

Multiple faces of precarious work: the Brazilian experience.

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Abstract

To discuss precarious work in capitalism, it is important to refer back to wage basis employment and proletarianisation from 19th century on, as a defining moment connected to work relations marked by workforce exploitation, intense working hours, absence of legal rights, etc. The 20th century was characterized by a series of gains to workers, related to the social reproduction, what meant limits to exploitation and, in some countries, access to a better standard of living and wellbeing. Changes occurred in the end of 20th century, including new work technologies, greater Capital and Labour mobility, the creation of more flexible working conditions in terms of contracts and working hours, posed again into the agenda the precariousness of work, and, beyond that, the precariousness of the social life, given that instability became inherent to social relations. In this paper, we will discuss precariousness, turning the attention to selected economic sectors that were affected by recent economic changes in Brazil, a country characterized by a huge social inequality and where welfare State was never fully accomplished, favouring only privileged employees from dynamic sector of the economy. While developed countries from the Second World War to the mid-1970s experienced a period of development of social inclusion policies resulting in poverty reduction, fairer income distribution, better standards of life and work, in Brazil welfare policies were much less developed, not benefiting (or favouring in a much lower level) the working class or other less favoured strata of population. Considering that, we are going to investigate the Brazilian case, trying to understand how precarious work has been a continuum in the history of a huge range of Brazilian workers, even if, at the same time, there has been economic sectors in which workers have experienced conditions of work similar to those found in developed countries. Based on studies carried out within our research group, “Work and Social Mobility in Brazil”, we will present and explore data from three Brazilian economic sectors: 1) services (including bank sector, software and call centre industry); 2) clothing industry; and 3) automobile sector. The paper is divided in four sections as follows: firstly, we introduce the concept of precariousness and analyse it in the light of the Brazilian context; secondly, we discuss changes in capitalist system including Capital and Labour mobility and its impact on peripheral countries; thirdly, we present the data from the three selected sectors above pointed out; and fourthly, we present our conclusions.

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1. Considerations about the concept of precarious work and precarization of work and employment

The history of the regularly paid work and its social meaning does not show an only and linear path. Its roots are in a transition from a society based on tradition and workers' tutorage and coercion, assured by the state and by craftsmen associations, to a society governed by principles of liberal governability, roughly initiated in the end of the XVIII century, where the contract and the freedom of entrepreneurship play a major role. If nowadays being a wage worker may ensure a condition with some social protection, in the beginning this condition was marked by traces of uncertainty, indignity and poverty. In traditional pre-industrial revolution societies, wage labour was the mark which identified the vulnerable ones, those who were nothing, that is, they were not linked to any craftsmen community nor tutorage relation and, for owning nothing to trade, they had to sell their only possession: their arms and legs strength (Castel, 2012).

According to Castel, in his study on conditions for social cohesion, with the mass poverty through the centuries, the wage labour seems to be linked to the vulnerabilization process of lower social classes, "the issue about the place where most dissocialized fringes of workers may occupy in the industrial society" (2012:31). In other words,

the wage condition might not correspond to the totality of the poverty situations (...) but the wage resource, partial or total, almost always points to a degradation, even in relation to already poverty-stricken situations: the tenant, who has to rent part of his time to a richer peasant or weave to a merchant of the town, the broke artisan who has to work to another artisan or to a merchant, the comrade who cannot become a master and remains wage worker for the rest of his life... (Castel, 2012, p. 148).

Understanding the wage condition is analysing the transition from a fragmented, miserable and despised condition to another one which shows up as desired, for

promoting the access to guaranties and social rights. This reframing has the creation of the Welfare State as a turning point. It emerges as an answer to the misfortunes and setbacks brought about by the liberalism in the end of the XVIII century, marked by the contract and the freedom of undertaking, which replaced the tutoring and coercion exercised by the absolutist state and by corporations. Such changes brought along new challenges, as highlighted by Castel (2012, p. 44/45): “under the contract system, it [the wage condition] develops, although the worker condition paradoxically becomes fragile while it frees itself. Then, it is found that the freedom without any protection can lead to the worst servitude: the servitude of the need.” (p. 44/45)

Therefore, the advantages of the individualism and the freedom of buying and selling the work force, which very much favoured the emerging industry, affected the lower work classes negatively, since they lost their linkages, their mechanisms of protection and social recognition. The Welfare State is created in order to eliminate part of the risks of this new social frame, “building solid guaranty systems around the labour relation” (Castel, 2012, p. 45).

Inasmuch as the history of the wage labour is associated to the vulnerability and to social degradation from its very beginning, a first conclusion to be drawn from our initial reflections is that there is an association between these terms. Moreover, if we consider that the word precarious indicates the quality of which is fragile, unsafe, delicate, we can conclude that the wage condition begins in a fragile, unsafe, precarious and therefore vulnerable condition. Thus, the wage labour and the precariousness have a long history in common, despite their differences concerning vocabulary origin and social use. It is possible to say that the social construction of the concept of precarious (and its use) or the expression precarious employment possesses an identifiable temporal demarcation.

Quinlan (2012) investigated if the term ‘precarious employment’ had been used in any preceding historical period to refer to some particular kind of work or labour market and, in this case, which lessons could be learned for the contemporaneous debate. Two data sources were consulted: 1) a digital archive of the British House of Commons, covering the period from 1800 to 1940; 2) a digital archive of the National Library of Australia, whose content consisted of newspapers of several parts of that country.

He identified two ways of using the term precarious employment: one referred to particular categories of labour associated to terms such as casual, temporary or of seasonal nature, with low pay and irregular working hours; the other referred to particular conditions of the labour market in specific regions. The first way of using showed to be predominant, specially the following categories: dockworkers, construction labourers, workers in the agricultural sector and 'temporary' workers in the public sector, besides workers under fixed, but intermittent conditions of employment, like sailors and self-employed subcontract workers, including fishermen, women who work in homes and family groups or children employed in the textile industry.

In the House of Commons documents, it was verified that the term precarious was used regularly from the beginning of the XIX century to the 1930's. The research in Australian newspapers showed the term precarious employment being used 125 times from the year 1834 to 1935 to describe the condition of employment insecurity during economic recession periods or specific situations where there was oversupply of manpower. Accordingly, the historic moment preceding the Great Depression is highlighted as a period when insecure employment was the norm in those countries, the labour unions possessed a limited success negotiating for stable work and the governments did little to counterbalance the effects of the recession and the economic depression.

In the post-world war II period, the economic recovery in the major countries involved, as well as a better organization of workers , changed the situation, as Quilan highlights,

It was no accident that disappearance of the term 'precarious employment' coincided with the growth of organised labour and collective bargaining, as well as the emergence of welfare states providing minimum labour standards laws, unemployment insurance, age pensions, state-funded education and the like. (...) It is not coincidental that references to precarious employment all but disappeared from public debate during the long post-war boom. (Quinlan, 2012)

Thus, the use of the term precarious employment has two moments to be highlighted, especially when it comes to its use in developed countries: the period preceding the 1940s and the period that follows de 1970s. In the first period, the Great Depression stands out. According to Kalleberg (2009), it was when most of the jobs in

the United States were precarious, unstable and the social security benefits, such as retirement and insurances against work accidents practically did not exist.

The second moment is marked by the so-called neoliberal globalization characterized by the intensification of the world economic integration, increasing competitiveness, utilization of new work technologies, transference of part of the industrial activity to low-wage countries via outsourcing and subcontracting, as well as increasing use of immigrant labour (Kalleberg, 2009).

There is a difference of almost three decades between the two periods (1945 to 1970), when the income of a great number of people increased, leading to a generalized improvement in the employment standard to the working class, which includes pay raise and social benefits (among which the creation of social security mechanisms) – which contributed to social inequality decrease – and made it possible to workers to build a more regular and satisfactory career narrative (Kalleberg, 2009). Then, it may make sense to speak about re-emergence of the concept of precarious employment in the period post-1970, having the Welfare State in the developed countries as a basis.

After introducing the historic peculiarities of this concept, it is important to reflect on its constant aspects¹. Thus, a first definition of precarious employment comes from Kalleberg (2009, p. 2), who defines it as “employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker”.

Although very useful, it is a broad definition which involves a subjective dimension, a “state of being”, as pointed by Wilson and Ebert (2013). In spite of recognizing the importance of Kalleberg’s definition to the qualitative study on the condition of precariousness, Wilson and Ebert (2013) opted for a less subjective structure, accepting an “industrial relations model of precariousness that anchors insecurity in the labour contract and labour market conditions” (p. 266). In addition to these two dimensions, the authors also consider a third one, which shows great relevance: the political dimension. According to them, the productive restructuring and the search for more flexible models of work contributed to decreasing the worker politicisation, which ultimately involves their capacity (individual and collective) of contestation and coping. More specifically, politicisation involves the existence of a public contesting speech concerning norms and values related to work and the work market.

From a Social Science perspective, the restructuring involved in managerialism, both in the public and private sectors, highlights worrying trends about the politics of employment relations and labour market conditions.(...) Since managerial control minimises, removes or redefines normative challenges, it inevitably depoliticises work in profound ways. (...) Individual workers and their collective organisations – most obviously unions – have fewer resources to contest work and resist. The effect is to make managerial decisions appear as global forces, beyond the power of local communities and collectives to address. (Wilson & Ebert, 2013, p. 266-267)

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To summarize these three dimensions of precariousness, the authors present the table below:

Table I. The social structures of a precarious work-society.

Layers of precarity	Types and forms	Examples featured in this issue
Precarious employment relations (categories of labour)	Casual work; short-term contracts; seasonal; temporary work	Casual retail work; insecure care employment; migrants on 457 visas
Precarious labour market and industry conditions	Recessed labour market conditions; industries structured by high levels of casual, seasonal and temporary labour; strategic and managerial use of precarious work; policy gaps and regulative deficiencies; rationalisation of transaction costs	Creative work and the 'creative industry'; precarious professionals; unregulated supply chain modes of work/ contacts and networks; exploitation of 'dependencies'
Precarious social and political relations	Loss of agency/defective coping strategies; blocks on social mobility; life-course disruptions; mobilisation of norms of precarity; 'co-institutions' of precarity; depoliticisation of work	Norms of 'self-exploitation'; unfulfilled expectations; promotion of personal flexibility as dynamic and creative or as 'opportunity'; ethnic networks as sources of exploitation; hostility to political parties and politics; de-unionisation

Source: Wilson & Ebert, 2013, p. 266

The French debate adds the increasing poverty and inequality, the segmentation of the work and the markets and especially the loss of the rights represented by access to social benefits. The loss of social rights linked to the wage relation would lead to a

¹ See Kalleber (2009) for a discussion on the peculiarities of the contemporaneous concept of precarization.

dismantling of what Castel (2012) called wage society, which characterized the period 1945-1970. With this, the need for constructing new social solidarity does not involve returning to a situation which is prior to the current phase of the capitalist development, but a rethinking of social rights so that they become universal and beyond the employment relations, since social protection should be seen as a right (Paugan, 2000; Castel, 2013; Cingolani, 2005). This process affects all the society and it is not limited to employment, since long term unemployment may bring consequences to familiar and social life in general. It is precarization of social life. Therefore, social protection is a right.

Druck (2011), who investigated the precarization of work in Brazil, also sticks to a more objective dimension of analysis. Moreover, the author opted to work with the term social precarization of work (instead of precarization of work), which she defines as

an economic, social and political process where the flexibility and modern precarization of work become institutionalized, which renews the historical and structural precarization of work in Brazil, now justified by the need to adapting to modern global times [...] The content of this (new) precarization lies in the instability, insecurity, adaptability and fragmentation of once established groups of workers and as well as in emptying the social content of work. This condition has become central and hegemonic, opposing other forms of work and hard-won social rights, which remain and still resist in Brazil. (Druck, 2011, p. 42)

Therefore, as for Druck, the new precarization is associated to a phase of the flexible capitalism. Thus, precarization should be understood as a domination strategy fundamentally associated to the demands of this capitalism. As such, it involves the use of force – once new and uncertain conditions of work are imposed to those who are constantly threatened by current structural unemployment in the country, and also by the use of consensus even among workers, when they start to believe changes are inevitable and the facts and phenomena associated to the current productive system are natural.

Leite (2009) emphasizes that precarization is not a one-way path. The author highlights that despite the strong historical disruption of the Brazilian work market and also the recent work changes accompanied by uncertainties, new forms of resistance have been forged. New identities have also been forged, independently of the fact that

the new generation has not been through the experience that marked that organization process in the XX century.

It is important to add that in the Brazilian case, the process of losing social rights related or not to work, has not advanced. This does not mean it is not contested by the so-called “market” forces. Changes in the outsourcing law, harder labour inspections, extension of social rights to categories which were not included, such as housemaids, are positive indicators that precarization is not an inexorable fact. Accordingly, the term precarization process is more suitable than precarization explain the loss of rights. Considering the existence of new occupations resulting from new productive processes and also new categories of workers, we can refer to an intrinsic precariouness present in the subordination relation of work to capital, but not necessarily precarization.

2. Studies on the Brazilian experience

A historical contextualization is needed to discuss the precarization of work in Brazil. In Brazilian history, regulated work has hardly ever reached more than 50% of workers, that is, a little more than half of Brazilian workers have counted on formal contracts, regulated workdays and social rights linked to their contracts, such as paid rest, access to health insurance or social security and pension funds. In the 1990s, with neoliberal economic restructuring, markets open to imported products and an attempt to deregulating the work market, the number of workers in the so-called informal sector almost reached 70%. This resulted from the closure of factories which lost competitiveness, denationalization of sectors such as auto parts and the reorganization of industrial plants, privatization of public companies, besides the processes of technological and organizational innovation, which reduced the number of employed workers. The labour unions weakened and a single speech seemed to triumph: the State should ensure the enabling environment to private investments, abstaining from intervention.

Development policies from the previous period were dismantled and several states started to compete for investments, offering more and more taxes exemptions. The cost of work force was considered the great villain in the loss of competitiveness of

the Brazilian industry and several attempts were made to deregulate work relations and make them more flexible, systematically attacking the “Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho”, the Brazilian set of laws and regulations of work, which has been governing the issue since the 1940s.

Among those attempts, the outsourcing had the most success. Although it is still in process of regulation, outsourcing has become a reality from new enterprise configurations of that period, as a focused organizational method. This fact had implications in corporate networks, where the search for lower costs made it possible the deregulation of work contracts, which were replaced by new alternatives. For instance, self-employed professionals are hired as a company or via work cooperatives, employees are replaced by interns, besides the resource of hiring small businesses to produce components or substitute for parts of the production process.

Although there has not been loss of formal rights through changes in law – on the contrary, other rights have been aggregated – high unemployment rates and informality worked as precarization elements indeed. Fiscal adjustment policies and inflation control added to this context, contributed to a fall in the industrial growth and to the weakening of the GDP of the period.

However, from 2003, in a context of questioning neoliberal policies worldwide and political changes in Brazil with the Workers Party in power, the situation has started to change. Despite the so-called macro-economic bases have remained (restrictive fiscal and monetary policies, fiscal surplus goals, liberalization of financial markets and free exchange rate), the State has resumed a pro-active role in the development issue, investing in big infra-structure projects, strongly encouraging domestic consumption, recovering the minimum wage's purchasing power significantly, and broadening social policies of supplementary income and social inclusion. As a result, formal jobs increased significantly, reaching 60%, at the same time in which unemployment decreased to 5%, one of the lowest rates in ten years (2003-2013). Economic growth was resumed, in spite of the international crisis in 2008-2009.

These positive data do not mask the work changes in the period, when considered in globalized capitalism logic. These changes allow us to discuss not only the precarization, but also the intrinsic precariousness in capitalism, which shows in the

new occupations and reconfigure the old ones, resuming old procedures alongside others considered modern. We can present some summarized situations to illustrate.

2.1. Service sector workers: the employment in banks and call-centres sector

Bank employees constitute an important category in terms of formal workers in Brazil. In 2009, this category had 462,164 workers, according to Dieese (2011). While the number of formal workers in this sector has been increasing since 2001 (Dieese, 2012), it is still a small progress if we compare it to the period prior to the restructuring in the 1990s.

The 1990s was a period of intense changes to the bank sector, marked by fusions, acquisitions and privatizations of public banks; work intensification; expressive extinction of formal jobs, outsourcing and deterioration of wage standards; and, at last, by recovery of profits in banking companies. The crises in the banks Nacional and Econômico in the mid-1990s serve as a symbolic milestone and provided the basis for the introduction of organizational models and more flexible management practices.

As a result of these changes, there was, in first place, a great fall in the number of bank workers. From 1989 to 1996, we have a reduction of approximately 300,000 jobs: the number of workers in banks fell from a little more than 800,000 to about 500,000. This number kept on falling until it reached 393,140 in 2001 (Sindicato dos Bancários e Financiários de São Paulo, Osasco e região, 2007). This fall was accompanied by a wage freeze, whose impacts for the workers were aggravated by the inflation.

Outsourcing, temporary contracts and the contracting of interns were some of the resources used by banks in the 1990s as an alternative to reduce their number of employees. It is important to mention that the wages and rights in contracts for these professional categories are inferior when compared to bank workers. Due to this process, bank jobs in Brazil have had losses, not only concerning wages, but also concerning social recognition (Martins, 2011). Moreover, bank workers have suffered with intensification of work, which has impacted negatively on their well-being and physical and mental health, phenomenon broadly describe in the literature. With all this, Jinkings (2002) concludes that in Brazil, there has been a real “precarization of

employment and wage, deregulation of working conditions and loss of social rights for the vast majority of workers” (Jinkings, 2002, p. 132).

The analysis of the call-centre operators’ case reveals important peculiarities from the precarization process point of view. This category is one of the biggest categories of formalized workers in Brazil, with about 510,000 people, who can be divided in two kinds of employees. The first one consists of workers with high-school education who work on computers as “attendants” in phone calls charging customers and selling bank, credit or telephony services, in short, an infinity of outsourced services, with standards for speech, voice, average time of call and control of emotions. The other kind refers to call-centres specialized in technical assistance (after-sales) with more qualified employees, who speak several languages and are formally linked to big companies of information technology, which work 24 hours a day, usually in three shifts of workers. These latest professionals are better paid, but also face intensification of work load and variation of working hours per shift, which compromises their personal lives organization, like the others.

A major characteristic of a call-centre is its great turnover of staff, since they cannot stand such intense work and the companies’ established and required goals. With overlapping forms of control (including the company which buys the services) and a system of goals to be reached, the employee is kept under permanent stress at work.

This is a typical example of precarious work, but not very precarious employment. These companies are generally big and international, providing services to banks, telephony companies and several others. They keep formal contracts, which include fringe benefits to attract and keep staff, such as payment of school fees and several others within an almost “Fordist” model. They employ a population of average schooling, who used to be hired by banks, trading and even domestic employment. In the case of former housemaids, we can see that call-centre work gives them more status, but it brings along a high emotional cost due to conditions already mentioned above.

2.2 Garment industry workers

The textile and garment industry was one of the most affected by trade opening in the 1990s and had to restructure itself in order to stay in the market. However, it affected mainly the big companies. This sector is strongly marked by intensive work, in

spite of technological innovations. It happens because the so-called fashion industry is permanently changing, demanding details in its production, which prevents human work from being replaced. It is one of the most globalized industries and big store chains and clothing brands of the sector make global contracts with thousands of suppliers all around the world, which manufacture the whole products or parts of it. It happens in cheap labour countries mainly located in South-eastern Asia, China, Middle East, Central and South America and even in big cities in developed countries, where illegal immigrant labour is hired by sweatshops, which are widespread and thriving (Lima, 2010).

In Brazil, some strategies have been used by companies to overcome international competition, with consequences to workers. Among them, we can initially highlight the relocation of textile, clothing and shoes factories from the South and Southwest regions to the Northeast. Although they are still concentrated in the first two regions, it meant a spatial redistribution of production to the Northeast, a region with cheaper labour cost, which is today one of the major regions concerning textile production and shoes export. The textile industry in São Paulo State represents 42,7% of the sector industrial production and 39% of all people employed in the whole country. The production is still characterized by regional concentrations such as the metropolitan regions of São Paulo and Campinas – clothing and textile segment; Vale do Itajaí/Santa Catarina State – textile and clothing; Fortaleza/Ceará State – cotton sector; South of Minas Gerais State – knitting; Region of Nova Friburgo/Rio de Janeiro State – underwear and lingerie (In: <http://www.sebrae.com.br/setor/textil-e-confeccoes/sector/mercado/147-3-principais-regioes-produtoras-de-texteis-no-pais/BIA_1473>. Accessed on 03/03/2014).

It is important to still add the existence of largely informal productive clusters with increasing weight in the national production, like Caruaru-Santa Cruz do Capibaribe – Toritama, in Pernambuco State, Aparecida de Goiânia in Goiás, Cianorte in Paraná and others all around the country. In all these clusters, the main characteristics are the high level of informal employment and the presence of family businesses and sweatshops. In São Paulo city, there are an increasing number of sweatshops with illegal Latin-American workers. Bolivians, Peruvians and Paraguayans are kept in semi-slavery working conditions by these businesses' owners, who are frequently their own

countrymen and entice workers to the city. A number of chain stores, such as Zara and C&A, among others, have already been fined by hiring these workshops. The companies have claimed that they do not hire such workshops directly, they state that they hire legalized suppliers, which subcontract these kinds of informal businesses.

The also globalized shoes industry, concentrated in São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul States until the 1990s, went through a relocation process, transferring part of its production to the Northeastern states of the country. Ceará, Paraíba and Bahia became important production and exports centers, being respectively the third, fourth and fifth largest exporters in Brazil (Lima, 2011). Firstly, this relocation was accompanied by outsourcing experiences with workers' cooperatives controlled by themselves and, in some cases, by state policies. Those policies were questioned by the "Ministério Público do Trabalho", the cooperatives were closed and the workers were hired by the companies. Those factories in the Northeast are located in cities without any industrial tradition where there is little organized labour, which turns out to be attractive in terms of low cost, besides large tax incentives by the states' governments, which offer tax exemption, infrastructure etc.

In this case, we do not notice a precarization process, but something similar – with caveats – to the creation of new occupations like the call-centres (which also are growing in the Northeast). The activity did not previously exist and is generally formalized. Precarious in its origin in terms of forms of production organization, but it has not gone through a precarization process, since it did not exist previously.

2.3 Automotive Industry Workers

The Brazilian automotive industry can be analyzed in two stages: The first, in the 1950s, with the establishment of the first factories in the country, mostly concentrated in the ABC region, metropolitan region of São Paulo, and the second from 1990 with the opening and the entry of new firms in the domestic market. This new period witnessed a relative deconcentration of new units, either within the State of São Paulo, or in other states such as Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Bahia and Pernambuco. Currently, the industry is composed of 26 automakers and agricultural machinery companies, 50 % concentrated in the State of São Paulo.

The industry was affected by a large industrial restructuring in the 1990s with job losses and wage cuts, with new forms of production and work organization. The automakers industry is a paradigmatic case of transformations especially because of its reduction in size and in number of employees (followed by an increasing productivity) and also because of the reticular character of production, involving concentration on the core product and outsourcing on the rest.

The precarization in this case can be seen by the reduction of jobs, greater work intensification, but this requires in-depth studies about their implications for workers who remain in the companies. Studies by Rodrigues (2002) at Mercedes Benz of Brazil show a great stability of workers in the company, as well as the recruitment of their children and other relatives, which complicates the discussion of the concept of precariouness.

It is noteworthy that, in the new political context of the 2000s, there was a recovery in employment in the sector, albeit with lower wages and the implementation of outsourced forms of production. Since 2003, employment growth in the sector has remained. Concerning wages, there have not been significant losses, but new forms of production and its territorial distribution have resulted in lower workers' organization.

ANFAVEA data in 2009 estimated at 109,043 the number of direct workers and 1.3 million the workers indirectly employed in the industry. The sector represents about 19.8 % of the manufacturing GDP and more than 5 % of the total GDP of the country . Noteworthy is the increased productivity, whose average production went from 7.8 vehicles per year per worker in 1990 to 29.2 in 2009. In 1980, 133.6 thousand workers were employed by the sector, in 2003, the number was reduced to 79 thousand workers (In: <http://desmanchanoar.wordpress.com/2012/09/04/a-crise-da-industria-e-as-demissoes-na-gm-precariozacao-inovacao-e-investimentos-a-servico-da-concorrencia-imperialista/>. Accessed on: 03.03.2014), and these jobs were to some extent recovered. In 2013, there were 131.7 thousand employees (In: <http://economia.ig.com.br/empresas/industria/2013-03-30/emprego-cresce-no-setor-automotivo.html> Accessed on 03 / 03 /2014).

Conclusions

The data presented in the last sections allow us to better discuss the concept of precariousness and precarization in the Brazilian context. Without denying the precariousness or precarization in relations between labour and capital, that are inherent in the capitalist pursuit of lower costs and higher profits, we seek to indicate peculiarities, nuances and internal tensions to the precarization process, in order to enrich this discussion in the light of practical experiences drawn from the Brazilian context.

We seek to argue that precarization can be understood as a process, although it cannot be considered as unidirectional or absolute phenomenon. New occupations may be accompanied by important contractual rights, which do not make them less precarious in terms of work activity and its conditions. Outsourcing and other processes may also be accompanied by access to rights that make them also less precarious.

Furthermore, if on the one hand, the loss of rights, flexibility and deregulation are a trend resulting from new forms of production and organization of capital, at the same time they are accompanied by movements against this situation that involves the relationship of forces between classes and social groups in different countries. In other words, the reduction of costs and the loss of strength of organized labor in recent decades have been accompanied by various forms of resistance that manifest differently in different countries. This reaffirms the understanding that, with the workforce being a 'factor of production' which thinks and resists, its subordination is not a simple task which can be "solved " easily or quickly .

In terms of coping with the precarization process, we believe that the return of forms of work organization and regulation of the Fordist period, though they have fostered substantial gains in quality of life for workers, should be viewed with some caution when we think of their meaning for the worker and their effectiveness in different national contexts. New forms of solidarity can be built and have been tried, not necessarily linked to the employment contract, but to the so called minimum income of insertion. In Brazil, they have been positive, even in the transition of the job search and its achievement. Furthermore, this constant struggle for rights is part of the social

dynamics and the relationship between social classes and within this we can establish trends that are neither fixed nor inexorable.

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