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Social work in the re-production of capital. A contradictory relationship

El Trabajo Social en la re-producción del capital. Una relación contradictoria

SERGIO QUINTERO-LONDOÑO*

LAURA HERRERA-PAVAS**

MARCELA DAYAN PAZMIÑO-ROSERO***

DAVID SEBASTIÁN DUQUE CHILANGUAD****

ALBA LUCÍA MARÍN-RENFINGO*****

ELEUTHERA

Abstract

This paper is part of the research “Working conditions of the Social Work Program alumni of the University of Caldas in Manizales and La Dorada” carried out by the *Critical Social Work* research seedbed of the University of Caldas between 2019 and 2022. The objective is to understand how the valorization of value emerges and operates in the capitalist society, the particularities of reproduction and the world of work in peripheral countries to finally reveal the social function of Social Work in these scenarios during the current neoliberal phase. The ideas presented here were generated based on a bibliographic analysis and a document review that correspond to the theoretical foundation phase of the research. The theoretical-methodological analysis makes it possible to reveal that Social Work belongs, like any other salaried profession, to capitalist relations and it is characterized both by alienating conditions and by emancipatory potentialities.

Keywords: Capitalism, Neoliberalism, Labor, Social Work, Marxism.

Resumen

Este trabajo hace parte la investigación “Condiciones laborales de egresados/as de Trabajo Social de la Universidad de Caldas en Manizales y La Dorada”, realizada por el semillero de investigación *Trabajo Social Crítico* de la Universidad de Caldas, la cual se llevó a cabo entre 2019 y 2022. El objetivo planteado es comprender cómo surge y opera la valorización del valor en la sociedad capitalista, las particularidades de la reproducción y el mundo del trabajo en los países periféricos, para, finalmente, develar la función social del Trabajo social en estos escenarios durante la actual fase neoliberal. Las ideas

* Universidad de Caldas, Manizales, Colombia. E-mail: Sergio.quintero@ucaldas.edu.co.

orcid.org/0000-0001-9232-7083 **Google Scholar**

** Universidad de Caldas, Manizales, Colombia. E-mail: laura.261813264@ucaldas.edu.co

orcid.org/0000-0002-8377-8031

*** Universidad de Caldas, Manizales, Colombia. E-mail: marcela.261625518@ucaldas.edu.co

orcid.org/0000-0002-6210-2403

**** Universidad de Caldas, Manizales, Colombia. E-mail: david.261625342@ucaldas.edu.co

orcid.org/0000-0001-5787-6247

***** Universidad de Caldas, Manizales, Colombia. E-mail: alba.marin@ucaldas.edu.co

orcid.org/0000-0002-9301-4166 **Google Scholar**



aquí expuestas fueron elaboradas con base en análisis bibliográfico y revisión documental que corresponde a la fase de fundamentación teórica de la investigación. El análisis teórico-metodológico permite develar que el Trabajo Social se inscribe como cualquier otra profesión asalariada en las relaciones capitalistas, caracterizadas por condiciones alienantes, y al mismo tiempo por potencialidades emancipadoras.

Palabras clave: Capitalismo, Neoliberalismo, Trabajo, Trabajo Social, Marxismo.

Introduction

The working conditions of the working class in the contemporary scenario have been dominated by neoliberal logic, where the mercantile dynamics that seek valorization of capital are intensified. The production of value and surplus value has been shifting from the productive sector to the service sector and the whole process is captured by the financial logic, in which production and the working population itself are sacrificed and precarious. (Iamamoto, 2015).

Rights have been incorporated into the logic of capitalist valorization, therefore, they have lost their gratuitousness and universality qualities to become services regulated by the purchase-sale relationship. This scenario is characterized by the reduction of social protection by the State and the reduction of citizen rights, a situation that directly impacts Social Work not only because of the precariousness of working conditions, but also because of the quality reduction of the services it provides in its social function. (Mallardi and Fernández, 2019).

Although the object of analysis of this article is Social Work, the status of their salaried professionals refers directly to the situation of the working class as a whole (to which the professionals belong). Therefore, a conceptual appropriation is necessary to decipher the ways in which work is developed in a capitalist society. Finding the mediations between wage labor, value reproduction, and institutional dynamics allows to observe that the neoliberal context alters the labor market of Social Labor, where reduction of the public sector is perceived, while the private sector and the “third sector” are expanded. In all sectors, the precarious labor of Social Work is radicalized.

The following reflection seeks to decipher the mediations between the process of capitalist production (starring wage labor instrumentalized for the production of value), and Social Work (as a salaried profession that, despite its particularities, is inscribed in the reproduction of capital). (Iamamoto, 2003; Plazas, 2021).

The ideas presented here are the result of the conceptual appropriation and the theoretical-methodological reflection of the Marxist tradition in the professional debate, which were developed in the framework of the research “Working conditions of the Social Work Program alumni of the University of Caldas in Manizales and La Dorada”, carried out between 2019 and 2022 by the research seedbed *Critical Social Work* of the University of Caldas.

The guiding criterion of the qualitative document review was the construction of a state of the art that addressed the academic productions of some journals of Social Work in Colombia, the presentations made at the last Latin American and Caribbean Seminar of Social Work (2018), and the works of the publishing houses Espacio, Humanitas and Cortez. This production was analyzed on the basis of the Marxist critical theory through the use of bibliographic data sheets and analytical matrices.

The objective is to understand how the valorization of value emerges and operates in the capitalist society, the particularities of reproduction and the world of work in peripheral countries, to finally reveal the social function of Social Work in these scenarios during the current neoliberal phase.

This article is part of a collective production comprised of two more articles, one on “Social Work as a salaried profession”, and another on “Social Policy: precarious working conditions in Social Work”, which are in the process of publication in 2022.

In order to contribute to the opening of the reflection on professional work and working conditions, the Critical Social Work Research Seedbed shares with the professional collective some ideas that, from the Marxist tradition, help to understand the reality in the contemporary scenario, and in the design of alternatives with emancipatory horizons.

Discussion

Production, appropriation and redistribution of value

A capitalist society is driven by the constant valorization of capital; its ultimate goal will always be to accumulate value represented in money. For this relationship of valorization to be possible, it is necessary to deploy a productive process whose basic condition is the interaction among nature (raw materials), products made in the form of tools and machines (which are also transformed nature), and the creative activity of the human being (work) (Marx, 1976).

In the society of capital, the way in which nature is transformed to produce commodities creates a social division-specialization of labor that, due to being based on the appropriation of

the work of others, as a logical consequence creates profound inequalities in the enjoyment of the socially produced wealth.

On the one hand, owners of the means of production are found in their most basic form and, on the other hand, those who are dispossessed of any material property only have their workforce. In this way, wage labor and private ownership of means of production are linked to produce goods, whose main objective is the growth of value or surplus value¹.

Regarding the classical political economy, the relationship between human labor and the value of commodities was sought; Karl Marx incorporates and subsequently surpasses such analysis, the conclusion is that value is labor power objectified in commodities, which can be material or immaterial. Since is the result of wage labor, value is created in an alienated way, creating accumulation of wealth through surplus value².

In the case of the labor power commodity, a wage represents the exchange value, and the creative capacity of the worker put into action represents the use value.

Although work is a commodity like any other, it differs from others because it is the only commodity whose use value has the quality of generating exchange value and surplus value; in other words, work is the only commodity capable of creating other commodities with added value.

Value, as an objective labor power can be presented in the form Money (D), Merchandise (M), or increased money - surplus value (D'). For an adequate process of valorization, it is necessary to go through the various forms of value in an uninterrupted way so that the ultimate end (valorization) is reached; a process called *the cycle of industrial capital* (D-M-D') by Marx.

Hence, the transformation of money into capital, or value into surplus value, is a specific social relationship that consolidates capitalist society; therefore, capital should not be understood as material things (even if they are accumulated in a few hands), but as a process of exchange whose ultimate goal is valorization that derives the accumulation of wealth, which is only possible thanks to the exploitation of labor power as private appropriation of collective labor.

¹The contradictory character of capitalist society is expressed in the process of production and re-production, which encompasses diverse dimensions such as economic, political, cultural, and even environmental. Although the productive process is placed as the *predominant moment*, its impacts are reflected in the whole of life. A synthetic text that presents this relationship in an illustrative way is the unpublished Chapter VI of *Capital*, Marx 2009.

²To determine the centrality of value in capitalist production, Marx had to identify the difference between abstract work and concrete work, use value and exchange value; these were unprecedented contributions to the understanding of capital. According to Marx's critique of classical political economy (1968; 1975; 1976), in capitalist society commodities have a double value (use value and exchange value), a condition shared by labor power, while, as a commodity, they also fulfil a certain function and can be exchanged for a value. The value in use is found in the usefulness of a certain commodity (it matters because of its qualitative condition); on the other hand, the exchange value is characterized by the relationship or proportion with which a value in use is changed in the market (it matters because of its quantitative condition, and it can be measured in working time destined for its creation).

The process of valorization of value is possible insofar as it is carried out through successive cycles without apparent end. Money (which represents value as the general equivalent) becomes capital in the constant metamorphosis of value during the process of production and circulation, acquiring an almost automatic dynamic: $D-M-D'-M-D''-M-D''\dots$

In order for capital to complete its cycle, three phases must be completed (the first phase of circulation, the phase of production and the second phase of circulation); when this occurs, surplus value is achieved. This is the capital-money cycle ($D - M \text{ Ft } M_p \dots P M' - D'$), where the first phase of circulation is defined by the investment of the initial capital and the purchase of goods expressed in labor power and means of production ($D - M \text{ Ft } M_p$). The second phase is production (P) in which labor power is consumed and the process of valorization and value creation takes place. Then, the second phase of circulation ($M' - D'$), in which the produced and valued goods begin their circulation in the market, to later take the form of increased money or surplus value³, begins.

In the logic of capitalist valorization, all commodities (including labor power) become a means to reach the end (surplus value); however, the contradictory character of this society (expressed in its political sphere) makes that, on the part of the working class, struggles and demands are deployed in order to try to restrain the commodification of life so that citizen rights and social welfare are guaranteed.

The working class and subalternized sectors have succeeded in challenging the immanent dynamics of capital, to the point that during some historical periods (such as the Welfare State) not only the commercial value is reproduced, but also better living conditions are claimed⁴.

Faced with the conscious and organized response of the working class, capital has been pressured to respond to the social demands that impose a more equitable redistribution of wealth; even the sectors with the highest degree of consciousness and organization project the transformation of alienating productive processes.

In this contradictory dynamic, despite the control of the State by capital, social policies, expressed as a field of tension between the interests of capitalist valorization and the improvement of the living conditions of the working class and subalternized sectors, are created.

Considered from the interest of capital, social policies legitimize the established social order, while the reproduction of the labor power suitable for the productive process (of valorization) is

³These phases have been analyzed in depth by Marx (1968; 1975; 1976), and taken up by a diversified group of Marxists who try to decipher the particularities of peripheral capital and its relationship with central capital; see Mandel, 1999; Marini, 2012; Osorio, 2005.

⁴Despite the fact that the welfare state is a particularly European experience, in different parts of the world there have been contradictory processes in which labor disputes a redistribution of value with capital.

guaranteed. However, considered from the interest of labor, such policies favor the redistribution of value, therefore, they guarantee a more socialized appropriation of the produced wealth.

As a result of the contradictions of a capitalist society and the new ways of dealing with the confrontation between capital and labor (“social question”), Social Work emerges as a salaried profession to which the executing function of social policies is delegated. Although originally the profession is strongly influenced by Catholic and philanthropic thought, its foundation lies in the fact that it is a salaried profession that meets social demands, guided by the institutional parameters of those who hire it. (Iamamoto, 1984).

Thus, Social Work as a profession is part of the contradictory process between capital and labor, and it is so not from a subjective vocation, but from the conditions imposed by the wage relationship, which impacts both the way in which professional labor is carried out (social function of the profession), as well as the working conditions in which it is carried out.

Social work takes on greater prominence in periods and contexts whose contradictions between capital and labor require the mediation of the State with social policies. Thus, we must highlight the historical period between the second post-war period to the mid-1970s, when strategies of expanded production were combined (either under Fordist or developmental parameters), and the protectionist measures of the State (in the molds of central or peripheral capital).

The need for economic and social intervention by the State in capitalist relations, coupled with the growing demands of the struggles led by various sectors of the working class, create the conditions for the strengthening of social policy.

The period from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s will be referred to by some authors as “the three glorious decades” or “the golden years,” due to the levels of profitability, progress, and stability witnessed in central capitalism. What Hobsbawm (1998) calls *economic liberalism and social democracy* was the combination of the highest level of capitalist accumulation, with the guarantee of goods and services to the working class⁵.

In short, for a variety of reasons, the politicians, officials and even many of the businessmen of the post-war West were convinced that a return to *laissez-faire* and an unconstructed free market were out of question. Certain policy objectives – full employment, the containment of communism, the modernization of lagging or declining and ruined economies – had absolute priority and justified the strongest government

⁵ Netto (2003) draws attention to two points: 1) the advances and guarantees of the golden years were found limited within the borders of central capitalism, and 2) within such borders, only the Marxists pointed out that the improvement in the living conditions of the working class did not alter the exploitative essence of capitalism, but affirmed the intensification of relative pauperism.

presence. Even regimes dedicated to economic and political liberalism now could, and had to run their economies in ways which would once have been rejected as ‘socialist’ (Hobsbawm, p. 275).

The high productivity rates and the Keynesian strategy of public administration consolidated, along with the implementation of social policy, a suitable scenario (political, institutional, financial) for Social Work as a profession in charge of confronting the “social question.” (Netto, 2012). The State established itself as the main employer of social work, providing not only the resources necessary for the implementation of social policy, but also the working conditions that allowed an acceptable satisfaction of needs for the professionals employed⁶.

Some peculiarities of the periphery

Understanding that capital develops immanent dynamics at the planetary level, but that it presents varied forms of production-reproduction in the different regions, the Marxist Theory of Dependence, from the 1960s-1970s to the present day, has been deciphering why in Latin America a dependent economy was constituted, continues to exist, and establishes structural “underdevelopment conditions”⁷.

Since the independence processes (early 19th century) Latin America contributed significantly to the development of the central economies, especially by the generation of raw materials, food and cheap labor. From that moment, it began to occupy a subordinate place within the international division of labor (ITL).

According to Osorio (2005), the notion of reproduction pattern of capital refers to the patterns of behavior that capitalist production takes in a given historical period or geographical space, which allows to understand the behavior of capital within a world system differentiated between imperialist economies and dependent economies⁸.

Since a reproduction pattern is a behavior that takes capital according to certain characteristics, it can change over time and shift from one to another and often imposes itself without leaving behind the one that has just passed. In the case at hand, since the 19th century, during the independence period in Latin America and until now, the primary-export *pattern* has been

⁶The book by Martínez (1981) was a pioneer and became a reference on the emergence of Social Work in Colombia.

⁷At present, Jaime Osorio, one of the main representatives of the Marxist theory of dependence, displays his analysis to understand the new and varied patterns of reproduction that operate in the Latin American region. With this intention, Osorio investigates what, how, who and what for is produced in the Latin American economy during certain periods of time, drawing attention to the precarious conditions in which the working population survives.

⁸Dependence on industrial and technological development facilitated an unequal exchange of values between central and peripheral capitalism. As a general trend, central countries produce goods at low costs, but they sell at high prices in peripheral capitalism; while peripheral countries have higher costs in production, and sell cheaper to central countries.

the one to cross the region. However, it has only been dominant in its first stage or moment, subsequently it has been subordinated by other patterns, passing over time through the *industrial pattern* (divided into internalized and autonomous pattern and diversified industrial pattern) to the prevailing one currently called the *export pattern of productive specialization*⁹.

The export pattern of productive specialization lies in the ability of the various economies of the region to have the natural advantages to produce certain values of use, specialize in it, and thus, find their space of realization in the external market through exports. “*Basically, the new export pattern rests on raw materials, agriculture, mining or energy, and on food, and to a much lesser extent on industrial goods where assembly and maquila predominate.*” (Osorio, 2005, p. 7). Although this model gives some strength to the Latin American economy, no real progress is visible in terms of improvements in the working and living conditions of the working class, and the bulk of the population of these countries. The impoverishment and wage deterioration of people is of little interest to the States and leaves them with little capacity to consume, which does not exceed the satisfaction of minimum needs such as clothing, food, services, education, etc.

The process can be further analyzed. A capital cycle occurs when the produced goods are successfully sold on the market, either internally or externally, that is, when they produce an appropriate surplus value (D') for capital. If most of the production of the Latin American countries is sold on the foreign market or on the high internal market (which would leave most the population out), the cycle is not carried out in the economy that started the production, which creates a break in the cycle of capital. However, a break for the periphery is a guarantee of greater accumulation for the center. The process of transporting a commodity from a peripheral territory to a central one, sell it there for a value higher than its production, and prevent the profit from returning to its place of origin does not only allow transfer of value, but also superaccumulation; both processes generate a direct impact (of precariousness) on the living conditions of the working class of the peripheral countries¹⁰.

Greater investment in the means of production and their technological development (living or dying conditions for capital) result in the displacement of the labor power, and therefore unemployment, which is much more intense in the peripheral countries.

One of the most striking contradictions is that of development-underdevelopment, which rests on the dominant logic of the central countries that lead to the impoverishment of the peripheral countries; this relationship is a necessary condition for their growth and development.

⁹The fact that the processes of industrialization in Latin America did not reach the production of capital goods, but were limited to the production of consumer goods cannot be ignored; this situation reaffirms the region's dependent and peripheral character in the face of central capitalism. However, despite Osorio's contributions here, it is necessary to consider that the dependent nature of the Latin American region is expressed differently in some periods and national contexts.

¹⁰In Vidal and Oliveira 2021 there is a comparative analysis between Brazil and Chile on the contemporary conditions of super-exploitation.

Although the global capitalist relationship is mutually dependent (center-periphery), since opposite poles need each other, the hierarchy of the periphery center establishes an unequal and subordinate relationship, which, under the foundations of the Marxist tradition, is seen as structural and not as accidental or transitory.

Considering the statements in the previous section, the value of the workforce is understood as the value (in the form of salary) that the worker receives for the sale of his/her workforce, with which he/she must guarantee the reproduction of his/her life, in working years and years of retirement, in terms of basic material and spiritual needs, according to the prevailing way of life in society and the determined historical moment. However, super-exploitation is characterized by the fact that the money received is not sufficient to cover the necessary expenses, and the intensification of labor becomes appropriation of future years of the worker's life, in which it is not possible to replace physical or mental wear and tear¹¹.

Insufficient wages or an overworked labor process (either by prolonging the working day or by intensifying work), which shortens the useful life and total lifetime, are cases of present capital appropriation of future years of work and life. (Osorio, 2005, p.12)

In general terms, the intention is to show that the dynamics of capital valuation becomes more aggressive in peripheral scenarios, where capital submits with greater intensity to wage labor, not only extracting surplus value through intensive or extensive procedures of exploitation (absolute and relative surplus value), but also transferring the value from the peripheries to central capitalism. This relationship adds to the form assumed by the State, which, determined by the logic of imperialist domination, has minimized its intervention in the provision of services and guarantee of rights that improve the living conditions of the working class and subaltern sectors.

Except for some historical periods and limited national contexts, social policy in peripheral capitalism has not been a protagonist in the democratic redistribution of value; that is why its emancipatory potential has been limited in the contradictory condition of Social Work. Such a situation cannot be understood as a natural condition, but must be analyzed as a socio-historical process, which, according to the correlation of forces between capital and labor, is susceptible to being altered.

¹¹ In addition to the transfer of value and the payment of precarious wages, there are three other ways of overexploiting the working class: through absolute surplus value, relative surplus value and increased labor intensity. The first concerns the extension of the working day, specifically working time surplus, in which there is greater production of commodities, which results in a rate increase of profit for the capitalist. The second form of super-exploitation, expressed in relative surplus value, is characterized by greater productivity of the workforce without the need to prolong the workday, that is, it is based on the use of technological advances to produce more in a certain workday; here the workforce is no longer worn out because the workday and work intensity remain "standard." Finally, the increase in work intensity occurs when technological progress and work organization are used to increase productivity but, unlike relative surplus value, generating greater physical and mental wear on workers. In this type of situation, the employer, in addition to taking advantage of the improvement of the means of production, also demands greater performance, efficiency and saturation of tasks or functions from the worker.

Social work as a profession registered in the sociotechnical division of labor

The organization and division of labor in capitalist society are expressed in the specializations of labor, according to the needs and transformations in the process of production and accumulation of value. Social Work as a salaried profession is also located in such a process, although in a particular way.

When the “social question” and its manifestations (poverty, unemployment, hunger, inequalities, job insecurity, as well as social struggles and demands, among others) become the subject of a response not by the police, but assistance by the State, social policy acquires importance; therefore, a specialized work is necessary for its implementation. The State develops plans for the implementation of social policy in this historical context and, in turn, it demands the existence of Social Work as a profession capable of addressing such social dynamics.

The profession of Social Work (as concrete work) is not directly linked to the process of creation of goods and, therefore, of value; however, the elements that underlie the professional practice are given in terms of social production (abstract work). (Iamamoto, 2015)¹².

Although the dynamics of industrial capital is regulated by the general law of capital (D-M-D') that aspires to the production of surplus value, the achievement of its objective (valorization) is not exclusively found in the industrial field or value producer. Although it is in this field where, through the working day (with its part of necessary time and surplus time) more value is produced (surplus value), also the conditions necessary for an adequate production-reproduction must be generated in other scenarios. Professional work is registered in the industrial field, which does not produce value directly, but contributes to guaranteeing the necessary conditions for it.

Although this is not an absolute condition, the sector or the specific institution where the professional performs do establish forms of labor and objectives drawn up, which can either prioritize the production of capital or the guarantee the rights of citizens.

Professional work acquires a diversified condition, according to the fields where the professional practice is carried out, which can be in the Public Sector, the Private Sector, or the “third sector”.

The public sector is made up of the State and the social offer that it guarantees for the assurance of citizenship rights, which is a form of redistribution of value. Social policy is one of the privileged ways for the State to carry out its functions, but it is necessary to consider that social policies are the result of demands from the working class and the responses created by the State.

¹² Iamamoto's analyses of the productive and/or unproductive character of Social Work are based on the studies developed by Marx, with emphasis on chapter VI unpublished (2009).

The creation and consolidation of the welfare state has been one of the great references of the strengthening of social policies, however, the neoliberal phase of the monopoly capitalism configuration undergoes a progressive process of outsourcing and privatization. Those social policies represented in unprofitable services were transferred to the “third sector” and those profitable and with a potential demand were transferred to the private sector.

The private sector is composed of institutions and social relations regulated by the logic of the market and it seeks the constant valorization of capital. For private institutions, the central objective is to generate greater profit margins, which can only be obtained through the productive process (industrial or service) and the purchase-exploitation of labor power.

The labor of the social worker is required to work in labor situations that interfere with the productivity of companies and the material reproduction needs of the laborer and his/her family. In addition to direct contact with the laborer and his/her family, the professional labor is also aimed at intervening in new, broader projects of the company, projects that are developed outside the company, which require an action “attached” to the philosophy and modern management practices that reproduce production relationships.

In addition, there is the so-called “third sector” mainly and generally related with the intention of strengthening the participation of civil society in the generation of responses to social demands, which are presented as solidary, altruistic and without any kind of lucrative profit.

Given the public / private dichotomy, the state fiscal crisis and the lucrative nature of the market, it is considered that neither of these sectors could take over the attention to the manifestations of the “social question”. Therefore, the “third sector” would be the articulation/ intersection of these two sectors whose institutions and/or organizations have a private origin, but with public purposes.

Social Service is an activity that depends on employing institutions to be carried out in the market; there, Social Assistants have *relative autonomy* to do their job. That is why all the labor of these professionals is not identical, a fact that reveals the importance of the ethical-political component in professional practice. (Iamamoto, 2003, p. 90)

Labor power, as a commodity, ends up being a power that only becomes an activity, a job when it is combined with the means necessary for its realization, which do not belong to the worker, but to the employer. This is how wage-labor is presented, inside it the professional work of Social Work is found.

As in any salaried job, for the professional, the means necessary to carry out the intervention process (economic, material and human resources) are essential for the development of the established functions. The fact that such means (resources, materials, equipment, etc.) belong to the employing institution, and not to the professional employed cannot be ignored.

The relationship described above is consolidated in two fundamental and contradictory processes: on the one hand, the professional's belonging to the working class, highlighted by the fact that he does not have the means of production, but sells his workforce to fulfill certain institutional functions. On the other hand, the recognition of that condition of wage-earner (primary condition in class consciousness), allows him to participate in the social and political struggles that aim to conquer, defend or expand social and political rights.

Thus, the mediations that occur in the type of link, the type of ownership of the workforce, the condition of wages, the division of labor and the diversification of the scenarios, indirectly include the affiliation and the value of use that the exercise of Social Work acquires as specialized labor in capitalist society. Thus, when Social Work is mentioned as a profession registered in the sociotechnical division of labor, it implies its relationship of sale of specialized labor power, which participates in the process of capitalist production and reproduction in spite of its contradictions (potentialities and limits).

Social Work in a Contemporary Context

The metamorphosis of the occupational spaces of labor market is linked to the transformation and restructuring of capital, which is part of a historical totality, located in a particular political context. The treatment of the "social question" by professional work faces an economically and politically restructured society, where social policy acquires new meanings and is executed in various scenarios.

During the last decades, labor has been subjected to counter-reforms that impact working hours, wages, hiring forms, intensification with greater physical and psychological exhaustion, insertion of business management in the public sector, outsourcing, super-exploitation and others, which degrade the existence of the working class, both in the workplace and in daily life.

The correlation of antagonistic forces makes it possible to create diverse possibilities and limits for professional work, all of which are conditioned by hegemonic-contra-hegemonic struggles present in society that support the basis of capital. In other words, the institutional orientation and functions of social policy are determined by the correlation of forces in the confrontation of social classes, a synthesis that is expressed in the form and intention in which social policy is formulated and implemented.

In the contemporary scenario marked by neoliberalism, government management is linked to private initiative and organizations of the “third sector”, undertaking new management models for the social area. With the transformation of rights into services, a mismatch in public spending is generated, public resources begin to be incorporated into private initiatives, the responsibilities of the State are transferred to private organizations, and the commodification of social rights is deepened.

The State of Welfare, the New Deal and Development, under the idea of a State that guarantees social rights, expands the labor market and the demand for professional work of Social Work. However, with the advent of neoliberalism and the dismantling of social policies (health, education, housing, transport, recreation, etc.), the *rights* acquired through social struggles (struggles that belong to classes and social sectors), become *services* offered in the market. The effect generated is the *precariousness* of public social policy, the *commodification* of rights and the *targeting* of services. (Quintero, 2022)

The de-responsibility of the State to guarantee rights and social welfare shifts the social policy of the public sector towards the private sector and the “third sector”, which dilutes the concrete possibilities of expanding democracy (political and economic) while restricting citizenship. Under this logic, Social Work is impacted and its labor field is reduced in space due to greater democratizing potentialities (the space of the public), and goes on to operate under the guidelines for the valorization of capital or neophilanthropic logics. (Iamamoto, 2003). The intervention of companies on different manifestations of the “social question” imposes a strategy that does not only respond to the forms of capital restructuring, but also to the neophilanthropic approach to shortages and pauperism. The new philanthropy seems to be more interested in offering a human face to companies, which improves their advertising image or even reduce production costs through tax exemptions.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) consists of business programs with the worker, the family and the community that are linked to specific needs based on a mission of intervention in the social sphere, very often supported by a charitable and solidarity mission, but without rights guarantee. In this context, the work of the social worker continues to be required to attend to work situations that interfere with the productivity of companies and the needs of value reproduction.

The professional exercise of Social Work, as indicated, is not immediately inserted in the process of production of goods and values, that is, in the process of valorization. In the private sector, the tasks of Social Work are linked to the personnel that compose it, the worker and his family, to guarantee the full satisfaction of their work conditions. The institutional representation of capital demands this kind of labor power (Santana and Cesar, 2009).

The professional work registered in the private sector that assumes, without any criticism, the functions that are delegated to it, by interfering directly in the field of social reproduction it contributes to the process of capitalist production and re-production. If capital is understood not only as production and reproduction of value, but as production and reproduction of forms of relationship (cultural, family, political, etc.) between groups and social classes, it is possible to observe how the tasks performed by the Social Work professional affirm an alienated form of existence.

Despite the fact that professional work in the private sector is more determined by the logic of capitalist production, since this sector is oriented towards the production of value and surplus value, *relative autonomy* does not disappear.

Although the private for-profit institutional scenario is less flexible than others (such as the public sector and the “third sector”), the commitment to democratic values and the rights of the working class does not automatically disappear. The fulfillment of operational or strategic functions can be subjected to professional criticism based on theoretical-methodological foundations, or they can even be processed in a more inclusive way, stimulating the participation of the working sectors in the management of social programs. Both processes, critical analyses and inclusive practical procedures depend on the ethical-political commitment of the Social Work professional, as well as on the technical instrumental preparation that he/she has been able to acquire in his/her academic training processes and in previous work experiences.

Within companies, Social Work can contribute not to limit its work to control the tensions between capital and labor, and to seek the supremacy of the process of capitalist valorization, but to help dialogue and negotiation in which better working conditions are also potentialized with full guarantee of rights.

The organizational capacity of the working class and the initiatives launched by it to the employers’ institutions must be understood and appropriated by Social Work as a labor function that responds to contractual responsibilities and, thus, facilitates conditions to face the alienation and super-exploitation against the vast majority of the population in the current neoliberal phase.

Consequently, the social function of Social Work within the private sector is closely linked to the correlation of forces in the confrontation of the social classes, in such a way that, in the face of organizational advances and the conquest of rights of the working class, there are objective conditions with greater possibilities of professional work that contribute to the emancipation of work and break with logics of domination and exploitation.

Although the demands of the working population towards the employers can acquire great visibility (due to the centrality of the work and its historical demands), other struggles cannot

be ignored because, although they are related to class struggles, they focus their demands on processes of recognition and/or citizenship rights.

The expansion of rights and the radicalization of participatory democracy are primary objectives for confronting the manifestations of the “social question”. This involves political dispute to ensure effective participation in public decision-making, as well as in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of social policies. As long as these objectives are achieved, Social Work, at the service of emancipatory projects, will have greater room for manoeuvre and will be able to carry out professional work with greater harmony between its work and the interests of the working class and subordinate sectors.

Thus, both the understanding by the professional collective regarding democratic struggles and demands as well as its daily articulation and strategic planning become fully relevant. From this point of view, the fundamental premise is that the Social Work professional, despite the subordination of wage labor in the *relative autonomy*, can participate in the emancipatory struggles, both in his citizenship condition and as a worker who claims better working conditions and faces the dynamics of capitalist exploitation/domination.

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