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Discussions about working time



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In an interview made by journalist Maxi Lequi on the radio program "El Arranque", reproduced in Política Obrera on 20/07/2023, Jorge Altamira said that "... There is a de facto labor counter-reform that has the following consequences: that a worker, for what he earns, has to work much more than eight hours a day and works seven days a week. And the unions support this circumstance because they demand wage increases over seven days, over ten hours, I mean? They don't want to change this regime." He also argued that we are in a time in which there is a technological change "of a magnitude that favors free

time and yet with technological progress what grows is slave time. That is, we are worse off than in manufacturing."

In what follows we discuss this statement, present data and conclude with some considerations concerning socialist policy.

The working day, Historical and social aspects

Let's start by pointing out that, in Marx's approach (JA claims to be Marxist) The extension of the working day has limits, not only physical, but also Social. Marx writes: "For a part of the day the labour force must rest, sleep, while during another part of the day man has to meeting other physical needs, feeding, grooming, clothing, etcetera". But above this limit the extension of the working day Work "runs into moral barriers. Man needs time for satisfaction of spiritual and social needs, the extent and number of which They depend on the level reached in general by civilization." Hence, the Working day "oscillates... within physical and social limits" (p. 279, vol. 1, *Capital*). That is, "the working day is determinable, but in and for itself indeterminate" (p. 278, *ibid.*).

A little further down Marx points out that in the determination of the working day They face two rights: that of the capitalist who has acquired the commodity force. of labor and seeks to squeeze it to the maximum, and the right of the worker to protect its workforce and prevent it from wearing out above the wear and tear that occurs under normal working conditions. Thus, right against Law, "decides the force", the struggle between the capitalist class and the class worker (p. 282, *ibid.*).

The point we make now is that, according to this approach, that We share, the *extension of the day Labor is not established at the whim of capitalists and/or governments, or trade union bureaucracies*. Therefore, if it is stated that in terms of extension of the working day Humanity (or Argentine society), has returned to the level of the times of the manufacture, it is necessary, first of all, to present evidence that supports such affirmation; and secondly, *to explain, from a materialistic framework*, how such a thing could have happened. What happened to the forces productive, and/or the class struggle, so that the extension of the working day has gone back 150 or 200 years? Is Marx's theory compatible with such an involution, and in view of the available evidence? Or is it necessary elaborate another theory? What is the relationship between the working day in Argentina? with what happens globally? None of this is dealt with by JA.

Data 1: trend of Long term

JA argues that today we are back to the times of manufacturing, that is, prior to the Industrial Revolution, at the end of the eighteenth century (manufacturing It is

characterized by the division of labor in the workshop). How long were they? those days? Rivera (1999) says "in the mid-eighteenth century, in England, The craftsman worked fourteen hours in a normal day. Fourteen hours chaired for that philosophy of work. Between eight and ten miners worked. In around fourteen also homeworkers... (...) The arrival of the This led to the most "industrial" sectors (women and children; men with a trade kept their schedules) went to work 14, 16 and up 18 hours, with a small break for lunch... . The utopian socialist Robert Owen revolutionized the work system in New Lanark by reducing the day from 16 to 12 and a half and then 10 and a half hours (in 1816), without going down to the time the production level. For his part, Marx, in *Capital*, reviews the Factory Act of 1850, in Great Britain that established 10 7/60 hours of work from Monday to Friday and < >/< > hours on Saturdays, that is, < > per week, and It was an improvement with respect to the previous (also compared to the account JA from "the seven days, about ten o'clock").

Well, since the Industrial Revolution, and even more, since the beginning of the In the twentieth century, *there was a downward trend in working hours, accompanied by increases in productivity and wages real*. Large strikes pushed for the reduction of the working day, such as those of 1886, in the USA. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Consignment of the eight hours of work, eight of rest and eight of Recreation was the banner of struggle of millions of exploited in virtually all industrialized countries. It was common to work 60 hours or more per week. Still in 1900 in Capitalist countries worked on average between 2,500 and 3,000 hours annual per worker (does not include agricultural work). But since then and until At the end of the twentieth century, annual hours worked were declining. In 2000 the annual average was below 2000 hours per worker in most advanced capitalist countries. In France, Germany and The Netherlands averaged close to 1,500 hours (see Messenger, 2018). In UK hours of work per year and per worker were: 1820: 3.000; 1870: 2.984; 1913: 2,624; 1950: 1.958; 2000: 1.489. The trend Descending seemed consolidated. However, in the last two decades it stopped (with the exception of Germany) and in some countries (Sweden and the USA). Among them) the number of annual hours worked rose slightly.

With respect to backward countries such as Brazil, India and China, there is no availability of data prior to 1950. In Brazil, the trend was downward from the 1970s, but with the industrialization of annual working hours by workers rose in China and South Korea, before flattening in China, and decrease significantly in Korea (ILO 2023).

Data 2, the conferences Labor today

According to JA, more and more workers, in Argentina (and apparently also in the rest of the world), work more than 8 hours per day for 7 days a week. That is, they would be working 60, 70 or more hours per week, without even a day. rest.

However, and according to the ILO, in 2022 the average hours worked in Argentina it was 34.6 per week. In 2008 the average was 41 hours; in 2012 39 hours (ILO – ILO).

Let us make it clear that these figures include employees and self-employed. However, they are indicative of the situation. in which salaried workers are in relation to the working day labour, since the proportion of those who work more than 48 hours per week is higher among those who are self-employed than those who are self-employed salaried.

At the global level, weekly working hours are, according to the ILO, 43.9. Discriminating by region, Africa: 38.8; Latin America and the Caribbean: 29.9; North America: 37.9; Arab States: 44.6; Asia and the Pacific: 47.4; Asia Eastern: 48.8; South Asia: 49M; Europe and Central Asia: 38.4; Southern Europe, North and West: 37.2; Eastern Europe: 39; Central and Western Asia: 42.7. Of how working hours in Argentina are within the parameters World. In no case are we facing average working hours such as those that there were in the times of manufacturing, the Industrial Revolution or even late nineteenth century. It is not noticed, in Argentina or in the rest of the world, which are in the process of becoming generalised working weeks of the type 10 hours x 7.

A fork

As mentioned above, *in the last two decades the downward trend of hours has stopped. annual worked, and in some developed countries there was a slight upturn.* According to Messenger (2018) that arrest was accompanied by a "bifurcation": significant portions of the workforce (especially men) work more than 48 hours a week, while another part of the The labour force (especially women) works less than 35 hours per week. We briefly develop these two facets.

1. Overwork

The ILO defines "long working hours" as exceeding 48 hours Weekly: We will use the expression Overwork. In 2019, in countries in development, 22.4% of those employed were overworked; in countries with emerging economies 41.6%; and in developed countries, 14.8%. On average, Globally, 35.4% were overworked. Again according to the ILO, in 2016, 488 million people worked at least 55 hours per week.

The proportion of men who are overworked is higher than that of women (41.2% vs. 26.4%). But women carry the greatest burden of work. unpaid, at home, and caring for children or the elderly. By On the other hand, there are differences between salaried

employees and workers by Own account: globally, 31.1% of salaried employees They work more than 48 hours per week, while the proportion rises to 44.4% among the self-employed.

Let us specify that overworking is not synonymous with precarious or informal work (also called "in black") as is sometimes thought. They can be, but not necessarily. Informal workers generally do not have paid holidays, health and unemployment insurance, disability pensions or future retirement (they are not registered in the social security system). It is clear that there are broad swathes of workers who are in informality, or in precarious jobs (which can be formal) and perform overwork. But there are also important sectors of the employed who have formal jobs, not precarious, and perform overwork. And in many cases voluntarily: due to low wages – especially in underdeveloped countries – overtime becomes a necessity for millions of wage earners. Likewise, many self-employed or self-employed workers are forced to "self-exploit" to survive, and work long hours. We have pointed out another terrible aspect of overwork: child labour. According to UNICEF, 1 in 10 children in the world is forced to work.

2. Underemployment

As well as 35% of global employees work more than 48 hours per week, 23% do not reach 35 hours per week. They work part-time, that is, *part-time*. Globally, part-time work It accounts for 23% of total employment. This proportion has remained stable at the last decade (in 2010 it was 22%). *Part-time* is more widespread among women than men: 31% against 17%. Again, it is necessary to specify that *part-time* work can be formal or informal. But it is common for work to part-time goes hand in hand with informality and/or precariousness, in addition to low wages. In addition, in many cases parttime work *is a situation not desired by workers; in other words, they are underemployed.*

It is important to note that in recent years part-time work was combined with new work schemes, such as averaging hours (quarterly, half-yearly or even annual) and with the dissemination of contracts temporary to adapt to production cycles according to the needs of the Capitalists. In turn, computer and communication technologies They allow employers to establish working methods such as Permanent connectivity. In practice, it means extending the working days. On the one hand, and on the other, the distinction between the working time and free time (and space) for personal life, dedication to the family, and so on.

In addition, part-time work has gone hand in hand in one of the ways more extreme flexibilization, the "available work" (*On call work*). It is designed to vary the number of

hours and/or days of work in based on the needs of employers. Under this modality is not guaranteed a certain number of working hours, and these can vary strongly from week by week. In the Netherlands, in 2013, 9% of all contracts Work was carried out with the *On Call* modality. In Britain this type of contracts grew after the 2008-09 crisis; in 2019 it comprised 2.7% of total employment. In the U.S., almost 10% of employees work *on call*, also known as "*just-in-time* planning" (although other studies outside the ILO-ILO reduced, by 2015, the participation at 2.6% of total employment). *On-call* work is often combined with "very short hours" of work, defined by the ILO-ILO as less than 15 or 20 hours per week.

A conclusion from the data presented in these two sections is that, Globally, 55% of workers are outside the 40 or 48 hours per week and 8 hours a day of work, either because they perform overworking or because they are part-time.

Working hours in Argentina

We reproduce some of the main data of the Ministry of Production and Work (2018). Almost half of the employed population (47%) work until 35 hours per week. Of these, 30% are men and 58% are women. In turn, the 19% of employed people work more than 48 hours per week (also 19% of employees).

The length of the workweek on average is 38 hours for people with a single job and increases 4 hours for people with two jobs (30 hours in average for the first job, 12 for the second occupation). The conference reduced are more common in women (mainly female workers) domestic in private homes) and overwork is more common among men (27%), among the self-employed and in the primary sector of the economy (41%).

With regard to the organisation of the working week, 39.2% of the Workers have the traditional week, Monday through Friday. Women in higher proportion than men. As for employees, 48.6% work Monday to Friday; 21.1 per cent from Monday to Saturday; 5.6 per cent from Sunday to Saturday; the 10.5% at least one day from Monday to Friday; and "other" 14.2%.

With regard to other working conditions of employees: 25.4% declared overtime; 74.6% do not work overtime. 29% of the respondents have rotating or variable shifts; 8.9 per cent work night shifts; 21.7% have split working hours.

All these data (remember that they correspond to 2018) demonstrate both the persistence of overwork as the advances of precarization and informality in broad swaths of the employed. Although, on the other hand, it does not authorize to affirm that in Argentina

there has been a regression to working hours typical of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.

Health effects

Overwork has negative effects on workers' health (in the following are based on ILO-ILO and WHO reports). It has been established that there are a positive relationship between overwork and lack of sleep, and increased of metabolic syndromes that mean increased risks of diabetes and cardiovascular conditions. Thus, a Harvard Medical School study found that people who work more than 55 hours a week have 30% more Odds of suffering a cardiovascular attack than those who work 35-40 weekly hours. Overworking also increases the risk of suffering Accidents at work. In the same vein, other studies found that the Physical and mental exhaustion is linked to increased use of painkillers, consumption of fast foods, lack of exercise and increased alcohol consumption. Overworking It is also associated with psychic exhaustion, which manifests itself in feelings of apathy, discouragement and loss of appetite.

According to WHO – ILO (2021) in 2016 some 745,000 people died from attacks or coronary diseases, derived from overwork. And there were 23.3 million of the which is known as "Disability-Adjusted Life Years" (DALY for its acronyms). DALU is a measure that combines years of life lost due to to premature illness and years of life lost due to time lived by below full health).

But the negative effects on physical and mental health are not limited to Overwork. Rotating or variable shifts and precarious jobs, make it difficult to reconcile work and personal life, in addition of increasing fatigue and associated with higher indicators of damage to health (work accidents, diseases and symptoms, among others).

Night work deserves a special paragraph: it is related to the circadian rhythm disturbance and correlated with certain diseases and Symptoms -Breast cancer, premature aging and alterations of the Dream, to name a few. The ILO maintains that there is evidence that Employment such as *On Call* negatively affects work-life balance. Is that those Work schedules are unpredictable and workers have no control over their working hours. The unstable and precarious nature of these forms of work It is also associated with diseases such as digestive problems, sleep, reproductive and cardiovascular problems, increased stress, anxiety and feelings of discouragement.

Two conclusions with Political connotations

In the first place, it is not true that the working day has regressed to the times of the Industrial Revolution, or manufacturing. If that had happened, we would have to To

assume that the working class has suffered a catastrophic defeat, of scope historical and global. The struggles for the reduction of working hours, which They mark the whole history of the workers' movement, and of socialism, there would not have been served for nothing. In 2023 we would be, in terms of working hours, as it does 200 years. As noted above, it should also be explained what factors social and political – again, the extension of the working day is not determined by the capitalists at will - would have made such a result. Especially when JA argues that because of the technological level reached by Humanity that setback should not have happened. In other words, just a setback. Infinite workers' resistance to capital could explain a Regression of centuries in the field of working hours.

However, the data do not support JA's thesis. It is true that sectors of The working class is engaged 49 or more hours a week, but nothing indicates that is returning to the 2,500 or 3,000 annual hours of 1900, or epochs Previous. From the political point of view, demoralising messages should be avoided (Is it worth fighting if we are always going to be like 200 years ago?), lacking of empirical and theoretical support.

Secondly, it is necessary to deepen the dynamics and consequences of the precariousness and growing informality of work, both with respect to Overwork as well as part-time work. We say this in reference to the "slogan-solution" of unemployment raised by many left-wing parties, the Reduction of working hours. In previous posts we have criticized this "solution" and we even presented what happened in France, where the working hours (here and [here](#)). But also it is illustrative what happened in the United States during the Great Depression, when many companies reduced the working hours. On average the working week in the industry and mining went from 45 hours in 1929 to 35 hours in 1932. The Hoover Administration supported this reduction, and the growth of the unemployment. But it did not prevent the unemployment rate from reaching 24% at most. deep of the crisis.

However, the biggest problems of the demand to reduce the working day On the one hand, *significant* segments of wage earners are in overworking. Should the agitation for the reduction of the working day with the prohibition of overworking? If this is what I know proposes, it should be said frankly and openly, since a measure of This type should have the approval of a majority of the movement. worker. Unfortunately, these issues are swept under the rug. But secondly, so that the reduction of working hours reduces the Unemployment *should also be banned Multiple employment*. Is that, again, given the low wages, how do you make that who goes to work 5 or 6 hours per day do not look for a

second job of 3 or 4 daily hours? But in addition, the axis must be put in the growing work in black and precarious. It is that the slogan of reducing the working day, in itself, without linking it to an overall economic and social programme, and to a capable power. If applied, it can become functional to the advances driven by capital, and government, in precariousness and informality of work. Therefore, and from a Socialist, it is a question of directing criticism to the property relations of the capital on which the exploitation of labour rests (and the threat of no have a job, that is, not be exploited). Social patches do not eliminate fundamental social ills, such as unemployment and alienating work, and stultifying.

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