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The influence of the industrial business fabric and multilateral agencies on Brazilian professional education

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ABSTRACT:

It is said that the Brazilian professional education reform is based on modern principles of general and professional education advocated by the World Bank and by the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean, as well as part of the Brazilian business fabric, represented by the Federation of Industries of the state of São Paulo and the National Confederation of Industry. Based on the documents produced by these institutions as sources, the argument goes that the professional education reform — which was put into practice in the mid 1990s — absorbed the propositions of these institutions, not because of their effectiveness in bringing about qualitative change to the educational reality, but because the Brazilian government was in step with the neoliberal thinking and the implementation of policy serving the interests of the international financial capital.

KEY WORDS:

Professional Education, Multilateral Agencies, Industrial Business Fabric, Brazil.

INTRODUCTION

Several works produced in recent years point out the interference of international funding agencies in defining Brazilian educational policies (Ação Educativa, 1999; Tommasi *et al.*, 1996, among others). This interference is highlighted both in the aspect concerning the accepted predefined “packages” — owing to the subordination of the Brazilian State as regards the granting of another loan — and also deriving from the ideological and political harmony of central government and the international funding agencies. Another important factor is the increasingly active role the Brazilian business fabric plays in helping to prepare the development policies and especially in drawing up proposals for educational policy (Oliveira, 2005; Rodrigues, 1998).

Taking into account this reality we identify the points in common between the content of the government policy during the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso for professional education and that proposed by the subjects directly linked to the productive and financial capital.

THE CONTEXT OF THE ANALYSIS

The poverty of Latin America, which intensified during the 1980s — considered the lost decade by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) — would be reversible provided the local economies achieved new stages of industrial competitiveness, and consequently greater participation in international trade. Economic competitiveness would guarantee not only reactivation of economic growth, but would also bring the possibility of better distribution of income. To sum up, the intensity of the poverty could diminish provided that effective

measures were taken in the economic and political fields (CEPAL, 1996a).

Inside Brazil the industrial business fabric, as it gradually accepts the hegemony in the capital-labour conflict, takes on the role of proposer of policies and has managed little by little to see the federal government put its propositions into practice (Oliveira, 2005). CEPAL, as well as the World Bank and other multinational institutions, with various justifications, are creating a new educational framework of ideas that are being incorporated by the education policy writers.

In assuming that to achieve sustained development (Brasil. MTb/SEFOR, 1995) the Brazilian government should trigger a set of actions aimed at better qualifying employees, in 1995, through the Ministry of Employment, a profound modification took place in the design of professional education. Professional education, coordinated by this Ministry, began to seek the reference points for its reformulation in the job market itself. In other words, according to the Ministry of Work and Employment (MTE), professional education is aimed at the development of new skills among the social sectors that find it difficult to enter the job market, both by improving the profile of the qualification of the employees — leading to greater competitiveness of the Brazilian economy — and at the same time establishing specific action so that this segment of the population can exercise remunerated activity.

The scope of the professional education reform proposed by the MTE became much wider than a simple conjugation of forces of various bodies of society and moved towards the mass qualification of employees. The MTE not only created an articulation between the federal government and the state government — represented by their work secretaries — but it was also the precursor of reforms established inside the technological education system by the federal government,

especially the technical and federal agrotechnical schools. Our interest in researching the influence of CEPAL, the World Bank and the business fabric in reformulating professional education arises in the midst of this context, as an attempt to explain the submission and complicity of the Brazilian State in defining the content of its public policies.

THE SUBJECTS ANALYSED

For the countries of Latin America the importance of CEPAL has been acknowledged for several years to analyse the content of their educational policies. This institution does not have the overriding goal of formulating educational policies, but, from the 1990s onwards, it has highlighted the role of education as the fundamental bedrock of the process of the economic reconstruction of this region (CEPAL/UNESCO, 1992). The CEPAL documents that we analyse here represent the main texts in the form of books published from 1990 onwards. Although not all of them contain recommendations for educational policies, we can understand that either directly or indirectly reference is always made to the importance of training human resources as a strategy needed for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to achieve a level of competitiveness that will allow them to hold their own in the world economy.

Several works (Coraggio, 1996; Lauglo, 1997; Tommasi *et al.*, 1996; Torres, 1995, among others) show the slow rise in interference of the World Bank in formulating educational policies for developing countries. According to Coraggio (1996), the importance the World Bank attaches to educational policies derives from the fact it is the main external source of resources for basic education. Furthermore, its approximation to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has a direct consequence on the possibility of some nations contracting new loans. In other words, this approximation has “forced” governments to accept its recommendations to contract new investments from the international banking sector. The analysis and recommendations of the World Bank for education are also based on its publications produced in the 1990s. We choose this period, both for CEPAL and for the World Bank, because we believe that it was from this decade that education was identified by both institutions as the priority area for economic development of the poorest nations.

As well as the importance of the multilateral institutions in relation to the destiny of Brazilian educational policy, one has to point out the role of the business fabric, through their representative institutions, in influencing the Brazilian State in order to guarantee that the educational system is suited to their interests. Ever since the document “Fundamental education & business com-

petitiveness: a proposal for government action” (IHL, 1992), the Brazilian business fabric has made it a concern of theirs to guarantee the establishment of reforms in the educational system, which cater for the demands through creating labour with new qualifications. As it is impossible to include all the business organisations of the country, we focus our research on the National Industry Confederation (CNI) and the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo (FIESP).

EDUCATION, FIGHTING POVERTY AND COMPETITIVENESS

CEPAL’s educational proposition was duly formulated in its document entitled *Educación y conocimiento: eje de la transformación productiva con equidad*, produced in 1992¹. This, according to CEPAL, represents its first attempt to draw up a policy proposal able to articulate education, knowledge and development. Its goal is to make sure technical progress is made in Latin America and the Caribbean, guaranteeing that the economic restructuring goes hand in hand with social equality, as had been suggested in its publication *Transformación productiva con equidad* (CEPAL, 1996c). Achieving competitiveness for the Latin American and Caribbean countries, according to CEPAL, is a goal not restricted to organisations linked directly to the economy, but should involve several segments of society, whether they are public or private sector, or other organised entities. In other words, the idea of “national harmonisation” is always at the fore of CEPAL’s thinking. For education this need is even more acute, not only because it represents the field responsible for the qualification of future employees, but because it is the central axis of the transformation process to be implemented in Latin America in the course of the 1990s.

The concern of the World Bank regarding education — as is the case of CEPAL — is closely linked to the radical change in the background of poverty in the Latin American countries. In analysing the social problem based on isolated phenomena, without including all the factors that determine the social relations, the World Bank endows education with the power to redefine the existing social background. One example of this perspective can be found in the work of Londoño (1996)² who, in analysing the background of poverty and inequalities in Latin America, blames the failure to modify the socio-economic reality of the continent in its entirety on the poor training of human capital.

The low investment in basic education is translated into the scarcity and unequal distribution of human capital and this fact, which in general is not sufficiently taken into account in the work undertaken on Latin American

development, is the main factor in the rising poverty and the persistence of large-scale inequality over the last 20 years (Londoño, 1996, p. 36).

In the document “industrial competitiveness” (CNI, 1988) the business fabric drew attention to the fact that the fragility of the educational system held back the training of human resources for the production sector. According to this document, the high level of illiteracy, deriving from failings in the educational system, limited the capacity of the Brazilian workforce being profited from in developing a new economic model. As well as these fragilities in the quality of Brazilian education, the CNI document drew attention to the gap between the education system and the demands of the production sector. The business fabric claim that even the professional training courses run by the National Industrial Learning Service (SENAI) — recognised by the business community as providing high-quality professional education — need to be reformulated given that owing to modification in the production techniques there is a risk of widening the gap between what is required in production and the response the workers are able to give.

The education system is out of sync with the real needs generated by business activity. In a market environment marked by the introduction of new production techniques, this gap may accentuate inasmuch as the demand for more qualified employees ready to carry out complex jobs is likely to increase (CNI, 1988, p. 19).

In line with the thinking of the Federation of Industries of the state of São Paulo (FIESP, 1995), the competitiveness of Brazilian industry depends, essentially, on greater investment in human capital, given that in the current state of capitalist development knowledge has become the major raw material. These first references on the relationship between competitiveness and education and its influence on job creation and consequently the reduction in poverty leads us to a second question which is the importance attributed to professional education by these subjects in production of more qualified employees and the increase in industrial competitiveness.

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND THE JOB MARKET

CEPAL believes that a national system to train human resources will only be efficient if the supply of qualification matches the demand of the job market. As well as criticising the low investment on the qualification of employees, the lack of synchronisation between what is

supplied as the model of professional training and what is required by the production sector is highlighted.

The training problem does not derive only from insufficient quantity, but also from its frequent unsuitability to the real needs of the country. Therefore, as well as expanding the scope of the training it is also necessary to improve the quality of the supply, to make it more institutionally flexible and to articulate it much more closely with the real needs of the companies (CEPAL, 1997, p. 168).

Recognition of the big modifications in the production sector and the difficulty in attributing responsibility for training labour to just a handful of institutions — considering the material resources and knowledge available — leads CEPAL claim that, to improve the availability of human resources it is necessary to involve and interchange all the agents that may, in one way or another, contribute to the qualification of this new employee.

The acceleration of technological change, the heterogeneity inside and among the countries of the region, the changing requirements in relation to the labour skills and the diversification of production agents imply that one cannot wait for a single agent to take charge of the training, updating and recycling of human resources (CEPAL, 1996c, p. 17).

One of the best solutions, if not the only one, to solve the aforementioned problems would be to leave it to the private sector to decide on the needs of professional qualification. Consequently, even if the possibility of providing training courses is not taken away from public authorities, they should maintain a connection with private initiative and establish a process of cooperation between the two. There should also be a set of actions that stimulate the business fabric to increasingly accept, its role as the main assessor and implementer of the most coherent actions with the real needs of the production sector.

It is indispensable that companies sharply increase their spending on training, through the reorientation of tax and financial incentives. It would also be convenient to modify certain aspects of the functioning of the public training institutions, through greater participation by the companies and business groups in defining guidelines, adoption of market criteria in the management and gearing the training programmes towards the technological priorities. Hence, special attention should be paid to the mechanisms that feed the demand for training (CEPAL, 1996b, p. 79).

FUNDING OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

The World Bank sees no sense in training a large number of employees without considering the needs of the market. It does not advise the undertaking of widespread professional training action to create a mass of qualified employees in any areas, aimed to attract industrial businessmen. In its design the important thing for the professionalizing courses is to guarantee training in activities that are immediately requested by the market (Banco Mundial [World Bank], 1991b). The World Bank believes state intervention in professionalizing training is obsolete as it carries out its training process divorced from the real needs of the market. Hence, the best way to stimulate and guarantee that the training of human resources is suited to the interests of the business fabric is to guarantee control in training new employees.

In general, training provided on the initiative of the company is the best cost/efficiency environment to develop the skills of employees. In comparison, in most countries training is provided by the government in state schools and especially professionalizing training which is expensive and often confers the participants with little more than a few negotiable skills. Formulas must be found to reorganise the public training institutions in line with the demand of the consumers and the market. Often the best way is to transfer the public funding of those who provide training to the demand side of the market, enabling the target population of employees to purchase it in a background where there is competition among alternative suppliers (Banco Mundial, 1995, pp. 46-47).

Although in some documents drawn up by the business fabric there is direct agreement with the opinions of the World Bank and CEPAL, there is no record of any more elaborate positioning on the professional education model to be developed. The business fabric wants the public authorities to pump more investment into basic education; they believe in a time of profound changes in the production sector whereby there is a need for workers to have a higher level of schooling so they are able to grasp new learning, and consequently occupy jobs that emerge. As for the relation between professional qualification and the job market, one observes that the business fabric is much more concerned with higher education than other modes of professional training. Businessmen believe, in addition to supplying employees with a higher level of instruction, the best contribution public powers can make to the production sector would be to foster closer relations with the research centres installed in the public higher education institutions (CNI, 1988).

According to the World Bank, because the public institutions do not establish a competitive process with private initiative and they cannot charge fees for their services, they have difficulty in obtaining funding from the State and consequently their actions do not have a significant effect in returning employees to the job market (Banco Mundial, 1991b). To cut costs in the professionalizing process the World Bank believes that this training activity, in encouraging an individual return, should have its costs naturally divided among its participants. In order to prevent low-income family students from being marginalised because of the fees charged, the World Bank believes it is perfectly acceptable for the government to subsidise the training of the most underprivileged students. Another way to cover training costs is for the training institutions themselves to sell services to the community (Banco Mundial, 1991b; Middleton, 1993).

The World Bank, in prioritising for governments the funding only of basic education — understood as eight years of schooling — relieves the State of its obligation to act at other education levels. Consequently, the disarticulation of professional education and secondary education does not aim to achieve greater efficiency of the former, but rather to take responsibility for its maintenance away from public power.

If the position of the World Bank is explicit as regards the privatisation of professional education, CEPAL takes a less radical stance, although it lets it be known that its position in relation to higher education is to firmly defend that it be funded by the students. CEPAL, instead of talking about privatisation, tackles the topic by looking at the issue of decentralisation of educational actions and defending greater participation of all the social, political and economic agents in intensifying the labour qualification actions. Although speaking about the participation of all the agents, public power is reserved the role of coordinator of these activities, which could be understood in the specific case of professional education as a movement to take away the State's responsibility for funding this mode of education. In relating decentralisation and autonomy of the educational institutions, CEPAL pointed to the possibility that, with this autonomy, the institutions in charge of professional education would establish contractual relations with companies, which would allow resources to be made available for their self-financing and lead them to comply with their social aims.

The articulation that the professionalizing schools can establish with the business environment, in a context of autonomy, enables the debate on the future of this training mode to be shifted to a strictly practical sphere,

asking what social and professional demands the education needs to focus on to achieve its goals (CEPAL/UNESCO, 1995, pp. 231-232).

The business fabric did not come up with any new position in relation to the funding of professional education. By considering the professional training model in place, in the background of the “System S”³, the business fabric sought to highlight that the actions carried out there enable professional training and basic education to be undertaken in a perfectly complementary manner.

If businessmen show no concrete interest in sharing the funding of professional education, this does not mean that they do not advocate their participation on the process to define the educational policy in this area. Indeed, interest is shown in participating in the boards of the schools responsible for professional education. To sum up, for the business fabric the quality of the educational training of employees enrolled in the public education system is the responsibility of the public authorities. If the business world became responsible for the qualification actions this would imply an increase in production costs which would make it impossible to achieve increased competitiveness in the national industry, and consequently a rise in jobs.

THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION MODEL AND ITS RELATION WITH BASIC EDUCATION

According to the World Bank, although primary and secondary education is highly important, as well as professionalizing education, these should not be articulated. In other words, the results of professionalizing education would be much better if it was not administered in the same facilities as formal education. In its opinion professionalizing education needs a flexible model, and if administered in institutions of certain autonomy its activities can be geared towards the economic movements (Banco Mundial, 1991b). As such, it is recommended that the institutions in charge of this kind of training are outside the scope of action of the ministries of education, notwithstanding that specialised technical schools may remain under the responsibility of these ministries, if bureaucratic hitches are eliminated, thus creating greater flexibility in the system. In these circumstances it is recommended that professional education be administered after secondary education is completed. This would enable students to have a real choice of a profession when they are nearing the time to enter the job market, as they would be more mature to do so and more able to assess each choice in line with the market situation (Banco Mundial, 1991a).

The recommendation that professionalizing education no longer be administered during secondary

education aims to reduce costs in education. According to the World Bank, the professionalizing education projects are economically flawed in comparison to general education. In addition to this aspect, it opposed the maintenance of professionalizing secondary education schools because it believes that the specific nature of the teaching lends itself to higher education. Striving for greater efficiency of the public training institutions, the World Bank recommends — as a means of cost cutting and ensuring greater quality — the reduction of time set aside for the final training of the employee, as well as better use of the existing premises and facilities. Following this logic, it recommends that professional training should be carried out in modular activities, as in its understanding this will allow individuals, at any moment, to enter the job market while continuing their training, chiefly through the undertaking of night-time courses (Banco Mundial, 1991a).

According to the business fabric professional education should be linked to basic education. The use of the terms “parallel” and “complementariness” in one of their documents (CNI, 1994) highlights that while basic education was fundamental for employees to be able to assimilate the new technologies, it would be professionalizing education that truly provides training activities aimed at the appropriation of specific knowledge. This probable separation of goals between education and training, reserving for basic schooling the mastering or development of more cognitive than practical skills, became more explicit in an extract from the document “Road to stability and growth” (CNI, 1992), in which the role of training of human resources for the new production processes was highlighted.

CEPAL has not presented a specific proposal for professionalizing education. Its acknowledgement that in the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean there is a huge range of experience in this field prevented it from attempting to systematise a directive that could serve as a guide for all governments. Obviously, this did not make it impossible to come up with a set of recommendations, respecting the peculiarities of each nation, but guiding the reforms to be implemented. CEPAL’s idea concerning the training of human resources extrapolated the traditional professionalizing education *versus* preliminary education duality, with the organisation recognising the importance of guaranteeing general education for all. In its view the major issue for this continent is to guarantee high-quality basic education. No matter how much this institution advocates the importance of professional training and the need for this training to move closer to the interests of the market, it does not defend the disarticulation between general education and professional training. According to CEPAL, although the number of activities to endow employees with skills has increased, these are practically restricted

to the young starting out on their careers, and ignore almost half the population of employees who have little or no school education. As a result the projects to impart skills developed by the manufacturing sector should attempt to insert adult workers in order to allow them to appropriate basic knowledge of mathematics and the national language, both of which are crucial skills in the new production model. CEPAL believes that the vital goal to be pursued is the universalisation of access to high-quality basic education.

SUMMARY OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS AS REGARDS BRAZILIAN EDUCATION POLICY

To understand what the federal government assimilated from the contributions of each of these subjects in this new professional education institution is the aim that we now return to.

We can observe the reform of professional education perfectly incorporated into the suggestions of selecting the clientele and duration of the professionalizing courses by the multilateral agencies. Both CEPAL and the World Bank state that the sectors that are most at risk of exclusion should be targeted for public investment in professional qualification. CEPAL, in prioritising employees from small and medium-sized companies, employees from the informal job market, the unemployed and workers who have recently entered the job market; and the World Bank, in focussing its attention on the unemployed; have led the Brazilian government to accept that professional qualification should be aimed at segments of the population who are at risk of social exclusion. The MTE, in defining the clientele targeted for the National Employee Qualification Plan (PLANFOR) does not accept that this policy has the makings of a social benefit, yet it is based on the assumptions defined by the aforementioned agencies, who focus on the creation of new jobs to diminish poverty.

The reforms to middle education and professional education — where professional training was attributed the post-middle level — are in perfect harmony with the World Bank's opinion, not only because this institution is against long-duration courses but also, at the same time, it allows the fragmentation of this training through the introduction of modules. The reform also met the recommendations of the business fabric, as it argued that professional education should complement basic education. As such, one can surmise that the reform brought about in the technical schools satisfies the interests of the subjects analysed, especially if we consider that, for all, what is essential at this point is to strengthen basic education, whereby the activities of professional training are governed by the logic of the market. In other words, it should not be a responsibility of the State to supply

professional qualification activities free of charge. Taking into account that a better qualified individual benefits as much as his/her employer, both should, as far as possible, cover the costs of the training.

The strategy developed by the Brazilian government in gathering together the highest possible number of institutions in its National Professional Education Plan mirrors precisely the CEPAL propositions, not only as regards the involvement of public power, private initiative and organised social sectors — achieving the aim of “national consensus” — but also in carrying out a process of decentralisation of actions, recommended by that institution. We highlight, in addition to the factors mentioned earlier, that the Brazilian professional education reform was also influenced by CEPAL's ideas concerning the modification of the institutions involved in this kind of education. As we note in the CEPAL document (1996b), there is a need not only to involve the business fabric in qualification activities, but mainly for them to take part within the public entities responsible for the training activities.

Another modification in technical education, which was implemented through Decree-Law no. 2208/97 (Brasil. Presidência da República [Presidency of the Republic], 1997), is linked to the fact that the education takes on a modular structure, enabling pupils to obtain technical certification at middle level not only for completion of the schooling period, but to justify this certification, upon acquisition of other professional qualification certificates in other educational establishments or work locations. This modification directly affects the internal dynamics of a professionalizing course, given that the technical schools are always characterised by having a sequentially structured curriculum, aimed at creating articulation between the subjects taken by the student and his/her specific training. Through this modularity, these institutions no longer have control over the training of their students.

The Ministry of Education (MEC) believes that modularisation of technical training is an innovative aspect, as it allows the student to select his/her training path in line with the demands of the job market, as well as not preventing the obtaining of a full middle-level qualification certificate. It also highlights the articulation between the formal professional education space and other training or production institutions, allowing those who miss out on this qualification process to take advantage of knowledge acquired throughout life and not restricting the qualification of the employee to the formal spaces of professional education. As for the separation of general training from professional training, Cláudio Moura Castro's text (1997) summarises the stance adopted by the MEC. According to this author, maintaining articulation is to repeat past mistakes, as in his opinion, “(...) We cannot again try to make schools

at the same time teach professions and prepare students for higher education. This idea should be buried once and for all” (Castro, 1997, p. 11). Another aspect to point out, not outlined by the MEC, is that this separation means that post-middle technical education also becomes a mechanism that aims to diminish the demand of segments of the public for higher education. The pressure exercised for the insertion of new population groups into the middle level has led the government to channel its energies into striving to diminish its demand, and therefore try to make technical professional education the end point of studies for the popular segments of the public.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As we have attempted to show in this text, despite the differences, there is a coming together of ideas between that proposed by the international funding agencies and that proposed by the business fabric. It is possible to see that the Brazilian government, either through subordination or through complicity, took on board some of these propositions. The current structure of professional education

is an expression of the correlation of forces between capital and labour at national and international level. The existence of a professional education model that does not interest most sectors of the population does not made it infeasible to think about the constitution of an educational project with the interests of those who experience professional education day to day and who have striven for a long time to draw up a proposal for professional education and for basic education whose presupposition is the training of subjects able to articulate the knowledge acquired in schools with the capacity to read the social reality in which they are inserted.

The role of capital in today’s moment of history is not something that is impossible to face up to and overcome. Therefore, basic schooling and professional education have an eminently political role to play, insofar as they can contribute to the production of mentalities able to analyse the reality and counter the establishment of policies or practices by the State that do not put the interests of Brazilian society at the forefront. Although it is not only through education that we achieve citizenship, it represents an indispensable tool in making the State able, gradually, to cater for the interests of the majority of the population.

ENDNOTES

1. Although we consulted the Spanish version of this text, originally published in 1992, we use as the reference source its complete version in Portuguese in 1995.

2. Juan Luiz Londoño is an economist from the Inter-American Development Bank and wrote this work to be presented in the World Bank Conference on Development in Latin America and the Caribbean in 1995.

3. The so-called “System S” was founded in the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas, when the National Industrial Learning Service was created (SENAI). It is today made up of entities linked to the Confederations that represent the business fabric of the different production sectors (industrial, trade, agriculture, transport, among others) and aims to qualify and provide cultural and leisure activities to employees. The organisations of the “System S” are: the National Industrial Learning Service (SENAI), the Social Service of Industry (SESI), the National Business Learning Service (SENAC), the Social Service of Business (SESC), the National Rural Learning Service (SENAR), the National Transport Learning Service (SENAT), the Social Service of Transports (SEST), the Brazilian Support for Small and Medium-sized Companies Service (SEBRAE) and the National Cooperatives Learning Service (SESCOOP).

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