

The exploitation of work in contemporary capitalism and its relationship with brazilian health: a critical review in the light of marxist literature

A exploração do trabalho no capitalismo contemporâneo e sua relação com a saúde brasileira: uma revisão crítica à luz da literatura marxista

La explotación del trabajo en el capitalismo contemporáneo y su relación con la salud brasileña: una revisión crítica a la luz de la literatura marxista

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze, in the light of Marxist literature, through a systematic critical review, the relations about the exploitation of workforce and its repercussions on Brazilian public health. A systematic critical review was carried out by 13 national Marxist reviews, with the search strategy for free terms: work, labor exploitation and health. The article contextualize the themes of overexploitation of work and social expropriation and, in a synthetic way, the historical perspective of capitalist accumulation in Latin America and the issue of work and health. The demonstrate that health conditions are intimately linked to the overexploitation of the workforce. Without a doubt, and it could not be different in our country of dependent capitalism, the production of absolute surplus value is much more important, with overexploitation being a structural characteristic.

Descriptors: Labor Exploration; Health; Capitalism; Revision.

Resumo

O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar à luz da literatura marxista as relações acerca da exploração da força de trabalho e seus rebatimentos na saúde pública brasileira. Realizou-se uma revisão sistemática crítica, em revistas marxistas nacionais, incluindo 13 artigos analisados em três categorias, sendo a exploração do trabalho, a saúde e as relações entre elas. O artigo contextualiza os temas da superexploração do trabalho e da expropriação social e, de forma sintética, da perspectiva histórica da acumulação capitalista na América Latina, a questão do trabalho e da saúde. Os artigos incluídos demonstram, que as condições de saúde se encontram, intimamente, articuladas à superexploração da força de trabalho. Sem dúvida e não poderia ser diferente no nosso país de capitalismo dependente, a produção de mais-valia absoluta é, muito mais importante, sendo a superexploração uma característica estrutural.

Palavras-chave: Exploração do Trabalho; Saúde; Capitalismo; Revisão.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar, a la luz de la literatura marxista, las relaciones en torno a la explotación de la mano de obra y sus repercusiones en la salud pública brasileña. Se realizó una revisión sistemática crítica en revistas marxistas nacionales, incluyendo 13 artículos analizados en tres categorías, siendo la explotación del trabajo, la salud y las relaciones entre ellas. El artículo contextualiza los temas de la sobreexplotación del trabajo y la expropiación social y, de manera sintética, desde la perspectiva histórica de la acumulación capitalista en América Latina, la cuestión del trabajo y la salud. Los artículos incluidos demuestran que las condiciones de salud están íntimamente ligadas a la sobreexplotación de la mano de obra. Indudablemente y no podría ser diferente en nuestro país de capitalismo dependiente, la producción de plusvalía absoluta es mucho más importante, siendo la sobreexplotación una característica estructural.

Palabras clave: Exploración Laboral; Salud; Capitalismo; Revisión.

Introduction

The harshness of the daily and unequal struggle for subsistence in the capitalist mode of production puts us on alert. It's no news that this mode of production is in structural collapse and is bringing with it harmful social consequences. On a global scale, this situation puts a strain on the survival of those who depend on selling their own labor power. Living labor has been reduced to a commodity, unprotected and totally free within the framework of capitalist society.

Between the 1960s and 1970s, the Fordist/Keynesian pattern of accumulation came to an end and fractions of the ruling class began to question the state's responsibility as a mediator of social policies^a.¹ In an attempt to restore profit rates, capitalism incorporated an ideological and political reorganization of domination. The strategy for leveraging accumulation in the neoliberal logic was the adoption of new technologies and monetary liberation/decompartmentalization of markets.² The consequence of this is a strong process of losses for the reproduction of labor, the adoption of multiple forms of precarious work, subcontractors (outsourcing and/or outsourcing), in which low wages prevail. At the same time as high technology is introduced, a greater amount of work is

required, whether physical or intellectual, in the same period of time, intensifying the pace of production. Marx and Engels³ already pointed out this process when commenting on how the capitalist mode of production works.

[...] to the same extent that machinery and the division of labor increase, the amount of work also increases, either by increasing the hours of work, by increasing the work required in a given time, or by speeding up the movement of machines.³⁽⁴⁶⁾

For a firmer understanding of the capitalist mode of production, we highlight Marx's basic definition of capital, which is reasonably well known: capital is first and foremost a historical social relationship between capital and labor in the production process.⁴ This is to say that capital is the product of a particular social and economic formation, that is, of a specific development of the productive forces, as well as of the relationships that are established between human beings in the characteristic production process, resulting in the appearance of capital. Capital only exists as the dominant form in a given society and is therefore not an economic category common to all modes of production. Capital, therefore, is not simply wealth that can be used to produce more wealth, but the result of a historically specific mode of wealth production. For Marx, it is necessary to recognize that the capitalist mode of production can only be understood historically, transforming and becoming more complex, according to its different phases, as its contemporaneity, from the 1980s onwards, is dominated by fictitious capital.⁵ It is also a question of seeking its understanding in what Marx called the process of valorization of capital (the law of value) and its consequences throughout capitalist society, bourgeois society. Marx considers that capitalism is oriented towards the pursuit of the valorization of capital and its accumulation, through the production of surplus value, with the value of labor as the central determination of the social relations of production and the development of the productive forces.⁴

Specifically, when Marx⁴ addresses the issue of work in capitalist society, he points out that big industry, driven by a work process aimed at valorizing capital, has harmful effects on workers' health. This theme can be found in the chapters of Book I of "Capital - The Working Day", "The division of labor and manufacturing" and "Machinery and big industry". In these chapters, Marx cites statistics on health and mortality levels. In this case, Marx seeks to emphasize the relationship between workers' health and the capitalist process of production and not just between health and the industrial process^{b,6,7}

The perversity of this mode of production has clear repercussions on health, with a significant increase in occupational accidents and illnesses,⁸ further aggravating the social issue^{c,9} and imposing counter-reforms which, in Brazil, have the state as their protagonist.

The state "maintains an intrinsic relationship with the logic of capital"¹⁰⁽⁵⁸⁾, always pushing down the minimum wage against the socially produced wealth. In its capitalist nature, the state is not neutral since it creates increasingly degrading conditions for the labor market.

With the discourse of confronting the crisis, the Brazilian government, after the institutional coup of 2016, has been adopting measures that have negatively affected the working class with changes to labor legislation,¹¹ with the freezing of primary public spending through Constitutional Amendment (EC) No. 95/2016,¹² in addition to the counter-reform of Social Security. To give you

an idea, since EC 95, with the transition from historical underfunding to the process of de-funding, the SUS has already lost around R\$22.5 billion (accumulated 2018/19/20).¹³

The economic crisis can be seen in the high unemployment rates, corresponding to 14.1 million unemployed according to data from the 2nd quarter of 2021,¹⁴ so these are people in a situation of social vulnerability.¹⁵ The decline in the economy has been significant in recent years, including negative Gross Domestic Product - GDP, which intensifies the deterioration of working conditions: 2014 (0.5%), 2015 (-3.5%), and 2016 (-3.3%), followed by pitiful rates in 2017 (1.3%), 2018 (1.3%), 2019 (1.1%) and 2020 (-4.5%).¹⁶

Given this turbulent scenario, this article aims to analyze the relationship between the exploitation of the workforce and its impact on Brazilian public health in the light of Marxist literature, through a critical systematic review. To this end, the article is structured in five parts. The first and second parts briefly contextualize the theme of work to be analyzed in the critical systematic review, highlighting key categories for understanding it in Latin America, such as the overexploitation of the workforce and social expropriation, as well as dealing with the historical perspective of capitalist accumulation in Latin America, highlighting the issue of work and health. The third part presents the methodology used for a critical systematic review of the Marxist literature on the exploitation of labor and its effects in the area of health. The fourth part discusses the results of the literature review. The fifth and final parts present a discussion of the articles included in the review, seeking to identify the relationship between the exploitation of labor and health.

The overexploitation of labor and social expropriation

The crisis was dealt with in different ways, not least because "in central capitalism, the axis of accumulation is articulated around relative surplus value; in dependent capitalism, this axis is based on super-exploitation".¹⁷⁽¹⁴³⁾ When reflecting on dependent capitalism in Latin America, highlighting the category of super-exploitation of the workforce, the Marxist Theory of Dependence (MTD) makes a fundamental contribution. The MTD explains the phenomenon of overexploitation as a "negative determination of value contained in the law of value, in which the living corporeality of labor power is subjected to premature wear and tear",¹⁷⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ or even "the replacement of its wear and tear takes place in such a way that the living substance of value is not restored under normal conditions".¹⁷⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ This situation is closely linked to the decrease in its value. Alongside the important category of the overexploitation of the workforce, addressed by the MTD, we can add the intensity of the social expropriation of the social rights of the working class in the world¹⁸ through counter-reforms and permanent fiscal adjustments, which are being felt with great intensity in Brazil today.

For Fontes¹⁹, the "original primary expropriation" that occurred with the masses who owned the land was not restricted to the stage of primitive accumulation, but is also present and intensifying in contemporary capitalism. The contemporary processes of the subjugation of labor to capital that result from the so-called primary expropriation can be called **secondary expropriations**. These expropriations do not concern the loss of ownership of the means of production, but are related to the economic and social processes that make workers more available to the market, creating new forms of accumulation and extraction of more value, such as the commodification of public goods, health and education.

According to Marx, expropriation is one of the bases of the primitive forms of capital, which marks the separation of the worker from his property and the means of carrying out his own work, in which thousands of people were violently "thrown into the labor market as absolutely free proletarians".⁴⁽⁷⁸⁷⁾ Expropriated from their land, entire families were exposed to the cruelty of this new mode of production, and had no choice but to migrate to the cities in search of some possibility of subsistence. The abrupt way in which everything happened left the peasants totally dislocated from their daily lives.

The capitalist mode of production imposed changes, confined the artisans to the same physical space (factories), took advantage of the concentration of several workers from different trades and reorganized (divided) the activities of the production process, in other words, the workers began to perform "continuously only one and always the same operation".⁴⁽⁵¹³⁾ The work was carried out within a given timeframe, simultaneously and in mutual collaboration between the workers. Productive development reached the mechanized system, machinery facilitated the incorporation of "workers with little muscular strength or immature bodily development".⁴⁽⁵⁷⁵⁾ Soon women and children were captured by capital. The machine increased exploitation: "In order for a family to live, it is now four people who have to provide capital not only with labor, but with more labor".⁴⁽⁵⁷⁶⁾ The rhythm of production was completely altered and workers were subjected to the "accelerating speed of machines".⁴⁽⁵⁹⁵⁾ Given the necessary conditions, "industry created the world market, prepared by the discovery of America".³⁽⁴¹⁾

The historical perspective of capitalist accumulation in Latin America, labor and health

Regarding Latin America and its association with the dynamics of capitalist accumulation, it can be said that the starting point is the 16th century, a period in which Latin America was compulsorily integrated into the "dynamics of international capitalism".²⁰⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ The workers' movement leveraged the "development of banking and commercial capital",²⁰⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ thus forging the ideal conditions for the Industrial Revolution. From this revolution onwards, Latin American countries began to occupy the place determined for them in the international division of labor, in other words, "it was from then on that dependency was configured, understood as a relationship of subordination between formally independent nations".²⁰⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ It is known that the colonized countries were the main suppliers of food and raw materials, and this historical determination contributed significantly to the colonizers who had favorable conditions for their own productive advance via technological incorporation, inaugurating a new form of accumulation.

The basis of capital is industry (industrial capital), the genuine source of value and surplus value, the only one that can technically alter social production and manage work processes. After the Second World War, the advance of industrial capital combined with financial capital brought the productive mode into the microelectronic era, known as the technical-scientific revolution. The reorganization of production in the mid-1970s and 1980s took place in a globalized way, with contradictory and unequal phenomena produced by this productive advance. On the one hand, the central countries shifted their production from absolute surplus value to relative surplus value, while the peripheral countries intensified the exploitation of workers combined with lower wages. All this architecture was built and (continues to be) supported by a social class^d "which determines how goods and services are produced and distributed in society".²¹⁽⁴⁰⁾

The globalization of capital forced the Brazilian state to adopt restrictive measures for the reproduction of the workforce, creating apparatuses that would somehow cover urban workers, a key player on the national political scene, within the dynamics of accumulation. Under the domination of industrial capital, this process was characterized by urban acceleration, an increase in the mass of workers, and degrading health and housing conditions. The dictatorship saw a deepening of the social question, the object of intervention in the form of repression and/or assistance. Welfare policy was expanded, bureaucratized and modernized by the state with the sole aim of increasing its power to regulate society, thereby minimizing tensions between classes and legitimizing the regime.²²

With the promulgation of the Magna Carta,²³ Brazilian public policies advanced slowly and unevenly between the federal states, hit by privatizations and dismantling under the pseudonym of **reforms** justified by neoliberal thinking as necessary for the efficiency of the Brazilian State. And finally (and most seriously), over the years, their resources have been expropriated via "budget manipulation mechanisms, which transfer resources from the social security budget to the fiscal budget".²⁴⁽¹⁶⁶⁾

All the rights enshrined in the constitution are the result of political mobilization and the tension of workers in the correlation of forces in the dispute over the resources of the public fund. Health is a fundamental right and the Unified Health System (SUS) is one of the mechanisms for preserving human life. The historical process has brought to light the contradiction between the project for society enshrined in the Federal Constitution of 1988 and the logic of accumulation,

[...] the configuration of universal and redistributive standards of social protection has been strongly stressed: by strategies for extracting super-profits, which include tendencies to contract social and welfare charges, by overcapitalization, with explicit or induced privatization of public utility sectors, which include health, education and welfare; [...].²⁴⁽¹⁵⁵⁾

It can be seen that over the centuries capitalism has gone through various stages and has brought with it a worsening of social inequality between nations, in which it can be seen that peripheral countries, such as those in Latin America, are the hardest hit. Since its inception, the capitalist mode of production has been essentially unequal. The basis of its relations is based on the pursuit of its own valorization, so commodity is the appearance of the concept of capital and the main mean of circulation. Value, on the other hand, is the "essence of this mode of production".²¹⁽⁴⁰⁾ Money is the connector between the process of commodity circulation, as well as assuming the function of the total equivalent of other commodities. The process of commodity exchange between nations, which generally takes place through equivalent value, when it comes to dependent economy countries, suffers losses in unequal exchange in relation to central capitalist countries. This phenomenon is expressed in the deterioration of the terms of trade, interest remittances (public debt services), remittances of profits, royalties, dividends and differential appropriation of income and absolute monopoly income on natural resources.¹⁷ There is no doubt that dependency is structural and directly affects the commercial, financial and technological spheres of Latin American countries.

In view of the historical facts, it can be said that Capital has always dictated the rules and exercised its economic and political control, ensuring the exploitation of those who sell their labor power, in

a mutual and inseparable way producing a number of miserable people, of which black women are the majority.²⁵

The stagnation of Latin American economies is putting a strain on workers' survival. Countries in this region, such as Argentina and Brazil, have adopted restrictive measures to guarantee fundamental rights for the reproduction of the working class. This dynamic has led to an increase in vulnerable and precarious jobs with low wages, as well as high unemployment rates. The instability of access to income has an impact on health, as exemplified by Brazil's return to the hunger map in 2014.

Methodology

This is a critical review of the literature to answer the following question: **What has Marxist literature made available about the exploitation of labor and its relationship with Brazilian health?** The aim is to understand how the discussion between the exploitation of labor in contemporary capitalism and Brazilian health has been approached in Marxist literature.

The review began with a general mapping of the main Marxist and heterodox journals^e that were close to the subject of the study. We selected a total of 22 journals: "Revista Crítica Marxista"; "Cadernos Cemarx"; "Revista Marx e o Marxismo"; "Argumentum"; "Katálysis"; "Revista Serviço Social e Sociedade"; "Revista Ser Social"; "Revista em Pauta"; "Revista de Políticas Públicas"; "Revista Lutas Sociais"; "Revista Serviço Social e Saúde"; "Verinotio Revista on-line de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas"; "Outubro"; "Revista Trabalho, Educação e Saúde"; "Temporalis"; "História e Luta de Classes"; "Terceiro Incluído"; "Germinal Marxismo e Educação em Debate"; "Arma da Crítica"; "Niep-Marx"; "SEP Revista da Sociedade Brasileira de Economia Política"; and "Rebela Revista Brasileira de Estudos Latino-americanos".

Based on the research question, the main keywords were defined: Labor, Exploitation of labor and Health, for an initial exploratory search, retrieving 3.341, 542 and 1.736 publications respectively.

After retrieving the publications for each term/word, a second search was carried out exclusively in journals with a return of publications equal to or greater than 50. In this new phase, there was a drop in the number of journals, leaving a total of 12, as shown in Chart 1. Combinations were used between the terms/keywords articulated with the Boolean operator "AND", in addition to creating another combination with the descriptor: *precariz** (referring to precariousness).

For "Revista Trabalho, Educação e Saúde", a specific combination was created using "AND MARX". This combination was necessary to refine the searches, as the journal has a vast production related to education in the field of health.

The journal "Argumentum" had problems with its website, so it was eliminated from the study.

[See chart 1 in original]

Thus, of the 479 publications found, 189 were excluded because they were repeated articles (72), had no abstract (109), interviews (4), editorials (2) and entire volumes (2), leaving 290 articles. In the next phase, the 290 articles were organized in a spreadsheet for better systematization when reading the titles. We used the following terms/words and/or correlates as inclusion criteria: Work (precarious, outsourced); Health (workers' health); Living conditions in Brazil (income, poverty/misery, social protection, social security, public policies, public system, crisis, neoliberalism/neoliberal). 208 articles were excluded, leaving 82 articles.

To read the abstracts, we constructed textual elements from reading the abstracts of the 82 articles, working with the materiality that the texts presented. The textual elements that appeared were: contemporary Brazilian capitalist sociability (social relations, crisis, neoliberalism/neoliberal); accumulation process (income, social inequality, poverty/misery); work relations (intensification, outsourcing, precariousness); health (workers' health); social protection (social security, social policy, social rights, public policy). After reading this set, another 51 articles were excluded, bringing us to a total of 31 articles that deal with the subject in a broad way.

Once we had these 31 articles, we began a second reading of the titles and abstracts, in which we identified the main textual elements: **labor and health**. The aim of this second reading was to obtain a more significant filter and assertively delimit the articles, which led to the elimination of another 17 articles, leaving 14 articles in the end.

After reading each of the 14 articles, one was eliminated because it did not deal with the subject matter of this review. Thus, 13 articles were included in this review, as shown in Figure 1.

The 13 articles were analyzed using Critical Content Analysis.²⁶ This analysis is associated with the analytical and interpretative framework of historical-dialectical materialism. The reality in question here is that constructed by the material conditions inscribed in a given economic, political and social order. From its dialectical interpretation, it is possible to retrieve the structure and its dynamics, for an understanding of the totality from the analysis of the exploitation of labor, in general, and of living and health conditions, in particular, used in this study.

The critical review of the selected Marxist articles is a challenge, as it ensures an analytical perspective within the Marxist vision, without going into detail about the limits of its various currents.²⁷

[See figure 1 in original]

Results

This review found that of the 13 articles included in the review, there is a 10-year gap between the first and second published article, in which the theme of health only appeared directly in 2011. It was observed that 69.23% of the articles are concentrated between 2011 and 2016. There was an absence of a direct approach to health in 2017, 2018 and 2019, years in which Brazilian workers have been hit hard by setbacks in the field of rights.^{8,28-39}

The following are the summary arguments of the 13 articles included in the review, according to their specifications, focusing on their approaches to labor exploitation, health and the relationships between them (Chart 2).

[See chart 2 in original]

The articles reviewed approach the theme of labor exploitation and its relationship with Brazilian public health in a diverse and complementary way. The approaches are divided into two groups: one that discusses health from a perspective of totality, with its production based on the logic of the social determination of health-disease processes^{f,40} and another with a more specific approach, which discusses the work process^g in its relationship with health.

The objectives of the articles can be found in Table 2, along with other information, in which they are organized in descending chronological order.

Discussion

Theories used for analysis

When it comes to the theories used in the articles, a variant was identified, which can be divided into two groups. The first group, with two studies^{29,39} does not clearly state which theoretical support they use.

The second group, made up of eleven articles, is subdivided into two subgroups: the first subgroup, with three studies, directly presents the use of critical social theory^{32,34} and the critique of political economy.³⁶ The second subgroup, on the other hand, uses the Marxist framework of analysis.^{28,30,31,33,35,37,38}

On the approaches to labor exploitation, health and the relationship between them

Regarding the approaches of the publications, we can identify two blocks of intentions. The first block, made up of five articles^{28,30,37-39}, discusses the transformations in the world of work and their impact on workers' survival conditions. These articles are in line with what Breilh⁴¹ has been developing when:

It was in the 1980s that the 'deconstruction' of social rights and health began, with the advent of the neoliberal state. [...] In Latin America, there was accelerated impoverishment, linked to the devaluation of its capital. In this context, the demolition of all remnants of collective and solidarity protection, as well as social security and state protection, became a strategic necessity, dressed up in the garb of modernization. It was a period of efficiency of power, regression of the law and massive degradation of the quality of life and health.⁴¹⁽¹³⁵⁻¹³⁶⁾

These publications expose some elements such as falling income, dismantling of social protection and/or restriction of rights, weakening of unions and/or dismantling of labor collectives; as the main mechanisms that leverage productivity while putting the maintenance of human life at risk.

The premise is that wages are the equivalent to guaranteeing the reproduction of the working class, but expropriation throughout the socio-historical process does not support this possibility. In the productive sphere, the worker is exposed, the value of their labor power is determined by the time socially necessary for its reproduction, just like a mere commodity.²⁸ However, unlike commodities, the worker is alienated from the use value, i.e., there is no exchange of equivalents between the sale of labor power and wages.

Alves³⁸ draws attention to the adoption of new parameters in the arena of collective bargaining and the extinction of the wage policy in Brazil, starting with the Real Plan in 1994.

Guided by neoliberal logic, this reorganization weakened "the working class in both objective and subjective dimensions, imposing on workers a situation of instability that undermines their process of consciousness with decisive impacts on class solidarity".³⁰⁽²²⁵⁾ This is the loss of the political strength of collectives in the decision-making process, that is, the abandonment of the stance of confronting the overexploitation of labor in favor of capital, in which "most unions adhere to the logic of capital by becoming cooperative with companies and carrying out a unionism of results".³⁰⁽²³⁰⁾

This attitude has the effect of "a significant drop in the real income of salaried workers, against a backdrop of stagnation in the Brazilian economy and rising unemployment".³⁸⁽¹⁹³⁾ In addition to the repercussions on social protection, a means of tackling the social question.

In short, the deepening of social inequalities and the miserability of the reserve army is intensifying. In this context of social risk, workers are unable to access a decent income to maintain their own reproduction, nor do they enjoy quality of life and health. In other words, in this sociability instituted by capital, the worker has lost the possibility of human emancipation, since "the generation of wealth depends on it being exploited and for this it needs the alienated worker".³⁰⁽²²²⁾

In the second block, with 8 articles^{8,29,31-36}, the discussion centered on work-health relations. These publications discussed changes in the production process and their impact on health (referring here to the health of the worker^h).⁴² The theme of exploitation of labor in these studies takes as its starting point the changes in labor relations that occurred between the 1970s and 1980s and up to the present day, and therefore dialogues with what has already been well explained by Antunes:⁴³

Fordism and Taylorism are no longer unique and are mixed with other productive processes (neo-Fordism, neo-Taylorism, post-Fordism) [...]. Toyotism is penetrating, merging with or even replacing the dominant Fordist pattern in various parts of globalized capitalism. We are experiencing transitional forms of production, the consequences of which are also acute in terms of labor rights. These are being deregulated and made more flexible in order to provide capital with the tools it needs to

adapt to its new phase. Historical workers' rights and achievements are being replaced and eliminated from the world of production.^{43(23,24)}

The reorganization of production has forced workers to "absorb a greater volume of work, since the functional staff has shrunk".²⁹⁽⁵⁴²⁾ The excess and insecurity caused by capital is expressed in the suffering of the working class, who suffer from diseases of the musculoskeletal system/connective tissue (Repetitive Strain Injury - RSI/Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorder - WMSD) and mental health.

Lourenço warns:³¹

[...] at the heart of worker exploitation and modern practices of administration/management and work organization, the rates of illness and death at and from work are based less on environments and much more on relationships, which comprise a set of rules and norms that should protect work and the worker. In countries where work is usually more regulated and protected, occupational risks are lower. On the other hand, in countries and places where there is greater lack of protection, the damage to workers' health tends to be much greater.³¹⁽⁴⁵⁵⁾

As Lara³⁶⁽⁸³⁾ alerts us, the "main factors generating occupational accidents and illnesses are related to inadequate salaries and benefits; inappropriate machinery and facilities, especially in production sectors that use outsourcing resources". Illness is the result of a socio-historical process and indicates the social conditions in which people work/produce.⁴

In other words: "the wear and tear on the workforce, together with the new forms of expropriation of surplus labor, form the basis for the overexploitation of the worker and, in this dynamic, their disposal is materialized by the decrease in their productive capacity".³²⁽¹⁸³⁾ And the aggressiveness of capital in the search for surplus value has in suicide a "radicalized expression of the deterioration of working conditions under flexible management".⁸⁽⁴¹⁵⁾

In order to understand other particularities of the deterioration of working conditions in Brazil and Latin America as a whole, Marini²⁰ enlightens us with an important understanding of the logic of subordination in these countries, characterized by the elements that make up the super-exploitation of workers. From this perspective, Marini states:

Well, the three mechanisms identified - the intensification of work, the lengthening of the working day and the expropriation of part of the work needed by the worker to replenish his labor power - configure a mode of production founded exclusively on the greater exploitation of the worker, and not on the development of his productive capacity. [...] Furthermore, it is important to point out that, in all three mechanisms considered, the essential characteristic is given by the fact that the worker is denied the conditions necessary to replace the wear and tear on his labor power: in the first two cases, because he is obliged to spend more labor power than he should normally have, thus causing premature wear and tear; in the last,

because he is deprived of the possibility of even consuming what is strictly indispensable to maintain his labor power in a normal state.²⁰⁽¹⁵⁶⁻¹⁵⁷⁾

The neoliberal offensive has contributed to the disorganization of the working-class collectives, leading to a loss of political strength. In the face of this weakening of the workers, the State has been promoted and has increasingly abandoned its responsibility for social policies. It can be seen that in the academic output discussed here, this fragility of the situation of workers is much debated, highlighting the transformations in the world of work and relating them to contemporary pathologies associated with salaried workers. In turn, these articles included in the review make little progress in discussing the situation of workers in the informal sector (reserve industrial army).

This gap has also been pointed out by Lacaz,⁴⁴ who explained the fact based on the historical process of the construction of the Workers' Health policy, which has its construction process articulated between the public health services and the workers' unions.

In this context, the discussion on the subject of workers' health is approached in this review through two aspects: the first is a pioneering form of analysis, as it discusses the increase in stress in workers on sick leave²⁷ and the second addresses health, more precisely primary care, as a privileged *locus* for building knowledge and rallying the struggle of the working class.³⁵

The relationship between the exploitation of labor and health manifests itself in a determined way and expresses the biopsychosocial conditions of the working class, as pointed out by several articles included in this review. According to Braz,³³ labor and health in this capitalist society are "intimately articulated and in a mutual relationship, to the extent that working conditions directly contribute to maintaining and reproducing the exploited situation and the impairment of health, physical and mental integrity".³³⁽²⁸⁰⁾

Grazia *et al*³⁴ summarize the result of the intensification of work and its impact on workers' health:

[...] the process of intensification of work, which has always been present throughout the history of capitalist production, is now taking on new forms, associated with the complexification of tasks, increasing polyvalence, and above all, as the workforce is pushed to take on for itself what used to be the task of the representatives of capital alone: to seek all ways of eliminating idle time, eliminating costs, improving quality, etc. [...] The result of this new way of serving capital can be seen in the countless statistics and studies by doctors and ergonomists that show very high increases in stress and a huge number of occupational illnesses, as well as damage to personal, family and social life.³⁴⁽¹⁷⁷⁾

Antunes and Praun⁸ warn of the results produced by the unlimited exploitation of workers: "the changes that have taken place in the world of work in recent decades have resulted in the creation of an army of mutilated, injured, physically and mentally ill workers, many of them permanently incapacitated for work".⁸⁽²⁴³⁾

Ferreira and Amaral³² point out that "degrading and exhausting forms of work are used by capital to make its development needs visible in a scenario of profound technological, organizational and

subjective innovations",³²⁽¹⁸³⁾ in which workers identified as unqualified to meet current demands can, given the circumstances, be replaced and discarded.

In this neoliberal logic, the polyvalent worker emerges as a person who, imposingly, performs various functions/activities in order to "collaborate" with capital. In a dynamic in which "people tend to seek greater production, overloading themselves".²⁹⁽⁵⁴²⁾ The extraction of surplus value is rooted in suffering, the result of "psychological pressure aimed at increasing productivity".⁸⁽⁴¹¹⁾ This whole mechanism has raised "the statistics on the increase in stress, depression and mental exhaustion, as well as the intensification of cases of RSI and other occupational illnesses".³⁴⁽¹⁷³⁾ Lara³⁶ pointed to this scenario of political and economic instability as the generator of insecurity and physical and mental discomfort for workers.

In conjunction with the neoliberal State, actions/legislation aimed at guaranteeing workers' health and protection, both inside and outside companies, are being undone. Capital tries to deny the number of sick workers by underreporting accidents and illnesses at work.³¹ The culture of fatality is created and/or the argument that blames the worker rather than the production system is adopted. All the maneuvers used serve only one purpose: to maintain the overexploitation of the worker. In short, flexible accumulation "produces the moral, ethical, political, physical and psychological violence of the worker".³²⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

Finally, it should be pointed out that the MTD, which inspires Ferreira and Amaral's argument³², has revealed the perversity of the overexploitation of labor, by exposing the impossibility of replacing the bodily wear and tear suffered by the living workforce to the detriment of this system which, by expropriating surplus labor, produces the atrophy of the human workforce.¹⁷

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to present a panoramic review of the particularities of the scientific production of Marxist literature, in which the theme of the exploitation of labor and its relationship with Brazilian public health was approached partly through the lens of totality and partly through the logic of particularity. This behavior presented by the publications analyzed raises questions as to why this dynamic worked much more as a complement between studies than as a point of tension.

It is worth mentioning that the health of the reserve industrial army was left out of the academic production analyzed in this review, particularly informal labor. This shows a mismatch between the materiality experienced by a significant part of the Brazilian population and what has been produced in the literature.

Another important point worth highlighting is that few studies have presented alternatives that contribute to the organization/mobilization of workers as a whole towards tension between classes (and perhaps overcoming the current order).

By identifying the gaps left by the studies, we can suggest that future Marxist productions can make inroads into the organization of categories of workers in the struggle for life.

Finally, it can be said that the articles included in this review generally point out that health conditions are closely linked to the overexploitation of the workforce. Undoubtedly, and it couldn't

be different in our country of dependent capitalism, the production of absolute surplus value is much more important, and overexploitation is a structural characteristic.

Authorial contribution

CLSR analyzed and interpreted the data and revised the entire text. AM analyzed and interpreted the data and revised the entire text.

^a For Boschetti, social policies should be considered as: "civilizing achievements that were not and are not capable of emancipating humanity from the capitalist mode of production, but they did establish systems of rights and duties that, combined with the institution of more progressive taxation and the expansion of public funds, altered the pattern of inequality between social classes".¹⁽²⁵⁾

^b For an approach to the discussion of work in contemporary times, the fruitful contribution of Moishe Postone,⁶ and the feminist Marxist approach of Kathi Weeks, are worth reading.⁷

^c Iamamoto argues that: "The set of expressions of the inequalities of mature capitalist society, which have a common root: social production is increasingly collective, work becomes more broadly social, while the appropriation of its fruits remains private, monopolized by a part of society".⁹⁽²⁷⁾

^d "The bourgeoisie increasingly suppresses the dispersion of the means of production, property and population. It agglomerated populations, centralized the means of production and concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of these transformations was political centralization".³⁽⁴⁴⁾

^e While we are aware that heterodox journals publish articles based on other theoretical conceptions, we have chosen to include those that discuss the issue addressed here, as we believe they are relevant to this review (authors' note).

^f **It is important to mention the meaning of the idea of the health-disease process:** "[...] the health-disease process is determined by how wealth is produced, how it is distributed and the relationships that arise from it [...]".⁴⁰⁽²³⁾

^g "The simple moments of the work process are, firstly, the activity oriented towards an end, or the work itself; secondly, its object and; thirdly, its means. [...] What differentiates economic epochs is not 'what' is produced, but 'how', 'with what means of labor'. These not only provide a measure of the degree of development of labor power, but also indicate the social conditions in which work is done".⁴⁽³²⁸⁻³²⁹⁾

^h Lacaz explains: "Thus, in order to understand the emergence of the Workers' Health field, as a theoretical practice (generation of knowledge) and a political-ideological practice (overcoming power relations and raising workers' awareness), it is necessary to stress that it emerges concomitantly with the maturation of the industrialization process and the form it takes in Latin America in the 1970s, with the emergence of an urban industrial working class".⁴²⁽⁷⁶³⁾

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