

**Reformist Professionals and the Silent Revolution in Social Policy:
Minimum Income Guarantees in Brazil**

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This paper argues that minimum income guarantees in Brazil represent a silent revolution in social policy, for unlike earlier social protections such as the social security and the minimum wage in the early 20th century, the new guarantees are less the product of mobilisation from below than the initiative of middle class professionals. It examines the two-decade trajectory (1990-2010) of the family minimum income programme (*Renda Minima*) in the metropolis of São Paulo, the first such programme to be proposed in Brazil (1991), rather than the evolution of the national-level and better-known programme *Bolsa Familia*.¹ Mobilisation by collective actors representing the poor are more likely to occur at the municipal rather than national-level, and more likely in the metropolis of São Paulo than in many other Brazilian cities.² The city's minimum income programme has received little attention however. Between its precocious conception early in the 1990s and implementation in 2001 a full decade passed. Studies have focused on the local and national experiments in income guarantee programmes undertaken during this period, and then on the national *Bolsa Familia* as it grew to cover over 11 million families. The early conception of São Paulo's *Renda Minima* and decade-long battle over its implementation, however, place in particularly stark relief a number of political dynamics behind the rise of such programmes.

One such dynamic is that there has been little organised pressure from below for the programme in the city, for example from urban social movements or organised labour. The resulting silence is remarkable because income guarantees have a substantial impact on the lives of the poorest quarter of the country's population. Furthermore, Brazil has erected one of the world's most elaborate system of participatory governance institutions, with the specific intent of facilitating the access of more marginalised social groups to (and over) the state's decision making and implementation processes. Once established, pressure to *expand* the programme has come from individual community leaders and city assembly members, using a variety of informal (and some formal but non-participatory) channels, rather than from organised pressure. The second dynamic we see in São Paulo is the crucial role played by loose networks of middle-class reformist professionals – economists specialising in labour markets in particular in developing *Renda Minima*, bringing it into the local state, and ensuring its execution. And third, the highly competitive electoral arena of the city has

¹ This paper is based on a comparative study in the city of São Paulo of the *Renda Minima* and the Family Health Programme (PSF – Programa Saude Familia), which provides primary care to the poor and is a gateway to the rest of the national Unified Healthcare System. The comparative analysis can be found Houtzager and Dowbor 2010.

² São Paulo has a particularly large and densely connected civil society that work with and/or represent the urban poor (Gurza Lavalle et al. 2005; Houtzager and Gurza Lavalle 2010).

played a vital role in the evolution of income guarantees in the city, shaping both the timing and form of its implementation, as well as its survival across city administrations of different political ideologies.

In many accounts of such social sector reform public sector professionals are portrayed as unmovable obstacles and the forces of change are characterised as either ‘the executive’ or ‘state elites,’ who are said to lead reform from above (Grindle 2000; Kaufman and Nelson 2004; Haggard and Kaufman 2008) or, when redistribution is implied, broad-based mobilization from below (Weyland 1996: 4). The likelihood of redistributive reforms such as the introduction of minimum income guarantees are said to be greatest when pressure from above and collective action from below pinch the middle – that is, middle-class professionals and civil servants who’s interests are believed to lie in maintaining the status quo.³ Social workers, doctors, and teachers, along with their professional associations, are often described as ‘vested interests’ or ‘rent seeking groups’ that block much needed change.

Detailed field research a team of CEBRAP researchers and I conducted over the last three years in the city of São Paulo find that local reform in social assistance, with the introduction of *Renda Mínima*, has not followed either the ‘from above’ or ‘from below’ path. Instead, *Renda Mínima* was brought into the local state in São Paulo and first implemented by progressive economists, and particular a network specialised in labour markets. Two factors in particular contributed to this silent revolution from the middle. First, professional networks that cut across the public-private divide, as members circulate between university departments, public interest NGOs, government departments, and other institutional sites, played a critical role in developing the programmes, bringing them into the state, and overseeing their initial implementation.⁴ Second, political parties, disciplined by highly competitive electoral competition, created the opportunity for leading reformist professionals to circulate through the state and carry their professional and/or policy projects into state decision making centres. Political elites and electoral competition played an important role as parts of the literature suggest, but in a somewhat different from that predicts. Contrary to expectations, participatory governance institutions had no or only a limited role. Finally, when leading programme founders and supporters rotated out of the state as a new administration took office, a different set of actors emerged to fight to preserve

³ There are always exceptions, which include work by Tandler (1997) and Schattan (200?) on Brazil. Outside of Latin America, see for example Joshi (2009).

⁴ The organisational sociology literature on the professions is distinct from that on experts and epistemic communities. This paper draws on the former literature. For an example of the latter, Gutiérrez (2010) offers a nice account of the role of expert communities in water and sanitation reform in Brazil.

the two programmes, adopting and sustaining them over time even as other programmes were eliminated.

The analysis traces how *Renda Mínima* was brought into and maintained within the local state in São Paulo over a 20 year period, across municipal administrations of dramatically different ideological colours – a rightwing urban political machine (Partido Popular), a centre-left party (PT), and a centre-right coalition (PSDB-DEM). In Brazil, where decentralisation has been more extensive than anywhere else in Latin America and municipal government has significantly expanded its duties and share of public revenue, this focus on the local face of service sector reform is particularly salient. São Paulo's political leaders and policy makers at various stages made basic choices about how to pursue the directives and goals set by national reforms in the social sectors and pursue their own social initiatives as well. In doing so they allied with different professional groups, and different groups within professions, that had longstanding ties to their respective parties.

The next section of the paper sets out briefly a few theoretical foundations and is followed by an introduction to the two programmes, our cases. A detailed rendering of the *Renda Mínima* story constitutes the body of the paper. The conclusion makes a small number of comparative statements across the programme and, based on the particular trajectories of the professions in Brazil across authoritarian and democratic regimes and periods of rapid state expansion, suggests that the role reformists may play in different national and subnational context is likely highly variable.

I. Missing Middle in the Analyses of Social Sector Reform

Studies of Latin American social sector reforms such as the introduction of income guarantee programmes take one of two positions on which social actors are the forces of change. In both professionals are absorbed into other categories of actors, making invisible their particular contribution to recent institutional change.⁵ Most studies argue that *most* reform initiatives have been from above, undertaken by state or policy elites, exceptional leaders, technocrats or 'the executive,' with little or no pro-reform pressure from 'below' or civil society. They further suggest that increased electoral competition, as a result of the democratisation the region experienced during the 1980s and 1990s, triggering competition among political elites for new or marginalised constituencies, has played a significant role.⁶

⁵ Cf. the collection of essays in Kaufman and Nelson 2004, and Haggard and Kaufman 2008.

⁶ Redemocratisation in Brazil during the 1980s, for example, saw the voting age fall to 16 years and the elimination of the literacy requirement, considerably expanding the electorate. In the case of Brazil, Melo (2006:

These arguments are made for a wide array of administrative, managerial, and sectoral reforms (Kaufman and Nelson 2004; Nelson 2000; Grindle 2000, Haggard and Kaufman 2008). Another set of studies argue on the bases of counter-factual – the perceived *absence* of reforms tackling large scale poverty and/or inequality – that without broad-based coalitions pressuring political and state elites from below, reform that makes states more responsive to the poor is not possible. These studies explore the failure of the poor, working class, and others to coalesce into effective reform movements. The failure is attributed to political-economy effects of neoliberal globalisation or to the nature of state institutions or the political regime features (Weyland 1996; Roberts 2002?).⁷

In the more common account, professionals are defined by either their position within the public bureaucracy and/or by their public sector unions. They are conflated with civil servants or bureaucrats, leading to the conclusion that the primary interest of groups such as teachers or social workers is the growth of public bureaucracy and protection of a range of civil service benefits. There are many well-documented instances of organisations representing professional groups, such as doctors or teachers, fighting tooth and nail against public sector reform, particularly in cases where professionals' autonomy and pensions were at stake (Kaufman and Nelson 2004; Haggard and Kaufman 2008). In some of studies professionals are clubbed together with senior bureaucratic, state elites, or members of 'change teams,' who lead reform from above, but in general they are portrayed as the villains, "powerful internal interests" pitted against more public-spirited reformers (Batley 2004). What we see from earlier studies on public sector reform in various regions of the world, however, is a great variation in the role professionals have played. It is this variation over time and across countries that needs to be explained. To identify this variation and some its possible causes is difficult without first properly conceiving middle-class professional as a category of actors in their own right.

What role professional groups are able to play in a reform process depends in no small measure on the nature of the reforms themselves. In particular, their role is likely to be diminished in areas where well organise groups may incur significant costs, in particular if reforms proposed cut or reworking existing programmes. This is the case of proposed privatisation of pensions or public health insurance for the industrial working class and public

169) in particular highlights the central role electoral competition has played in the expansion of minimum income guarantee programmes.

⁷ Skocpol's (1992) classic work on the rise of the welfare state in the United States of course also focuses on such pressure from below. From a different analytic perspective on the need for collective action from below, see Banerjee et al. 2008.

sector workers. Such reforms, emblematic of Latin America the 1990s, becomes highly politicised and provoke the entry of multiple powerful actors that limits the influence of reformist professional groups. Layering new social programmes on top off, or alongside, existing ones, without altering the latter substantially, is far less susceptible to such politicisation, debate is largely restricted to small groups of professionals, advocacy groups, and political leaders. Reformist professionals are more likely to play a central role in reforms of this kind. Minimum income guarantee programmes represent such a new layer of social programmes for the poor that do not fundamentally challenge the integrity of programmes for other social groups, such as the industrial working class, small farmers and agricultural workers, public sector workers, and so forth. While rural and urban poor have much to gain, other social groups have little to lose. Furthermore, as Haggard and Kaufman (2008: 287) observe, the total transfer of resources under Bolsa Familia, the national income guarantee programme, was 0.15 of GDP in 2003, a tiny value compared to the social security funds at the centre of fierce political dispute.

Professions: Interests, Values, and Practices

The interests, identities, and values of professionals in health, social assistance, education and so forth, contrary to the state reform literature, are not only or even primarily the product of their positions in the respective public bureaucracies (Schön 1983; Starr 1984). The professions, the sociology of organisations suggests are work areas (law, religion, medicine and so forth) where a body of practioners have developed a specialized and systemic body of knowledge that is acquired through extensive and formal vocational training, and that is accompanied by a publicly proclaimed set of professional norms (Wilenski 1964: 138; Ritzer 1975: 630-31; Abbot 1988).⁸ The practitioners' ability to regulate who can enter the profession and in particular its control over the required vocational training – “the production of producers” (Larson 1977), the “conditions and methods of their work” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), and the norms that accompany technical knowledge – such as that embodied in the hypocratic oath in the case of medicine – has two critical consequences.⁹ First is a monopoly over a work area – professionals authority to exclude

⁸ On Weber's views of the professions, see also Ritzer (1975).

⁹ Studies of the professions and that on the role of experts and epistemic communities have some overlap but they are not used interchangeably. The professions have their networks or communities of experts, but expert communities or networks may cut across several professions or not fall into any profession. For an interesting account of how water resource experts contributed to the reform of water resource management in Brazil, see Gutiérrez 2010.

other practitioners from their trade is publically sanctioned (through state licensing or less formal means). Hence licensed social workers cannot argue cases before a judge on the behalf of clients, nor can lawyers place children into foster care.

Second, the extensive training practitioners receive prior to entering public organisations such as state agencies or private enterprise is meant to provide a set of values and practices that are independent of the position and/or organisation one enters subsequently. These values and practices are reinforced and evolve over time in part through the interaction with other members of the profession. When professional networks cut across different types of organisations – university departments, research institutions, organisations in the public sector, firms in the private sector, professional associations, and non-profit entities – they reinforcing and/or innovate values and practices in ways that are not narrowly tied to specific positions within public sector administrative hierarchies. Far from all professional networks have this characteristic (Abbot 1988), but those of public health, labour economics, and social assistance do in Brazil.

How Professionals Contribute to Reform

A variety of scholars have identified the professions as a vital source of institutional reform in the public and private sector.¹⁰ For Weber professionalization is a central part of the rationalization of public authority and is tightly interwoven with the history of institutional change leading to bureaucracy as an organisational form. The production and transmission of a rational, systematic, and theoretically coherent body of knowledge has been central to the transformation of how state's engage in warfare (modern military), their role in wellbeing of their populations (public health), regulate labour relations (human resources), and so forth (Weber 1968). Knott and Miller's (1987) offer a compelling account of the Progressive reforms in early 20th century United States that highlights the role of professionals in replacing particularistic, personalized, and politicized public administration that granted powerful economic actors and political bosses privileged access, with forms of organization that were less overtly political (and partisan), more universal, impersonal, and rational – that is, modern bureaucratic organization led by experts and directed by elected representatives. They note that while the dominant claim professionals' made was efficiency, the convergence of their interests with that of political and social reformers at the time was

¹⁰ Cf. Selznick 1969; Friedson 1970, Starr 1984; Edelman, Abraham, and Erlanger (1992), Dobbin and Kelly 2007.

around a platform of social inclusion and democratisation.¹¹ This reformist role reflected the particular political opportunities the professions faced in late 19th and early 20th century US and parts of Europe.

Social and state reformers put centralized command and control and administrative hierarchy at the service of the professions in the early 20th century.¹² The problems of public administration and need for state reform in late 20th century Latin America were framed very differently however, and the alliances professionals made and state reforms they supported differed accordingly. Authoritarian governments Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and to a lesser extent Mexico, had dramatically increased the role of the professions in the state as they sought to modernize their respective public bureaucracies. This project to rationalize the state – such Weberian language was common among key ministers in Brazil during the military dictatorship (1964-1984) – was at best partial but it helped cement a close association between authoritarian rule and professionals, known in the region as the ‘technocrats.’¹³ In the context of this association between authoritarianism and technocrats, reformists in a variety of professions – law, urban planning, health, education, sanitation, and others – adopted as a project social inclusion and democratization of the state. Reformist professionals who occupied, or sought to occupy, positions of influence in state institutions that relied on their expertise – lawyers and judges in the justice system, public health doctors and nurses in the Ministry of Health and in state and municipal government health secretariats, and so forth – adopted policies (formal and informal) and introduced reforms meant to broaden access to their services and, in a number of cases, expand who could participate in decision making.¹⁴

Translating professional authority into institutional reform

¹¹ The claim rested on the need to separate politics from administration – democracy was enhanced when democratically elected representatives made policy and left implementation to neutral and expert professionals. Knott and Miller (1987: 65) observe for example that “social workers found the Progressive model of professional autonomy within a bureaucratic structure the ideal political vehicle for reversing the nineteenth century pattern of volunteer domination over paid employees.” In education, medicine, policing, social services, professionals would occupy positions at the top of the hierarchy, or act as advisors to those at the top, and use their legitimating expertise to direct the lower-archs: the street-level service providers such as police men and women, the nurses and nurses assistant, teachers, and so forth.

¹² DiMaggio (1991) and others observe that there is an inherent tension between the professional claim to autonomy. Bringing together the professions’ projects for control with that of social and state reforms therefore entailed managing this tension carefully.

¹³ The rationalizing reforms helped earned these regimes the moniker “bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes” among scholars of Latin America (O’Donnell 1973, Collier 1979).

¹⁴ See for example, on the legal profession, see Arantes 2002; Houtzager 2005. On the public health profession, see Dowbor 2008; on social assistance profession, see Bravo 1996.

Activist professionals seek to translate their authoritative voice in a work area into institutional reform through a variety of mechanisms, but in the case of *Renda Mínima* two stand out. First, they bring policy or professional projects into the state by consolidation reformist professional networks that cut across organizations and the public and private sectors. Many professional networks cut across organisations, and across the public-private divide, and can consequently become a major source of institutional reform. The idea has two components. First, best practices, technical norms, unspoken rules, develop within different nodes of these networks and are carried by more influential and mobile members from one institutional arena to another. Second, the fact that members of professional networks often occupy positions in different departments or public agencies, at different levels of government and in different positions – i.e. as policy, managerial, or street-level – can help innovative ideas or new practices developed in parts of the network permeate the state, increasingly likelihood that these will help push along real change. Alternative and often competing professional practices and institutional models are developed within networks and when some of these gain political support, as public policies or as new best practices, it is the diffuse nature of professional networks that facilitates their spread across wide array of public and private institutions. In a slightly different vein, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that the professions are a major source of organizational change, as innovations they develop are identified as ‘best practices’ by influential individuals and are subsequently adopted across sectors of the economy or state, to legitimise organisation’ actions. In the case of *Renda Mínima*, the movement appears to have been two-ways from the start, as local experiments in income transfer programmes occurred simultaneously with debate over national legislation. These processes are far from straight forward as different professional groups contest each others’ authority in policy domains by constructing competing “professional projects” and mobilised ‘activist’ professionals contest control over their own profession with their own projects.¹⁵

Second, leading reformist carrying such projects into important decision making centres of the state through their ties to political parties elected to office. In democratic polities, competitive electoral politics, a variety of studies show, contribute to state reform by facilitating the circulation of political elites and, related, the pressure it places on those elites once in power to improve state performance. But competitive politics also appears to be a mechanism for the rotation of leading reformist professionals through the state. These

¹⁵ Cf. Abbott 1988, Edelman et al. 1992, Dobbin and Kelly (2007). The shift from Keynesian to monetarism in British economic policy that Hall (1992) explores is a compelling example.

distinguished members of the profession are given appointed positions, at the discretion of elected officials.

Different professional groupings within policy fields – public health, economic policy or development, urban planning and sanitation, social welfare, environment, and so forth – have ties to various political parties in Brazil, as they do in many Latin American countries. Parties draw on these ties to staff their administration and make policy when they come to power at the city, state, or federal levels. Elections therefore have served as an institutional mechanism that selects which groups of professionals in a field, and their respective policy projects, enter the state and occupy important decision making positions. The Brazilian state is particularly generous in the number of appointed positions elected officials can fill, which number in the thousands rather than hundreds, and the ability to bring in consultants and draw personnel seconded from other agencies.

In the cases of *Renda Mínima* in São Paulo, competitive electoral politics shaped poverty reduction policies in a number of important ways. Similar to what Hall (1992) found with monetarist economists in 1970s Great Britain, prominent members of different public health and economics groupings, carrying distinct policy projects, cycled through key policy making centres in the state because of their close ties to political parties. The political viability of the projects that different professional groups carried – that is, the electoral returns of these projects, and timing of the returns – had an impact on the party leadership's willingness to support poverty reduction initiatives (and one set of policies over another). In Brazil, like elsewhere, the challenge facing elected officials upon entering office is to select programmes that can, within a two year period, produce visible and significant benefits to large segments of the population. This is particularly true if the programmes involved do not enjoy the support of a large organized political base.¹⁶ Electoral pressure therefore means that any new programmes created by an administration must begin to produce visible results by the end of the second year of the term, in order to change course if necessary in year three.

II. A Case of Policy and Institutional Innovation

The move towards minimum income guarantees such as São Paulo's *Renda Mínima* reflects the concatenation of several types of reforms. The first set originated in democratic

¹⁶ Elections for executive positions are held every four years in Brazil, but year one of any administration is largely spent on setting up the administration and year four on re-election and touting the results of the administration's work. Programme benefits have to be visible and significant at the beginning of the election campaign.

transition of the 1980s and sought, among other things, to deepen democracy and increase social inclusion. The 1988 ‘Citizen Constitution’, as the new constitution became known, substantially decentralised the existing federal architecture, granted citizens new social rights such as those to health and social assistance, and mandated the creation of an entirely new institutional sphere of participatory governance councils in each social sector, with a role in policy, administration and oversight of services. The Constitution reaffirmed the longstanding practice of complementary public and private provision of public services. By 1993 each social sector had its own implementing legislation, creating a complex tapestry of laws and rules that reflected the influence of the varied actors in the each service sectors. A second set of reforms in the mid-1990s focused primarily on cost savings and making public administration more efficient in response to the growing fiscal crisis of the state. Inspired in part in NPM rather than the political struggles for democracy and social inclusion, the changes in public administration sought, with some success, to erode autonomy of decision making of lower federal administration (state and municipal) by recentralised policy making in strategic areas, challenged state provision of public services by delegating provisioning to public non-state organisations – i.e. non-profit service providers – and, perhaps less successfully, limited recent gains citizen participation to the exercise of accountability over service providers.¹⁷

Renda Mínima is a new programme that seek to make ambitious national promises a reality for poor urban communities, as it seek to universalize access to new constitutional social rights for the poorest quarter of the population, and particularly those on the edges of the formal labour market. The programme has required substantial institutional innovation along the way. Contrary to past social policy models, however, it has adopted form of service delivery that minimise the state’s administrative role and is compatible, if not always inspired by, new public management: *Renda Mínima* (and its federal counterpart *Bolsa Família*) provide low-income families rely on the public banking system for direct cash transfers. The programme therefore embodies in unexpected (and perhaps contradictory) ways the spirit and features of both waves of reform: the constitutional promise of inclusive citizenship and the shift from a developmental state to what Bresser (1997; 2007; 2010) calls a managerial state.

Renda Mínima is one of a series of minimum income guarantee programmes established first by municipal administrations and then the federal government that aim to

¹⁷ On NPM prescriptions, see Barzelay 2000a, Manning 2001, Batley 2004, Hood 1991.

tackle intergenerational poverty on a large scale and to varying degrees within a rights or entitlement framework. The federal programme *Bolsa Família* is the largest and best known of these programmes – it supports an unprecedented 11.2 million families, an estimated third of the country's households – and builds on the many municipal and federal programmes that preceded it. In the city of São Paulo, *Renda Mínima* was proposed in 1992 but only materialised in 2001, when it quickly became the city's first large scale anti-poverty programme for people on the margins of the formal labour market. São Paulo's programme is the largest of the municipal initiatives. It provides a monthly income grant to families with children under the age of 16, and a per capita income of less than R\$175.¹⁸ It requires that the families fulfil a corresponding obligation: ensure all school-age children attend at least 85% of their classes and that children under the age of 6 complete the government's vaccination schedule. Families in the programme are the extremely poor, with an average monthly *household income* of only R\$243.76 (roughly €101.57 at 2001 exchange rate).¹⁹ Families register directly with the government and then access their monthly grant through a bank account opened in their name, normally using a bank card. Women tend to have legal custody of the children, and are generally responsible for the education and health of family members, and are often the entitlement holder.

III. Bringing Minimum Income Guarantees into the State

A loose network of progressive economists and their political party allies sought for over a decade to bring minimum income guarantees into the city government of São Paulo. In a first for Brazil, the PT of São Paulo included an income guarantee programme in its platform for the municipal elections in 1991. The party lost that year's elections. Then it lost the city's 1996 municipal elections. The conservative political machine (*Partido Popular*) that was victorious on both occasions locked proponents of *Renda Mínima* out of city government. When a party favourable to income guarantees finally won the city's elections in 2000, it was the PT. The party gave progressive economists in the party a chance to enter the city administration and shape policy towards the urban poor. The *Renda Mínima*

¹⁸ The programme excludes poor individuals or poor families without children, unlike *Bolsa Família*. Brazil has a constitutionally guaranteed entitlement for the elderly (over the age of 65) or disabled (who cannot work) living in extreme poverty (income of less than a ¼ of the minimum wage, R\$95 or €35 a month) – the *Benefício de Prestação Continuada* – but other families without children do not. Exchange rate used €1=R\$2.7.

¹⁹ Half the families had two parents, but the entitlement holders were overwhelmingly women (74.2%). The family must have resided in the city for two years and prove legal custody of the children. The monthly grant is R\$140, R\$170, or R\$200 (€52, €63, and €74) depending on whether a family has one, two, or more than two children respectively.

programme that was established in 2001 by-passed all other social assistance programmes in São Paulo in the size of population attended and in budget share within a year.²⁰

In the 10 years between the first PT proposal in and implementation of *Renda Mínima* in the city, local and state-level governments in several parts of the country adopted income guarantee programmes. Two years after its creation the federal government created *Bolsa Família*.²¹ The long campaign to create the programme in São Paulo is noteworthy, however, because it reflects particularly well three dynamics/features in the rise of income guarantees in general: the prominent role progressive economists have played, a fate closely intertwined with that of partisan electoral politics, and the conflict it engendered with another progressive professional group – social workers – with its own competing historically for the poor. In the dispute with economists over policy towards the poor, progressive social workers, along with colleagues in psychiatry and sociology who worked directly with the poor, sought at different moments to ignore, capture, or work with income guarantee programmes.

Progressive Economist and Partisan Politics

There is a consensus among protagonists of Brazil's minimum income guarantee story that prominent Brazilian economists who obtained their PhDs in the United States during the 1970s carried back to Brazil the debate between Milton Friedman, Robert Solow, and James Tobin on negative income taxes (Suplicy 1992 and 2006; Fonseca 2001). Minimum income guarantees, Antonio Maria da Silveira argued as early as the mid-1970s, were preferable to the longstanding food and nutrition programmes to combat poverty, and other forms of service delivery, because they offered minimum interference in the market, recipients' greater choice, and were less costly to delivery and susceptible to corruption and clientelism.²² The latter were considered endemic problems. Economists differed, however, in what form minimum income programmes should take.

²⁰ The programme's budget in 2006, R\$168.9 million (€62.5 million), represented 88% of the budget of the Municipal Secretariat for Social Assistance and Development (SMADS). The remaining 12% covers the SUAS-related social assistance programmes financed by the municipal government and administrative costs. The poverty line is per capita income of less than half-minimum wage (currently R\$190, €70). Current exchange rate, €1=R\$2.70.

²¹ Among the earliest was that of the Federal District, implemented by the PT and Sorbonne-trained economist Cristovam Buarque. By the time the city of São Paulo had its own *Renda Mínima*, over a 100 municipalities, several state governments, and two federal ministries provided poor citizens with some form of minimum income grant. On *Bolsa Família*, see Hall (2006).

²² See Antonio Maria da Silveira (1975) and Fonseca's (2001:101) discussion of the evolution of this debate.

Two projects emerged. The first is for a universal *citizen (or basic) income* and is closely associated with Eduardo Suplicy, a faculty member of the Fundação Getulio Vargas economics department, and Michigan State trained economist, and a Senator since the late 1980s. Suplicy connects three partially overlapping spheres – professional, elite, and political. He is a member of the loose network of progressive Brazilian economists, as well as a member of the elite São Paulo industrialist ‘Matarazzo’ family and the first senator elected by the PT (in 1988). He brought into the PT the idea of income guarantees, and once elected to the Senate introduced legislation for a *national* “Minimum Income Guarantee Programme” that fuelled intense debate among labour economists and the political classes.²³ The legislation proposed a citizen income that would be a universal right of individuals, and foresaw the elimination of most social assistance programmes, deemed as wasteful and inefficient (Suplicy 1992).²⁴ The second, and ultimately dominant, project was narrower in scope, focusing on breaking the cycle of inter-generational transmission of poverty. Labour economists such as Camargo (1991, 1993, 1995) argued that minimum income guarantees need to target *families with children*, ameliorating immediate economic distress so that children can be kept in school and acquire the education (and health) that will help them rise out of poverty, rather than contribute to household income by working at an early age (Fonseca 2001: 177).

Income guarantees became a new focus in a number of economics departments such that of UNICAMP, and its Centre for Social and Labour Economics in particular (CESIT), and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Labour economists tied to a variety of parties, including prominently the PT and PSDB, and to a variety of international organisations such as the World Bank, International Labour Office, produced competing models of such programmes. It was Suplicy, as the PT candidate in his home city of São Paulo in 1991, who proposed the first municipal *Renda Mínima* programme in his platform. None of the newly elected mayors, in São Paulo and elsewhere in Brazil, embraced the radical shift in anti-poverty it implied. After the municipal elections in 1994 a small number

²³ Since the late 1980s Suplicy has published works on minimum income guarantees, including "Da Distribuição de Renda e dos Direitos à Cidadania" (Editora Brasiliense - 1988); "Programa de Garantia de Renda Mínima" (editado pelo Senado Federal - 1992) e “Renda de Cidadania – A saída e pela porta” (Cortez Editores e Fundação Perseu Abramo – 2001); “Renda Básica de Cidadania - A Resposta dada pelo Vento” (L&PM, 2006, edição de bolso).

²⁴ The proposed legislation gave every 25 year old Brazilian citizen, with residence in Brazil and an income below a certain level, the right to 30% of the difference between that level and the minimum wage.

of newly elected mayors began to experiment with different minimum income grants (the PT lost in São Paulo again).²⁵ The electoral fortunes in São Paulo changed in 2001.

Income guarantees were not a visible campaign issue but when the PT took office the new Mayor, Marta Suplicy (wife of Senator Suplicy at the time), and the powerful Finance Secretary opened the doors to the carriers of income guarantees. The administration brought in a leading member of a new generation of labour economists into the state.²⁶ The economist, Marcio Pochmann, had written his doctoral dissertation at CESIT-UNICAMP on labour policy and income guarantees, and received his PhD in 1993.

Social Workers and Renda Minima

The team Pochman assembled to create and run *Renda Minima* echoed the deep seated suspicion that parts of the left have of social assistance, the field that had emerged to care for the vulnerable poor. The team explicitly juxtaposed its approach to combating social exclusion and poverty to the longstanding social assistance model in which small scale projects that seek to meet the immediate needs of a particular vulnerable population segment, and are executed by fragmented networks of non-profit organisations that are perceived as paternalistic and vulnerable to forms of political clientelism (Pochman 2002 and 2004). Pochman wanted a “fundamentally break” in the type of good provided by the state and in the institutional form of its delivery. His team would emphasize building direct relations between the state and beneficiaries, cutting out what were seen as ‘bad’ or self-interested civil society organisations to strengthen this citizenship relation.

A substantial reform movement within social assistance, led by social workers, psychologists, and professors in social services departments at prominent universities such as the Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) and the Federal University of Brasilia, shared some of the economists’ critiques of their field but saw a very different road ahead. Leading intellectuals in university social welfare departments, research centres, and elsewhere developed a professional project that would in many ways replicate the health sectors’ SUS that is, a policy field anchored in the state, rather than civil society, with strong public institutions – the proposed Unified National Social Assistance System (SUAS) would break with the historic pattern of extreme pluralisation and “conservative, paternalistic, and charity-

²⁵ The PT first proposed a minimum income programme in its 1993 national conference and 1994 party platform for the presidential elections. It has not occupied a prominently position in PT political campaigns however.

²⁶ Departamento Intersindical de Estatísticas e Estudos Socioeconômicos.

based model of tending to the vulnerable” (ref.).²⁷ Most SUAS activists failed to see the rise minimum income guarantees as they pursued their professional project. Some leading social workers sought to discredit income guarantees as a “neoliberal” effort to reduce the role of the state and (paradoxically from the vantage point of the economists) a new kind of “assistencialismo” that would keep the poor disempowered (ref.). And a few argued that such programmes were inherently a part of social assistance and should fall under the control of the people who actually worked with and knew the poor, the professionals of social assistance (Esposati 1995). This last group would, in the São Paulo administration, seek to win control of *Renda Mínima*.²⁸

In São Paulo the conflict between progressive economists and reformist social workers seeking to revitalise their profession in São Paulo at moments became acute and found expression within political parties and eventually within the São Paulo city government as protagonists on each side secured allies. Each professional group mobilised allies within the two structures. The party platform for the electoral campaign was a compromise: it promised a *Renda Mínima* programme that combined monthly income grants to the poor families with children and a range of social services to attend to these families (ref).

In the new PT administration the core disputes between the labour economists and social workers were (i) whether income transfers should be accompanied by social assistance programmes for specific populations, some of which have become known as ‘exit doors’ in the field, (ii) whether the programme should be located in the Secretariat for Social Assistance or in an new independent administrative unit, and (iii) what role should be played by civil society organizations who work with the target population.

The economists prevailed on all fronts. At the crucial foundational moment – Year One of the administration – a new department was created within the influential Secretariat of Finance to pursue *Renda Mínima*, along with a series of smaller “labour market reinsertion” programmes. This institutional location of the new Department of Development, Work, and Solidarity ensured both proximity of the team responsible for its development to the most

²⁷ But progress was limited because provision, and policy, in social assistance has been made ‘in society’ by charities and non-profit service providers, which control the physical infrastructure and substantial human resources used to delivery programmes to the poor. The SUAS movement met with substantial opposition from powerful non-state actors.

²⁸ As late as 2007, however, reformist social workers appear to have limited awareness that the most significant anti-poverty initiatives has passed them by. The SUAS movement has no creative proposals on the table to build a coalition around the expansion of programmes such as *Renda Mínima*. Surprisingly, income guarantee programmes barely received mentioned in the 10th (national) Social Assistance Conference of 2007, considered a watershed by the movement.

important figures in the administration – the secretary of finance and the mayor – and their institutional autonomy from the Secretariat for Social Assistance.²⁹ The Finance Secretary and Mayor provided important *blindagem*(armour) against pressures from the social welfare professionals and their allies in civil society, as well from city politicians seeking inclusion of their constituencies into the programme. In a bold gesture to ensure the programme's autonomy from influences outside of the department, civil society in whatever form was denied a role (beyond disseminating information) in the design and implementation of *Renda Minima*.

An important electoral rationale favoured the income-transfer component of the initial programme. Electoral pressure meant that the administration's new programmes had to begin producing visible results within the second year of the four year term, and hit full stride in the third year. More pragmatic members of the Mayor's cabinet doubted that the large and slow social assistance machinery could be turned around to implement the very large and radically different programmes in the time available.

Pressure from Below and Participatory Governance Institutions

The political battles to implement and expand the programme were fought primarily by economics professionals and their allies among the political leadership, rather than by leaders representing networks of civil society organisations, including those in the city's social assistance delivery network.³⁰ With one important exception, the demands on the city's administration by-pass the existing participatory governance councils, such as the Municipal Council for Social Assistance which is meant to oversee social assistance programmes (Pólis 2007). Local leaders and some organisations did attempt to pressure the government for expansion of the programme at different moments but demands have been made directly on regional administrations, the Secretariats, the Mayor, or indirectly through the mediation of *Vereadores*. But this pressure came from individual initiatives of local

²⁹ The programmes included smaller income transfer programmes for different age groups – the Work Grant, Work Operation, and Beginning Anew – and three 'emancipatory' programmes that provided skills, resources, and other support to income generation initiatives.

³⁰ The municipal PT's working group on social assistance, which prepared the campaign platform item on income guarantees for the 2001 municipal elections, had no direct participation by urban movements, professional organizations of social workers, service providers or other groups working with the poor. The civil society Forum for Social Assistance, which coordinated some activities among service-providers and, less so, advocacy groups, was not consulted. The working group was led by Suplicy and composed by economists, political leaders or their advisors, two social workers, and a prominent business man. Interviews with the group's members suggest there was also little if any indirect participation through informal discussions outside of the group. While strategies to build support within the business community, through the São Paulo Federation of Industry (FIESP), was discussed in some detail, there were no discussions of any strategy to build support among those working with the poor.

leaders, usually to bring the programme to their clientele or to demand the inclusion of specific families, rather than from networks of organisations seeking to broaden the programmes coverage or engage in social accountability. Furthermore, local leaders and their organisations largely by-passed participatory councils such as the Municipal Council for Social Assistance (COMAS) and the Forum for Social Assistance, as well as other municipal councils and forums composed of representatives of those working with the poor. The exception that proves the rule occurred in the 2003 Participatory Budget, when leaders from the Penha regional administration, composed of four of the city's districts, succeeded in placing the extension of the STDS programmes as a priority in the participatory budget for the region (Ponchmann 2003: 64). This hastened the extension of the *Renda Mínima* to that region. The participatory budget was discontinued by the subsequent PSDB-DEM administration, however, and the institutional mechanism is no longer available.

COMAS brings together representatives from government, non-profit service providers, and user organizations or movements, and is formally charged with making policy and oversight in the area of social programmes. As the largest programme for the low income households which social programmes target, one would expect significant involvement of COMAS in at least oversight. Our survey of COMAS meeting minutes and resolutions over the course of 7 years found that it appears to have been pro-active in various areas during the PT administration, and then under the PSDB-DEM administration focused its energies mostly on boundary maintenance and regulation of the network of non-profit providers contracted by the city government to service the poor. *Renda Mínima*, however, was discussed only twice in the 7 years and there are no resolutions approving, modifying, or in any other addressing the programme (Serafim 2007).

The failure of COMAS to address and/or monitor *Renda Mínima* reflects in large measure the composition of its councillors. The social workers and other government representatives used COMAS to push for stronger government direction of the sector and the creation of government social service units. Non-profit providers fought for better terms of the service contracts, and to maintain their autonomy. Neither institution had any investment in, or responsibilities for, the programme. Representatives of user groups, by far the weakest member of the council, had different reasons for not taking up the programme. Movements of the urban poor are organized around specific issues and government policies, and rarely coalesce around cross-cutting issues such as income grants. But more importantly, the council seats reserved for user groups were generally empty. Users did not have effective

representation on COMAS. The head of the *Movimento de Catadores* explained in an interview, was both prohibitively expensive and humiliating, as the councillors broke for lunch and the user representatives were abandoned to the basket of snacks on the meeting room table.

A Conservative Government and Programme Reproduction

The PT was voted out of power in 2004 and a centre-right PSDB-DEM alliance that took office the following year. The new administration disbanded the hallmark PT secretariat for Development, Work and Solidarity, and terminated all of its programmes, except for *Renda Mínima*. The programme was transferred to a special unit in the Secretariat for Social Development and Assistance, the institutional home of the social workers with ties to the PSDB in the new government. And the administration proclaimed it was committed to integrating social assistance programmes into *Renda Mínima*, seeming to give social workers control over the largest social assistance programme for the first time.

The victory was more apparent than real however. The new administration did not integrate *Renda Mínima* beneficiaries into the PSDM-DEM social assistance programmes. And while the unit responsible for the programme was moved into the Secretariat for Social Assistance, it maintained a high level of autonomy. What changed was the administration's commitment to expanding programme. If the previous administration ran an aggressive campaign to bring *Renda Mínima* to poor neighbourhood across the city, the subsequent PSDB-DEM administration limited itself to the legally mandated two-year re-registration to weed out beneficiaries who no longer meet the criteria.

Renda Mínima's survival after its original proponents and supporters left the city government is less mysterious than it might first appear. If, on the one hand, there was no organised movement from below to defend the programme, as civil society had been excluded from direct involvement in *Renda Mínima*,³¹ on the other the newly elected mayor José Serra belonged to the PSDB, which competed with the PT for credit for the rise of income guarantees. Serra himself is a prominent economist and has straddled the economics profession, party politics, and government.³² As Minister of Health he had introduced a

³¹ Only two petition relatively small petition drives, in late 2006, conducted by local leaders with ties to *Vereadores* in the city's Zona Sul (southern zone) and Zona Leste (eastern zone) sought to expand *Renda Mínima*'s coverage. The various social assistance participatory governance councils and forums are currently dominated by organisations whose primary concern is the terms of these contracts and the regulation of who enters their field.

³² José Serra received his PhD in economics from Cornell and taught in the economics department at UNICAMP. He was, respectively, minister of Planning and Minister of Health in the Cardoso government.

federal income transfer programme Bolsa Alimentação in 2001. The PSDB governor of the State of São Paulo at the time had created the Renda Cidadã (Citizen Income) in 2001 – state government programme that complemented municipal and federal income guarantee programmes (*Bolsa Família*). Serra left office early to become governor of the state of São Paulo but his more conservative DEM vice-mayor did not act against *Renda Mínima*. The DEM party is weak in São Paulo and the city's unexpected mayor relied heavily the now Governor Serra for political support.

The continuity in the programme likely also relates to its scale and legal framework. Unlike other programmes of the PT administration's Secretariat for Development, Work, and Solidarity, *Renda Mínima* functioned on a massive scale. Although there is no organised movement that defends *Renda Mínima*, withdrawing an entitlement from 150,000 families would likely produce a public outcry and undoubtedly considerable pressure on elected city assembly persons and city officials, who in turn would pressure their respective parties and the city administration. Organised contentious mobilization would be less likely. The legal status of the *Renda Mínima* might also have played a role. The programme was made an entitlement by municipal legislation and its budget is embedding in the city's *Lei Organica*, akin to a city constitution.³³ This legal framework has a couple of important consequences. It makes altering, and revoking the entitlement, far more politically costly and it is therefore more likely to survive across different administrations. Few City Assembly members would be willing to go on the public record as taking away an entitlement from poor families which help increase school attendance by children and face an electoral backlash.

The best indicator of the programmes institutionalisation is the stability its budget has acquired across several administrations. The initial allocation for *Renda Mínima* was around R\$13 million in 2001. That year it spent R\$51.6 million. From 2002 onward its expenditure has fluctuated between R\$160-191 million, making the programme 88% of the STDS budget (2001-04) and the SMADS budget (2005-Sept 2007) (Prefeitura de São Paulo, SEO 24/09/07).

IV. Conclusion

³³ The administration succeeded in revising the city's *Lei Organica* of 1990 and increase the legally mandated allocation for education from 25% to 31% of the municipal budget (well above the Constitution's mandated 20%). The 6% difference is for social programmes that contribute to improve educational attendance or performance, and includes 1% of the municipal budget specifically for *Renda Mínima*.

In the 1990s fiscal and administrative decentralisation (i.e. devolution) moved significant political authority to municipal government and accompanying democratisation reforms have created one of the most elaborate systems of participatory governance institutions in the global south. Notwithstanding these extensive state reforms to facilitate citizen participation and pressure from below on municipal government, it was progressive economists specialising in the labour market who played a central role in introducing municipal minimum income grant programme *Renda Mínima* in São Paulo. This is not to suggest that pressure from below or participatory governance institutions have been irrelevant across issues in either health or social welfare, but rather that they are *not necessarily* arenas where the interests of the poorest quarter of the population are represented and addressed.

The central role of professional networks of progressive economists, and labour economists in particular, have played in developing income guarantee programmes and bringing them into the state in Brazil runs counter to explanations of social sector reform in the literature. Studies of social sector reform tend to conflate professionals with either the labour organisations that represent narrow workplace interests, and therefore opposed reforms. The interests and identities of professionals in health, social assistance, urban planning and architecture, sanitation engineers and so forth are shaped by the networks within which they practice their profession, not only or even primarily, by the position within administrative hierarchies they occupy.

In the case of São Paulo, electoral competition was an important mechanism for the adoption of new social programmes, including *Renda Mínima*. Not only did it create competitive pressure on elected officials to reach out to new constituencies through policies directed at those constituencies, but it played an important role in selecting which professional groups, with their respective policy projects, would gain access to the main decision making positions, and subsequently in either eliminating policies that lacked strong enough political support or redesigning those that had strong support coalitions. The role of elections, and politics in broader terms, in the emergence and continuity of poverty reduction programmes will not surprise many political sociologists or political scientists. Comparative historical studies have shown labour movements and parties have a well documented role in the creation of welfare states in Europe, as is the role of populist parties in Latin America's developmental state more limited social policies. The different mechanisms through which competitive electoral politics contributes to social sector reform remains a somewhat

underexplored area. Facilitating the circulation of professionals with competing projects is one such mechanism identified in this paper.

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