

The Social Precarization of Labor and Inequalities among Workers in Brazil

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Abstract This article examines the current social precarization of labor in Brazil, its main and diverse manifestations within the broader transformations of contemporary capitalism. The central thesis is that, in this context, what intersects the power of finance, neoliberal policies, globalization, and the permanent restructuring of production is the social precarization of labor as the core dynamic of the system, both in central and peripheral countries. The first section discusses the current stage of flexible accumulation; subsequently, the historical specificities of labor precarization in Brazil are analyzed, followed by the presentation of some indicators of this precarization in the present conjuncture. From these, the article engages with intraclass inequalities and the struggle to reduce working hours in the current context.

Keywords Labor. Social Precarization. Inequalities. Working Hours. Brazil.

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1 Introduction

This text aims to discuss the current social precarization of work in Brazil, its main and different manifestations, in the context of the transformations of contemporary capitalism, analyzing the changes in the forms of labor regulation in Brazil, based on the neoliberal offensive, which intensifies inequalities between and within classes, and suggests that the recent struggle to reduce working hours is one of the most important social movements of resistance and confrontation against the offensive of capital.

The central thesis is that, in this context, what intersects the power of finance, neoliberal policies, globalization, and the permanent restructuring of production is the social precarization of labor, which constitutes the core dynamic of the system both in central and peripheral countries.

The concept of the social precarization of labor, which contributes to the deepening of social inequalities, can be succinctly outlined through the following points: i) it is a strategy of capital domination at a specific historical juncture, combining the crisis of Fordism and welfare states, the financialization of the economy, neoliberal policies, and the productive restructuring, which together constitute a new regime of flexible accumulation (Harvey 1990); ii) it is not merely a result of labor flexibilization, as asserted in many studies; because flexibilization and precarization are synonyms; iii) it is a global process, albeit marked by distinct national historical specificities, and it is also a form of precarization that has become generalized with different speeds across all regions and among all different segments of workers; accompanied by an institutionalization of instability and inequality (Appay, Thébaud-mony 1997); iv) these transformations in labor reverberate across the broader fabric of social life, affecting the family, education, leisure, and restricting the access to public goods, most notably health and education (Hirata, Prêteceille 2002); v) precarization is not confined to the sphere of the labor market (contracts, occupational insertion, wage levels), but extends across *all* domains: the processes and organization of work, the conditions of labor and workers' health, the realm of rights, the forms of resistance and struggle, and the role of the State (Druck 2020).

Precarious labor, in its multiple dimensions (in forms of insertion and contracting, informality, outsourcing, platformization, the deregulation and flexibilization of labor legislation, unemployment, illness, workplace accidents, wage loss, union fragility, and long and extensive working hours), is reconfigured in ways that affect the entire class dependent on labor (Antunes 1999), while simultaneously fragmenting it.

The research methodology adopted a qualitative approach, using historical materialism as a theoretical and methodological framework

and employing various collection and analysis techniques, such as literature review and documentary research.

The article begins by addressing the dynamics of flexible accumulation, then turns to the historical specificities of labor precarization in Brazil, showing a few indicators of this precarization in the current conjuncture, from which intraclass inequalities are analyzed, ultimately underscoring the centrality of the struggle for shorter working hours in the present context.

2 The Current Stage of Flexible Accumulation: Precarization as a Strategy of Domination

In the present historical conjuncture, labor takes on a configuration that has held global hegemony for at least five decades. This era is marked by an unprecedented globalization of capital under financial hegemony, anchored in a neoliberal political-economic project, and materialized through the ongoing restructuring of production and labor.

Throughout the history of capitalism, different patterns of accumulation have been established, shaped by a constellation of economic, social, and political factors most notably the struggles of workers' resistance, which imposed limits on accumulation, redefined and implemented social and labor rights, and fostered the acceptance and legitimation, by both society and the State, of social protection as a right to be guaranteed.

These are historical conjunctures that act upon the structural conditions of the system, modifying them and reshaping its forms and configurations. They are, therefore, moments that synthesize specific relations of forces arising from the actions of social classes, whose experiences also vary historically. In short, the point is that nineteenth-century capitalism cannot be equated with that of the twenty-first century.

The passage from one historical era to another reveals transformative processes wherein older and newer forms of labor and employment coexist, intertwine, and are redefined, producing a metamorphic movement that, in the present conjuncture, occurs under the aegis of a dynamic that now predominates over others: the dynamic of the social precariousness of work.

In the age of flexible accumulation and the hegemony of neoliberalism, the rupture with the Fordist model engendered new modes of labor and life, organized through flexibilization and precarization as imperatives of economic financialization, thereby facilitating a globalization of capital unprecedented in scope. The ascendancy of the financial sphere has come to dominate all economic action of capital, subordinating productive practices and labor

management. Anchored in a reconfigured State that increasingly functions as the ‘manager of bourgeois interests’, this dynamic advances the deregulation of markets – most notably financial and labor markets as its central project. It is the neoliberal maxim of absolute corporate freedom, whose principles are based on the defense of a market economy society as meta-historical, whose values emanate from human nature and cannot be violated by the actions of the State (Harvey 2014; Basso 2003; Druck 2011).

According to Castel (1998), the precarization of labor constitutes a central element in the new dynamics of capitalist development, producing a novel condition of social vulnerability. This process transforms the conditions of stable wage labor that were previously hegemonic during the so-called wage-earning or Fordist Society. The loss of employment, or of stable occupational insertion, generates insecurity and precarious modes of life and work – both objectively and subjectively – thus creating mass vulnerability, a weakened social condition or ‘social *disaffiliation*’, which intensifies social inequalities on a global scale. In the words of Sennett (1999), “flexible capitalism” corrupts social ties – the character – leaving individuals “adrift”.

To assert that the social precarization of labor lies at the center of the dynamics of flexible capitalism also means to understand it as a strategy of domination. That is, force and consent are the resources capital employs to enable this degree of accumulation without material or moral limits. Force is manifested primarily in the imposition of precarious labor and employment conditions, sustained by the ever-present threat of structural unemployment intrinsic to capitalism.

What Marx and Engels (1971) elaborated regarding the principal political function of the industrial reserve army applies here in a generalized form: namely, to generate profound competition and division among workers themselves and, thereby, to secure an almost absolute submission and subordination of labor to capital as the sole means of survival. Consensus emerges at the moment when workers, influenced by their political and trade union leaders, come to believe that transformations in labor are inexorable and, as such, are justified as the expression of a new epoch or of a ‘new spirit of capitalism.’

This ‘new spirit’ delegitimizes the values of the preceding era, eroding faith in progress, durable employment, social rights, and the mitigation of inequality. Under the banners of the ‘single path’ and ‘single thought’, it enforces transformations that are rationalized, materially and ideologically, as unavoidable.

In Bourdieu’s words (1998), this transition rests upon flexibility as a ‘strategy of precarization’, inspired by economic and political rationales, the product of a ‘political will’ rather than an ‘economic fatality’ supposedly dictated by globalization. Precarization is conceived as:

a political regime [...] inscribed within a new mode of domination, founded on the institution of a generalized and permanent situation of insecurity, aimed at compelling workers to submission and to the acceptance of exploitation. (Bourdieu 1998,124-5)

This regime is the outcome of political will - active or passive - rather than the 'inflexible laws' of an economic order. It reflects deliberate choices aimed at securing the ever-expanding domination of labor and workers.

These formulations reveal a phenomenon at once old and new: the market fetish, which unfolds in different expressions, such as the fetish of flexibilization. This entails the autonomization of economic imperatives from social and labor relations, producing an inversion of subject and object. Flexibilization thereby governs subjectivity as an external force, depriving individuals of the capacity to resist or reclaim control over social processes.

Within the current conjuncture of capitalism - marked by flexible accumulation and a political regime grounded in precarization - the aim is to understand, in concrete terms, the specificities and singularities of each country or region.

In Brazil and across Latin America, the dynamics of labor precarization share the same structural nature, yet their generalization assumes a distinct trajectory: only a small fraction of workers ever secured relative stability. In other words, social vulnerability and inequality have historically remained profound, encompassing wide sectors of the working class.

3 The Historical Specificities of the Social Precarization of Labor in Brazil

To understand the specificity of the Brazilian case, it is necessary to refer to its history: a colonial country grounded in slave labor, specialized in an agrarian-export economy, and whose late industrialization, through the import-substitution model, condemned it to a subordinate position regarding central economies. This trajectory characterized the specificity of capitalism in Latin America and gave rise to different interpretations of the center-periphery relationship or of development versus underdevelopment.

It is considered that the global development of capitalism unfolded in an uneven and combined manner, creating an international division of labor in which the former colonies, such as those in Latin America, became dependent countries, exporters of raw materials, while industrial dynamics and technological matrices advanced in the central nations. This was a heterogeneous process both among the central countries and among peripheral ones. In the case of Brazil,

industrialization, though late, rendered the economy more complex and dynamic, with the establishment of major durable consumer goods industries, thereby differentiating its productive structure from that of other Latin American countries (Druck 2023).

Examining labor transformations in Brazil under financial globalization and neoliberalism requires acknowledging the absence of a Welfare State. What emerged instead was a social protection regime codified in the 1943 Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), tightly bound to state control of unions, and limited to the urban sector. While limited, these rights, demanded by workers since the 1930s, represented a significant advance towards the ‘wage condition’ discussed in studies of the European experience.

Unlike in the more developed countries, the ‘wage condition’ was never fully achieved in Brazil, though it was strongly desired and pursued through social struggles, serving as a political inspiration for critiques of Brazil’s ‘wild capitalism.’ In this sense, the ‘capitalist spirit’ of the Fordist model of development and regulation – which fostered a period of prosperity and social progress in those countries – was, in a certain way, claimed or sought as a path to overcoming the conditions of inequality, misery, poverty, underemployment, and ‘social malaise’ in our country.

It is also from this perspective that the advances enshrined in the 1988 Constitution stand out, expanding certain rights, consolidating others already in place, and creating new universal public policies – for example, universal retirement for rural workers and the Unified Health System (SUS), which incorporated occupational health as part of public health, as well as the reduction of the workweek from 48 to 44 hours. Nevertheless, the difficulties in implementing these achievements soon became evident in the context already emerging in the early 1990s: the neoliberal project, victorious in the 1989 elections, contradicted fundamental principles of the new Constitution.

This was the period of capital restructuring that began in the late 1970s, reaching Brazil and receiving favourable political reception from its rulers, who, through economic policies, reinforced the liberalization of capital and deepened the country’s subordinate position within the ongoing financial globalization. The struggles of workers and their trade union and political organizations, which had managed to delay or even block neoliberal policies during the 1980s, weakened and lost their capacity to contend in defense of alternative political projects.

In the current Brazilian historical moment, it can be argued that labor precarization has emerged as a new phenomenon, whose main characteristics, modalities, and dimensions suggest an unprecedented process of social precarization and management, in the dynamics of the fourth technological Revolution, in labor and social legislation, in the role of the state and its social policies, in the behaviour of

trade unions, and in the new modes of action of public institutions and civil associations.

The character of this new social precarization of labor rests on the idea that it is a process which – economically, socially, and politically – institutes the modern precarization of labor on a global scale, renewing and reconfiguring the historical and structural precariousness of labor in Brazil. It is now justified – within the capital-dominated perspective – by the supposed necessity of adapting to new times, marked by the inevitability and inexorability of a worldwide process of precarization, also experienced by the developed countries. Thus, the reference point for peripheral nations is no longer the Fordist citizenship or the wage condition of those countries, but the flexible and global capitalism as the ‘only path’ to modernity in the contemporary world.

This social precarization of labor is new because it has been reconfigured and expanded, leading to social regression in all its dimensions. Its scope and generalization can be identified insofar as it affects both the more developed regions of the country, such as the Southeast, and those more traditionally marked by precariousness, such as the Northeast; it is present both in the most dynamic and modern sectors of the country – in cutting-edge industries employing digital technologies – as well as in the more traditional forms of informal, self-employed, and autonomous work. It affects both highly qualified and less qualified workers alike, and extends across the private and public sectors, in both urban and rural areas.

4 The Social Precarization of Labor in Brazil: Some Indicators of Inequalities

In the current configuration of the Brazilian labor market, according to Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE 2025)¹ data for the second quarter of 2025, the employed population was composed of: 69.5% employees, 4.1% employers, 25.2% self-employed workers,² and 1.2% contributing family workers. There are approximately 32.5 million Brazilian workers who are either self-employed or employed in the private sector without a formal labor contract, representing

1 IBGE - Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - official agency of the Brazilian federal government, subordinate to the Ministry of Planning and Budget, responsible for the production, analysis, research, and dissemination of statistical information - demographic and socioeconomic, and geoscientific - geographic, cartographic, geodetic, and environmental.

2 The IBGE defines a self-employed worker as “a person who works running their own business, alone or with a partner, without having employees and with or without the help of unpaid workers who are members of the household in which they live”.

31.7% of the country's 102.5 million employed persons. This situation already reflects the high degree of informality and the absence of labor rights.

Moreover, according to IBGE, the average weekly working hours of self-employed workers is 45.3 hours, well above the national average of 39.1 hours worked per week across the workforce. Regarding earnings, self-employed workers receive the lowest incomes: on average R\$ 2,600 per month, while employees earn R\$ 3,100 on average and employers R\$ 8,200 per month. In summary, these figures reveal a scenario of social precarization of labor and inequalities among workers themselves - in their forms of insertion, working hours, and remuneration. These are structural conditions of the Brazilian labor market, and are subject to change, reflecting conjunctural movements and transformations in labor legislation and technological innovations.

The 2017 labor counter-reform imposed the withdrawal of rights established in the CLT, as an expression of the neoliberal offensive and part of an international movement aimed at removing the limits on labor exploitation by capital. The changes in labor legislation institutionalized precarization as the norm, declaring the end of workers' legal vulnerability protections, and placing at risk the very existence of Labor Law by hollowing out the Labor Courts, restricting access to them, and relegating them to the mere role of ratifying negotiated agreements over statutory provisions. (Dutra, Machado 2021; Teixeira et al. 2017)

Following the enactment of Law No. 13.467/2017, it becomes evident that both old and new forms of precarious employment have been validated or instituted. The range of precarious contractual arrangements is extensive, encompassing intermittent work, the expansion of possibilities for part-time employment, telework, outsourcing, self-employment, among others.

In the wake of this counter-reform, currently under review by the Supreme Federal Court (STF), Brazil's highest judicial authority, the legality and boundaries of *pejotização* - that is, the replacement of formal employment contracts governed by labor law (*carteira assinada*) with contracts under the status of Legal Entity (PJ) - are being examined. This practice, already underway in the country, has been adopted by companies as a strategy to circumvent the costs associated with labor rights that remain in force under the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT).

According to IBGE (2022), of the 5.5 million employees dismissed from companies, 4.4 million became Individual Microentrepreneurs

(MEIs),³ with many continuing to provide services to the same employer. This reveals a clear case of labor fraud.

In October 2025, a public hearing entitled “Economic and Social Challenges of *Pejotização* in Brazil” was held at the Supreme Federal Court (STF 2025). Out of 500 requests to participate, the reporting justice authorized 48 participants, including individuals, legal entities, representatives of employers, workers, and public authorities. At this hearing, labor scholars (including economists, sociologists, lawyers, and jurists), together with representatives of trade unions and public authorities, presented the implications of a Supreme Court decision that could authorize the unrestricted adoption of *pejotização*. This practice entails hiring workers as registered Legal Entities (*Pessoas Jurídicas*), thereby classifying them as “companies”, which would result in the loss of remuneration and benefits tied to formal employment contracts, such as: the thirteenth salary, paid vacation, Severance Indemnity Fund (FGTS), overtime pay, night-shift premiums, severance payments, maternity leave, sickness benefits, among others. The loss of entitlements would result in a reduction of workers’ disposable income estimated at no less than 20%. This calculation considers only the amounts related to FGTS, vacation pay, and the additional one-third vacation bonus that workers subject to *pejotização* would forfeit. (Welle, Petrini 2025)

In the same study, the economic and social implications of this liberalization are examined, highlighting the losses incurred by both workers and society. Several outcomes of *pejotização* are emphasized, such as the removal of the principal flow of resources for financing social security; the complete flexibilization of hiring and dismissals; the elimination of the minimum wage as a benchmark for labor remuneration; and the withdrawal of rights including the thirteenth salary, paid vacation, FGTS, higher-level retirement benefits, and unemployment insurance. According to Welle and Petrini:...unrestricted *pejotização* increases unemployment, reduces wages, slows economic growth, heightens economic volatility, and exacerbates wage inequality among workers. (2025, 17)

3 Individual Microentrepreneur - The Individual Microentrepreneur (MEI) is a legal entity established by the National Statute for Micro and Small Businesses, which formalizes informal entrepreneurs who work for themselves as small business owners, allowing them to become microentrepreneurs and thereby enjoy greater constitutional guarantees. The formalization of the MEI guarantees a CNPJ (Corporate Taxpayer ID), making it possible to obtain some benefits of a Legal Entity, including the use of special lines of credit, social security rights, sickness benefits, among others.

This new labor counter-reform, which may be defined by Brazil's Supreme Federal Court (STF), will enable capital to detach itself not from labor itself - since that would imply its own demise - but from the condition of the worker. By no longer recognizing individuals as labor power employed in production - whether industrial, commercial, or service-oriented - they come to be formally regarded as "entrepreneurs of themselves". Consequently, their contracts will be governed by civil and commercial law rather than labor law.

Such a process is already underway in the country, generating a significant volume of cases before the Labor Courts and the Supreme Federal Court. These actions seek recognition of the employment relationship and the payment of labor rights, as they demonstrate the subordination of workers to employers who circumvent labor legislation using *pejotização*.

Concomitant with this situation in the sphere of state regulation of labor, another transformation has been driven by the digital revolution through the use of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). These technologies have established a new form of work organization adopted by companies, which aligns with the same objectives as *pejotização*: the denial of the condition of the salaried worker. This phenomenon is referred to as "uberization". The use of digital platforms has spread across numerous professional activities, most notably among delivery workers and drivers. In Antunes's (2018) view, they constitute the new service proletariat. The fundamental nature of this form of work lies in the absolute denial of the wage-earning condition of workers, as it establishes them as autonomous service providers. Digital platforms present themselves merely as technical intermediaries, facilitating a connection between these self-employed individuals and clients. Under the fetishization of technology, companies seek to conceal the underlying labor and production relationship, refusing to acknowledge any employment bond, while perversely transferring all costs of the means of work onto the workers themselves.

Beyond this objective condition of labor organization, there is also a political effort by capital under neoliberal hegemony, marked by the dissemination of the ideology of entrepreneurship. This has led some app-based delivery workers to refrain from identifying as workers, instead perceiving themselves as "entrepreneurs of themselves", believing they possess autonomy to define their work and working hours in the capacity of self-employed individuals. Such a 'belief', however, collides with the concrete reality experienced by these workers.

A recent IBGE (2025) survey on "platform-based workers" reveals that the average number of hours worked per week is 44.8, which is 5.5 hours longer than that of other employed individuals. It was found that 55.8% of app-based drivers (excluding taxi applications) and 50.1% of delivery workers had their working hours influenced

by incentives, bonuses, or promotions that alter pricing. More than 60% of individuals working through service applications were not covered by the National Institute of Social Security (INSS). Earnings vary according to educational attainment: those with a completed higher education earn 29.8% less than other employed workers, while those with lower levels of education earn up to 40% more than other employed workers. It should be noted that the income of platform-based workers corresponds to a “piece-rate wage”, insofar as they are paid per ride or per delivery. This partly explains the constant rush of motorcyclists and cyclists (more visible on the streets) and their exposure to risks and accidents, including fatal ones.

5 Inequalities Within the Working Class

The labor indicators referenced above in official statistics, together with a wide range of studies on recent transformations in the world of work - particularly those that synthesize a dual offensive of capital, both in the sphere of labor legislation and in new forms of work organization through digital technologies - demonstrate that the social precarization of labor is becoming generalized, albeit in an unequal and hierarchical manner.

Beyond the structural inequalities of gender and race reflected in all indicators of the Brazilian labor market, these recent transformations reveal a scenario of heightened precarization among self-employed workers, who lack any form of social or labor protection, as the data attest. Should *pejotização* be declared legal by the Supreme Federal Court (STF), it would amount to the constitutionalization of fraud, removing any limits on companies replacing formal CLT employment contracts with PJ arrangements.

Nevertheless, other dimensions of labor precarization have also been observed among “formal workers”, that is, those with registered employment contracts. This has been revealed, for example, in studies on outsourcing in both the private and public sectors, which demonstrate the inseparability of outsourcing and precarization across all dimensions: in precarious hiring arrangements established for increasingly shorter fixed periods with high turnover; in working conditions; in remuneration; in working hours; in occupational health; in trade union representation; and in labor rights.

Outsourced workers earn less, work longer hours, have fewer rights and benefits, experience higher turnover and greater job instability, receive less training and skill development, and have fewer safety equipment provisions. They suffer more accidents and fatalities, and their numbers are increasing at a faster rate than

those of directly hired employees.⁴ Outsourcing anticipated what subsequent labor reforms imposed upon the workforce as a whole: the institutionalization of precarization as the norm. It intensifies competition among workers, since beyond reducing costs and transferring responsibilities for the employment relationship to a third party, employers pursue a political objective by provoking the fragmentation of labor collectives, fostering division and discrimination among workers by classifying them as first- and second-tier categories. This process leads to the dispersion of trade unions, as workers within the same productive unit may be represented by multiple unions, thereby undermining their unity and weakening their struggles (Druck, Basualdo 2022).

Within the sphere of “formal workers”, another dimension of precarization has historically been a central issue for the working class: long working hours. In Brazil, the eight-hour workday was only instituted in 1932 and enshrined in the 1934 Constitution, with six working days per week – thus, 92 years ago. The Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), created in 1943 and limited to urban workers, incorporated the forty-eight-hour workweek.

In the 1988 Constitution, although the labor movement had advocated for a forty-hour workweek, the standard working time was reduced to forty-four hours. Nevertheless, numerous loopholes in the legislation effectively allow this limit to be circumvented, such as the 6x1 schedule – six consecutive days of work followed by one day of rest – which remains prevalent, particularly in the commerce and service sectors.

According to an analysis conducted by DIEESE (2025), the 2017 “Labor Reform” modified legislation in ways that facilitated the extension of working hours through the following provisions: (i) elimination of the requirement that competent authorities authorize the extension of the standard eight-hour workday to twelve hours in unhealthy or hazardous activities; (ii) the normalization of the ten-hour workday (eight hours of work plus two hours of overtime), which ceased to be exceptional with the removal of the obligation for a written agreement to implement the habitual two daily overtime hours; and (iii) the introduction of permission for individual agreements to establish time banks of up to six months, thereby excluding the requirement of collective agreements or conventions. In cases of compensation within a thirty-day period, no written formalization of the agreement is required. (iv) The reform also excluded from the calculation of working hours the commuting time to the workplace (*horas in itinere*), even in companies with extensive territorial

4 See Krein 2016; Biavaschi, Teixeira 2015; Droppa, Biavaschi 2014; Marcelino 2004; Dau et al. 2009; Druck, Basualdo 2022.

dimensions, such as those in agriculture or mining. Consequently, working time came to be counted only from the exact moment the worker begins the labor activity, resulting in lower remuneration for those who spend minutes or even hours traveling within the company premises. (DIEESE 2025, 5-6)

In addition to these legislative changes, there has been an expansion of precarious contracts such as intermittent and part-time work, which flexibilize working hours, as well as the liberalization of unrestricted outsourcing and the hiring of self-employed workers, all guaranteed by the reform. These arrangements are characterized by longer working hours and the extensive use of overtime. In summary, one of the central indicators of labor precarization - affecting the entire working class - has become a key issue that unifies workers within a context of growing inequalities.

6 The (Recent) Struggle for Reduction Working Hours in Brazil

In the history of the struggle for the reduction of working hours, the bourgeoisie and its spokespersons have consistently resisted, portraying a chaotic scenario for the economy and predicting dramatic increases in unemployment and the closure of businesses. This pattern of behaviour dates to colonial Brazil, when large landowners and slaveholders opposed the abolition of slavery, forecasting the collapse of coffee production and a *debacle* of the national economy. A similar reaction occurred more recently with the extension of labor legislation to domestic workers. History has shown that the predictions of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, in all these moments of workers' achievements, did not undermine the economy or the process of capital accumulation. (Filgueiras, Druck 2024)

At the present moment in the country, as a (new) movement emerges advocating for the reduction of working hours and against the 6x1 schedule (six days of work for one day of rest), the same reaction of the dominant classes is repeated: claims that the Brazilian economy will not withstand it, that small business owners will “go bankrupt”, that unemployment will skyrocket, and that the prices of goods and services will rise.

Despite these resistances, a Proposed Constitutional Amendment (PEC-8/25), introduced by Deputy Erika Hilton, obtained more than 200 signatures from representatives across diverse political parties, and was formally submitted to the National Congress. This outcome was made possible by a campaign launched both on social media and in the streets, initiated by a worker who is now one of the most-voted city councillors in Rio de Janeiro, Ricardo Azevedo (Rick). He first gained public recognition while working in a pharmacy, when he produced a

video expressing frustration over the 6x1 schedule (six days of work for one day of rest), denouncing the modern slavery to which workers were subjected, and calling upon everyone to fight for a “Life Beyond Work” (*Vida Além do Trabalho*, VAT). This expression gave its name to the movement sparked by his appeal on social media, which went viral and transformed Rick, as he is known, into a digital influencer.

Although this claim for a Life beyond work, was launched through social media, it also moved into the streets. Rick began to gather not Only “followers” but also workers who started to participate in demonstrations and leaflet distributions held in shopping centres, pharmacies, public squares, and neighbourhoods. From 2023, When the video was released, up to the present, the call for Life Beyond Work (VAT) has consolidated itself as a national movement active in Brazil’s major cities, bringing together primarily young workers. Their reality is marked not Only by the highest unemployment rates (14.3%) but also by the fact that 72.8% of employed youth between the ages of 14 and 29 worked 40 hours or more per week in 2021, making it impossible to reconcile study and work.

The movement emerged outside traditional organizations, such as trade unions or political parties, which were slow to join the VAT campaign - only beginning to do so in 2025, and even then, in a hesitant and reluctant manner. It was also in that year, during the May 1st celebrations, that President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva declared the importance of the struggle against the 6x1 schedule, which encouraged other union leaders to speak out and support the constitutional amendment (PEC) under consideration in the National Congress. The proposal seeks to replace the schedule of six days of work followed by one day of rest with a four-day workweek and three days of rest, without salary reduction. It has already gathered more than three million signatures. (Pereira, Pereira, Santos 2024)

Brazil has one of the highest annual working hours in the world. According to an OECD (2023) survey, Brazil ranks fourth among 46 countries considered, with an annual average of 1,936 hours worked. Mexico occupies first place with 2,128 hours, followed by Costa Rica with 2,073 horas, and Colombia in third with 1,964 annual hours. At the other end of the spectrum, Germany records the lowest figure with 1,349 annual hours, followed by Denmark with 1,363 annual working hours.⁵

The struggle against the 6x1 schedule and for the 4x3 workweek without wage reduction, proposed as a constitutional amendment, although formally directed at workers with registered contracts,

5 For an analysis of the working day in Brazil and recent struggles, see the dossier organized by Cesit/Unicamp, Site DMT, Remir, GEPT/UNB, and FCE/UFRGS, available at <https://www.dmttemdebate.com.br/category/dossie-fim-escala-6x1/>.

extends beyond these segments, reaching all those who aspire to a “life beyond work”. Thus, the necessary reduction of working time also applies to those in informal employment, many of whom endure a 7x0 schedule with no weekly rest, serving as a reference point for rethinking their working and living conditions and encouraging new mobilizations. Moreover, with the reduction of working hours, new workers could be hired, thereby decreasing informality. In this sense, it is a struggle that provides unity to a fragmented working class - divided by competition, marked by inequality, and heterogeneous - bringing together men and women, Black and white, employed and unemployed, formal and informal, outsourced and non-outsourced, ultimately enabling a common agenda that unifies the class-that-lives-from-work (Antunes 1999).

7 Final Considerations

Inequalities between and within classes have been produced by forms of expropriation and exploitation of labor in capitalism since its beginnings. In contemporary times, the metamorphosis of labor relations has led to unprecedented precariousness, the result of the neoliberal offensive around the world. One of the main indicators of this process - determined by financial logic, sustained in the very short term, which has contaminated all types of work and life, subordinated to information and communication technologies - is the increase in working hours and their intensification.

The class dispute in the capital-labor relationship is a struggle for control over time - both working time and free time. According to Marx (1971), the working day is a variable quantity, consisting of the time necessary for the reproduction of the worker and for the production of surplus value. The reduction of the working day without a reduction in wages directly affects the extraction of surplus value and is, therefore, a preliminary condition for an emancipated life.

Currently, there is a counteroffensive by workers in several countries around the world, expressed in the approval of legislation or specific experiments that have reduced working hours, as is the case in Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Belgium, Colombia, and more recently in Mexico.

In Brazil, as mentioned above, there is a strong, independently organized movement underway, with growing mobilization in the streets and on social media, called *Vida Além do Trabalho* (Life Beyond Work, VAT), which has managed to influence other trade unions and political parties, as well as already having significant representation in the legislative and executive branches.

These are counter-hegemonic movements which, even if limited to new regulations on working hours in the Brazilian case, the end of

the 6 X 1 working day, go against the grain of labor reform and the precarization of work and open the way for reflection, beyond their immediacy, on self-control over working time and life time, with a view to building another form of sociability.

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