

The Resistance Strategies of Telemarketing Operators against the Offensives of Capital

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Abstract: This article reflects on the forms of consciousness, organization and resistance of workers in a context of flexibilization of labor relations, fragmentation of the working class and sectorialization of the union movement, in light of studies of contemporary changes in the world of labor. It revives part of the author's doctoral thesis, presenting results of a study about a strike by telemarketing operators at a private telecommunications company that took place in the city of Fortaleza in 2007, motivated by low salaries and precarious working conditions for young out-sourced workers. The observation of the protests and mobilizations, as well as interviews, revealed the perceptions, motivations and perspectives of the demonstrators, indicating the meanings of the movement that marked the history of these "info-proletariat", which was more striking for the unprecedented nature of their political struggle against big capital than because of the conquest of effective rights.

Keywords: Telemarketing operators. Resistance. Strike.

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Introduction

Traditionally, the class struggle, as Postone (2003, p. 10-16) affirms, has remained as a “critique of capitalism from the standpoint of labor” instead of advancing towards a “critique of labor in capitalism”. From this perspective, the distribution of income within capitalist society is questioned, leaving aside the possibility for the emancipation of the real subjects of production and the negation of alienated labor. The manifestations of the struggle between workers and employers over questions related to salaries and the length of the work shift, for example, do not break with the structure of the capitalist system, but are intrinsic to its dynamic. Nevertheless, “the analysis of capitalism as a contradictory society seeks to indicate that the possibilities for critical distance and heterogeneity are generated socially from within the framework of capitalism itself” (POSTONE, 2003, p. 38). It is in the historic context of the social relations of capitalist production that is formed not only the awareness that affirms or perpetuates the existing order, but also a critical awareness and a position that is counter to this context.

This article reflects on the forms of consciousness and organization of workers, as well as their resistance strategies against the objective determinations of capital in the contemporary scenario, marked by the flexibilization of labor relations, the fragmentation of the working class and the sectorialization of the union movement. To do so, it examines a strike by telemarketing operators at one of Brazil’s largest communications companies, and the largest in the state of Ceará – which in this article is called the T-Com Company, and are contracted by the largest contact center company in Latin America, which will be called here the X-Subcon Company¹. That strike, unprecedented in the history of these subcontracted workers, was a crucial moment for the development of my doctoral research², the field work for which included various steps and methodological procedures³, although this article is limited to presenting the results of the qualitative study conducted during the strike movement.

1 The research subjects and methodological procedures

Upon learning about the strike of telemarketing operators at the company – where I had worked as an operator and therefore gained understanding of the reality of these workers – I was surprised to hear about the initiative to stage a work stoppage, given that in recent years there has been a growing submission by youth to the demands of the labor market, who fear unemployment or not being able to secure their first job. In fact, the strike surprised everyone, no one expected any “rebellious” action from those who usually always speak in the name of the company for which they work.

During the movement, in addition to observation and systematic registration of the events and situations experienced by the demonstrators – by means of annotations in a field notebook, photographs and videos – I interviewed seven people with different forms of involvement in the strike, to learn their perceptions, motivations and perspectives, given the qualitative nature of this study. Identified here by fictitious initials, they include: an organizer from the national union confederation, the Central Única dos Trabalhadores [Single Workers Center] (CUT), who has more than 20 years of participation in workers struggles; a telemarketing operator who assumed a leadership role during the strike, although she had no previous experience as an organizer; the president and one of the founders of the Telemarketing Workers Union (Sinratel); and four other operators (three women and one man), all with a minimum of two years of experience at this call center.

The statements of those interviewed were of different lengths, influenced by the time that they had available and the moment when they were encountered: during breaks or in the heat of the demonstrations. The topics considered included: their professional trajectory and their experience as militants; the reasons for participating in the movement; and the main demands, difficulties and meanings of the strike. Nevertheless, in a type of open and spontaneous interview, the subjects spoke as they wished, without a concern for the order of the questions. In an effort to systematize the narratives, six themes were identified, which will be presented in the next item.

In the universe of the call center studied, the working conditions are a concrete expression of the inhuman logic of capital. Factors such as accelerated work pace, psychological pressure, moral abuse and health risks are common in the telemarketing workers’ environment.

It should be emphasized that Resolution 196/96, which regulates the studies conducted with human beings, foresees situations in which it is impossible to secure free and informed consent from the participants, but requires that the reasons be justified. In the case of this study, due to the nature of the social fact investigated – a strike of workers in the private sector – and the urgency with which information was collected in the field work, the researcher was not able to conduct a prior consultation with the Ethics and Research Committee, because the strike could not have been foreseen and we did not know who would be interviewed. It was a public act, with repercussions in society and that gained attention in the media. The demonstrators made a point of socializing their demands and of giving visibility to the strike movement.

The research strategy used at the time was the collection of statements recorded during the demonstrations, with an emphasis on the aspects related to the strike and the category of workers involved, and not on personal information about the strikers, who were informed of the purpose of the research and spoke on their own free will. Their identities, however, will be protected. Thus, the study did not cause any risk or damage to the integrity, dignity and privacy of the participants, and is thus compatible with the values protected by the National Commission for Research Ethics.

2 The unprecedented strike of the telemarketing operators of the T-Com Company: strategy of struggle against the domination of big capital

At an assembly held on 14 June 2007, in the city of Fortaleza, the telemarketing workers at the T-Com company, who were under contract to the X-Subcon company, decided to stop their activities because they did not agree with the proposals made in the last collective labor convention. The strike, unprecedented in the history of these subcontracted workers, was organized by the Telecommunications Workers Union of Ceará (Sinttel) and began on 19 June that year.

For more than one month, representatives of this labor category struggled to win the demands that were the focus of negotiations, and organized alliances with social movements and other categories of workers who were not satisfied with their working conditions⁴. To do so, they sought support in the public spaces of society, demonstrated in the streets, made appeals in various media and parliamentary agencies, at entities that work for the defense of workers' rights and others, displaying their capacity for resistance, although with visible limitations. To expand the strength of the movement and awaken social solidarity, they held marches and demonstrations, displaying banners and posters with protests and charges against the company. The strikers protested against the employers' actions, chanting: "If there is no money, the strike will last all year!"; "If there is no raise, I won't sit down at the PA⁵!" And, with a "warning cry", called the colleagues who were not participating in the movement: "You who are sitting down and working are also exploited!"

The strikers took advantage of a visit by President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010) to the state capital in July 2007⁶ to present him with a letter in which they expressed the reasons for the strike and requested that he intercede in support of their demands. Here are some portions of the letter:

The work at a Call Center and Telemarketing is arduous and unhealthy, the workers at this company suffer from occupational diseases and their working conditions aggravate the problem. [...]. The pressure to achieve goals and the oppressive use of time – even when going to the bathroom – cause stress. Moreover, this company has the absurd turnover of 90% of its operating staff per year. [...]. Our demands are simple and would in no way destabilize a company that had billing of R\$1.3 billion last year. [...]. The company has responded with threats, the use of the police force to intimidate workers, intransigence and silence. [...]. We would like to thank you for receiving this letter and we would be grateful if you could intercede to help reopen negotiations. Recognizing that our expectations are worthwhile, we know that he who taught us to fight also showed us that we must go on without fear of being happy⁷ (SINTEL/CE, 2007).

2.1 The telemarketing operator workers and their conditions for realization

In the universe of the call center studied, the working conditions are a concrete expression of the inhuman logic of capital. Factors such as accelerated work pace, psychological pressure, moral abuse and health risks are common in the telemarketing workers' environment. It is a scenario that is typical of the modern world, whose contradictions are expressed in the intensification of human labor that accompanies growth in technological operations, which are organically articulated to forms of exploitation that are similar to slavery. As we see:

We are highly pressured every day. [...]. There's one call after another, which causes us to live with some illnesses on a daily basis: throat aches, back problems; tendinitis is constant. [...]. But the operator cannot, under any circumstance, present a doctor's note [to justify absence], because the supervisors warn that such a note would generate something called absenteeism, which can lead to firing (PH, leader of the movement).

If you are one minute late, it harms the goal for the entire shift; harms the supervisor, who will look for the attendant wherever she is. A break to go to the bathroom is also highly disciplined: it is at most five minutes. If you need to go to the bathroom more often, the supervisor stays "on your tail," behind you, wanting to know why you go to the bathroom so often. Everything is very rigid (RA, telemarketing operator).

Fearing the "punishment of unemployment", the telephone attendants behave like true slaves, and must relinquish not only their social rights – like the right to rest when they are sick – but also human rights, like that of satisfying physiological needs and the freedom to come and go. The company, dedicated to achieving results, and more precisely, profits, instead of hiring more workers to guarantee the highly promoted "quality service", increases the demands and control over the call attendants, who must meet certain goals – above all the average time of service (TMA) – under the constant pressure of supervisors and also under the threat of being laid off. In this work environment, which the operators themselves call the "slave quarters", the supervisor becomes a type of "slave driver", who is always persecuting the "slaves" under his responsibility (operators from a single group), to have them meet orders (goals) of the master (company). For this reason the demonstrators sang a song during the strike⁸, followed by the appeal: "Lerê, lerê, lerê, lerê, lerê... Negotiations for the slave quarters now!"

2.2 Reasons to support the strike or not

Dependent on salaried labor, although aware of their condition as subjects with rights, some call center attendants sought out the historic possibilities of a strike. Others, given the uncertainties, did not. Here are some of the motivations of those who decided to participate in the movement.

I believe that all people have a will to struggle for their rights; not only for their rights but for the rights of others. [...]. I am going to a public university, but I have a number of colleagues who are in private school who, with their salary, are not able to pay for school, are not able to support their children, are not even able to feed themselves (W, telemarketing operator).

The salary issue was, in fact, the main motivation for the operators who adhered to the strike. Nevertheless, the working conditions were not forgotten, given that this is the factor that makes their stay at the company temporary, but also their identification with the activity that they conduct and with the people with whom they work. For this reason it is difficult to organize the category and have strong adhesion to the strike movement. But there was a notable presence of veteran operators, as they were seeking a reason – such as a salary increase – to stay at the job, given that they had enough time to understand the company's logic of not respecting or giving value to the so-called "collaborators" [as employees are known]. The new workers, however, even if they are not satisfied with their salaries and working conditions, feared losing the opportunity to finance their studies and acquire time and experience in the labor market until they can find a better job. For this reason, their participation in the strike was much lower:

Various people also did not participate in the strike because they are new. The company, only Monday, laid off 400 more people. So, others entered the company. Since, for most people this is their first job, they are not ready to participate in the strike, they are afraid they will be laid off. [...]. There are no benefits like unemployment insurance (W, telemarketing operator).

The fear of losing their job and the mechanisms of pressure exercised by the company deter adhesion of many workers, weakening the movement.

Various efforts were made by the leaders to maintain the striking workers engaged and to encourage them to resist. To motivate the presence of the demonstrators at the "company gate", Sinttel offered them lunch and a snack, while a sound truck played music to raise their spirits and keep them informed about the negotiations. The company took advantage of this enthusiastic climate to accuse them of disruptive

behavior and even of aggression against the supervisors and operators who continued to work. Upset with the mobilization, the company sought to intimidate the strikers with reproach from society and their families, as will be seen below.

2.3 The demands of the telemarketing operators

To place this in context, we should present the main demands of the telemarketing operators at the Company X-Subcon, which are clarified in the statement below, made on June 19:

Since May, these workers have been trying to negotiate a salary readjustment and the company offered only 2.5%, which is below inflation, which was 3.44%. Another essential need is food. This is a human need. This company adopted an American standard: a card that the employees pass through a machine, and a soda drops down and some cold potatoes. Another case that is very grave is the problem of occupational diseases related to the profession. The fact is that the women (considering that the majority are women) work all day long without interruptions or a break, even at night and holidays. They work with sound equipment that is hooked to their ears, therefore during the day they hear voices and this generates hearing ailments. [...]. They speak all day and this also generates throat problems. And, finally, there is a question of typing. They type a lot and this leads to Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI). A number of men and women workers (and most are young) are already mutilated, with serious problems. [...]. They are demanding a salary readjustment, improved working conditions, with a special demand in this health issue (AI, CUT organizer).

The main demands of the demonstrators, however, were salary raises, with the negotiation of the base salary for the category; improved quality of food, with substitution of industrialized snacks for healthier meals, and attention to healthcare, as a way of preventing occupational diseases⁹, as the posters and banners raised during the strike reveal:

“General Strike at (X-Subcon) Company against low salaries and in defense of workers’ health”;
“General Strike in defense of labor, health and dignity”;
“Low salaries”;
“Occupational diseases”;
“(X-Subcon) Company: a factory for mutilating people”;
“(X-Subcon) Company: it’s really sad”;
“At (X-Subcon) Company it’s serious, a serious case”;
“Increase now”.

2.4 The company reaction to the strike movement

The X-Subcon company is known as one of the companies with the highest number of labor complaints, which include: non-compliance with work shift limits, absence of a break for meals, submitting workers to exhausting labor¹⁰.

During the strike, the company was accused by Sinttel and the Public Labor Ministry of practicing a series of intimidating acts against employees. The state police force was used without need to the extent that police were allowed to enter and circulate in the work environment, pressuring workers during their shifts. The constant presence of armed police outside the company during the strike sought to intimidate the demonstrators grouped there and inhibit their protest actions. One indignant person interviewed affirmed:

The state police has an ostensive presence, with guns, protecting the company’s capital. In reality, this is absurd. This is not the role of the police (AI, CUT organizer).

The supervisors exercise constant pressure on workers who continued to work, accompanying them to the snack area and to the bathroom, to keep them from going on strike; in addition, they were present at the bus stops close to the company to pressure the strikers to go back to work. This upset PH, a leader of the movement:

We become employees the moment we enter the company. And at this time of exploitation [the presence of supervisors at the bus stops], they demonstrate that we are their employees and slaves from the moment we get off the bus.

Threats were also made through telegrams and telephone calls to family members, calling the workers to their jobs, under the threat of getting laid off:

The people who stopped working are suffering psychological pressure. They [the company] are calling the parents of each operator who joined the strike, inventing slanders, lies, saying that their children are involved with disruptions, with fighting. This is not true (PH, movement leader).

In violation of labor law, the company fired workers and hired new call attendants during the strike period, as a way of showing that the demonstration would be useless and that the demonstrators would be penalized. By order of the Regional Labor Court, the company was required to ban the entrance of police on their grounds and the action of any supervisor or employee to restrict the workers right to strike and right to come and go, under penalty of paying a daily fine of R\$ 1.000 per worker whose rights were violated. In relation to the workers' demands, the negotiations were quite difficult, because the company was not willing to pay the basic salary proposed by the category (R\$ 460). It insisted on maintaining salaries below the minimum wage¹¹ and did not present a counter proposal to the issues related to reducing the weekly work shift, overtime pay, meal bonuses and the participation of workers in profits and results¹². Due to the delayed negotiations, the strike lasted 45 days.

2.5 The perspectives of the movement and inter-union help

During the strike, various unions supported the movement, as registered in the following statement:

[...] we received support from CUT and the organized social movements in Fortaleza. There are various important unions and, during these nine days of the strike, we had the presence of the textile union; the commercial workers union; the shoemakers union; the post office union; the cleaning and conservation union; the Federation of Commercial Workers; the health workers union; the union of the workers from this company, Sinttel; Sinratel, which is a union that also works in this category; as well as various others. The MST¹³ was here. This support, the importance of these categories being here to help, is because we as internationalist workers maintain the principle of solidarity. The working class is exploited by a single system, which is the capitalist system, which today represents the misery, the degradation of life, prostitution, violence, drugs, unemployment. A billion workers throughout the world are now unemployed. So, if the capitalist system is acting to exploit the working class at a global level, workers must have among themselves, as their greatest wealth, solidarity (AI, militant of CUT).

The statement points in two directions: to the vision of totality of the social context and to the articulation of the demands of workers at an international level, as means to resist the domination of globalized capital in its various forms. The strike in focus, although it has support from various unions, expresses the current sectorial character and defensive position of the union movement, trends indicated by Mészáros (2002). It cannot be said, however, that this is due to the mere issue of the subjective choice of workers, without first analyzing the objective conditions of the reality in which they live.

The T-Com Company rose from the process of privatization of telecommunication services which generated, among other negative consequences, unemployment and increased precariousness of work, mainly through outsourcing. The outsourced workers constitute a portion of the working class whose sociopolitical organization becomes an increasingly greater challenge to the union movement, considering that they work for companies of certain sectors of activity – where they establish their relations *at work* – and are contracted by service companies – with which they maintain their relations *of work*. For this reason it is difficult to locate the interests of the telemarketing operators within the realm of the union that represents the workers in the telecommunications sector (Sinttel), given that the T-Com company does not recognize them as employees. This creates the need to form an association in defense of the “unaffiliateds”, who provide telemarketing services to companies from various sectors, who are not considered, however, to be engaged in the final purposes of these sectors. LS discusses this situation:

On October 15, 2005, various telemarketing workers from Fortaleza, from *call centers* from various sectors joined together and founded a specific union from the category, which is, Sinratel, founded to legalize the category to [...] establish a salary base and obtain recognition on their working papers [...]. Thus, Sinratel was founded to defend the category of telemarketing workers which was an orphan, despite the fact that there were other unions to which the operators were affiliated, like Sinttel, the Union of Healthcare

Workers and others. Because, as much as they tried to defend the workers in this category, they did not know them like we know them, because we are telemarketing operators, we have experienced this daily (LS, president of Sinratel).

Sinttel and Sinratel thus dispute the union adhesion of a category that is found in an “identity crisis”, which is due both to its provisory trajectory at the call center, and to the lack of definition or imprecision of their position in the labor market – given that, although they work in and for the telecommunications sector, they are not part of the staff of employees at the company that “subcontracted them” via outsourcing. In other words, they are contracted by a service provider and subcontracted by a telecommunications company.

2.6 The meanings of the strike in the universe of the telemarketing operators of the X-Subcon Company

The difficulties and obstacles faced by the striking telemarketing operators at the X-Subcon Company wound up dividing the workers, compromising the workers’ collective strength. Nevertheless, the strike had important meaning for the category, as emphasized by the statements below:

This is my first strike. It has been a formidable experience, because I am seeing responsible people struggling for a just cause. Our strike is peaceful; at no time was there any vandalism or aggression. We only want an agreement. [...]. The worker must sell their labor power every day, but, just as the worker needs the company, the company also needs the worker (PH, movement leader).

All of the conquests of the workers are due to their demands, struggles, protests. So the workers, who only have their labor power to offer, can protest and achieve their objectives. Due to the liberal [neoliberal] process, the union environment had a large stagnation, but the youth are going back to and revitalizing the union movement (LS, Sinratel president).

Although aware of the strength of capital against the working class, above all in the context of so-called “neoliberal globalization”, these young workers believe that resistance is still possible and that they can achieve favorable results, after all there is a mutual dependence between capital and labor, as the leader of the movement reminds us. In addition to some isolated conquests¹⁴, the strike signified an important step and the first in the struggle of the category. It involved telemarketing operators from a contact center company that had become a reference for other companies in the sector throughout Latin America, even in terms of salary regulation. The demands and protests of its employees denounced to society that the gigantic growth of the company has a single explanation: the exploitation and intensification of labor, under the guise of technological investment – which, in reality, transforms the “infoproletariat” into a “subproletariat”, to the degree to which the working conditions become more precarious in favor of sophisticated forms of communication and interaction at the companies that have contracts with its clients.

The collective manifestation also showed results by making visible the strength of the working class when it is united to resist the offensives of the system. By expressing distinct forms of awareness and behavior existing in the universe of the call center at the X-Subcon Company, the strike indicated the limits and challenges of the organization of workers, who have been debilitated in the new configuration of labor relations, in which there is a tendency to substitute direct ties between a company and employees with subcontracting, to give capital greater flexibility and to fragment the working class, weakening its political struggle.

3 The debate about the resistance of workers in the current context

According to Mészáros (2002), given current attempts by globalizing capital to transform labor into its accomplice – instead of its adversary – the workers movement assumes a sectorial character and a defensive position. It thus ignores the historic possibility of overcoming labor’s dependence on capital, considering that capital depends absolutely on labor – which it must permanently exploit – while the dependence of labor in relation to capital is relative, created historically and therefore can be overcome.

The construction of a form of sociability alternative to capital, however, is not an easy task. If the criticism of the ruling system must be the most radical possible, the break with the elements that sustain it require a transition process with many mediations. As Antunes (2000, p. 177-178) highlights, the responses to the effective needs of the working class, currently involve two necessary demands: a) the struggle to

reduce the work week and the consequent expansion of so-called “free time”, seeking, most immediately, to minimize structural unemployment; and b) the struggle for the right to work, not because salaried work is seen as something good “but because to be out of work, in the universe of current capitalism, [...] means a dis-effectivation, dis-realization and brutalization even greater than those already experienced by the class that lives from its labor¹⁵”. Antunes affirms that the changes that took place in the world of labor since the 1970s, when a structural crisis of capital began, affected both the materiality (the form of existence), as well as the subjectivity of the working class (the values and ideology that supported its concrete actions and practices). The productive restructuring process and the flexibilization of labor relations have not only an economic content, but also a strong political and ideological content, given that they fragment the working class and weaken its representative bodies, challenging it to seek strategies for struggles that contemplate all workers.

In Brazil, according to Cruz (2000), unions developed the ability to apply strong pressure during the 1970s and the early 1980s, a period of deepening crisis of the military regime, marked by the growth of the political opposition and the return of the left – consubstantiated in the organization of the Workers Party (PT), in the creation of CUT and in the founding of the MST. In this period, the union movement was characterized by a set of social practices that became known as the “New Unionism”, whose world view sought to understand the totality of social relations and presented an image of class articulated by the notion of collective confrontation of the forms of socioeconomic, political and ideological domination of capital, proposing the construction of a new form of sociability, by means of the awareness and political organization of workers.

The period that followed the redemocratization not only altered the socioeconomic and political landscape of Brazilian society, but also obliterated the window of observation of the working class, which became a “shattered window”: “Instead of enjoying crystal-clear luminosity, observation gradually became clouded by the light broken up by the prism of a set of transformations experienced at the end of this century” (CRUZ, 2000, p. 100).

The global transition to neoliberalism marked an extremely unfavorable situation for the working class, placing on the defensive any discourse based on the unity of the interests and the action of the workers. According to Alves (2005), as an alternative to the logic of the contestation of capital, the critical unionism of the 1980s was followed by a “new type of defensivism”, of a neocorporate character, which substantially altered the forms of sociopolitical organization of workers, with a predominance of strategies that tend to promote only vertical articulations of salaried categories of the industrial or service sectors, instead of articulating the general interests of the working class.

According to Alves, the establishment of a “new (and precarious) world of labor” in recent decades, as a result of the productive restructuring, is responsible, directly or indirectly, for the decline of unionization, the leading causes of which include: a) changes in the composition of the labor force, with a reduction in the number of workers employed in the industrial sectors, with greater union density, and the increased number of workers in the service sectors, where union mobilization is historically more difficult; b) growth of the so-called “late subproletariat”, composed of precarious workers, subcontractees (including outsourced workers), for part time or temporary work, or that is, segments of the working class that are difficult to unionize; and c) the growing participation of women in the labor market all contribute to the decline in the levels of unionization, to the degree to which the rate of unionization of women has always been lower than that of men (ALVES, 2005).

These factors can be seen in the reality of the telemarketing operators, a predominantly feminine and outsourced labor force, which has weak political organization and is distant from the union movement¹⁶. The creation of the Telemarketing Workers Union (Sintratel) is an expression of the “neocorporatist misery” Alves (2005) refers to. This union was created to exclusively defend the interests of workers in the category of salaried workers that Antunes and Braga (2009) define as “infoproletariat”, that is, those who exercise activities that arose from the implementation and development of new information and communication technologies in the production of goods and services, with a strong tendency towards outsourcing and the degradation of labor.

Cruz (2000, p. 211-213) points to some responses that the union movement can give to the afflictions of the working class in times of crisis: a) reaffirm Marxism as the privileged method of analysis of capitalism, given that it has been abandoned for a reified and fragmented view of reality; b) produce a discourse that points to the identity of the working class as a whole (including salaried workers, the outsourced and subcontracted, informal workers, self-employed or autonomous workers, the unemployed and those excluded from socially produced wealth); c) clearly identify the opposition, depicting the State as the central element of organized action of the neoliberal discourse and proposing a joint agenda for the new “class that lives from labor”; and d) establish itself as a single union of the working class, organically

structured and discursively unified, that is, break with the traditional identification of the working class as being the entire set of salaried workers, proposing forms of identity of social and even productive organization for those who are outside of the formal market.

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Notas

- 1 It should be emphasized that the T-Com Company and the X-Subcon Company, although they offer different products and services, are part of the same corporate group. T-Com is the leading telecommunications company in the Ceara market, a former state-owned company, which was privatized in the 1990s. The X-Subcon Company is considered the largest provider of contact center services in Latin America.
- 2 See the thesis entitled *Relações 'de' trabalho e relações 'no' trabalho na lógica capitalista contemporânea: um olhar sobre atendentes do call center de uma empresa de telecomunicações* (CAVAIGNAC, 2010).
- 3 In addition to observation and unstructured interviews conducted during the strike, the original study presented questionnaires to a sample of 100 telemarketing operators and 20 former operators, to trace a profile of the subjects being analyzed; semi-structured interviews were also conducted with employees of the T-Com Company, union leaders and workers with various functions and different trajectories at the call center of the X-Subcon company.
- 4 Other categories of workers participated in the demonstrations. The telemarketing operators had support from motorcycle taxi drivers, who were seeking regulation of their profession. One of the marches organized by the demonstrators went to the offices of the Federal Police, whose employees were also on strike at the time.
- 5 In the language of the telemarketing operators, PA refers to Position of Attendance or work post.
- 6 The president was visiting the city to present the objectives and goals of the federal Accelerated Growth Program known as (PAC) for its Portuguese acronym.
- 7 The expression “without fear of being happy” was a long term campaign slogan for former President Lula and the Workers Party.
- 8 This is the music to the opening of the dramatic television series (known in Brazil as a telenovela) *Escrava Isaura*, an adaptation of the novel by Bernardo Guimarães by the novelist Gilberto Braga. Sung by the striking telemarketing operators, it symbolized the working conditions of these “free workers”, who are treated by the company as if they were slaves.
- 9 Among the diseases, that which most afflicts the telemarketing operators are tendonitis (inflammations of the tendons), myositis (muscle inflammations), otitis (ear inflammations), calloused vocal chords, back problems and stress (CAVAIGNAC, 2010).
- 10 From an article published in the newspaper *O Estado*, on 3 July 2007, page 10.
- 11 The value of the minimum wage at the time of the strike was R\$ 380.
- 12 “TRT calls for reintegration of strikers at (X-Subcon) Company. Laid off as of June 14, they should return to work”. Published in the newspaper *O Estado*, on 4 July 2007.
- 13 National Landless Farmworkers Movement.
- 14 Despite various layoffs, the strike earned some conquests for the telemarketing workers hired by the X-Subcon Company: including a small salary increase, which was put off to the following year (2008); the substitution of industrialized snacks for a meal card, in some circumstances; and the extension of the nursery assistance to male workers who prove they have custody of their child.
- 15 This expression corresponds to the expanded notion of the working class defended by Antunes (2000, p. 102-103), which should include salaried workers who sell their labor force, including the industrial proletariat, “those who directly create surplus-value and participate directly in the process of valorization of capital”, the workers of the so-called informal economy, the outsourced and those in precarious conditions, in addition

to those who are unemployed “under the command of the destructive logic of capital”.

- 16 This is what is revealed by the data obtained at another moment of my field work. Half of those who responded to the questionnaire – issued after the strike – affirmed that they had no knowledge of either of the unions that represented telemarketing operators at the telecommunications company studied (Sinttel and Sinratel). Only 12,50% said that they participated or had participated, while the majority, composed of 87.50%, had never participated (CAVAIGNAC, 2010).

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