

# The current social metabolism of work and the precariousness of the human world

*O atual metabolismo social do trabalho e a precariedade do mundo humano*

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The 56th issue of *Em Pauta: social theory and contemporary reality* presents the thematic dossier Crisis, Social Issue and Social Work, with the aim of disseminating articles that address relevant aspects to this topic and aiming to deepen and socialize the knowledge produced through studies and research on the economic, political, social, and cultural transformations that have occurred in Brazil and/or worldwide. This is especially so because, in the first decades of the 21st century, capitalism has been showing signs of the exhaustion of its civilizational possibilities. As we know, this mode of production involves a social relationship that imposes the formal and real subsumption of work. However, this is exacerbated under neoliberal rule – the so-called ultra-neoliberalism –, since the inherent exploitative/expropriating characteristic of this mode of production was heightened. According to Dardot and Laval (2016), it can even be considered that neoliberalism has been assumed as a historical construction and general norm of life.

The trends and contradictions of the aforementioned mode of production took on significant momentum and expanded, constituting the world of informalization with computerization, of the “technological dynamics” of work, in which the deregulation of labor laws, as well as the decline of social protection and the power of trade unions, underlies industry 4.0, the uberization of work, work on digital platforms, the service proletariat of the digital era, as explained by Antunes (2020, 2018). With this, it can even be stated that control and manipulation in the different and most hidden spheres of social life have become the guiding principles of the development of contemporary capitalism. In this regard, in the thinking of Alves (2011),

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it can be seen that new flexible work relationships promote significant changes in the social metabolism of this activity, which alters sociability and personal self-reference, that is, they imply essential elements of the process formation of the human-generic.

We live in a society of peripheral and dependent capitalism. Thus, the picture that was described imposes on us a truly complex period, since the (ultra)neoliberalism that guides the aforementioned mode of production has enhanced the exploitation of work and therefore the violation of parameters dear to the human world in favor of valuing the capital. This raises social drama resulting from precarious working conditions and/or the level of disposability of the workforce present on a large scale, along with physical and/or mental pathologies and hunger among a significant segment of the working class. These worsened aspects were predominantly revealed during the pandemic period. By this we refer to the intensification of a process in which the precarious living conditions of a large portion of Brazilian workers were already characterized by the historical informality of work and the incipience of social protection, given its history of slavery, political changes “from above” (1930, 1985), and democratic instability.

In general terms, it can be considered that the advance of capitalism under the neoliberal aegis has eroded what, in our country, was seen as a kind of neo-developmentalism or, if we prefer, the attempt to “retake” a form of industrializing program of our last dictatorial era. Originally, it was a program supported at the time by the industrial bourgeoisie and workers in combat against imperialist interests, as they were considered obstacles to the advancement of Brazilian industrialization. This developmental program of the civil-military dictatorial era served, simultaneously, the bourgeoisie and foreign capital, which joined the process of dependent industrialization in Brazil and other Latin American countries – we mention a form of dependence defended even by former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso. This was eroded, in capitalism, under the neoliberal aegis, as a certain segment of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, associated with international capital, entered into dissonance with the rest of their class who did not agree with international interests, which came to strengthen another type of dependence, strengthening the basic-resource-export function of the economy and causing a decline in the country's industrial development.

Finally, from José Sarney's administration to the present date, despite different nuances, no progress has been made in favor of overcoming the neoliberal logic, even though it is irrefutable the occurrence of periods in which, particularly in PT administrations, there has been important improvements in living materials conditions of the poorest individuals, given the real increase in the minimum wage, the expansion of credit, and the expansion of income transfers. This, in fact, was a driving aspect of the revolt directed at reformism during this period by certain class segments. The reactionarism expressed by the upper middle class, in the face of a small rise of the people in the poorer layers

of society made possible by the economic and social policy of the PT governments, was blown wide open, leading even the Workers' Party to be identified as the quintessential enemy among other leftist parties, and therefore should be combated and eliminated. This aspect spread among other segments of the population who were also dissatisfied with PT's policies, and could be seen as a fundamental ingredient in the process that led to the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, coalescing the neo-fascist movement à la Brazil – a movement that supported the arrival and permanence of Jair Bolsonaro in the country's presidency. Evidently, it was a process that, based on anti-democratic values and positions, brought a high cost to social policies, greatly increasing the expressions of the “social issue”.

In the context of crisis, there is a visible worsening of the multiple expressions of the “social issue”, such as: super-exploitation and precariousness of work, misery, poverty, hunger, violence, segregation, oppression, expropriation in the countryside and in the cities, with their marks of gender, race/ethnicity, generation, sexualities, etc. Being objects of investigation and professional intervention, such expressions reflect intrinsic inequalities and give meaning to the ethical-political commitment of social work, which advocates the category's engagement with social movements and struggles in favor of human emancipation and against the retrograde political forces that seek to destroy democratic achievements, public policies, and social and human rights.

Based on these thematic axes, issue no. 56 brings together articles that contribute to the critical professional debate with fruitful reflections to expand knowledge about the challenges that, in capitalism in crisis, stand in the way of the profession and society. The articles that make up the thematic dossier are organized into two groups. The first focuses on the debate on the capitalist crisis and “social issue” in different areas and the second focuses on the discussion of social work, emphasizing, in various aspects, professional work.

The article that opens the first group is that of Marilda Vilela Iamamoto, who summarizes her presentation at the Joint Conference on Social Work, Education, and Social Development (SWSD), held in 2024 in Panama City and organized by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), and the International Conference on Social Work (ICSW). The article addresses the transformations carried out in social work, in a context of crisis, emphasizing the reinforcement of ethical-political links with social subjects, in their unity of diversity.

The following article, by Milena da Silva Santos, deals with the absolute limits of capital in the structural crisis process, based on the theoretical formulations of István Mészáros. The article by Rodrigo Castelo, Lays Ventura, Guilherme de Rocamora, and Henrique Galdino analyzes the current cycle of capital reproduction in Brazil, called the export pattern of productive specialization, and the particularities of the “social issue” in

the southern region of the state of Rio de Janeiro, based on the study of the superexploitation of the workforce in the automobile industry. The article by Juliana Firmino Fonzar and Eugênia Aparecida Cesconeto discusses the challenges and perspectives of intersectorality in tackling rural poverty as one of the expressions of the “social issue”, based on a qualitative study and professional experience in the area of rural extension. Concluding the first block, the article by Lilian Angélica da Silva Souza, Amabele Rodrigues Freire Montavoni Pereira and Luiza Guimarães Oliveira analyzes the expressions of the social issue regarding public education in Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the second block, the article by Gabriela Alves dos Santos addresses racism and patriarchy in the constitution of the social issue in Brazil and the influence of eugenics in Brazilian social work as one of the manifestations of conservatism in the genesis of the profession. Next, Daiane Zanin and Jean Von Hohendorff address, in their article, the perception of professionals who work in Social Assistance Reference Centers (CRAS) regarding the social assistance policy’s compliance with demands for rights violations in municipalities that do not have a Specialized Reference Center for Social Assistance (CREAS) or a specific technical team. The article by Gênesis de Oliveira Pereira presents reflections based on the technical supervision experience developed with social workers from the National Social Security Institute (INSS), through an extension project at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Francine Helfreich Coutinho dos Santos and Thayana Vianna Melo discuss the home visit as part of the technical-operative instrument used in the work of social workers, proposing a critical reflection on this instrument and highlighting its historicity, purpose, and consonance with the guidelines of the ethical-political professional project. Closing the second block, the article by Jacqueline Tatiene da Silva Guimarães, Linda Gabrielle C. Monteiro, and Luís Sidney N. Fiel discusses the role of social workers and child protection in the Brazilian Amazon, taking as its locus the municipality of Cametá (PA), which concentrates riverside and quilombola families.

The free topic section consists of two articles. First of Helena Lúcia Augusto Chaves, deals with the relationship between work and social protection, problematizing the configuration of *workfare* in times of financialization of capital and reflecting on social policy in the relationship between the state and society. The second, by Ethol Exime, Clério Plein, and Evandro Alves Barbosa Filho, analyzes the evolutionary permanence of hunger from the perspective of external interference against political freedom in Haiti.

The interview in this edition was carried out by Juan Pablo Sierra Tapiro and Diego Martins Dória Paulo with Franci Gomes Cardoso, who has an admirable life and work trajectory. Our interviewee is recognized for her valuable contribution to social work, with experience as a social worker, a university professor, a researcher and a militant intellectual, with relevant academic production that gives solidity to the theoretical-practical foundation of social work.

This edition presents two reviews of fundamental works today. The first, prepared by Guilherme Moraes da Costa, is from Lise Vogel's book entitled *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*, published in 2022 by Expressão Popular. The second, written by Sandhro Luiz de Almeida Abrahão, is from the book by Clóvis Moura entitled *Brazil: The Roots of Black Protest*, published in 2023 by Dandara Editora.

The lifetime tribute is to the School of Social Work at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (FSS/UERJ), a historical heritage of Brazilian social work, which turned 80 years old. Graziela Scheffer and Carlos Felipe Nunes Moreira praised, in this tribute, the historical trajectory of this educational institution against the winds and tides of conservatism, highlighting its commitment to democracy and its pioneering spirit in offering an evening course, enabling access to higher education for workers in the state of Rio de Janeiro and elsewhere. Long live FSS/UERJ!

Finally, the photographic exhibition presents the work of Iasmin Mamede who, in addition to studying to get a degree in social work at FSS/UERJ, stands out for her work as a professional photographer. Iasmin's work reiterates that photography is a product of the photographer's gaze and that this gaze expresses life repertoires in the moment of production of the image.

We hope you enjoy the thought-provoking content published in this edition!

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