

**BETWEEN THE LEGITIMATION AND THE CRITICISM OF LEADER IN THE
NAVAL AND OFFSHORE POLO OF RIO GRANDE-RS**

**ENTRE A LEGITIMAÇÃO E A CRÍTICA DO LÍDER NO POLO NAVAL E OFFSHORE
DE RIO GRANDE-RS**

**ENTRE LA LEGITIMACIÓN Y LA CRÍTICA DEL LÍDER EN EL POLO NAVAL Y
OFFSHORE DE RIO GRANDE-RS**

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to have an understanding of the reasons provided for taking on a fictive position within a formal hierarchy, as well as its entailed tensions. This paper aims to unravel the strategies employed by employees who undertook responsibilities other than those stipulated in their work record booklet. The methodology comprised the execution of thirteen interviews, in 2016, with employees and a labor union official, as well as a literature review as regards the empirical question. Team leadership requires specific features, such as having "communicative skills". The employees sought to be promoted to the position of supervisor; however, in the meantime, as "leaders", they were not only accumulating functions but were also cooperating to their self-exploitation disguised by a twofold symbolic perspective: either by the fictive position or by the modernizing varnish of the word "leader".

KEYWORDS: Team leader. Naval pole. Self-exploitation.

RESUMO: O objetivo deste artigo é compreender as razões apresentadas para a ascensão de um trabalhador a um cargo fictício dentro de uma hierarquia formal, bem como as tensões envolvidas nessa questão. Pretende-se com isso desvelar as estratégias utilizadas por trabalhadores que assumiram responsabilidades para além do previsto em sua carteira de trabalho. A metodologia envolveu a realização de treze entrevistas no ano de 2016, com os trabalhadores e seu representante sindical, assim como a revisão bibliográfica atinente ao problema empírico. Os trabalhadores objetivavam obter a promoção para o cargo de encarregado, enquanto "líderes" acumulavam funções e colaboravam para sua autoexploração, dissimulada por um viés duplamente simbólico: seja pelo cargo fictício, seja pelo verniz modernizante em torno da palavra "líder".

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Líder de equipe. Polo naval. Autoexploração.

RESUMEN: El objetivo de este artículo es comprender las razones que se aducen para el ascenso de un trabajador a un puesto ficticio dentro de una jerarquía formal, así como las tensiones que conlleva esta cuestión. El propósito es dilucidar las estrategias utilizadas por los trabajadores que asumieron responsabilidades más allá de lo previsto en su informe de trabajo.

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La metodología implicó la realización de trece entrevistas en 2016, con los trabajadores y su representante sindical, así como la revisión bibliográfica relacionada con el problema empírico. El liderazgo de los equipos requiere características específicas, como las "habilidades comunicativas". Los trabajadores aspiraban a obtener el ascenso al puesto de capataz, mientras que los "líderes" acumulaban funciones y colaboraban a su autoexplotación, encubierta por un sesgo doblemente simbólico: ya sea por el cargo ficticio, ya sea por el barniz modernizador en torno a la palabra "líder".

PALABRAS CLAVE: Líder de equipo. Polo Naval. Autoexplotación.

Introduction²

The deregulation of the economy to free up capital flows, in progress since the 1990s, and the resulting strengthening of the market occurred through the reduction of the role of the State and the adoption of policies that unprotected workers by removing their rights under the label of easing. In this wake of transformations, the location of companies has also changed, moving to the Global South (in countries with a qualified and cheap workforce whose governments offer tax incentives), remaining in countries considered central only their center of power, which manages and controls all the production chain. Furthermore, the internal organization of the division of labor has changed. The globalization of capital, brought about by the development and dissemination of information technologies (ICTs), the internet and automation, destabilized the current organizational model until then; for example, managers lost a significant part of their power and status to investors and shareholders (SENNETT, 2006).

However, through productive restructuring, subcontracting and outsourcing of services, companies went from a pyramidal organization, inspired by the military model - with delimitation of positions and functions - to the elimination of intermediate layers, and the organization became horizontal and in network. The organization of the “network company” (CASTELLS, 1999) arises, therefore, from the crisis of the Fordist model marked by the “transition from mass production to flexible production” (CASTELLS, 1999, p. 211-212, our translation) and, with the decline of the vertically integrated company, new management methods emerged, specifically Toyotism:

The real distinguishing nature of Toyotism from Fordism does not concern the relationships between companies, but between managers and workers. As stated by Coriat (1994) [...] the central and differentiating feature of the

² The present work was carried out with the support of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - BRAZIL (CAPES) - Financing Code 001.

Japanese method was to abolish the role of specialized professional workers to make them multifunctional specialists (CASTELLS, 1999, p. 216, our translation).

In addition to the multifunction that is now required of the worker, the predominant type of contract among direct employees is temporary. According to Sennett (2006), this type of organization avoids the formation of bonds and, due to the multifunctionality attributed to workers, it obliterates the identification of a single authority. In general, the transformations that have taken place since the 1990s, aim at the non-payment of guarantees to workers, through the withdrawal of rights with the increase of exploitation, under the label of flexibility.

In this wake of changes that result in the impoverishment of workers, through the undermining of their rights, individualization of the work relationship, worsening of working and inspection conditions and implementation of flexible working hours and remuneration, a lexicon emerged that justifies and covers exploitation. Thus, terms such as *employee* were replaced by *collaborator*; *manager*, per *leader*; motivation, *engagement*, among others, that have been gradually emerging.

According to Gaulejac (2007), the worker is left to himself and his constant reinvention has become imperative, without the protection provided by the State. Objective changes in the organization of production and the work process also have a lexical basis. The managerial discourse engenders an *ethos* of promise, that is, the realization turns to the projection of mimesis, that is, of being like a certain person or possessing something. For Gaulejac (2007), from the moment capitalism dissociated itself from the Protestant ethos, which legitimized it, managerial ideology came to fill this ethical void, replacing its content with the ethos of the entrepreneur – inspired by the figure of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or executive director –, which by mimesis is the model to be followed, so to speak, the projection attributed to workers.

Scholars of the Sociology of Work have been dedicated to understanding the impact of the withdrawal of workers' rights³, as well as the forms of resistance and organization. The topics researched, in general, are flexibility, as well as the growing individualization of work relationships and the precariousness of working conditions; the loss of salary purchasing power; outsourcing; informality; criticism of entrepreneurship, uberism and gamification in the dismantling of unions and institutions to safeguard rights, among others.

³ A process that has been expanding in Brazil since the 1990s, assured by the Labor Reform and the legalization of broad and unrestricted outsourcing in 2017.



In this scenario, empirical studies that focus on the association between precarious work relationships and the way in which it is naturalized and, at the limit, legitimized by workers, are incipient and relegated to other areas of knowledge. However, we consider that the examination of the reasons why workers more or less engage in a discourse and, even more, the explanations they present for this, are part of the broader process of increasing exploitation, discussed by the Sociology of Work. It is in this gap that the present text is inserted, trying to articulate some themes debated and experienced by workers with the dimension that sometimes legitimizes, sometimes questions and even unveils the veil of exploitation.

Cardoso (2019), in the study *A construção da sociedade do trabalho*, shows that the perception of inequality is important in legitimizing and maintaining it. Following this analytical line, it is considered that the perception of leadership and the justifications for remaining in the fictitious position supported the very existence of the fictitious figure of the leader and, at the same time, exposed the forms of self-exploitation and the strategies involved for promotion to the position of leader in charge.

The object of this study were the workers of each sector of construction of oil platforms of the Naval and Offshore Pole of Rio Grande-RS. This pole was the result of the strategy of reactivation of the naval industry, in progress from 2003 to 2015, through the decentralization of the shipyards located in Rio de Janeiro-RJ to other states of the federation - following the same line adopted, for example, in the educational.

The Naval Pole itself began with the installation of two shipyards, aimed at the construction of large and small ships, as well as the renovation and construction of ships for Transpetro – a subsidiary of Petrobras (FABRES; SPOLLE, 2014). However, with the restructuring of the Brazilian naval industry due to the announcement of the pre-salt⁴ discovery, Petrobras modified its investments and expanded the industry's objective in the municipality by building the dry dock for the repair and construction of offshore platforms destined for the Oil and Gas

The Naval and Offshore Pole was active from mid-2006 to March 2019. Officially, it was opened in October 2010 and, in the peak years of its activities (2013-2014), employed around twenty thousand workers. The aforementioned enterprise was structured in two shipyards: Rio Grande and Honório Bicalho, which manufactured oil platforms destined for the

⁴ “Pre-salt is a layer of oil located at great depths, under oceanic waters, below a thick layer of salt. At the end of 2007, an extensive reserve of oil and natural gas was found in this layer, in a strip that extends for 800 km between Espírito Santo and Santa Catarina” (SATO, 2009).



pre-salt field, located in the Campos Basin – between the north coast of Rio de Janeiro and the south of Espírito Santo.

The construction of an oil platform involves different sectors that are articulated in the assembly of each block, so these processes have some specificities. However, the workers interviewed, when describing the work process and the hierarchy of each sector, pointed to the existence of the team leader. Such data drew attention because the interviewees presented a worker who, paradoxically, was not included in the formal division of activities, but was in all the work teams of the various sectors (building blocks, assembly of blocks and finishing, among others).

It was inferred, based on the interviewees' reports, that the workers who were dedicated to this fictitious function assumed responsibilities beyond what was foreseen in their work portfolio and were called “team leaders” or “front”. The rise of a worker to the leadership of a team required specific attributes, such as: “knowing how to communicate” and “knowing how to relate”. These attributes present in teamwork at the Shipyard led to questioning the permanence of the leader, questioning how this fictitious figure was maintained. Given the above, this article aims to understand why workers assumed such leadership "positions", as well as the reasons presented for the rise of a fictitious position within a formal hierarchy and the tensions involved in this issue.

In empirical research carried out from July 2014 to August 2016, three interviews were carried out with union leaders - for this article only one was used - and an observation with the Union of Workers of Metallurgical and Electrical Material Industries of Rio Grande-RS and São José do Norte-RS (Stimmmerg), to obtain materials produced by the same and update the agenda under discussion. In addition, thirteen semi-structured interviews were carried out with workers.

The research context was impacted by the advance of “*Operação Lava-Jato*”, as several interviewees declined to grant an interview and even talk informally, in some cases. These interviews were carried out using the snowball technique, in which each worker indicated another colleague from one of the platform construction sectors, thus constituting a sample through “reference chains” (BIERNACKI; WALDORF, 1981). Finally, it should be noted that newspapers were consulted, as well as the website and the *Cenários da construção naval* produced by the employers' union, named National Union of Naval and Offshore Construction and Repair (Sinaval), and bibliography relevant to the theme and object of study.



In addition to this brief introduction, the text is divided into two sections. The first presents the theoretical framework that helped to reflect on the macro-level transformations of the “world of work” and some of its implications. In the second section, the research data are presented in correlation with the theoretical contribution, as well as the analysis of the work performed by the team leader, or “front”, based on approaches that helped to reveal some of the dimensions reported by the interviewees. Finally, final considerations are made and the fragility of workers is indicated, who, due to self-responsibility and individualization, tended to move between the legitimization of the role of "leader" and the rise of responsibilities that resulted in self-exploitation. Workers were aware of the limitations attached to this symbolic role and sometimes were critically opposed to it or not as involved as advertised.

Theoretical notes for understanding the work of the leader, or "front", of a team

The changes that took place in the “world of work” led to an individualization of negotiation in parallel with a decrease in the sense of collective belonging and the socialization of risks. Thus, for Linhart (2000), companies increasingly require workers who are favorable to them, and Colbari (1995) argues that these transformations are not included in the employment contract, that is, they include the “good will” of the worker.

According to Linhart (2000), the constraints of Taylorism-Fordism were decentralized and included as a requirement for workers, who must assume responsibilities and answer for them, but with limited decision-making power. Thus, it is possible to corroborate with Linhart the author in her analysis of the modernized company, whose discourse and practice seem advanced in releasing the worker's word, while at the same time holding him responsible for what would not be his responsibility:

The modernized company is a company that fails in terms of coherence: if the individual is valued at the level of discourse, the management of human resources, at the level of social relationships increasingly founded on the liberation of speech, on communication, exchanges, a deep commitment is required, to be available, flexible, above all with this it is increasingly spread to include it within a logic of accountability, without always offering the necessary means for this (LINHART, 2000, p. 31, our translation).

The phenomenon of accountability can be inscribed in what Bourdieu (2001) calls the double truth of work: objective and subjective. When referring to objective truth, the author explains that it is linked to salary compensation, through employment. In turn, the subjective truth concerns the valuation of the subjective dimension, which shifts the worker's interest to



the enrichment of the tasks, that is, the worker himself ends up collaborating for his self-exploitation (BOURDIEU, 2001). This enrichment of tasks occurs through the “modernizing varnish” (LIMA, 2002), as exemplified by the term “leader”.

In terms of institutions that organize society, it is argued that the Church and the State occupied this position until the mid-1970s. After the restructuring of production, the advent of Toyotism as a form of management and organization of production, outsourcing, withdrawal of the role of the State, among other related phenomena, the company started to occupy this place and to impose itself as a worldview (LÓPEZ-RUIZ, 2004). Due to this change in the referential matrix, the phenomenon of “*performance cult*” (EHRENBERG, 2010) emerged, in which the individual is responsible for himself, a tendency observed in the issue of entrepreneurship.

These transformations are explained by Boltanski and Chiapello (2009), based on the consensus that capitalism, as a mode of production and organization of social relations, is a system doomed to crises. The authors argue that capitalism needs moral justifications to engage individuals, as the pursuit of profit, by itself, lacks reasons for everyone to work and support increasingly precarious conditions – in the case of the Brazilian labor market, of a legalized precarization⁵ from the Labor Reform of 2017. Faced with an increasingly severe context of exploitation, a new semantics emerges to accompany this change, which aims to obtain greater engagement from workers. Therefore, they are called “collaborators”, because mobilization takes precedence over motivation for work.

Com o objetivo de mobilizar os(as) trabalhadores(as), criou-se a figura do líder, cuja responsabilidade consiste em engajar os referidos colaboradores, ajudando a conferir sentido ao trabalho realizado. Isso porque, ao compartilhar um sentido, o líder passa a ilusória visão de que cada um sabe o que fazer sem ninguém precisar mandar (BOLTANSKI; CHIAPELLO, 2009). Um dos efeitos disso consiste na reputação como critério de avaliação para que o indivíduo seja empregável; para tanto, os atributos imperativos consistem em estabelecer elos, saber engajar e tanto depositar como inspirar confiança.

Dardot and Laval (2016) oppose Boltanski and Chiapello's (2009) explanation by arguing that when studying the managerial discourse of the 1990s, the authors tend to “trust piously what the new capitalism says about itself” (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 329, our translation). In the Foucaultian perspective, the authors contest Boltanski and Chiapello (2009),

⁵ GALVÃO, Andreia. Aumento da miséria extrema, informalidade e desigualdade marcam os dois anos da Reforma Trabalhista. **Jornal da Unicamp**, 11 nov. 2019. Seção Humanas. Available: <https://www.unicamp.br/unicamp/ju/noticias/2019/11/11/aumento-da-miseria-extrema-informalidade-e-desigualdade-marcam-os-dois-anos>. Access: 20 Nov. 2019.

as they consider that they only praise the new forms of power and underestimate the disciplinary character of the managerial discourse, which, in turn, produces new forms of subjectivities through the mobilization of other techniques.

The production of new subjectivities occurs in the context of the progressive dismantling of employment protection, the undermining of workers' rights, solidarity networks and the role of the union. In parallel, there is the creation of precarious “new forms of employment”, given the increase in the employer's discretion in hiring, exploiting and remunerating the workforce (KREIN, 2001). In a context of social fear, in which risk, until then related to market transactions (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016), was socialized to the labor market, that is, through the flexibilization of rights, employees are subjected to the market of work as to the fluctuations of the financial market.

When analyzing the Brazilian case after the labor reform, Krein (2018, p. 98, our translation) clarifies that business risks are shared “with the worker, but the result of the work is increasingly unequally appropriated”. This transfer of risk to employees has increased the power of companies, which demand greater availability and commitment from them (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016). These authors also argue that capitalism is always the same, while Boltanski and Chiapello (2009) argue that capitalism incorporates and re-signifies the criticism directed at it, metamorphosing itself. Dardot and Laval (2016) are in a Foucaultian interpretation key and call attention to new forms of power, which not only deal with engaging individuals, but also with shaping new subjectivities:

[...] the great novelty lies in the modeling that makes individuals able to withstand the new conditions imposed on them, while by their own behavior they contribute to making these conditions increasingly harsh and more perennial. In a word, the novelty consists of promoting a 'chain reaction', producing 'entrepreneurial subjects' who, in turn, will reproduce, expand and reinforce the relations of competition between them, which will require, according to the logic of the self-realizing process, that they subjectively adapt to the increasingly harsh conditions that they themselves reproduced (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 329, our translation).

This self-production of more severe working conditions is combined with objective transformations in the organization of the work process (goals, performance and reputation evaluation, flexibilization of rights) and gives rise to a new self-government, which has the company as the reference matrix (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016). The dividing line between economic problems and production management was broken and merged, making both psychological problems due to the centrality of the individual in this process. The



transformation in the managerial lexicon transferred the manager's external authority to self-management, in which motivation plays a key role: “economic and financial coercion turns into *self-coercion* and *self-blame*, since we are the only ones responsible for what happens” (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 345, our translation).

In this way, the company starts to select and evaluate according to relational, behavioral, personal characteristics, aesthetics, among others, and this goes beyond the “man at work” because it shapes the entire existence and shapes subjectivity (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016).

In this article, the formatting of subjectivities will not be deepened, but the empirical material that allows to discuss the tensions involved around the fictitious figure of the leader in the Pole - which evidence the imposition of a company model on the workers will be explored. After this brief discussion, the figure of the Pole leader will be presented below and the way in which he is paradoxically articulated to the above.

The figure of the leader in the Naval and Offshore Pole of Rio Grande-RS: between legitimation and criticism

The Polo's formal hierarchical composition, synthesized based on the speech of the workers interviewed, consisted of: manager; division boss; coordinators and supervisors of each section; in charge of each team, workers, interns and helpers. Therefore, at first the Pole had a hierarchical structure with several well-defined levels. However, in addition to the hierarchy described, the majority of respondents explained the presence of a team leader. Each one consisted of, on average, six workers, and the leaders were described as candidates for incumbents, who assumed this role due to specific “qualities” and the expectation of being promoted.

In order to understand how the figure of leadership was constituted in the Naval Pole teams, we began to describe and analyze the speeches of some interviewees. According to them, the team leader, also called “front”, had the attribute of “ease of communication”: “you will be the front, you have more vision of work, everyone is qualified, but you go ahead because you can communicate better with others, you know how to talk better to keep the group together” (Amanda⁶, scaffolder, Rio Grande-RS, 22 January 2016).

The distinction between the leader and/or “front” of the person in charge concerns a type of *daily management of the group relationship* that the leader must carry out, while the

⁶ All interviewees signed a consent form that ensures anonymity through the use of fictitious names.



person in charge manages the work and passes on the guidelines regarding the work in the blocks of the platforms – each block has a number that guides the assembly order.

You're a leader, all right, but you have to work. Now go there and look at me, no, you have to work together, what is the leader? He's the first guy to work, he's the first to go there and he gives the initiative: hey kids, let's do such a thing and let's go! There are leaders who think that they are in charge who will be watching, and even the supervisor has to “turn the key”. But there's a guy there, who at first, just kept looking, then they complained and he started doing it, because he couldn't afford it. Stage 3, the team was divided into three guys, there was a leader and the other two of the team, then two worked and the other looked, then it was not possible (Otto, scaffolder 1, Rio Grande-RS, 5 February 2016 – author's emphasis, our translation).

The interviewee understood that the leader's role consisted of setting an example at work and mobilizing the team. In doing so, he also worked according to the role prescribed in his work card, but as a leader, his performance was measured by his colleagues based on the reputation generated through his dedication to work - even, in part, the promotion to supervisor came from of the team's best performance.

It was found that team leaders at the Polo should fulfill some requirements not prescribed in the employment contract, such as: knowing how to interact, communicate, be a person of trust and know how to work in a team. Based on these data, it is possible to infer that aesthetic criticism, in terms of Boltanski and Chiapello (2009), appears in this context of work at the Naval Pole, given that team leaders would need to “know how to be”, to know how to relate to the group and mobilize them for daily tasks, while the person in charge assumes the bureaucratic functions. However, it was inferred, based on Dardot and Laval (2016), that in the expectation of obtaining the promotion to supervisor, the adoption of this symbolic position in the hierarchy made workers more susceptible to withstand the intrinsic conditions and, at the same time, reinforced the competitive relationship between them, which remodeled, in this situation, the subjectivity of the team members. On the other hand, in this movement, the leader contributed to the reduction of the sense of belonging to the community, as his promotion to supervisor would depend solely on his team, and not on the group of welders as a whole, for example.

The division of teamwork produced both a decrease in this sense of belonging to the collective and reinforced the promotion by individual criteria due to reputation, generating a chain reaction. Otto, for example, explained that he had been the leader of a scaffolding assembly team since 2014 and that he reached this “position” because, at the time, their supervisor had been promoted to supervision and “he said he was grateful to us, right, *he*



climbed because of us, our performance there, we did everything right, we worked with four there, which a whole team of ten didn't do" (Otto, scaffolder 1, Rio Grande-RS, 5 February 2016 – author's emphasis, our translation).

Knowing his role, registered as a scaffolder, but symbolically playing the role of team leader, the interviewee clarified that

[...] I don't demand too much, I try to do it, in case, it's no use for me to be a guy, make the guys have production, be a bad leader there because I have to know how to lead the team. So, I try to take it in the middle, half to the side of the company and the side of the employee too, so I go there, you have to run, you have to run, now from time to time you can be a little lighter. No, the executioner that no, no. I go more in the morning, then the others are shocked with me even because I go more in the morning because otherwise there is no way, even the team takes the guy down. And I don't even get paid for that either, I just do my job (Otto, scaffolder 1, Rio Grande-RS, 5 February 2016, author's emphasis, our translation).

As described, he considered himself a more moderate leader, otherwise the team would not support him in the role and he would lose the opportunity to “pipe”, that is, in part the interviewee legitimized the existence of this symbolic place in the hierarchy but was aware of the limitations existing. Understanding leadership role differentiation demonstrates that engagement is actually a means to an end. Assuming the role of leader, therefore, is an individual strategy for the worker to climb the hierarchy and obtain a formal position and belonging to a work team reveals an ephemeral involvement, as the concern for other teammates also boils down to the kind of evaluation they will make of him, hence the question of a moderate leadership reputation.

While the promotion to supervisor did not take effect, the leaders went through what they called “*cachimbar*”:

[...] he [the person in charge] will put an appropriation in your name, then the guys on the team will be in your appropriation. Then, when you have [the opportunity for promotion], you take a course there to be in charge, and then move on to being in charge. They say they were not even “*cachimbandando*” (Otto, scaffolder 1, Rio Grande-RS, 5 February 2016, our translation).

According to the interviewee, “pipe” comes from a pipe and alludes to waiting for the opportunity to be promoted. The nomination for the leadership of teams of scaffolding assemblers, industrial painters, sub-assembly and electrical, among others, occurred only by verbal agreement. The interviewees explained “because it's word of mouth, you don't get a differential”. The workers admitted that the differentiation, while “*cachimbavam*”, was only



symbolic. “It's because I answer anything there, even if I don't earn anything, it's just a symbolic thing that, if they have the opportunity, they'll give it to whoever is 'front’” (Cléber, in charge of the subassembly sector, 2 February 2016, our translation).

While “cachimbava”, the leader also accepted a flexibility of functions, according to Krein (2001); that is, the adjustment of tasks and the evolution of worker responsibilities. The leader continued to be a worker who performed the role prescribed in his work card and assumed the responsibility of taking care of the team due to personal attributes, so that promotion fell into self-coercion (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016) and self-exploitation (BOURDIEU, 2001) within a vision that the leader was solely responsible for what would happen to him.

Thus, it can be observed that “employees continue to be subject to the same division between conception and execution of tasks” (LINHART, 2000, p. 31, our translation), because even if the “position of leader” requires more involvement - and in the case of the leader has to make decisions, he does so following the prescriptions of the person in charge -, the power of decision is restricted, and this reveals a liberation of the word at the cost of the accumulation of responsibility, that is, there was an enrichment of the tasks through the “modernizing varnish” (LIMA, 2002) of the term “leader”. That is, although the leader felt responsible for his/her promotion, the responsibility for him/her was, in fact, conditioned to the evaluation of the team and the decision of the person in charge.

There is, however, criticism of the leader in the production process, as can be seen from the speech of another worker, who claims that the leader is a whistleblower and that this is due to individualistic competition on the company floor:

[...] it's the “snitch”, who delivers the guy [...]. Yes, he is the “go to the sale” – who says everything, wants to knock everyone down [...]. There, everyone wants to stand out, everyone wants to grow, so one wants to be seen more than the other, one wants to be more professional than the other, and then where you have a problem, one points to the other and it's every man for himself (Cainã, industrial painter, Rio Grande-RS, 7 January 2016, our translation).

This report demonstrates another facet of team leadership: the decrease in the sense of collective belonging due to the ephemerality of participation in different teams and the non-association of belonging to the category of workers. The cooperation required by the team members also involved a logic of competition.

In relation to this mechanism of individualization of the “leader”, the workers' union showed itself to be attentive to the situations of conflicts that were established on the company's



floor and that could lead to wear and tear. For one of the union leaders interviewed, the leader's situation included three questions: a) there was a deviation from function; b) at the same time, the worker could be asking for a better job: “*cachimbando*”; and c) adequacy occurred when the worker was qualified for the function he performed and received less than what was due. This last question, for the union, “it is wrong, so this is the great disparity that we live today, that we are managing to change little by little” (Union Leader, Rio Grande-RS, 1 July 2016, our translation). However, if the leader felt harmed, he could go to the union. However, even feeling harmed, the search was rare, as the name of the worker would be involved and this factor was limiting to a collective complaint, which made it difficult to frame between deviation of function and adequacy, for example.

Adequacy comes down to the qualification of the worker, for example, for level 1F⁷, but the company needed to adapt so that the worker was a 2F, 3G and 4G welder, the one who welds in all positions. According to the union leader, there were problems at the time with this issue, as there were cases of workers welding as 4G and being paid as 1F, but the union leader revealed that he had an Internal Accident Prevention Commission (Cipa, Portuguese initials)⁸ team active and that in a visit carried out in June 2016, the shipyard was expected to carry out 340 adjustments and ended up making 640.

Adequacy was collective; this is the case when the worker is qualified to perform the activity, but earns less than the equivalent amount. According to the union leader, this disparity was a recurring issue within the shipyards, also given the difficulty of inspection and the crisis that had set in. However, even with the crisis, that is, against the trend towards unemployment, the shipyard made these adjustments, which also reveal the contradictory aspects present in the conjuncture by demonstrating the power of workers in their collectivity, represented by the respective union.

⁷ 1F, 2G; 2F; 3G, among other acronyms, refer to the type of welding position that the worker is qualified to perform. Thus: to weld a flat plate, the positions are 1G and 1F; to weld a sheet in the horizontal position, the position type in the weld is 2G, 2F; if welding on a vertical rising plate, the required position is a 3G, 3F Uphill weld; if the worker has to weld a plate over the head, the welding position is 4G, 4F type. Likewise, there are different welding positions for pipes with fixed vertical axis, fixed horizontal axis; and fixed 45° axis (SENAI, 2010). At the Naval Pole, as the worker was welding in other positions, he had the right to be remunerated in a compatible way.

⁸ “[...] aims to prevent accidents and illnesses resulting from work, in order to make work permanently compatible with the preservation of life and the promotion of worker health”. (GUIA TRABALHISTA. NR 5 - COMISSÃO INTERNA DE PREVENÇÃO DE ACIDENTES. Texto dado pela Portaria MTP n.º 422, de 07 de outubro de 2021. Available: <http://www.guiatrabalhista.com.br/legislacao/nr/nr5.htm>. Access: 5 July 2021).



As of 2015, when the Polo went into crisis⁹, the role of “leader” lost its relevance: “everyone is disappointed, the leaders that had returned to the current role of pawn, because they stopped being, because they know they will not go for supervisor” (Luan, welder, Rio Grande-RS, 21 January 2016). In other words, at the moment of crisis, workers left the individual dispute and positioned themselves according to their function; the factor that altered this dynamic is attributed to unemployment.

Final considerations

In this text, it was observed that the workers presented the “leader” as a “position” situated between them and the person in charge, as the “leader” usually awaited promotion to supervisor. That said and considering the objective of this study, it is observed that the position of “leader” in the Naval Pole was “fictitious” or, as explained by one interviewee, referred to a “leader by mouth”, who did not occupy an endowed function with hierarchical recognition, that is, did not receive compatible monetary compensation.

According to one interviewee, the “leader” was paid according to the function declared in his work card. So, for example, if he was the “leader” of a team of grinders, he was paid as a grinder, that is, during the performance of leadership, these workers did not receive a compatible monetary compensation, thus configuring an accumulation of functions.

In general terms, it can be said that the hope of being promoted was the symbolic element – in the sense of being distinguished from the others by the name itself, by bands on the helmet and respective attributes. Performing various functions and having a certain autonomy - which this figure carries - were the main reasons for certain workers to accept and remain in such functions, even without being sure that the promotion would actually arrive or, even if formally promoted, they would receive as such. For this reason, it is argued that, while waiting for promotion to supervisor, leaders moved between legitimizing the existing post, whether they occupied it or not, and criticism, as they observed the accumulation and deviation

⁹ The crisis and the case of the Naval Pole are correlated to the conduct of “Operação Lava-Jato”, as well as to the impeachment – in August 2016 – of President Dilma Rousseff and, especially, in November of that year, with the change in the index of local content, by then president Michel Temer. With this change, Petrobras not only went back to the previous milestone of Law No. 9,478/1997, but also had its role minimized, as it was once again placed as operator that has preference in the bidding for the contracting of blocks under the production sharing regime, with the minimum participation of 30%. In short, it was a series of factors that, together, resulted in the sector's crisis.



of functions, competition between workers and the fugacity of working for a possible promotion, without any guarantee of effectiveness.

It was also observed that the term “leader”, coming from the executive environment, is correlated to the daily lives of these workers. This term spread and was so naturalized that, although the reactivation of the naval industry in the country is something recent, it is possible to observe that it was present in the daily lives of workers in this industry. Starting from this condition, workers sometimes reinforced the formatting of a competitive subjectivity, sometimes explained the situation as the rise of responsibilities without any guarantee of promotion.

These strategies observed in the Shipyard, such as the creation of a fictitious position, are due to an organizational change aimed at expanding the exploitation of work. Modern capitalism, through targeted criticism, realized the importance of the subjective dimension of work and began to incorporate and re-signify a part of the criticism that suits it (BOLTANSKI; CHIAPELLO, 2009). Thus, according to Linhart (2000) and Bourdieu (2001), modern administration “grants” to workers the organization of their work, but at the same time reserves the control of profit for itself. This “freedom” of workers is the condition of their exploitation, because in terms of Bourdieu (2001), the worker’s well-being increases and the interest of external gain, that is, the salary, does not, because the compensation is shifted to the intrinsic gain, that is, the enrichment of the tasks (D’AVILA, 2014; 2016).

From the interviewees' point of view, being a leader was seen as a promotion strategy, but analytically it appears that they accumulated tasks in addition to their own, without the guarantee of promotion. It was noticed that, when distinguishing this figure from the others under the pretext of claiming a position in charge, the leader - a term from the management literature - ended up taking on more responsibilities, which did not match the function prescribed in their work portfolio. Thus, it is possible to corroborate with Bourdieu (2001) regarding the organization of work, since there was an enrichment of the tasks, which in turn made the common worker adopt the position of leader and legitimize exploitation insofar as he collaborated to your self-exploration. This increase in task responsibilities is also made possible through role flexibility (KREIN, 2001).

The workers, in the expectation of being promoted, partially naturalized the conditions imposed to do so. In doing so, they unveiled a “chain reaction” which, on the one hand, reinforced the existence of this type of function and, on the other hand, resulted in the expansion of competitive relations between them. According to Dardot and Laval (2016, p. 329, our



translation), following a logic of the self-fulfilling process, the leaders were adapting “subjectively to the increasingly harsh conditions that they themselves reproduced”.

This fact highlights the fragility of these workers, even before the Labor Reform carried out in 2017, in relation to the acceptance of a risk, in this specific case, when assuming responsibilities beyond that described in their work portfolio, based solely on the hope of obtaining the promotion to supervisor.

However, the workers also showed some clarity about this symbolic differentiation involved in the figure of the leader, mainly to the extent that the possibilities of promotion were cut and they no longer saw reasons to maintain an individual struggle to conquer a space, because they knew that that would no longer happen.

The workers' awareness of this engagement reveals how perennial it is, since without the possibility of being promoted, the “position of leader” resulted in striving for something in vain. That is, the interviewees moved between the legitimation of this model and the criticism of a subjective leadership. In this case, the perception of exploitation and the effective working conditions were mutually conditioned.

This text intends to reflect on workers' motivations, in a self-reflective and critical perspective, without losing sight of ambivalences. In addition, it sought to understand how workers are in the world of work, how they justify, explain and argue, which is considered central in a sociology that is not exclusively about work, but for and by workers.

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