

IASSW Brazilian and American Social Work Training Workshop

Summary of key concerns and challenges

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Abstract

This is the content of the lecture given by Barbara Shank at the Training Workshop of the International Association of Schools of Social Work IASSW-AIETS, held in July 2022 at the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), in which this eminent social worker expresses what in her opinion were the main concerns and challenges for social work at that time. The importance of this text lies, among other things, in the fact that it represents a new opening of a proposal for dialogue with the aforementioned association at a key moment in which the International Meeting of the IASSW-AIETS Board took place in Brazil. From this point of view, it is a document that can serve as a motivator for a dialogue in which the internationalization of Brazilian Social Work, is in an expanded course at this time, determines a recognition of partners around the world. Barbara Shank, in this sense, sought, in her conference, to raise points that seemed to her to promote such a broadening of dialogue, including between the Social Work of the United States and that of Brazil.

Keywords: Conference; Social Work; Internationalization

Resumo

Trata-se do conteúdo da conferência proferida por Barbara Shank no Workshop de Capacitação da Associação Internacional de Escolas de Serviço Social IASSW-AIETS, realizado em julho de 2022 na Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE), na qual essa eminente assistente social expressa o que no seu parecer eram as principais preocupações e desafios para o serviço social naquele momento. A importância deste texto reside, dentre outras coisas, no fato dele representar uma abertura nova de proposta de diálogo com a citada associação num momento-chave no qual o Encontro Internacional do Board da IASSW-AIETS ocorreu no Brasil. Desse ponto de vista, trata-se de um documento que pode servir como motivador para um diálogo no qual a internacionalização do Serviço Social Brasileiro, em curso ampliado nesse momento, determine um reconhecimento dos/das parceiros/parceiras em todo o mundo. Barbara Shank, neste sentido, buscou, na sua conferência, levantar pontos que lhe pareceram promotores de um tal alargamento de diálogo, inclusive entre o Serviço Social dos Estados Unidos e aquele do Brasil.

Palavras- Chave: Conferência; Serviço Social; Internacionalização

INTRODUCTION

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First of all, I would like to thank Alexandra Mustafa for providing us with her excellent summary of the process of change, political, religious, and economic scenario that has influenced the development and roles of Social Work and Social Work Education in Brazil. So it was very interesting for me and a little challenging to make some observations reflecting on how those same factors influenced Social Work and Social Work training in the United States.

1. The History of Social Work in Brazil in comparison to it in the United States

Let us begin with the social doctrine of the Church.

Social Work in the USA, both in terms of training and practice, had its origin and was strongly influenced by the social doctrines of the Protestant Church, the social gospel and the Catholic Church (Pope Leo XIII), *Rerum Novarum*, aiming to achieve justice between capital and labor. At first, assistance was largely provided by volunteers, usually upper-class women, in an effort to address the social issue expressed by the rising poverty rate in an increasingly productive and prosperous economy.

At that time, social work in the United States, unlike Brazilian social services, did not have a direct relationship with the state. In the mid-1800s (1861-1865), the U.S. was embroiled in a Civil War. The focus of social work during this period was through the American Red Cross' medical assistance to soldiers and veterans and also children and families affected by the war.

In the first 20 years of the 20th century, the U.S. moved from a focus on charity and the application of corrections, to one centered on the public welfare.

With the stock market crash of the late 1920s, the U.S. was swept up in the Great Depression and economic contraction. Faced with these challenges, President Franklin Roosevelt initiated the New Deal (1933-1936) that instituted a Social Security system enacted in 1935. To this end, Roosevelt appointed three social workers, Francis Perkins, Jane Hoey, and Harry Hopkins, to head and handle efforts in relation to four instances of the new system: 1) social security; 2) laws regarding child labor; 3) public assistance and 4) a federal work program (WPA).

It should be noted that, for the purposes of comparative historical understanding, it was at that time, when social work in the USA was being reformatted, that, in Brazil, was the formal foundation of the social work profession (1936).

Thus, it is noted that, while in Brazil, Social Work gained legal recognition in the 40s and formulated its first Code of Ethics in 1947, in the United States, the NASW was established, the *National Association of Social Workers* in 1955 and the United States approved the first edition of the NASW Code of Ethics in 1960.

The CSWE, *Council on Social Work Education*, was formed in 1952 and its legal regulation was initiated in 1969 in the United States. By 1993, all the states and the District of Columbia had implemented some form of regulation in that regard. It should be remembered that there social work regulations differ from state to state, which is often a challenge for social workers when they have to move from one state to another. These displacements occur quite a bit because, in the United States, there is ongoing work for the national social work practice for mobility and license portability to meet the needs of social workers and protect users.

Alexandra Mustafá, in her speech, noted that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Brazilian social work was strongly influenced by Paulo Freire's thinking, and that the country was moving towards Basic Reforms and Agrarian Reform to support family farming, to eradicate illiteracy and to reduce poverty. She showed how it met with resistance from the military and that resulted in a total disregard for the human, civil, social and political rights of Brazilians for the next 20 years. Meanwhile, in the United States, in the early 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969) initiated the '*War on Poverty*' program, and the *Great Society* in response to the national poverty rate. The main domestic policy programs of the Great Society addressed five fundamental points: 1) the fight against poverty (Economic Opportunity Act); 2) the guarantee of health care (Social Security Amendments created for health care and the Elderly Americans Act); 3) the education of the population (School Initiative and AmeriCorps VISTA); 4) combating racial discrimination (Civil Law Laws of 1964); 5) protection of citizenship (Right to Vote); 6) Structuring the presence of the population in the national territory (Immigration and Nationality Law) and 7) environmental protection (Nature Law). In addition, 40 programs were established and still today include Head Start, VISTA, TRIO, and Job Corps.

Returning to Brazil, we have that at the end of the 70s, Social Work entered a period of Reconceptualization that brought the principle of social justice back to the forefront and reinforced the principles of Marxism (against the exploitation of man by man, the basis of all social inequalities and political domains) as the theoretical-methodological basis of Social Work. This ethical-political project, as it is called, served as the basis for the reformulation of the curricular guidelines, the Law of Regulation of the Profession and the Code of Ethics. This has created a greater emphasis on training, research and postgraduate courses. In the United States, on the other hand, we are living in the Reagan era, which emphasized *the Regonomy* that dominated the late 1970s and 1980s. The focus of this neoliberalism-based period preached conservatism, free-market capitalism, reduced government spending, increased private sector role, privatization, deregulation, and globalization.

Arriving in the 1990s, in the United States, a democratic president, Bill Clinton (1993-2001) faced many challenges. Regarding social programs, in 1996 he declared that the U.S. would "end welfare as we know it" and this would result in ending AFDC (*Assistance to Families with Dependent Children*) that had been instituted under the Social Security Program in 1935. The AFDC was replaced by the TANF (*Temporary Assistance to Needy Families*), which allowed three remarkable transformations in the assistance: 1) that the states became widely flexible in the interpretation of the program; 2) allowed for greater work demand; 3) allowed for greater punishments for non-compliance with deadlines for receiving benefits.

While in Brazil, the 2000s marked the beginning of the social democratic governments of Luiz Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil. The National Social Assistance, the Unified Social Assistance System, the Statute of the Elderly and the Youth Statute, in addition to the Zero Hunger Program (aimed at the UN millennium goals for the eradication of poverty and hunger) were institutionalized; in the United States, the election of George Bush (2001-2009), after Clinton, faced the terrorist attacks of September 11, which resulted in the order of invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, followed by cuts in projects, the *No Child Left Behind* education program, and socially conservative policies. To top it all off, the global collapse in financial markets dominated George Bush's last days in office.

That is why Barack Obama (2009-2016) inherited a country in financial and social crisis. During his first term, he signed three major bills: 1) a general bill to stimulate the

economy; 2) one of legislation, making health care more accessible (ACA - *Affordable Care Act*); 3) and reformed the country's financial institutions. Moreover, globally, Obama faced the challenge of the rise of the proclaimed Islamic State. He established a treaty with Iran that prevented the development of nuclear weapons in the country and adopted a climate change agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help slow global warming.

Let us also note that, while in 2016, in Brazil, the Dilma government faced impeachment, and those who took power there unleashed a series of ultra-neoliberal measures in the country. In 2016, Donald Trump (2016-2020) assumed the presidency of the United States. Jair Bolsonaro would later assume the Brazilian presidency in 2019, intensifying the ultra-neoliberal trend in both countries.

If we compare, in parallel, the positions of Trump and Bolsonaro in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, we will see that both reflect a various denialist stance: 1) in relation to climate change; 2) in relation to science; 3) minimizing the COVID pandemic; 4) in addition to cuts in resources for social policies. This has caused: 1) poverty rates to rise; 2) the spread of religious fanaticism would be intensified; 3) the spread of conservatism would also intensify; 4) environmental protections have been rolled back; 5) and harsh policies of repression of immigration were initiated.

Brazil is preparing to face a presidential election in 2022², while the U.S. will have it in 2024. While Brazilian social workers wait for the re-election of Luiz Lula da Silva, Lula, in order to restore social services and fight hunger and poverty, U.S. social workers expect Democrats to maintain control of the presidency and senate and increase representation in Congress. Trump's return would be disastrous for the nation and social work as a profession.

2. The development of social work training in Brazil and the United States

The expansion of social work education in the United States began between 1913 and 1919 and increased further in the 1970s. Alexandra Mustafá, in her lecture, reminded us that, currently in Brazil, there are 39 graduate programs with master's and doctoral degrees in social work based on critical social theory. In the U.S., there are currently 541

² It should be noted that Barbara Shank's present conference took place in July 2022.

accredited bachelor's degree programs with 23 bachelor's degree programs in pre-application or application; 313 accredited master's programs with 41 master's programs in pre-application or application; and 4 accredited programs offering fellowships in post-master's social work. It should also be noted that, at the present time, doctoral programs are not accredited by CSWE (Council on Social Work Education).

I clearly perceive that Marxist theory has been the basis of the formation of Brazilian social work since its Reconceptualization and that it remains strong to this day. In the U.S., we would call it a macro-level practice.

It should be noted, then, that the development of the U.S. curriculum has two different levels of training: 1) bachelor's degree; 2) Master's degree. Although social work in the United States began during the housing distribution movement, it has always included attention to the individual, the community, and society.

The CSWE, Council on Social Work Education *is the only accrediting body for bachelor's and master's degree programs in the U.S., while the COA, Commission on Accreditation, which is a division of CSWE, sets the standards for accreditations, by which programs are reviewed and evaluated.*

a. The Bachelor's Degree Programs in the United States

Bachelor's degree programs are required to provide a *generalist* curriculum whereby students learn theories that inform *micro, meso, and* macro practice, and practice their skills under supervision in all three areas in a field placement or internship.

Bachelor's degree social workers, generalists, work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, social policies, and communities in a variety of settings in pursuit of social and economic justice.

Social workers in the United States view people and systems from a strengths perspective in order to recognize support and alliance in the innate capacities of all human beings.

They engage, evaluate, negotiate, provide services, advocate, advise, educate, and organize with and on behalf of individuals, families, and groups of people. As generalist practitioners, they engage in community development, organizational development, and evaluation to ensure that services are useful, effective, and ethical. In the component of

the generalist curriculum that deals with macro practice, it is common for programs to present the theoretical perspectives of Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky, among others.

b. The Curriculum of the Master of Social Work in the United States

The master's curriculum in the United States has two main types of content: a first-year curriculum and a second-year curriculum.

The first year of the master's curriculum is mandatorily generalist, as these students did not graduate from an accredited bachelor's degree program in social work.

Students who graduate from an accredited bachelor's degree program in social work are usually given 'advanced standing', meaning that they enter the master's program primarily at the second-year level.

The generalist curriculum is regarded as 'what all social workers need to know' for micro, meso, or macro practice, no matter what area of practice they intend to work in after graduating from the MSW (*Master of Social Work*) program.

The second year of the Master's programme can be developed in two ways: 1) around an area of advanced practice; 2) in *concentration*.

The master's program is able to identify one or more concentrations in which it will build its curriculum around it. Common concentrations include: 1) clinical change; 2) leadership and social; 3) integrated practice; 4) school social work; 4) community organization; 5) advocacy; 6) health; 7) child; 8) well-being; and so on. At last count, there were well over 60 different types of concentrations being offered in schools across the United States, the most common being direct or clinical practice.

Macro practice programs in social work have increased in popularity over the past decade, and so have problems.

Macro practice social workers in the U.S. serve in various roles, including administration, advocacy, community organizing, leadership, lobbying, management, labor policy, just to name a few.

The work of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, in which he also analyzes the Marxian conception of class and defends the thesis according to which the student should be treated as a co-creator of knowledge and the community as a co-creator of services, is often used in macro programs.

The work of Saul Alinsky, an American community activist and political theorist, helped poor communities in Chicago organize to press demands from homeowners, politicians, and business leaders, he is also included as a foundational theorist for the macro curriculum.

Alinsky championed the art of confrontation and the compromise involved in community organizing as key to social justice, one of the key values of social workers around the world.

I think we can say that both the social services of the United States and the social services of Brazil agree that, given the current world level of poverty; in the face of hunger; of the wars that follow one another; the escalation of domestic violence; from the outbreak of pandemics, etc., that social workers around the world feel a duty to engage in the struggle for the defense of democracy, social and human rights, the fight against discrimination and prejudice, and protection of the environment. In other words, the differences we have just identified are not related to the need to address, necessarily and immediately, all the critical issues in order to proceed with solidarity actions and partnerships, but rather that these differences revolve around fundamental theoretical-methodological approaches and the perspectives we use to formulate our strategies.

Finally, I need to tell you a brief story.

Several years ago, a friend of mine who had already turned 90 passed away and I was appointed as the administrator, executor of his inventory. Everyone thought he was poor, but in fact, he had a lot of money.

His name was James, and he was a staunch socialist, a Marxist. Seventeen years ago, he had made a trip, embarking on the Mauritania bound for London to make a pilgrimage to the tomb of Karl Marx. That visit was so remarkable for him that, in his will, James determined that he wished that a quantity of his ashes be planted in the ground in which Karl Marx is buried. Later, my husband and I took Queen Mary II (another requirement of his will) to the UK and I took the opportunity to dig a hole behind Marx's grave (the top was a huge concrete slab) and there I deposited James's ashes.

I never thought I would make a pilgrimage to Karl Marx's grave, but now I can say, I have an intimate familiarity and relationship with him.

Thank you all for this opportunity.

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