

# The Covid-19 pandemic in the world of work: Psychosocial effects for the working class

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## Abstract

Our objective in this essay is to analyze the psychosocial impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic in the worker's lives and in the organization of work in Brazil. From studies conducted in the Psychology of Work and Organizations field, we study the consequences the pandemic has been generating with the increase of (1) remote work (2) relaxation of employment contracts and (3) informal work. We postulate that remote work tends to correlate with the intensification of work, invasion of the family life, loss of the collective dimension of work and social isolation. The relaxation of employment contracts stimulates the fear of losing jobs, thus leading to negative effects in the mental health. The informal work, in its turn, is associated to lower wages and worse work and health conditions. We consider the organization of working class through its institutions to be a way of building an ethical-political project focused on the human life.

**Keywords:** informal work; work conditions; worker's health.

## Resumo

*A pandemia da Covid-19 no mundo do trabalho: efeitos psicossociais para a classe trabalhadora.* Neste ensaio, objetivamos analisar os efeitos psicossociais da atual pandemia do Covid-19 na vida dos trabalhadores e na organização do trabalho no Brasil. Desde estudos realizados no campo da Psicologia do Trabalho e das Organizações, estudamos as consequências que a pandemia tem tido com o aumento (1) do teletrabalho (home office), (2) da flexibilização dos contratos de trabalho e (3) do trabalho informal. Argumentamos que o home office tende a se relacionar com intensificação do trabalho, invasão da vida familiar, perda de dimensão coletiva do trabalho e isolamento social. A flexibilização dos contratos de trabalho estimula o medo do desemprego e, conseqüentemente, tem efeitos negativos na saúde mental. O trabalho informal, por sua vez, está associado a remunerações mais baixas, piores condições de trabalho e de saúde. Consideramos que a organização da classe trabalhadora através de suas instituições é uma forma de construir um projeto ético-político centrado na vida humana.

**Palavras-chaves:** trabalho informal; condições de trabalho; saúde do trabalhador.

## Resumen

*La pandemia del Covid-19 en el mundo del trabajo: los efectos psicossociales para la clase trabajadora.* En este ensayo nuestro objetivo es analizar los efectos psicossociales que la actual pandemia del Covid19 tiene sobre la vida de los trabajadores y la organización del trabajo en Brasil. A partir de diferentes estudios realizados en el área de la Psicología del Trabajo y las Organizaciones, estudiamos las consecuencias que dicha pandemia está teniendo en el aumento (1) del teletrabajo (home office), (2) de la flexibilización de los contratos laborales y (3) del trabajo informal. Argumentamos que la expansión del home office tiende a relacionarse con una intensificación del trabajo, invasión de la vida familiar, pérdida de su dimensión colectiva y aislamiento social. La flexibilización de los contratos laborales estimula el miedo al desempleo y, en consecuencia, tiene efectos negativos sobre la salud mental. El trabajo informal, a su vez, está asociado a salarios más bajos, peores condiciones de trabajo y de salud. Consideramos que la organización de la clase trabajadora a través de sus instituciones es una forma de construir un proyecto ético-político centrado en la vida humana.

**Palabras clave:** trabajo informal; condiciones de trabajo; salud del trabajador.

Since the 1970s, the world of work has experienced intense transformations, affecting the lives of millions of workers in capitalist societies (Antunes, 2008; H. L. F. Silva, 2018). The productive restructuring process, which marks this phase, reconfigured the way labor is organized, opening a breach for work relationships to become increasingly flexible and distant from the previous decades, with stability, regulation, and protection of workers (Antunes & Druck, 2013; Leite, 2019). Faced with this scenario, authors such as Antunes (2018), Garrido (2006), and Standing (2014) have problematized the effects of precariousness in the new work modalities – such as outsourcing, teleworking, the use of flexible periods (working at an established time, part-time, per shift, among others), and, more recently, service provision mediated by mobile applications (e.g., Uber, Ifood, Rappi) – on the lives of workers. According to these authors, the work crisis has increased insecurity and economic and social vulnerability of workers, who now have to deal, among other things, with more precarious and unstable jobs, with the absence and/or partial compliance with social protection measures, and with weaker union representations.

Although some authors point to the end of work in industrial societies (e.g., Gorz, 1987; Offe, 1989; Toni, 2003), with structural unemployment as one of the main arguments, others (e.g., Antunes, 2008; Brief & Nord, 1990; Garrido, 2006; Organista, 2006), in turn, have argued that, despite the indicators that shape the crises installed in capitalism, work remains the foundation of social relationships, through which necessary material conditions (salary and/or wages) are obtained so that the other spheres of human life can develop. Corroborating this line, empirical studies on the meanings that work has taken for workers in different occupational and social contexts have confirmed the central role of work in people's lives (e.g., Arnoux-Nicolas, Sovet, Lhotellier, & Bernaud, 2016; Borges & Tamayo, 2001; MOW, 1987). Even under adverse conditions, such as those highlighted, work continues to fulfill important social and psychological functions (Álvaro, 1992; S. C. Barros, Álvaro, & Borges, 2018; Jahoda, 1987), whether they are manifest, through the financial remuneration, or latent functions, referring to time structure, to socialization, to the construction of social identity and status, to the achievement of goals, among others.

Currently, the precariousness in the world of work has been exacerbated by a pandemic health crisis, due to the rapid proliferation of the coronavirus

(*Organização Internacional do Trabalho* [OIT], 2020b). Actions of social distancing/isolation – keeping only those activities considered essential to society – have been adopted by most of the affected countries, aiming to mitigate the mass contagion and the overcrowding of hospitals in the treatment of infected victims. These actions, however, have compromised many economic sectors on a global scale, especially the informal sector, which, this year, comprises more than two billion (62%) workers (OIT, 2020b). This data is even more alarming when considering that, according to the OIT, 90% of total employment in low-income (developing) countries and 67% in middle-income (emerging) countries are in that sector. They represent, therefore, those workers who have already experienced precarious work preconized by productive restructuring and neoliberal policies, especially regarding the loss of labor rights, corresponding, as Barahona (2020) points out, to the most economically and socially vulnerable countries, intensifying the inequality already institutionalized in these societies.

In Brazil, which has experienced a strong economic recession since 2015 (Pochmann, 2018), the effects of the current crisis have caused a loss and/or a considerable reduction in workers' income. According to an evaluation by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* [IBGE], 2020), in the first quarter of this year, the percentage of unemployment in the country reached 12.2%, representing 12.9 million people unemployed. Although it corresponds to a period prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus, this data already indicates a more pronounced economic slowdown in the country. This fact was pointed out by the Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies (*Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos* [DIEESE], 2020b), according to which almost 240 thousand layoffs were reported by the main Brazilian press during the pandemic. For those who are engaged in activities considered non-essential, in turn, many companies in the public and private spheres adopted the remote system, like home-office work, without, however, the population having been prepared for this modality (Porto, Puentes-Palacio, & Neiva, 2020).

It is important to highlight that job insecurity has been intensified in the last three years with the approval of the labor reform act of 2017 (Law 13.467/17). Although it intended to increase the supply

of formal employment and formalize employment contracts not previously included in the *Consolidação das Leis Trabalhistas* (CLT, Consolidation of Labor Laws), its implementation contributed to an increase, in 2019, of 41% in the population working in informality (DIEESE, 2020a), perpetuating the flexibility in the forms of hiring, as well as the worsening of the precariousness and intensification of the work processes.

Under such contexts and strong pressure from society and unions, the Brazilian Government announced Provisional Measure MP936 (DIEESE, 2020c), which temporarily provides for a reduction in the working hours or suspension of employment contracts, with the worker receiving complementary (for the former) or monthly (for the latter) allowances, through the *Benefício Emergencial de Preservação do Emprego e da Renda* (Employment and Income Preservation Emergency Allowance). However, according to DIEESE (2020c) itself, such measures have been shown to be insufficient in the face of such a crisis (health, economic, and social), in addition to the fact that resources do not quickly and adequately reach the workers who have been most affected by the pandemic. With the precariousness of work enhanced by the effects of the pandemic, Brazilian workers are increasingly distant from experiencing decent working conditions, a concept presented by the International Labor Organization (OIT, 2015), which advocates the integration of economic (creation of jobs and combating unemployment) with social objectives (social protection and guarantee of labor rights), to promote a dignified life and to tackle social inequality and exclusion.

In view of the presented scenario, we raise some questions. Given the new types of work, advocated by the productive restructuring and aggravated by the pandemic, what psychosocial effects can be observed in the lives of workers? What reflections are possible for strengthening and for a greater articulation of the unions in the face of the challenges that are being announced?

With this study, we aim to analyze the psychosocial effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the lives of workers and on the organization of work in Brazil. Therefore, and without the intention of an exhaustive reflection on the subject, we developed the discussion based on three points that we consider, from the above, more illustrative of the current moment in the country: (1) the intensification of the work processes, under the context of telework (home office); (2) the flexibilization

of labor rights; and (3) the increase in unemployment and informal work rates. Finally, due to the complexity, dynamism, and socio-historical character of psychosocial phenomena, we assume the importance of understanding them considering the different levels of analysis that cross them (from macro to micro), as shown by authors such as Álvaro, Garrido, Schweiger and Torregrosa (2007) and Doise (1986). In this sense, we consider in the discussions of the points listed in the subsequent sections, elements of the macro-social context (macro), of the organizational contexts (meso), and how these elements have an impact on the life of the worker (micro) in the world of work.

We believe that the discussion on this subject is urgent and necessary, so that the dismantling of work processes that has been taking place since the 1970s will not be perpetuated with the pandemic crisis. On the contrary, it serves as a stimulus for reflection – by professionals in the field of labor rights, by union organizations, and by workers in general. We hope to contribute to building paths towards more humane and dignified work.

## From teleworking to the effects of the home office: what intensified?

From all the adaptations that the world of work had to forcibly take over during the pandemic, teleworking emerges as a trend with strong worldwide acceptance and an increasing pace, but laden with old and complex challenges (Abbad et al., 2019; Aderaldo, Aderaldo, & Lima, 2017; B. S. A. Barbosa, 2010). Rocha and Amador (2018) point out three perspectives on the theme: the first is linked to the benefits of teleworking, advertising it as an advantageous innovation by giving the worker autonomy and flexibility (Aderaldo, et al., 2017); in contrast, the second refers to the flexibility of work as a form of precariousness and exploitation (Antunes & Braga, 2009); the third, and more growing, brings critical readings, without pointing to an emphasis on either extremes (Filardi, Castro, & Zanini, 2020).

In more general terms, teleworking is characterized when workers carry out parts (or the totality) of their activities in an environment physically separated from their workplace, with the home office modality being the one whose insertion takes place in a space in the worker's residence (B. S. A. Barbosa, 2010). The term "home office" is exclusive to the work performed at the worker's home. Even if this home shared by other residents, work-related activities have more flexible

schedules, whether the worker is self-employed or working for an organization (Rafalski & Andrade, 2015).

Several terms (telework, home office, virtual work, telecommuting, and remote work) are used indiscriminately when referring to work developed outside the traditional work setting. As for compulsory remote work, we alert to the attempt to equalize its modes of execution to the traditional face-to-face model. With the absence of control indicators in this type of work environment, there is a predisposition to increase pressure on performance. Without the control of such elements, levels of involvement and performance above those required before the teleworking started are often required (Sandall & Mourão, 2020).

In addition, this context triggers an abrupt change in the workers' routine, immersed in a home office system without any preparation. For many, the home itself became their workplace, affecting their ways of life, their routine, and their family relationships (A. M. Barros & Silva, 2010; Rafalski & Andrade, 2015). The adaptation to the work environment, in addition to a negotiation with the family (habits and workspace), reinforces the formulation of routines that balance the reality of work from home and the reality of the worker's chores (Rocha & Amador, 2018). This change is provocative of the appropriation of senses and meanings of work, testing the individual's ability to regulate emotions. Social distancing, for example, by producing a distance from colleagues, requires new forms of sociability as a means of preserving one's own sense of work, or even rethinking another meaning to it (Gondim & Borges, 2020).

Some counterpoints can be listed when analyzing aspects associated with the home office work mode. On one hand, cited as favorable and motivating, we find issues associated to the reduction of personal and organizational costs, to the increase in productivity, and to the optimization of time, such as the reduction of time spent in traffic and the consequent stress derived from it (Filardi, et al., 2020; Rafalski & Andrade, 2015). On the other hand, the negative impacts associated with the risks of the intensification of work, due to the difficulty of separating the space and time dedicated to other spheres of life (e.g., family, personal interests) to dedicate themselves to work fully through digital devices, in addition to the risk of reducing the possibilities of professional advancement, and those related to work regulation (Abbad et al., 2019; Rocha & Amador, 2018).

It is undeniable, in the typical productivity of a worker who has adapted to the teleworking modality, a willingness to over individualize work, with consequences both at the individual (social, professional, and political isolation) and at the collective level, for the cultural transformation of society, with general vulnerability of work relationships, loss of the collective work dimension, and increased individualization processes in the social field (Abbad et al., 2019; Aderaldo, et al., 2017; Rocha & Amador, 2018).

This list of risks associated with teleworking, both from the standpoint of the workers directly involved with these risks and of the society itself, invites us to reflect on the repercussions on the modes of sociability among workers, which directly concern their health, especially when the care of work is defended as a collective experience, instead of an exclusively individualized experience (Rocha & Amador, 2018). Although it is an irrevocable trend in the world of work and it offers concrete benefits for organizations, workers, and society, we cannot relativize the risks involved in teleworking due to their consequences in the individualization and impersonality of work, in the loss of social relationships, and in the intensification and flexibilization of work relationships and contracts.

## Flexibility of employment contracts

As already reported, in the last decade the world has experienced a worsening in flexibility and destruction of labor rights. This situation is reflected in the multiplication of outsourced, fixed-term, or even intermittent contracts. In general, the precarious diversification of employment contracts is aimed at cost reduction, by both companies and the state, hiring and firing their employees. The various changes in labor laws promoted around the world go in that exact direction.

Brazil is an example of this process, considering the transformations brought by the Labor Reform Act of 2017 promoted by the Michel Temer administration. It provides for both direct negotiation between worker and entrepreneur about the former's dismissal, as well as the reduction of the fine for unfair dismissal. The legalization of atypical new forms of hiring (Krein & Oliveira, 2019) and the expansion of outsourcing (Filgueiras & Cavalcante, 2015) also corroborate to the increase in forms of work in which the turnover of workers and professionals is greater.



Even if the trend, in the current pandemic, is to increase unemployment, analyzing the scenario before this moment and the measures adopted by the representatives of capital, in moments of acute crisis, it is possible to say that the flexibilization of contracts will deepen. The attempt to approve Provisional Measure 905/19, known as the “Green and Yellow Card”, shows signs in this direction. This proposal aims to create a type of hiring, aimed at young people, which provides, for example, a smaller fine for the dismissal of these workers.

This growing scenario of pressure for the flexibilization of labor contracts, by the business community and their political allies, results in the increase of job insecurity for workers. That is, the concern of the worker in face of the threat or the effective loss of the job. Despite being influenced by non-economic elements (Gimpelson & Oshchepkov, 2012), studies (Argimon, & Wendt, 2014; Peiró, Sora, & Caballer, 2012; M. A. Silva, Witte, 2005) have shown a strong relationship between the presence of high unemployment rates, a more flexible labor market, and the increase of fear.

Although there is no data related to the period corresponding to the pandemic, in Brazil, since 2015, workers have more intensely perceived the threat to employment (*Confederação Nacional da Indústria [CNI]*, 2019), and there are no contextual elements – reduction of unemployment or measures to reduce layoffs – indicating a reduction in this perception, either during or after the pandemic. In addition to an indicator of understanding about reality, the presence of this perception of threat has harmful impacts on the health of these workers.

This is what a vast literature reveals, pointing to the association between high levels of job insecurity and the occurrence of health problems, such as depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, headaches, high blood pressure, and heart problems, regardless of age, sex, education, or marital status (e.g., Barrech, Baumert, Gündel, & Ladwig, 2018; Elst, Notelaers, & Skogstad, 2018; László, et al., 2010; M. A. Silva, et al., 2014; Witte, 2005). Fear of unemployment has a significant effect on the worsening of global life satisfaction (Helbling & Kanji, 2018), in raising work-family conflicts (Minnotte & Yucel, 2018) and can be considered one of the most important work-related stressors (Elst, et al., 2018; László, et al., 2010).

As Castelhana (2005) portrays, fear of unemployment is a perverse management tool within

organizations. Based on this, it is possible, for the representatives of capital, to implement policies to intensify work and to subject workers to worse working conditions. Consequently, job insecurity favors collective demobilization and enhances individualism and competition among workers. This fear is also related to the coercion of workers not to seek health care (Augurzky & Tauchmann, 2015; Castelhana, 2005; Reichert), perpetuating a vicious cycle of deteriorating people’s lives.

If, on the one hand, job insecurity tends to fulfill this functionality, on the other, it can negatively affect job performance. First, if from an ethical standpoint, the worsening of workers’ health should be disapproved per se, there are also effects on productivity (M. A. Silva, et al., 2014). In addition, studies have reported a worsening in the relationship between leaders and their teams, as well as the emergence of unexpected behaviors, but which benefit the organization – named as organizational citizenship (Nikolova, Van der Heijden, Låstad, & Notelaers, 2018; Staufenbiel & König, 2010; Wang, Lu, & Siu, 2015).

## Unemployment, self-employment, and “uberized” work

If, in the scope of formal work, it is possible to see the world of work consequences that worsen the workers’ lives – such as the intensification of work and increasing job insecurity –, the situation is more drastic for those outside this regime. The first point is unemployment. In the early stages of the pandemic and the necessary measure of social isolation, the world experienced an abrupt loss of jobs. It is estimated that, in the second quarter of 2020, there will be a 10.5% reduction in the hours worked in the world – which would correspond to the loss of 305 million full-time jobs (OIT, 2020a). In the United States alone, in seven weeks, more than 33 million workers applied for unemployment insurance (Department of Labor of United States of America [DOL], 2020). In Brazil, as already presented, in March there was an increase of 1.3 points, reaching the unemployment mark of 12.2% (IBGE, 2020).

If unemployment is a problem from an economic standpoint – even if it is organically contained in the very dynamics of capitalism (Marx, 2013) – it has strong impacts on the lives of workers in this situation and on social development, in a broader sense. In addition to the immediate consequence of income loss, other aggravations to the situation are identified

(Mandelbaum & Ribeiro, 2017). Leaving employment results in the progressive loss of social ties arising from the work environment, in the reduction of social status in relation to peers, as well as in the limitation of access to entertainment and leisure activities (e.g., Andersen, 2014; Buendía, 2010; Góngora, 2011). Consequently, there is an impact on mental health, such as the general psychological deterioration of unemployed workers, in form of depression, anxiety, insomnia, fear, stress, suicide attempt, and drug abuse (e.g., Álvaro-Estramiana, Gondim, Garrido-Duque, Luna, & Dessen, 2012; Classen & Dunn, 2012; Coelho-Lima, Costa, & Bendassolli, 2013; Furnham, 2013; Kahn, 2013; Lima & Gomes, 2010; Schmitz, 2011).

Historically, in Brazil, considering the lack of effective public policies to support workers in this situation, the main ways out for those who are unemployed is informal work (e.g., Bendassolli, Coelho-Lima, Carlotto, Nüssle, & Ferreira, 2015; R. J. Barbosa, 2019). That is, forms of unregistered contracts or self-employed labor (Cacciamali, 2000) that aim to produce income for survival and that have low capital investment, being associated with precarious life situations (Tavares, 2010). Right now, there is no signal from governments or companies to change their attitude in the way they face unemployment in the country. Thus, it is reasonable to infer that the post-pandemic scenario is marked by more precarious formal jobs and by the growth in informality. This was already a trend present in the pre-pandemic scenario, when unemployment in the country started to reduce its growth rate due to the increase in informal work (IBGE, 2020).

Two considerations are necessary. The first concerns the population of informal workers before the pandemic. According to the OIT (2020b), at that time, more than 90% of workers who were in the informal sector lost their source of income. This situation portrays one of the characteristics of informal work: its lack of protection. In addition to the lack of access to rights, such as the 13th salary, vacation, and overtime pay (mainly in the case of self-employment), as they do not contribute, for the most part, to social security, they also have no guaranteed income due to sick leaves or even when retiring (Fagundes & Souza, 2017; Vargas, 2017). The lack of protection is also associated with a greater recurrence of accidents and illnesses, while absenteeism rates for health reasons are low (e.g., Dias et al., 2011; Diaz, Guevara, & Lizana, 2008; Maquillin, Marín-León, Monteiro, & Correa Filho, 2013). In addition to being unprotected, informal work in Brazil is

characterized by a higher number of working hours, lower salaries, and a reduced quantity of days off (IBGE, 2003).

If, on one hand, the trend presented is that of possible growth in informality, special attention should be paid to the emergence of “uberized” work (Antunes, 2020). Formally, they are configured in a modality in which, through mobile applications and in a virtual way, (large) companies act as mediators in the relationship between service providers (deliverers, drivers, etc.) and customers. However, the “service providers” are actually the main workforce for carrying out the core activity of these companies (Slee, 2017). These workers do not have any legal guarantees, nor a defined salary or even safety in their activities, a situation similar to that experienced by the previously described informal workers.

## Final considerations

Although the Covid-19 pandemic is ongoing, its effects were felt in the first moments, such as the loss of income, totally or partially, by countless workers, either due to unemployment or to the reduction and/or interruption of the activities they performed, due to protective measures to contain the spread of the virus.

However, the cost of the crisis is not exclusively economic. Even work, being commonly associated to income (salaries and/or wages) in capitalism cannot be reduced to that function. On the contrary, as previously mentioned, work fulfills latent social functions and, in this sense, its effects – of a psychosocial nature – are perceived and experienced by workers in different ways in their daily lives.

Thus, answering the first question we asked in the introduction of this study, we call attention to those workers, in formal employment, that were forcefully and intensely dragged into telework - home office. The problems arising from this process are structural, related to its implementation, planning, and management, with the need for teleworkers to pay attention to time management, self-management of tasks, and work-family reconciliation. Linked to this we have “the pains of excesses” with the overload of activities, the pressure for production and performance, causing an emotional exhaustion in addition to the body’s fatigue. Consequently, there is a projection for the increase in Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WRMDs), in diseases related to work stress, and in signs of psychological distress related to the increments of the most

diverse forms of psychological violence linked to work scenarios. There is still much to be studied regarding the motivation of workers, their bond with the organization and the work group, the work-family interfaces, and the strategies for learning and facing the challenges in teleworking.

It is undeniable that the same model carries the weaknesses and “blindness” in terms of guaranteeing rights, protecting health and safety at work. Aspects such as registration of occupational accidents, medical and maternity leave, vacations, and limitation of the workweek are very diffuse in this process of making working hours and places more flexible. Such obscure elements, if not well covered in protective laws for workers, tend to be an inexhaustible source of illnesses, of weakening socio-professional relationships, of identity crises about the sense and meaning of work, of the collective weakening, and of the precariousness of work relationships.

Likewise, we highlight the negative impact of the flexibilization of employment contracts, which tends, as we have already indicated, to deepen under the current period of pandemic crisis. With the institutionalization of flexibility, the new types of work, so criticized for their harmful effects on workers' lives, tend to crystallize more and more in society. As a result, the workers' health problems reported are added to the aggravations, and also the intensification of insecurity and fear generated by the possibility of becoming unemployed, as well as the disarticulation of these workers with their possible representative bodies, such as unions and associations.

In the same direction, but under a much worse condition due to the social neglect to which they are subjected, there are informal workers who, with the pandemic, will suffer an even greater statistical growth, due to the unemployment situation already announced under the current context. They are the ones who will have to deal with the limits of a social vulnerability announced by the low income and the general precarious situations of life. Certainly, the problems listed here do not occur due to the coronavirus crisis, but their effects are deepened because of it.

In addition to the necessary condition for survival, a person's work provides, among other things, the construction and maintenance of social bonds, giving people a feeling of usefulness and of insertion and inclusion in society. Although the picture presented does not extinguish structuring aspect of work in people's lives, the issues discussed in this study tend to compromise, on a large scale,

the latent functions advocated by work and which should, by themselves, be guaranteed and protected.

The effects of the pandemic on workers go beyond its psychosocial effects and have implications for the working class's coping processes. Here, the working class is considered as the group of men and women who need to sell their work or service to survive, either directly (as in the case of wage/salary earners) or indirectly (in self-employment, for example). The individuals who participate in it are necessarily diverse, both because of the difference in the kind of work they occupy, and because of their condition as a subject within social relationships in capitalism (Antunes, 2008; Mattos, 2019). In this direction, we can raise three considerations in order to contribute to the organization of these confrontations in the current context.

The first of these is the fight against the simplification of work-centered discussions. As several sectors of academia and the state have operated, these discussions are restricted to their economic aspects, conceived as the production of wealth. Thus, the consequences of work-related measures for the lives of men and women who depend on it are marginalized. Therefore, rescuing the psychosocial effects implied in the current paths that the world of work has taken is fundamental to combat economic abstractions, given that human lives are at stake in the face of the measures adopted by the government and business community.

The second aspect is linked to the first: the marginalization of the debate about human life involved in measures related to work is not a random fact. It reveals the limits of our current sociometabolism. Since the reproduction of capital is at the center of production and social relationships, in times of crisis, caring for marginalized human life— including the work they do — is a perverse expected consequence. The data presented in this study confirms this thesis. If the current trends in the world of work are maintained, the scenario in the short term will already be that of acute degradation in the living conditions of men and women who live of work.

Contrary to considerations like these, resulting in fatalistic attitudes, a third consideration is that they should boost the necessary struggles on the part of the working class and its allies. Knowing the basic limits of our current production mode imposes a double task: (1) escaping reformist attitudes that bet on sectorized or superficial actions, without attacking the central determinants of the process of work precariousness; and (2) waging struggles and projects that dialogue with the current emergencies of



the working class. Thus, even if projects, such as the ones related to the promotion of decent working conditions, headed by the International Labor Organization, or the #DemocratizeWork, which brings together several intellectuals and political figures of our time, are limited for not criticizing the basic form that determines the precariousness of work – its exploited character –, their defense currently ends up revealing to the workers the limits of possible changes within the current milestones of society. Therefore, the construction of programs that allow a dialogue with the present demands of the current class can represent effective gains for these people, at the same time that the partiality of these achievements increasingly stress the fundamentals of this way of organizing work and, therefore, society.

Thus, as in other times of crisis, it is essential that working class organizations, such as unions, social movements, and political parties, can build these alternatives that, instead of pacifying workers in order to maintain the current status quo, serve to propel them to a new state of affairs in which their needs are met.

It is true that we are still in the first chapters about the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for human society as a whole, and for the world of work in particular. The directions we will take as a society will depend, without a doubt, on the various disputes between classes at this time. If the crisis context reveals the limits of our current sociometabolism, on the other hand it reaffirms the need for other ethical-political projects. If its details can only be constructed in action, it is certain that placing human life as the top priority is urgent. Otherwise, citing Rosa Luxemburg, we will only have barbarism.

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