social assistance – and a strong investment in the professional references, to expand the knowledge about the relationship between the social question and social policy. This led to a broad process for the production of knowledge about social policy, which has become a central pillar in the consolidation of Social Work as a field of knowledge in the social sciences. This has favored both the insertion of the profession and its professionals in the political confrontations of Brazilian society, and also stimulated debate about the professional intervention of social workers in the realm of social policy.

In relation to the knowledge produced, Iamamoto (2004, p. 11) highlights the privilege of a professional category that acts “transversally across multiple expressions of the social question, in the defense of social and human rights and of the public policies that they materialize.” This situation, according to Simionatto (2004), does not solely involve the increased production of knowledge about the issue, but a growing qualification in terms of theoretical-methodological rigor and a considerable deepening of the discussion of contemporary social processes.

With reference to professional intervention, it is noted that the inclusion of social policy in the debate about the profession would allow more concretely locating its objectives in capitalist society. Concerning intervention, this can overlap the issue of “why do” something over that of “how to do” something. With the deepening of the investigation about the relationship between social policy and Social Work at the bases of critical social theory³, knowledge can be advanced in the direction of “doing for what reason”. The proposals that stem from this constitute the bases of a professional project for Brazilian social workers, which is collectively constructed and known as the Professional Ethical-Political Project (MIOTO, 2009, p. 214).

Based on the Federal Constitution of 1988, it was possible to envision in the field of social policy a virtuous confluence between the legal measures that were being created to implement Brazil’s social welfare project – the Organic Law for Healthcare, the Organic Law for Social Assistance – and the movement of the professional category around its Professional Ethical-Political Project. This project postulated “positioning in favor of social justice and equity, which assured the universality of access to goods and services related to social policies and programs, and their democratic administration,” in addition to a “commitment to the quality of services provided to the population and to intellectual improvement from a perspective of professional competency” (CFESS, 1993, *on-line*).

Nevertheless, two situations provoked the rupture between this virtuous relationship, leading to a serious divergence that deserves to be debated. The first was the reversal that took place in the 1990s in the essential proposals of Brazilian social welfare policy, breaking the expectations of part of society that there would be an expansion of social rights. The second is the complex form of demands, in quantitative and qualitative terms, which went beyond the design and manner of the institutionalization of social programs, influenced by the regulatory guidelines of the multilateral financing and development agencies, which required evaluations of a quantitative nature and intense administrative-bureaucratic control over the actions undertaken and the results

obtained. These two situations, in addition to producing significant impacts on the interventional processes of social assistants, reveal the existence of issues related to the handling of intervention in social policies in the realm of the profession that must be considered.

It is precisely the question of professional intervention in the field of social policy that this article addresses. By doing so, it seeks to deepen the debate about the particularities of professional actions in the realm of social policy, especially the issues of autonomy and specificity related to the insertion of social assistants in traditional spaces of public policies, linked to the direct provision of services to the population.

The presentation is organized in two topics. The first concerns the relationship between Brazilian social policy and professional intervention and provides a brief historic retrospective, which looks at professional values, the space of intervention and its convergence or divergence with public policies in the social field. The second particularizes the debate about intervention and its relationship with social policy, an understanding favored by the framing of the first topic, which concerns the expansion and complexity of the demands and the responses offered in terms of the institutional principles and designs.

Social policy as a privileged field for professional intervention

Although this text proposes to analyze the relationship between social policy and the professional intervention of social workers since the 1970s, a brief historic incursion is necessary, considering that the professional alterations are inherited from past elements and the new functionalities contain traces of what came before them, which may be denied or consolidated.

A review of the trajectory of the profession in Brazil since its institutionalization in the country to the time period that will be analyzed locates the professional intervention at the margin of the debate about the confrontation of social demands by Brazilian society, although with the presence of Social Work professionals among the ranks of State employees, especially at the federal level⁴, in addition to their insertion in systems⁵ and organizations of a religious and confessional nature⁶.

The functions performed by social workers since the 1960s reveal a concern for the integration of individuals and the normalization of their conduct. There was no discussion of the relation of this with social policies, which were also not analyzed, either by Social Work or by other fields of knowledge. More serious issues with more complex theoretical explanations were not part of the common professional activity. The intervention of social workers converged on the institutional objectives of social integration and the reduction of “behavioral deviations”.

The particular moment of Social Work should be considered, seeking its consolidation as a profession in a field that is supposedly considered as a worthy cause and one that undertakes actions aimed at organizing the demand for services and benefits offered by the public and private institutional apparatus. Debating the meaning of the functions in the handling of social issues, and of these along with structural and topical issues, was not a professional concern of social workers. Until the mid-1970s, these functions were focused quite endogenously at the interior of Social Work, on the processes and methods of intervention, autonomously from institutional instances. Internationally, they were related to issues concerning development and social progress as a natural trajectory to be followed by countries that at the time were considered underdeveloped.

Since the second half of the 1950s, in an environment of great expectations, due to the post-war development philosophy and the first development plans underway, while Social Work incorporated the philosophy, it also recognized a need to review its theory, posture and methods, as a condition for better integrating this process (JUNQUEIRA, 1980, p. 5).

The military dictatorship that took power in 1964 not only suffocated the debate about the directions of Social Work initiated in the 1960s, but isolated the professional category from the movement of critical review experienced in Latin America.

In terms of the relationship of the military dictatorship with the field of social protection, the state organization was used to expand the base of support for the military government through the provision of some social security benefits, and there was an expansion of national social programs. These included the creation of Urban and Rural Social Centers, the National Foundation for the Well-being of Minors (Funabem) and the Brazilian Assistance Legion (LBA). The later expanded its range of action both geographically and in the scope of its protective activities. The provision of social welfare services and benefits, or the “handling of poverty”, was restricted to civil society organizations usually of a confessional nature.

With the rapid urbanization of the 1970s, and the impoverishment of the population, demands for actions in the field of social protection reached state and municipal governments. The offer of services expanded,

consolidating the public-private network, especially for the protection of children and adolescents. The number of professionals increased, and their action was polarized among initiatives for community development, attention to well-defined population segments and in government and non-governmental agencies. The first state and municipal secretariats were created at this time to handle the new demands⁷. The discourse of well-being was developed, echoing the international debate. There was an *aggiornamento*⁸ of the profession, which came to assume a better defined function in terms of its legal-administrative position, and one that was apparently better qualified and in a better hierarchical position with the recently created institutions.

At the end of this period, isolated experiences brought a critical perspective to the activity of social workers, separating it from the dominant “technicist” discourse that stemmed both from U.S. influence and from a technical-administrative influence from the military dictatorship, and also from reductionist explanations about the relationship between the social structure and the social question⁹. The logic of the social programs and projects appears at the heart of the technical rational adopted at the time, and shaped the emergence of a planning process as a form of guiding and controlling the social changes. Nevertheless, the method for formulation and accompaniment of state planning, at either the federal, state or municipal levels, was conducted in an isolated and non-systematic manner, always in terms of large objectives. This favored the autonomy of professional action, even when it diverged from the official dominant position, because the instances for control did not grasp the local and particular interventionist processes.

It is interesting to note the beginning of the debate about social policy and its relation with professional conduct in the realm of the professional category. The strongest expression of this was the release of the first issue of the journal *Serviço Social & Sociedade* [Social Work and Society] by publisher Editora Cortez. Launched in September 1979, the central theme was social policy and the first article was a statement by the Federal Council of Social Workers (CFAS), entitled *Pela prática dos direitos sociais*, [For the Practice of Social Rights] which addressed “the political dimension of social policy based on the understanding of Social Work” (CFAS, 1979, p. 5). It raised a debate about the issue of social rights, taking strong positions on issues such as democracy and the exercise of liberty, social domination and practice and social rights. The article identified a vanguard position that revealed criticisms of the process of professional education made by professionals. The criticisms were aimed at the execution of services on one hand, and on the other, the administration of social programs.

At this time, social policy was being understood in its relation with the social question, and the creation of graduate programs favored a more critical reading of the Brazilian reality, while a Marxian perspective was gradually inscribed in the theoretical production of segments of the professional category.

The return to the state of law in 1985 brought new life to the profession, mainly with the approval of the Constitution in 1988, which incorporated the ideals of social rights, defining a perspective of ethical values that are dear to social workers, as well as a guarantee of universal social protection under the responsibility of the state, especially in the field of health care and social assistance.

Professional intervention was aimed at the implementation of national policies. First, soon after the end of the dictatorship, there was an identification between professional values and the constitutional measures related to social rights. There was an asymmetry, however, between the practice of social workers, which continued to be that of previous times, and the new values, such as equality in the fruition of rights, democratic participation and universal protection, under the aegis of the state in some social policies.

The convergence between the principles and values of Social Work and government policies did not last long. The virtuous cycle was broken, in at least two senses – in the professional field and in the realm of national social protection policies.

In the professional realm, the time needed was not found to reorder the practices from a perspective in keeping with the opportunities for the sedimentation of the social rights offered by the new moment. One of the possible explanations for this was the form of appropriation of the new curriculum at schools of Social Work, which was based on critical theory, which on the ethical plane, took a radical position on the side of the working class. This minimum curriculum, approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture for the Schools of Social Work in 1982 to be implemented by 1985, was incorporated in quite a heterogeneous manner by the universities, with adjustments that replaced the former practices with a new argumentative focus, as analyzed by Carvalho (1992). For this reason, the educational process reduced the changes in terms of professional intervention, which, combined with the expansion in the number of schools of Social Work, contributed to the maintenance of reiterative practices, although with a theoretical-methodological discourse that was apparently critical and conducive to the new Brazilian social protection paradigm. Another great transformation in this field was related to the demands that were placed on social workers. These became complex, multifaceted, and expanded both qualitatively and quantitatively¹⁰. New socio-occupational spaces arose with two implications for the interventions of social workers. The first was the requirement for contextualization and to grasp the meaning of

the new requirements, which because of their complexity, constituted fields of knowledge shared with various professional areas. The deepening of this understanding unveiled the specificities of the professional areas involved, producing knowledge that must be incorporated to professional knowledge and action. The second was the requirement for institutional apparatuses that had a greater capacity to provide physical and operational support to the new demands, considering their diversification and expansion.

In the institutional field, the global crises of Western capitalist economies led to a violent reduction of the emphasis on universalist and egalitarian ideals in the field of social rights, with these ideals substituted by the demand to focus on vulnerable populations and social risk, as preached by global development and finance agencies¹¹. A divergence appeared between the definitions of social protection found in the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 and the operationalization of social policies and professional values.

The consequence of this for professional intervention, as a result of the forms of operationalization of the social policies, soon become evident. The new nationally institutionalized models, which were quite rigid in terms of control of the implementation of social policies, which previously did not exist, reduced the relative autonomy of social workers. Their action was tied to bureaucratic procedures in the development of social programs and to constant requirements for the quantification of results. The relative professional independence, resulting from their reading of the real conditions and from the implementation of actions linked to ethical values of the profession, was restricted because it was not possible to program actions, because they had become subject to administrative controls that sought the computerization of the implementation and evaluation phases of the sectorial social policies. The functionality of the professional intervention in the field of social policies alters and conditions their content according to the possibilities of a given historic moment.

Professional intervention in the field of social policy and its current challenges

The work undertaken by Social Work professionals in the spheres of formulation, management and execution of social policy is unquestionably an important element for the institutionalization of public policies, both for the affirmation of the logic that seeks to guarantee social rights, and for the consolidation of the profession's ethical-political project. Therefore, the confrontation of the challenges in this field became a fundamental question for the ethical, theoretical and technical legitimacy of the profession.

In this regard, the analysis of the results of studies about professional practice in different sectorial policies, and systematic contact with social assistants inserted in these policies has indicated the need to deepen knowledge about professional intervention, contextualizing it in the field of social policy. This is because, upon introducing themselves to countless socio-occupational spaces, social workers must appropriate the debate about professional intervention in their field of knowledge and the need to place it in action. This involves activating it in a field that is under extreme pressure from conflicting professional and societal projects in a dynamic that expresses public and private social contradictions and interests in the context of collective labor processes. In these circumstances, social workers face two crucial issues: that of professional autonomy and professional specificity. In thesis, this means confronting the dilemmas that still persist in the debate about professional practice in Social Work¹² and that are revised in the new Brazilian scene.

In terms of professional autonomy, the development of critical social thinking and the postulation that the profession is inserted in the socio-technical division, allows advancing in the debate related to the condition of social workers as salaried workers. This condition imposes limits on the conduct of their work and consequently on the implementation of the professional project, confirming its relative autonomy, which is conditioned by social struggles between different social projects. That is, this autonomy can be expanded or compressed, depending on the social bases that sustain the social direction projected by the professional in his or her actions (IAMAMOTO, 2003, 2007).

Iamamoto (2007) indicates that the tension generated between the professional project, which designates that social workers are dotted with liberty and teleology, and their situation as salaried workers, when understood subjectively, is expressed through complaints about the distancing between the professional project and reality, or about the discrepancy between theory and practice. In this analysis by Iamamoto, it is important to highlight the attention she gives to questions related to these expressions or to these "denunciations" which are:

- (a) the existence of a field of mediations that must be considered to move from analysis of the profession to its effective exercise in the diversity of the occupational spaces in which it is inscribed; (b) the need to break from unilateral analyses that emphasize one of the poles of that tension that is transversal to the work of the social workers, voiding social relations of their contradictions (IAMAMOTO, 2007, p. 9).

Following Iamamoto's thinking, it is possible to affirm that the professional intervention process is particularized in the sectorial field of social policy, with immediate implications for the reconstruction of the object based on that particularity. Wellen and Carli (2010, p. 127) affirm that it is "peculiar to Marxism that each concrete circumstance requires a particular modality of analysis." Therefore, to understand how the object of intervention is particularized in the different contexts of social policy and which are the theoretical matrixes that sustain the different practices that are incident to these contexts, constitutes the first of the mediations required in the contradictory field in which social policies are formulated and implemented. This is an indispensable condition for, on one hand, disengaging from "unilateral analyses" that impede interlocution with administrators (federal, state and municipal) of social policies and services and with other professionals. This interlocution is realized in the field of "complex processes of negotiation and political struggle that give place to the gestation of social policies, which are not resolved in any professional field, if not in the arena of politics, without adjectives" (GONZÁLES; AQUIN, 1992, p. 6). And to, on the other hand, consider that, even under certain objective conditions, social workers exercise their relative theoretical, political, ethical and technical autonomy (MOTA; AMARAL, 1998). This particularization becomes essential for social workers to be able to visualize and position themselves before processes underway and not be reduced, as Aquin (2009, p. 156) affirms, to a "mere instrumental arm" of social policy.

These processes seek to break with this trend, which is still persistent from the mimetic relationship between Social Work and social policy. This mimetism is expressed in routine, prescriptive and bureaucratized actions, which are supported not only by the permanence of a technical perspective towards the profession, but also stimulated by the redesigns and forms of administration of social policy since the 1990s. These forms developed at the heart of a republican logic with a commitment from the state to the expansion of the right to social protection through broad programs and policies, with broad sources of financing and with the provision of human resources (RIZZOTTI, 2010). But they have also been redefined under the logic of effectiveness and efficiency through cost reductions, and consequently, an intensification of labor in the realm of social services (BRITOS, 2006).

The widespread use of technology, the standardization of procedures and the control of productivity in services through pre-determined actions, even when advocated in the name of transparency and of quality in the supply of services (RIZZOTTI, 2010), appear to have increased the difficulties in the exercise of professional autonomy. Social workers increasingly find themselves involved in the tasks of feeding information systems and conducting actions prescribed at the level of central administration and less focused on the realization of interventional processes that respond to needs raised by users in the context of local realities. In this way, the centralizing characteristics of social policies have conditioned the professional intervention, the selection of alternative solutions and the opportunities to define the users. With the strengthening of the strategy for focusing on the field of social policy, the dynamic of the emergence and the conjuncture also influences the professional intervention, creating priorities for the actions of social workers (MONIEC; GONZÁLES, 2009).

In considering the Argentine reality, Malacalza (2009, p. 191) affirms that the depolitization of social demands which tends to find individuals guilty for their condition, was one of the main triumphs of neoliberalism. Malacalza affirms that Social Work is not immune from this logic, because an important portion of the professionals "incorporate it in a nearly fatalistic manner, establishing a trend that reduces social policies, and therefore their own intervention, to an 'aggiornado tecnicismo' that intends to be autonomous from the political dimension that constitutes both of them."

Raichelis (2010), when discussing the question of the social worker – as a worker – in the organization of labor in Brazil's Single Social Assistance System (SUAS), calls attention to the qualifications needed for exercising the profession. She affirms that this activity cannot be separated from the macro-social dynamic, and that the qualification of professionals involves, on one hand, overcoming a historic culture of pragmatism, naturalization and the criminalization of poverty, as well as improvised actions. On the other hand, she criticizes and resists quantitative "productivist" methods, measured by the number of meetings, home visits and other activities, without the necessary clarity about the ethical political direction of the action undertaken.

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To complicate even more the exercise of professional autonomy, another injunction of current Brazilian social policy cannot be forgotten, which is the significant increase in the participation of private and philanthropic entities in the provision of social services, although financed by the state¹³. This forces professionals to operate in quite contradictory logics. At the same time in which they establish guidelines, formulas and parameters, which emanate from the “guarantee of social rights” supported by the state, these entities also seek to attend the respective logics that sustain their existence, requiring a process of accommodation of interests by the part of professionals. Or, they tend to have a strong tie to documents and laws emanating from the state, in keeping with the professional project. This obscures the contradictory character immanent to the field of social policy, and makes it difficult to break the mimetic relationship between the profession and social policy, impeding the opportunities for exercising a possible autonomy. This reiterates once again that one of the fundamental mediations for the development of the interventional process consists in the particularization of the debate of the theoretical-methodological mark of the profession and theoretical matrixes from the disciplinary field in the respective sectorial camps of social policy.

Based on this particularization, it is possible to consider the old problem of the profession: the recurrent lack of distinction between institutional and professional objectives in the realm of social work. Even when the institutional objectives are based on laws that guide the execution of social policy, they do not fail to express its affiliation to certain values and concepts that decisively steer the organization of the work process. A more refined analysis may not find a real synergy between the professional and institutional objects with the constitutional proposals, marked by a logic of citizenship, nor with the project defined by the professional objectives, expressed in its code of ethics. These are the antagonisms between the institutional demands and the demands of users that lead professionals to come into conflict with the institution through their work processes. As a consequence, the analysis of the institutional processes that characterize the different socio-occupational spaces, constitute a second order of mediations that are necessary for professional intervention. It is essential that they are appropriated from the institutional processes underway to allow for planning and making decisions about professional actions and for moving in the restricted field of professional autonomy.

Paradoxically, the tighter the circle around professional autonomy, created by the various factors indicated, the greater is the demand for knowledge of the limits imposed for the exercise of this autonomy.

The second question raised for the agenda of the daily activity of professionals who work in the context of social policy is that of professional specificity. In the debate of the disciplinary field of Social Work, it can be said that this question is resolved, if it is understood dialectically as Argueta (2006, p. 220) suggests, as “the perspective from which certain social fields are approached and intervenes in them in a systematic way based on a specific perspective”. Argueta also maintains that this expresses a disposition to focus, within the social realm on that which can be served by the profession and also as a condition for interdisciplinarity.

Nevertheless, the insertion of social workers in the implementation of various sectorial policies has revealed difficulties in defining their role in multi-professional teams. The postulation of interdisciplinarity as a guideline for labor processes in social policies, particularly in the social services, has increasingly required – in times of increasing corporativism and efforts to expand disciplinary fields – an objective definition of the competencies of each profession.

Iamamoto (2002) clearly defends that the identity of professional teams around common coordinates does not dilute the professional particularities. She affirms that social workers, even when sharing work with other professionals, have particular interpretations of social processes and a distinct competence to conduct professional actions. This is due to various factors, including their professional education and theoretical-methodological training, as well as their competence in undertaking certain actions. In this sense, a critical professional project goes beyond postulating a framework of values, it implies the existence of a set of knowledge that sustains the definition and execution of professional actions (AQUIN, 2009; CAZZANIGA, 2005). In relation to the Ethical-Political Project of the Brazilian social worker, it is important to remember that it includes, both in the realm of education and in professional exercise, the inseparability of the theoretical-methodological, ethical-political and technical-operative dimensions.

Netto (2005, p. 291), upon referring to the Ethical-Political Project, recalls that “its possibilities are not sufficiently developed, for example, in the realm of indications for the orientations of modalities of professional practices (there is much to be done in this area).” He thus reaffirms what he said in 1996:

[...] in the framework of the social transformations typical of late capitalism, of the demands of the labor market and of the professional culture, the need is raised to develop more qualified responses (from an operative point of view) and those with greater legitimacy (from a socio-political point of view), to the questions that fall in their realm of institutional intervention.

In this way, he indicated that “the objective possibilities for expansion and enriching the professional space [...] will only be converted into professional gains [...] if Social Work can anticipate them”. He also indicates that these possibilities tend to be permeated “by tensions and conflicts in the definition of roles and attributions with other socio-professional categories” (NETTO, 1996, p. 124).

These considerations can be indicative that the specificity of the profession – in the field of social policies – is affirmed to the degree to which professionals have an organized field of knowledge that surrounds their actions. These actions structure their specificity during their history and are expressed through the professional attributions and competencies that are socially supported¹⁴. A specificity of the object of its professional intervention is the expressions of the social question (IAMAMOTO, 2003), with actions that are involved with the articulation of the resources needed to make viable social protection of singular subjects or groups of subjects, who are users of different political sectors.

The conformation of social protection is conditioned by the social processes underway in a given historic moment and also by the way that professionals configure and make their actions viable. That is, it depends on the theoretical-methodological matrix that is particularized in the specific field of action, which gives it direction; on the way that they interpret the demands raised by their users, and by the structured knowledge of the nature and content of the professional actions needed to achieve the professional objectives. These factors are always related, in the social-political field, to the possibilities for conformation of social protection, which require other developments, which are related both to the content of actions and to the knowledge about the set of instruments and techniques needed to approach the subjects of intervention that place the professional project in movement.

Final considerations

To debate the practice of social workers in the field of social policy is not to be confused with the debate of the professional practice in the field of knowledge of Social Work. Although the intervention of the social worker in the field of social policy is determined by the professional *ethos*, it involves characteristics that require more than an alignment to a certain professional project. It also raises the question of how to place this project in movement, in a space where the direction of the process is not known and where autonomy is relative. Work in the field of social policy, under the auspices of the strategic critical project, in the terms of Netto (1996), requires making explicit the mediations needed for professionals to be able to make decisions about their practice.

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Notes

- 1 The “social question” is understood to go beyond social, cultural and economic inequalities caused by the capitalist mode of production and reproduction and contains an essentially political element. As Yamamoto and Carvalho (1982, p. 77) affirm, “The social question is nothing but the expressions of the process of formation and development of the working class and its entrance to the political scenery of society, requiring its recognition as a class by owners and the state. It is the manifestation in everyday social life of the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, which comes to require other types of intervention beyond charity and repression.”
- 2 Throughout this article, the approach recognizes the contradictions in the field of social policies.
- 3 The works of Yamamoto and Carvalho (1982) and Netto (1991, 1992) about the process of appropriation of critical social theory in Brazil are emblematic.
- 4 Legião Brasileira de Assistência [Brazilian Assistance Legion], Previdência Social [Social Security].
- 5 Serviço Social da Indústria (SESI) [Industrial Social Work], Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial (Senai) [National Industrial Learning Service] and Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Comercial [National Commercial Learning Service] (Senac).
- 6 Caritas Diocesana, Santas Casas de Misericórdia.
- 7 Secretariats, such as those denominated Social, Development, Social Welfare and Social Promotion.
- 8 Actualization.
- 9 The period was highlighted by the perspective formulated by professors at the School of Social Work at the Catholic University of Belo Horizonte, which become known as the Método BH [BH Method] which was considered by Netto (1991) as an effort to break with traditional social work.
- 10 An in-depth look at this issue can be found in Netto (1996).
- 11 This situation is analyzed by authors such as Harvey (1993), Netto (1993, 1996), Mota (1995) and Yamamoto (1982) among others.

12 About these issues, consult Santos (2010) and Forti and Guerra (2010).

13 About this issue, see Simionatto and Luza (2011).

14 The attributions and competencies compose the text of the Law for Regulation of the Profession (CFESS, 1993).

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