Precarious but organized: the resistance strategy of uberized workers

Precários, mas organizados: a estratégia de resistência dos uberizados

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Abstract

Uberization of work is one more step in the process of unconfiguring the social pacts formed in the Fordist period. The strategy of building "partners" makes it possible to externalize fixed capital costs to a multitude of precarious workers and exempt companies from responsibility for guaranteeing labor rights and occupational safety. This process is driven by large transnational companies that operate beyond national limitations and accumulate on a global scale, in this new territory of labor exploitation. In this article, we present initiatives for the organization of uberized workers based on international and national experiences, in light of the concept of social movement unionism.

Keywords: uberization; globalization; unionism; work; platforms.

Resumo

A uberização do trabalho é mais uma etapa no processo de desconfiguração dos pactos sociais conformados no período fordista. A estratégia de construção de "parceiros" possibilita a externalização de custos de capital fixo para uma multidão de trabalhadores precários, como também uma fuga, por parte das empresas, da responsabilidade de garantir os direitos trabalhistas e as seguridades ocupacionais. Diante desse novo terreno de exploração do trabalho, impulsionado por grandes empresas transnacionais que operam para além das limitações nacionais e acumulam em escala global, aqui são apresentadas iniciativas de organização dos uberizados a partir de experiências internacionais e nacionais à luz do conceito de sindicalismo de movimento social.

Palavras-chave: *uberização; globalização; sindicalismo; trabalho; plataformas.*

Introduction

The so-called Uberization of work is a phenomenon that manifests in different businesses in the service sector, such as passenger transport (Uber, 99Taxi), food or object delivery (iFood, Rappi, Loggi, Uber Eats), household services (TaskRabbit and Parafuzo), manicure (Singu), and small digital tasks (Amazon Mechanical Turk). What unifies these businesses, despite their specificities, is the characterization of companies as bare intermediaries of a client who demands a service and a partner who offers it on their digital platform. In this sense, they claim to be not companies in the field where they actually operate, but technology companies (Abílio, 2017; Antunes, 2018).

In this manner, there is an evident strategy that allows the extraction/externalization of production costs which, in the case of Uber, are costs of purchasing a vehicle fleet, taking out insurance, fuel expenses, workforce training, and guaranteeing rights established in labor laws, such as vacations, paid leave, Christmas bonus, regular working hours, minimum wage, and even the wage status itself (Pochmann, 2017). This condition of unemployment and total disconnection with the employee category – with no prior training for the role, including – causes what Abílio (2019) names a crowd of amateur workers to orbit around these companies.

There is data that highlights the growing expressivity of this market in Brazil. Today, Uber is present in over 100 Brazilian cities and has 600,000 "partner drivers" (Uber, 2019). iFood, by the end of 2019, had approximately 340,000 delivery drivers registered and, in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, until March 2020 alone, the company received 175,000 applications for new delivery drivers.[1] Data released by Análise Econômica Consultoria shows that, in May 2020, application workers totaled around 4.7 million, that is, 15% of the entire informal market, a significant increase compared to the 3.8 million Brazilians in this condition, according to the number released by the 2019 Continuous National Household Sample Survey (Brazil, 2020).

But who is this mass of Uberized people? There is not only one answer to this question, given the differences between the levels of precariousness of app drivers and couriers. In the first group, these are predominantly workers who have entered higher education, aged from 26 to 35, that earn on average less than 2,000 reais per week (excluding the costs of gasoline, food etc.) when driving, mostly, over 8 hours a day and more than 5 days a week (Moraes, Oliveira and Accorsi, 2019). The group of bicycle couriers is mainly made up of young workers aged up to 22 and who, almost all of them, only have completed secondary education. In relation to working hours, 75% cycle more than 8 hours a day and 92% work more than 5 days a week (with 57% working every day), receiving average earnings that vary from 466 to 1,105 reais per month (Aliança Bike, 2019). In the case of motorcyclists – who, according to research by the Federal University of Bahia, are most of the category –, the working day is on average 9 hours and 3 minutes, with 5.8 days of work per week, totaling 53 .8 average working hours per week, that is, less time than that worked by bikers. Following this journey, motorcyclists used to receive on average a little more (1.78

reais) than the minimum wage per hour worked, and, with the pandemics, their income were closer (1.35) to the minimum hourly wage (Filgueiras et al., 2020).

From a historical point of view and from the social processes that drive the uberization of work, it comes in the wake of a set of measures that the literature calls productive restructuring (Alves, 2007; Antunes, 2018), that is, a set of changes in the Fordist accumulation regime (Braga, 2017) which, based on a class pact, consisted of increasing labor productivity and, in return, guaranteed an increase in trade union power, social democratic parties and labor protection measures (minimum wage, growth in actual wages and social rights) (Bihr, 1998).[2]

However, the Fordist model, which was firmly established in Europe, fell into decline at the end of the 1970s, materialized in the fiscal crises of national states, which were responded to by the business classes with a set of neoliberal economic policies that aimed to revive the profit rate of companies through the retention of expenses with the Social Welfare State, the increase in unemployment as a way of eroding the bargaining power of employees and moments of stagflation (Anderson, 1995). At the same time, there was a reorganization of class power on a global scale, as the concentration of income and power shifted from industry to the financial sector and to the CEOs of large transnational companies (Harvey, 2008).

These changes had a major impact on the world of work and productive arrangements, which became more flexible, acquiring even more internalized traits of reification from compositions that advocate words such as: involvement, partnerships, collaborations,

individualization of goals and competencies. In this sense, the worker has a need for versatility according to which, in addition to doing his job, he must also supervise himself and his colleagues to guarantee the company's goals, with his remuneration directly depending on this (Alves, 2007; Antunes, 2018). During this process, a set of new workforce hiring models, more flexible and devoid of rights, were created, such as intermittent work, outsourcing, independent-contractor-only hiring policy, and uberization. (Antunes, 2018).

Furthermore, there was a shift in the dynamics of labor absorption from the industrial sector to the services sector: in the Brazilian case, from 1994 to 2008, 70% of job vacancies created were in this sector (Dedecca and Rosandiskim, 2006). This displacement is also a symptom of a broader phenomenon – in which uberization is both part and symptom – of the weakening of the national economy, of strong deindustrialization processes especially after the 1980s, and of subordination in the international division of work (Braga, 2017; Pochmann, 2001).

The movements presented so far are structuring the uberization of work in Brazil and around the world, that is, they were the precursor to this process. Another important transformation of uberization takes place in the control of the various stages of the work process, which contradicts the rhetoric of autonomy defended by companies (Slee, 2017). Control operates on several layers: work management control, crowd control, and self-control. These three instruments operate together in the daily life of uberized workers, but, just for clarity in this presentation, we chose to separate them.

Work management control operates from the first moment in the applications, as it is the company that determines who can or cannot work on the platforms (how effective the acceptance criteria are in each of them is discussed; however, the decision center is exclusive to companies) (Antunes and Filgueiras, 2020). Furthermore, it is the companies that unilaterally determine the price of services; of a delivery, for instance, and with this, they are able to direct it in two directions: that of market monopolization, with the defeat of competition with artificially low prices (Srnicek , 2017); and control over working time, as the lower the wages, the greater the need for time available to the platforms, as well as the need to be eligible for promotions, bonuses, and dynamic rates[3] (Oitaven, 2018). In this model of remuneration, a type of inverted auction occurs, in which workers are in permanent competition for a task to be performed, which allows the company to lower the value of rates and, even so, get available labor (Antunes and Filgueiras, 2020).

These work control mechanisms are completed with the permanent evaluation of workers, herein called crowd control. For each task, workers are evaluated with grades, and being below a certain minimum limit (which varies across each platform and location) can lead to punishment and even dismissal from the platform (Slee, 2017). With this, in addition to the possible psychosocial impacts on workers when they are constantly evaluated, companies/platforms reduce their production costs from the need for a typical Weberian hierarchical superior, who controls

and evaluates his subordinates, and, in this way, partially externalizes the control into the hands of a multitude of consumers, a collective manager who permanently watches in order to maintain labor productivity (Abílio, 2019).

Finally, the applications' control mechanisms are subjectively fulfilled by the workers' own control over themselves, which we understand as the symbolic strategy of the neoliberal period that reorganizes the world of work and spreads the model of self-control, by means of what Zarafian (2002) calls subjective engagement or what Dardot and Laval (2016) conceptualize as the new reason for the world of the neoliberal subject. In other words, the subject himself is obliged to do the work with the greatest efficiency and increase his productivity. In the case of travel and delivery platforms, for example, this logic is based on the form of remuneration itself, which is directly proportional to productivity (the driver or delivery person receives for the amount he actually drives and not for the time available on the platform)[4] and in work relationships masked as relationships between two companies, therefore, partnership relationships in which the subject as a "self-company" enters the market to sell a service (ibid.).

In summary, uberization is a stage in a process of precariousness within the historical and political mode of capitalist precariousness, that is, the advance in diluting the obstacles placed on the exploitation of labor conquered during the 20th century and which remain within of the landmarks of a social structure that is encompassed by the commodity form

of living work (Alves, 2007). It is also important to highlight that this is a dynamic movement, that is, it is not the result of an inevitability of technological development and that, in this sense, it can advance or regress depending on the power relations in society (Antunes and Filgueiras, 2020). The possible contours of these power relations, as well as the global terrain of capitalism and its impacts on organizations in the world of work, are the themes we will focus on in the next sections.

In addition to this brief Introduction, this paper is divided into three sections that aim to present the forms and content of counteroffensive initiatives by Uberized workers against platforms. In the first section, we present the theory of globalization as a new historical stage and its relations with uberization. In the second section, we deal with the close relationships between globalization and uberization and a possible path of investigation into the initiatives of uberized people based on the concept of social movement unionism. In the third section, we discuss a set of work strategies in the face of uberization and their potential considering the concept of social movement unionism and an internationalist vocation. Finally, in the Considerations of this paper, we present a summary of the main arguments that support it.

Counteroffensive strategies of work in uberization

As we have presented so far, the uberization of work is an element of the macroprocess of change in the pattern of capitalism from the end of the 1970s and, in particular, after the crisis of 2008 and 2009. In this sense, we want to briefly present the background of uberized work, which is its relationship with the globalization of capital.

By globalization, we understand a qualitative change in the capitalist system, that is, when production starts to occur on a global scale and breaks the barriers of national states. As a result, transnational corporations (TNCs)[5] begin to coordinate their actions across the planet (Robinson, 2013). In other words, the accumulation of value expands in two directions: extensive and intensive. In the first, there is the inclusion of new regions, countries, and societies in the sphere of capitalist production, a phenomenon exemplified both at the end of the Soviet regime, and in the inclusion of China in the world market, and also in the advancement of agricultural frontiers in Brazil towards more or less autonomous indigenous communities from the logic of the commodity. In this case, therefore, there is a form of permanent primitive accumulation (Luxemburg, 1989; Harvey, 2013). In the second sense, the intensive expansion of capital involves the inclusion of spheres and activities of human life that previously maintained relative autonomy from the commodity form and are incorporated into this logic. In the phenomenon of the Uberization of work, it concerns part of the services (travel, deliveries etc.) that maintained relative autonomy with the capitalist form of production and began to be controlled by large TNCs. For example, taxi and delivery services previously operated in forms of individual ownership, cooperatives, small groups of couriers hired directly by small businesses.[6]

In the global economy, not only is trade global, but production itself has become fragmented and geographically dispersed in global production and distribution chains (Robinson, 2013; Gereffi, 2005). This change in production patterns was made possible by the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the global financial market, and also by the formation of transnational companies that, in Marxist terms, geographically fragmented the value production circuit – that is, starting from the formula for value production (D-M-P-M´-D´),[7] not only the circulation of goods in commerce (M'-D') is spread across global terrain, but production itself (P) (Robinson, 2013). The similarity of this process with the performance of Uberized labor companies is evident here, considering that the great champions of this sector, such as Uber, iFood, 99Taxi, Rappi, and others operate in more than one country to produce value around their services and, in doing so, they need different work tools produced in a geographically dispersed manner, for instance, cell phones, cars, and motorcycles.

Furthermore, in production chains, dispersion also involves the externalization of activities and responsibilities to outsourced companies, assemblers, suppliers, and self-employed workers, at the same time that command and direction power is centralized in TNCs (Gereffi, 2005; Robinson, 2013). On platforms, the process of decentralization of tasks and responsibilities is, for a multitude of workers, the possibility for platforms to "reconfigure the geography of their production

networks at almost zero cost" (Graham and Anwar, 2019), that is, operate on a planetary scale, but with centralized control in corporations.

This change is not the result of economic impulses alone, but actively mobilized by a new dominant sector: the transnational fraction of the capitalist class. In other words, there is an agent committed to producing changes in the productive and social sphere for global accumulation. This new fraction is oriented towards its global business and is competing to establish itself as a hegemonic fraction at a global level. In this sense, transnational boards of directors are the locus of articulation and formation in which capitalists from different locations are coordinated by global objective interests of accumulation and form common subjective, cultural and strategic interests, that is, they are spaces that integrate this fraction of transnational class. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that there is a process that goes beyond the participation of non-national members in these councils and that advances towards the intertwining of members who serve on councils of different companies, which enables alliances between TNCs and shared business among players in different parts of the world (Robinson, 2013).

In the case of Uber, its Board of Directors is made up of representatives from TPG Capital, Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, Nestlé, Veon, CIT Group, Mattel, Northrop Grumman, Match Group, and Flex.[8] iFood, in turn, is supported by resources from the Warehouse Investimentos capital fund, from Movile (a technology investment company

based in Brazil, but which since 2011 has had an office in Silicon Valley); merged with Restaurante Web (a branch of Just Eat, a British-based food delivery group), with SpoonRocket (food delivery group from Silicon Valley), with Rapiddo (super application linked with iFood, 99Táxi, services music streaming, cell phone recharge) and purchased Hekima (a Brazilian artificial intelligence, data science and big data company).[9] The case of iFood is symptomatic and highlights the phenomenon pointed out by Robinson (ibid.) on a global basis, that is, the fact that the formation of transnational capitalist sectors also occurs in the Global South.

In summary, what we briefly sought to establish here was a picture of proximity between the uberization of work and capitalist globalization, as both promoted a regressive transformation towards a new regime of accumulation that, from the point of view of work, introduced new technologies, new forms of control and new types of employment contracts (Braga, 2017) that undermined social and labor rights typical of the Fordist model. A new social agent drove these changes: the transnational fraction of the capitalist class that organizes its businesses in TNCs, has common objective interests, joint initiatives, and spaces for articulation (Robinson, 2013). But if this happens from the point of view of the dominant forces, what is the role of the forces of labor in this new historical stage?

Robinson (2013) points out that, although the transnational working class is an objectivity in itself, there is still, from the perspective of the labor forces, no class formation for itself as a counter-hegemonic global project. It is worth noting that this is not a small challenge or just one of the new stages of capitalism, since in the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels (2005 [1848]), in their conclusion, called for "Workers of the world, unite!" (p. 37), in other words, this political challenge of unity for those who make a living from their workforce remains open.

However, the objective terrain of work to build bonds of solidarity and global strategies to counterbalance the power of the transnational capitalist class has become more accentuated in the stage of globalization, as there is now a growing mass of workers under the command of the same transnational companies in across the globe (Robinson, 2014). However, it is important to emphasize that there are still internal cleavages within the working class, such as occupational differences (formal jobs and non-conventional jobs outside the protection of rights), geographic (Global North/South), communicational, generational, gender, and racial differences. (Antunes, 2018), which makes the task of a global unitary agency a difficult undertaking. Added to this is the decrease in union density – especially due to the crisis of the Fordist model and traditional unionism – in the major economies of the world (Braga, 2017).

On the other hand, there is a set of new initiatives to organize the world of work based on other forms of organization and union political orientation, particularly important for the theme of this article, that of uberized workers. Therefore, here we will deal with the organization initiatives of uberized people around the world in the light of social movement unionism (Waterman, 1993; Moody,

1997; Braga and Marques, 2017), concept from the sociology of unionism that, in our view, provides guidelines for renewing labor forces in the face of the challenges of the globalized economy.

By social movement unionism, we understand it as form of organization that is critical of the limitations of unionism on strictly economic issues and of the hierarchical/bureaucratic structures of internal organization. In this sense, the workers' struggle should not be limited to the workplace, but incorporate various societal agendas, in particular, the struggle for the expansion of democracy (Costa, 2011). In this way, the centrality of democracy places these experiences in opposition to hierarchical unionism by valuing more horizontal forms of organization and with a greater degree of participation and deliberation at the base (Braga and Marques, 2017), as participation is seen as a central element for decisions made by those who actually participate (Moody, 1997).

By articulating itself around more general agendas and beyond the economic ones of each workplace, social movement unionism proposes to weave organic relationships of partnership and sharing of strategies with other movements, for example, with communities affected by business activities, with ecologism and with feminist movements (Waterman, 1993; Recoaro, 2020). This relationship with other popular social agents is fundamental to thinking about a strategic orientation that deals with the internal fragmentations of the new morphology of the working class. From this angle, it is worth highlighting the orientation to organize the disorganized, the most impoverished, unemployed and informally employed sectors of workers (Moody, 1997),

which is particularly important, in the sense in which Braga and Marques (2017) point out, to the need for trade unionism to incorporate and reorganize itself based on the demands of young precarious workers – a worker base that even supports the work of drivers and app delivery people, as we have already pointed out in this article, based on data on remuneration and working hours.

Added to this is the vocation for internationalism pointed out by the authors in social movement unionism. With the weight of TNCs in the current stage of capitalism, it is necessary for there to be, on the labor side, an organization at an international level that even goes beyond just the top links between leaders of national unions and that puts workers from the base to articulation of strategies, exchange of information and resources (Moody, 1997; Waterman, 1993). International strategies are, moreover, a means of finding points of weakness in the global production chain of companies and have an educational role for workers to understand the different productive situations in each country (Moody, 1997).

In this sense, the experiences of international union networks and international framework agreements (IFAs) are elucidative of the potentialities and limitations of the internationalism advocated by social movement unionism and, as we will present, they have close relationships with the strategy of the uberized. By conceptualization level, we understand a union network as "a horizontal organization that aims to articulate in the same space for exchanging information and action, the representatives of workers who work in relation to the same transnational company in different locations" (Mello, Framil, Freston, 2015, p. 3) and which combines different

strategies and public campaigns within these companies (Evans, 2014). In other words, here we are dealing more with an orientation than with a rigid and predetermined model of organization, and what is posed is a challenge and a potential for the work of building its global governance (ibid.).

In summary, we are presenting a work strategy to share information, joint action strategies, global campaigns to put pressure on TNCs and especially to target weak points in global production chains. To this end, one of the repertoires used by transnational networks and federations of international unions are IFAs. These agreements are pacts signed between the company's management and, at least, an international union federation – but which may also involve other union agents and company committees – which aim to standardize a minimum floor for workers' rights throughout the production chain, "establishing permanent mechanisms for exchanging information and control, which promote the implementation of healthy work practices in all operations of an international company" (Hennebert, 2017, p. 3). In terms of content, the agreements are diverse, but, in general, their common denominator is the conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO) (ibid.).

The signing of IFAs, initiated in the late 1990s, is a movement of appropriation/resignification by unions of social accountability commitments built by the companies themselves, for example, ISO 26000 and AS 8000.[10] That is, instead of social responsibility commitments being defined by the companies themselves or by other employers as an accountability strategy,

trade union organizations become part of the definition of these production and workforce management standards in some transnational companies (ibid.). In this sense, IFAs have the power to forge a space for the recognition of international union agents and the construction of global governance – in the terms of Evans (2014) – for the world of work. Furthermore, from them, a common agenda can be formed between different union players that begin to share global practices and solidarity networks between different production plants that can even be means of support for workers from countries with less protective resources and organizational power. Furthermore, agreements can be mechanisms for improving the organizational context of workers and, in this case, the examples of Chiquita and Quebecor World[11] are interesting, because the global campaigns to establish IFAs in these companies were followed by an increase in unionization rates in these transnational companies (Hennebert, 2017).

However, if this is a promising path for labor forces in the face of the globalization of production, neither union networks nor IFAs are panaceas that provide answers to all union dilemmas. Therefore, the authors discussed here point to the main difficulties of these initiatives: the real apprehension of these agreements by the base of the categories (not only by workers from central countries or by international union leaders) and by sectors of the production chain outside the headquarters (suppliers and outsourced) (Hennebert, 2017; Evans, 2014). This is because as they are agreements between international networks and company management, there is no binding element from a legal point of view at the global

level, which means that, ultimately, it is the workers' own ability to mobilize strength that makes these real practice agreements.

Up to this point, we have presented an approach that seeks ways to face the globalization of production from the forces of labor, or what Burawoy (2000) names globalization from below up, that is, that seeks to understand the impacts of global changes at the local level, with based on the real experiences of workers. It is with this orientation and the theoretical frameworks of social movement unionism and international union networks that we will analyze the organization, strategies, repertoires, and agendas of uberized workers.

Precarious, but organized

The collective organization of uberized people is limited by barriers, whether those of the State or those of transnational companies themselves. The main one is the subjectivity encouraged by companies through the idea that these workers are just individual partners and, therefore, the success or failure of each one depends solely on themselves. The result of this is the denial of collective action and representation as a legitimate mechanism for workers. Cant's report (2020) on the strike of delivery drivers in Brighton, England, is an example of the practice of platforms across the globe. The author points out that Deliveroo, even with a pause in services, refused to discuss any demand collectively or with any trade union in the category,

arguing that negotiations should only be done individually with its "independent hired individuals" (ibid.).

It is worth highlighting that, in addition to not recognizing collective demands, platforms also use "force" to stop mobilizations. Disconnections from the platform are recurring practices as an instrument of control for the independent workers' organization[12] and, there is even a determination of how Uber users should address their complaints to management, with access to websites such as Reclame Aqui being prohibited (Antunes and Filgueiras, 2020). Another symptom of the platforms' anti-union practices was the report, produced by Agência Pública, which pointed out that iFood hired an advertising agency and infiltrated people in the category's mobilizations to limit strike practices.[13]

However, despite the scenario of control and delegitimization of collective action, these workers organize themselves in different ways. Grohmann (2020) presents a proposal for dividing the organization of these workers, namely: "a) regulation of work on digital platforms; b) collective organization of workers; and c) construction of other work organization logics, such as platform co-operativism" (p. 106). This is not a schematic division, and, in the daily practice of workers, there is a combination of these initiatives/objectives in different levels, but it serves us, to some extent, as a guiding compass.

Regarding the regulation of work on digital platforms, Grohmann (ibid.) points out two main paths: a) the recognition of uberized people as employees of corporations and b) the establishment of guidelines so

that platforms follow minimum standards that guarantee decent work, according to the parameters of the International Labor Organization. In this field, we are dealing with a scenario with comings and goings and with very particular rhythms in each country. For example, cases from the United Kingdom are illustrative, where the British Supreme Court recognized the employment relationship of 20 Uber drivers and guaranteed rights such as minimum wage and paid vacation; and Spain, where the government announced a proposal to regulate workers after a decision in the same direction by the Supreme Court of Spain. In the Spanish case, Artur and Cardoso (2020) point out that decisions have advanced towards a more updated understanding of the idea of subordination, seen as existing as a result of the platform holding the major means of production (software), the brand, the monopoly of information and evaluation control. On the other hand, in the Brazilian case, the understanding of the main labor court is to deny the employment relationship and subordination, in view of the decision of the Superior Labor Court, in March 2021, for the non-recognition of the employment relationship (Brasil, 2021).

Regarding the collective organization of uberized people, the English experience is emblematic, but there are also Brazilian experiences, such as the articulation of Uber drivers in May 2019, who paralyzed their activities in Brazilian cities, such as São Paulo, Recife, Acre, Brasília, and Salvador, in conjunction with a global call for strikes that occurred simultaneously with the opening of the company's shares on the stock exchange. The agenda in Brazil revolved around better remuneration and information for drivers about

customers – a measure that directly impacts job security – and was shaped by new associations in the category, such as the Association of Application Drivers of São Paulo (Associação dos Motoristas de Aplicativo de São Paulo - Amasp) and the Association of Independent Private Drivers of Rio de Janeiro (Associação de Motoristas Particulares Autônomos do Rio de Janeiro – Amapa RJ).

More recently, delivery drivers led a national strike in July 2020, with focus on large capitals in the country (São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Brasília, Fortaleza, Salvador, and Recife), for better wages, insurance against theft and accidents, life insurance, assistance to face the pandemic – such as personal protective equipment – and paid leave for sick couriers.[14] In São Paulo, center of the mobilization, there was a large motor march from the Masp museum to Estaiada bridge. In addition to the mobilizations materialized on the streets, behind this, there is an entire informal network of ongoing contacts of these workers by messaging applications and groups on social networks (Cant, 2020; Kalil, 2020; Englert, Woodcock and Cant, 2020).

In these virtual and informal networks, information, tips about work, and debates about platform issues are shared, and even embryos of more lasting collective organizations are formed. This importance is expressed by Galo, leader of the group Entregadores Antifascistas, in an interview for UOL's Ecoa portal: "*I joined WhatsApp groups of couriers and said that we had to have better working conditions, that they had to guarantee us food*" (Rodrigues, 2020).

From this perspective, a dialectical relationship is observed between work and information and communication technology

because, on the one hand, ICTs allow the control in uberization to be elevated to the smallest particle of production (the individual); on the other, the work's own counteroffensive initiatives are also forged in these spaces. Clear examples of this contradiction are Turkopticon and Fair Crowd Work. The first is a platform that allows workers to rate people and companies requesting tasks on Amazon Mechanical Thurk;[15] the second is a website developed by the German Metalworkers Union, which allows applications to be classified by Uber users. In other words, these are initiatives by uberized people who use ICTs in the search to change the meaning of evaluation mechanisms, this time in their defense, since they reduce "the asymmetry of power that exists between the platform and its clients and workers, in as it opens up space for the exchange of information about service takers" (Kalil, 2020, p. 90).[16]

From the point of view of its internal organization, there are a myriad of organizational forms in the category, ranging from exclusively online initiatives to more horizontal workers' organizations without a clearly defined structure (Treta and Entregadores Antifascistas are the two biggest examples of this format, also because they were the major boosters of the #brequedosapps in July 2020), as well as more traditional associations and unions.[17] As examples of the latter case, the Association of Application and Self-Employed Motorcycle Freight Workers of Brazil (Associação dos Motofretistas de Aplicativos e Autônomos do Brasil – AMABR) and the São Paulo Motorcycle Couriers Union (SindimotoSP) stand out, two organizations that even participated in hearings of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (CPI) of the São Paulo City Council Applications.

Another element to be highlighted are the different tactics of these movements, with Treta and Entregadores Antifascistas favoring shutdowns and strike initiatives as a way of submitting their demands to the platforms, and AMABR and SindimotoSP prioritizing pressure relations through parliamentarians, city halls and state agencies such as Detran (state traffic department).

In this sense, the British experience highlighted by Cant (2020) points to a possible path of relationship between delivery drivers and unionism, as, after a cycle of mobilizations by Deliveroo's couriers[18] which spread across the major cities of the country, there was a movement of double rapprochement between the unions and the agenda of the uberized. Thus, on the one hand, these agendas were incorporated into trade union agendas, especially by the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), and, on the other, there was a gain in confidence on the part of the category in this organization.

Then, we believe that this process is close to social movement unionism and its orientation towards relating, as a mobilization strategy, with a set of diverse social players (Watermann, 1993). Both Treta and Entregadores Antifascistas have relations with mobilizations of other categories (metallurgists, chemists etc.), other social movements (the Landless Rural Workers Movement, for instance), and with mobilizations of acts in defense of democracy and against privatizations of public facilities.[19] Besides, during the category's shutdown itself, there was a call for solidarity with consumers on the platforms, to boycott deliveries during the #broquedosapps (Braga, 2020), that is, in an effort to mobilize consumer communities as a support .

In relation to the agenda, #brequedosapps centrally dealt with issues linked to remuneration and work in the category. As Braga (ibid.) and Grohmann et al. point out. (2022), the movement's public demands were for an increase in the value of the delivery fee, for the creation of life insurance and meal vouchers, for personal protective equipment, such as masks and alcohol gel (in the wake of covid-19 pandemic), and the end of unreasonable blocks - that is, when a courier is blocked from the application either due to a customer complaint or political persecution, with no possibility of counter-argument from the worker, and is no longer allowed to provide the service. In this sense, it is clear that there is a set of guidelines focused on specific rights of the delivery people themselves and linked to the demands generated by the work process.

As for international orientation, there is an experience of an international federation of app couriers, the Transnational Federation of Couriers, with a base of Uber users in European countries, such as Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (Cant, 2020). However, despite these initiatives in the field of work, the posture of the platforms is the same: in general, quite refractory to the recognition of workers' agents and, even more so, this occurs unevenly between countries. In this way, IFA negotiations between platforms and Uberized workers have not yet been reached globally.

In the Brazilian case, there has not been, until now, such an evident formation of transnational articulation of Uberized people, but there have already been attempts to establish international relations, both in the strike of Uber drivers in 2019, and in the approaches of Entregadores Antifascistas, with the tactic to build co-operatives of couriers via app, very inspired by the Coopcycle experience.[20] Here we deal with the third axis of organization proposed by Grohmann (2020): Coopcycle is a cooperative of couriers that claims to be democratically governed by the members, which allows the reduction of couriers' costs through the combination of resources and the increase in bargaining capacity for your rights. In addition, they have a group of volunteers who help organize an anti-capitalist business model, from software development, global coordination, lobbying and legal support.[21]

This strategy is inspired by and inspires the theoretical contribution of Scholz (2017) on what the author calls platform cooperativism. For him, the way to counter uberization is to give new meaning to the use of technology based on 10 principles: shared ownership of the platform; decent pay; transparency in data and information for workers and consumers; direct communication channel between consumers and workers; involvement of workers throughout the production process; legal structure that supports the existence of cooperatives; portability of labor benefits – that is, that they are maintained if there is a change in activity; protection against abusive behavior; prohibition of excessive surveillance as a control mechanism; right to disconnect, guaranteeing rest time for workers. In other words, the bet is on the possibility of reversing the direction of technology, which, in uberized

work, is mobilized to explore and control and, in platform cooperativism, would be used to provide more supportive and equitable arrangements.

In summary, what we intend to show in this section are the similarities between some organizational experiences of uberized people, social movement unionism, and the potential of the notion of international union networks for this category. Evidently, these three concepts are not identical, but they are somehow related to responding to the precariousness of platform work on a global scale in the light of democracy, more participatory arrangements, global articulations, and a more explosive profile. The Considerations summarize these experiences according to what we defend in this article: a need for a global counteroffensive by uberized workers.

Considerations

In the present paper, we point out a close relationship between the uberization of work and the process of capitalist globalization and, mainly, we debate the organizational strategies, forms, and repertoires of uberized people in international experiences and in Brazil (especially Treta and the Entregadores Antifascistas), starting from its proximity to the concept of social movement unionism and an international orientation of work organization.

The first approach was outlined based on the presentation, on a global scale, of several companies/applications, their merger processes and purchases from other companies at the international level, as well as the transnational profile of the agents on their administrative boards, which highlights, in composition of uberized companies, their participation in the transnational capitalist class (Robinson, 2013). In this scenario of operation of applications on the global terrain for accumulation, there is a new landscape that requires new strategies from trade unionism and, fundamentally, new governance at the global level to counter the power of capital (Evans, 2014).

As discussed throughout the article, the task of global labor governance is neither completely new nor simple, therefore, the experiences studied and presented here are not panaceas for the future of trade unionism. There are still a few difficulties with the companies/applications not recognizing the collective agency of these workers, that is, their performance as legitimate negotiation agents. Despite this, it is evident that a set of experiences of workers emerges who, in their different methods, forms of organization and repertoires, in Brazil and around the world, have tendencies towards a more democratic, mobilizing and internationalist orientation, which brings a power to confront, in the global arena, the plundering of work that represents uberization.

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Notes

(1) Data published in *Exame* magazine on April 1ˢᵗ, 2020. Available at: https://exame.com/negocios/candidatos-a-entregador-do-ifood-mais-que-dobram-com-coronavirus/. Accessed on: March 29, 2021.

(2) It is worth noting that the transformations that engendered the fordist model had specificities in the Brazilian reality, because a working class holding labor and social rights has always been a minority part in the national labor market, with informal work persisting perennially and inequality in labor and social rights, thus favoring more organized categories and with greater relative bargaining weight before the State (Abílio, 2011; Oliveira, 2003).

(3) Dynamic rates, or lives, operate as multipliers in service prices in certain regions and times when there would naturally be a low supply of drivers/couriers in relation to demand. As a result, "at times when workers would normally prefer to stay at home, such as festive days, the company provides financial incentives" (Oitaven, 2018, p. 37) and guarantees the supply of workforce.

(4) This form of remuneration resumes a type of wage employment highlighted by Marx (2013) as a way of linking the interests of the individual worker with the interests of capital: the piece-rate wage.

(5) By transnational corporations, we mean companies that have branches dispersed around the world, with an increase in cross-border mergers and acquisitions, with transnational interconnection of administrative boards, mutual cross-investments between companies from two or more countries, transnational ownership of equity shares, diffusion of cross-border strategies alliances of all kinds, vast outsourcing and subcontracting networks, and the growing importance of high-ranking transnational business associations (Robinson, 2013).

(6) With these forms of business management, hiring, and employment, we do not mean that they are anti-capitalist models, but models that maintain greater autonomy in relation to the direct logic of accumulation imprinted by transnational companies of uberized labor, which allows, for example, more advantageous local agreements for workers.

(7) Translator's note: the elements that compound the formula is in Portuguese: D stands for dinheiro (money), M for mercadoria (merchandise), P for produto (product), M' for mais mercadoria (more merchandise), and D' for mais dinheiro (more money). This is Marx's classic value production formula, that is, how money is converted into merchandise (input, labor, machinery etc.) that form the production process of new goods, with a central focus on the labor force. These new products are added with more value, resulting from human work, which will later be sold on the market, transforming this value into more money for the owner of the means of production when the production cycle is resumed.

(8) Available at: https://www.uber.com/pt-BR/newsroom/lideranca/. Accessed on: March 29, 2021.

(9) Available at: https://institucional.ifood.com.br/ifood. Acessed on: March 29, 2021.

(10) A ISO 26000 is a standard that advocates social responsibility and the incorporation of socio-environmental considerations in decision-making processes through ethical and transparent behaviors that contribute to sustainable development (Inmetro, 2020).

(11) Chiquita Brands International is an agricultural company and one of the world's leaders in banana cultivation and distribution worldwide. And Quebecor World is a clothing production corporation, especially sporting goods.

(12) The documentary "GIG – The uberization of work", shows some reports from workers who were disconnected from the platforms after participating in mobilizations. Available at: https://reporterbrasil.org.br/gig/ . Accessed on: August 25, 2023

(13) Available at: https://apublica.org/2022/04/a-maquina-oculta-de-propaganda-do-ifood/. Accessed on: 5 April, 2022.

(14) Details of the agenda can be accessed on Treta's Facebook page. Avaiable at: https://www.facebook.com/113571473622723/posts/154807339499136/?d=n . Acessed on: March 15, 2021.

(15) Amazon Mechanical Turk is a digital platform service created by Amazon where users hire remote workers to perform small tasks that computers are not yet capable of, for example, correcting a text.

(16) In Brazil, female Uber drivers, to face insecurity and the risk of harassment, created a group on WhatsApp called "Damas ao Volante" ("Ladies behind the Wheel") in which they periodically post their locations to signal that "everything is ok" (Dolce, 2019), another indication that the organization of uberized people involves communication and articulation tools by means of applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram.

(17) An association is understood here as a group of professionals of the same category that organizes itself around a set of demands and elects representatives to lead this entity, that is, it is a form of collective organization of workers. The union is a specific type of association, because it is recognized by the Brazilian State, based on the structure of official unionism, and is legally the representative of an entire category of workers.

(18) Deliveroo is an Uber-based food delivery company based in London and operating in more than 13 countries.

(19) All of these actions can be found on the Facebook and Instagram pages of the respective movements.

(20) In an interview arranged by BBC News and republished by UOL's Blog Tilt, Galo highlights this approach: "It's logical that we know the limitations we have, maybe we start in a state (of the country), but the idea is that it should be a general cooperative, and if possible international. We are in contact with Argentina and other countries, with Chile, Mexico, Colombia. It's live and let live, you know? Let's see what happens." Available at: https://www.uol.com.br/tilt/noticias/bbc/2020/07/27/adeus-ifood-entregadores-tentam-criar-cooperativa-para-trabalhor-sem-patrao.htm?cmpid=copiaecola . Accessed on: March 21, 2021.

(21) See the Coopcycle website: https://coopcycle.org/en/

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