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A political approach to the role of the autonomous from Marxism



Sources: South wind

The crudest Marxist historiography has implicitly maintained a high degree of positivism with tragic political consequences. It is a prejudice according to which only the industrial and manufacturing model would have introduced modernization processes that, ultimately, have determined the form and composition of the figure of the worker. However, capital has been responding for some time to the workers' push and responses through intense processes of decentralization and productive reorganization in order to weaken union unity and social cohesion.

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This same thesis underlies the core of volume I of *Capital*, where we can read how Marx collects the dialectical relationship between workers' resistance to exploitation and the constant forms of capital to overcome this resistance through new ways of organizing production and with them social relations. This constant transformation of the capital-labour conflict undoubtedly leads us to expect a transformation of the ways in which the class struggle is presented to us in each historical phase. Identifying these forms and responses from below to these movements is a central task. In this sense, what we know today as a *self-employed worker* requires reflection and analysis to approach this figure as a specific form of work.

This is our starting point, because To attend to the evolution of the capitalist mode is to study the development and impact of the working class about him, as Tronti (2001) pointed out:

We too have seen, first, the development capitalist, then the workers' struggles. The problem, change the sign, start again from the beginning: and the principle is the Working class struggle.

This humble contribution aims to contribute to a political understanding of the figure of the self-employed or *independent worker* who, as we shall see, It also coexists under high doses of submission and dependence. I do not know tries to analyze mathematically the quantitative weight of women workers and self-employed workers in the productive fabric of Spanish capitalism, but of elaborate a political approach to the role they play as a subject with Own interests and needs within the class struggle.

A brief approach from Marxism to the figure of the self-employed worker

Starting from the Marxist conception that all the new value created (value added) that exceeds the value of the cost of labor power is surplus value and that, therefore, requires the use of wage labor as the differential element, we could then characterize the self-employed by two main criteria: by having private ownership of the means of production and by the contribution of personal labor in the production of commodities, which they subsequently sell on the market. Considering that domination over wage labor converts the means of production into capital and makes labor power itself a commodity in itself, from a point of view of political economy, the purchase and sale of labor power is the decisive and differential factor to characterize the self-employed worker. Therefore, it differs from capitalist production by the source of its own value, the commodity being in simple commodity production the result of one's labour. Meanwhile, in capitalism, the source of value comes from the exploitation of the labor of others, turning labor power itself into a

commodity. While the above is true, we must recognize the obvious subordination of the process of simple commodity production to capital in the current historical phase. Simple commodity production is undoubtedly subject to the theory of value, from which the value of the commodity is determined by the labor socially necessary to produce it.

Therefore, historically it was of an intermediate layer that, although we can trace back to the past, its forms and Composition has been profoundly transformed over time. This is The traditional independent producer we can imagine at work agricultural or artisanal that has its own land, tools, expert knowledge and machinery from which it produces its own products or services that Finally sell in the market. It is then a form of production. that has existed in various socio-economic formations.

Unlike classical reading Spread by the liberals who fix the success of the so-called revolution industrial in the technological leap experienced as a result of the steam engine, It is true that capital already played an important role in the Simple commodity production. The need for concentration, control and specialization of the labour required by capital from the Factory production, in order to increase productivity, constituted the great Leap forward that initially lived the Industrial Revolution. It's about Initially from a specialization model, known as *putting-out system*, where the producer maintained the Control over the work process, losing control over the product. The The worker was free to decide the hours and intensity of work. With the Arrival from the factory this disappears and control is lost, both over the production process as on the result of the final product. The hierarchy in The productive process and the division of labor were already present in the pre-capitalist societies. They are not inventions exclusive to the mode of capitalist production. The difference introduced by capitalist production, Without the possibility of delving into a process undoubtedly much more complex, the We find in the transformation of the independent producer into a worker employee as a result of the specialization and essential role of the entrepreneur as an intermediary agent between production and the market.

Who do we refer to in contemporary capitalism as self-employed?

As we said initially, the new forms of organization of work respond to the development of the conflict between capital and labor, responses to new forms of the class struggle in each historical moment. In the words of the Marxist André Gorz (1977): "Reorganization does not modify the technical content of work, it modifies its social form." In the same way that at the end of the nineteenth century technological/organizational solutions (Harvey, 1989) attacked the artisanal models of the professional worker and provoked the mass growth of

unskilled workers, as well as the consequent expansion of syndicalism and its struggles, in the first decades of the twentieth century other mechanisms were put in place by the bourgeoisie as a response. For this reason, we are going to use as an illustrative example of this process the case of the Weimar Republic as a scenario on which to analyze the role of the self-employed worker.

The Weimar Republic is undoubtedly one of the first experiences where modern capitalism began to test these practices. In the productive field, we observe a tendency opposed to the Fordist development of the time tending towards concentration. As we say, a response of capital in search of greater political control of the labor force after the events of the German Revolution and the process of politicization that extended in the midst of the economic and social crisis. The data provided by Heinrich A. Winker in his work *The Road to Catastrophe (Der Weg in die Katastrophe, 1978)* reflect these movements: if in 1925 approximately 6,800,000 workers out of a total of 18 million were employed in factories with fewer than 10 employees, by the end of the republic they already reached up to 7 million of the 14 and a half million total, that is, 50% of the workforce. If we bring the focus closer, we can attend to the specific case of self-employed workers at that same time, which went from being 15.9% of the total employed in 1925 to 16.4% in 1933. Workers concentrated mainly in the industrial-artisanal sector, being 17.1%, and in the trade-transport sector, 25.1% of the total. From these data, we observe the specific process of disintegration of a working class whose main militant sectors, not by chance mostly in the large factories of the industrial sector, were framed in the unions of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) or to a lesser extent in the communist ranks of the KPD.

In the same vein, from the The 80s, after the profound cycle of workers' mobilizations of the decades of the 60 and 70, new forms of organization of production were adopted that were coming to dismantle the processes of vertical integration of the whole of the forces labor of the productive chain in favor of the extensive use of more and more Outsourced phases, what we know as outsourcing. A process extended both at the spatial and sectoral level that sought to respond to both to the different signs of labor conflict and to the logic of competitiveness imposed by the market itself. This has been the case, for decades, which are increasingly productive processes and services subcontracted by the parent company.

More and more production processes and services are outsourced by the parent company

As we say, it is not a question of a historical exception or a simple modification of management processes, organization and administration of work, but it is about the answer

In the face of the social conflict inherent in the capitalist model and rationalization of production. Therefore, it is impossible to isolate the figure of the worker autonomous as a productive agent and its role as a political subject of the context general socio-political characterized by the development and evolution of one's own Class struggle. Within this general picture is where we must analyze it in order to know your situation and anticipate your different Movements.

To complete this explanation, here one of the conclusions reached by the Italian Marxist Mario is useful to us. Tronti in *Workers and Capital* (2001), where it concludes that "to a certain degree of exploitation of labor corresponds to a certain level of capitalist development"; that is, they are the degree of exploitation of workers, the different ways in which this develops and expresses surplus labour and, ultimately, the amount of added surplus value which reveals the level of development of the capital. Being the result of the balance of forces between the classes from where the level of exploitation of labor is resolved. Logically, expressed in different forms at each historical moment, but which, as we said to the The beginning of these lines, leads us to reject the ideas impregnated with positivism from the inevitable development of concentration as a form The last of capitalist development. Observing ways of working today Flexible and autonomous, we can more easily identify in them the workers of the nineteenth century than the great masses of the factories of the XX century. The form of autonomous work today corresponds much more to a form determined exploitation of labour than a vestige of production pre-capitalist. *Riders*, work companies temporary, logistics, transporters, hospitality, millions of workers and workers in self-employed condition, or false self-employed, as they come recognising numerous judgments, which express a specific form of Production of highly profitable surplus value. It is then a question of a *Democratizing* process insofar as it is formally the market which exerts the pressure of capital on the producer and not the Entrepreneur as a specific agent. We are facing one of the most Clear of capitalism as an impersonal relationship beyond the figure of one or Another specific pattern.

What is the situation in Spanish capitalism and how can we intervene?

In response to the case of the Spanish State, according to the latest data from the Ministry of Labour as of March 31, 2022, there are some 3,323,536 self-employed people. Of these, according to these data, 74% are over 40 years of age and, according to the sectors, 73.6% are employed in the service sector, 10.8% work in agriculture, 11.5% in construction and 4.1% in industry. Another striking fact to complete our photograph of this sector is the one

referring to the number of self-employed who have employees in their charge; Currently, 21% of self-employed workers have a salaried worker, being in the service sector where this situation occurs the most. Percentage that increases as the contribution base increases, reaching the maximum number of employees in charge among 35.7% of those who recognize contributions three times higher than the minimum base.

It is interesting to highlight at this point one of the most relevant data referred to by the Ministry of Labour in this report regarding the situation of the self-employed: it points out that 85.3% of self-employed people do not exceed the minimum contribution base; A level currently located at 944.40 euros. To all this we must add the figure of the *false self-employed* who, according to various sources, reaches between 300,000 and half a million workers who elaborate a stable productive task with the same employer.

These Data allow us to deepen the political reflection of these lines. His Political position is conditioned, as in all cases, both by its objective role in the production process as by the set of relationships social and cultural that pass between paper in the production chain and subjective political positions. A sector that on many occasions has Tilted between one or another political field and within which they coexist in a way tense diverse interests. We are not discovering anything new here; is in the moments of strong crisis when, as Lenin (1920) pointed out in *The Leftism, infantile disease of communism*: "Those above no longer can, those below no longer want, the layers or classes in between tilt..", And we would add, on the side of those at the bottom provided that they have a Solid project capable of winning them for the socialist project and there is a leadership revolutionary (leadership, party and class consciousness). This is where it comes to the importance of developing and implementing one's own policy orientation in this field.

En el contexto actual marcado por una inflación récord en los últimos 45 años y el crecimiento exponencial de los precios de los carburantes y de materias primas básicas, la situación de los autónomos se hace especialmente complicada como agentes totalmente dependientes del gran capital. Situación influida coyunturalmente por la guerra en Ucrania, pero, sin duda, determinada por la profunda crisis de los combustibles fósiles en la que se encuentra inserto el capitalismo global. Dado que en las economías occidentales el consumo interno supone uno de los principales motores económicos y que esta tarea ocupa en gran parte el foco de la actividad de los autónomos en el caso español, no es descartable el fuerte impacto que sufrirán en caso de extenderse la actual situación. Es en base a las contradicciones que presenta en estos momentos el capitalismo, y cómo estas se expresan en el caso concreto del capitalismo español, desde donde deben partir nuestros

análisis para elaborar una teoría y una práctica capaz de incidir en el conflicto político en ciernes sobre estos sectores. A partir de lo cual, considero que debemos prestar especial atención a la situación en el transporte, ya que coinciden en él tanto el relevante papel del transporte y logística de mercancías y personas por carretera como el auge imparable de los combustibles fósiles; y tanta o más, también, a la situación del sector servicios, donde encontramos desde en hostelería y todo el sector turístico a trabajadoras del hogar y profesionales de la economía digital.

Para ello, contamos con una primera experiencia reciente, protagonizada en el pasado mes de marzo por parte de los transportistas 1/. Como principal causa se encontraba el elevado precio de la gasolina y el diésel, pero que encubría en su interior fuertes contradicciones entre pequeños propietarios y asalariados y, a su vez, contra la gran patronal del sector. Una movilización hegemónica políticamente por sectores de la pequeña burguesía, pero que incorporaba a miles de asalariados en una lucha conjunta con intereses compartidos contra la gran patronal del sector. Lejos de ser una expresión aislada, podemos partir de ella para extraer algunas lecciones, reconociendo las potencialidades transformadoras en las principales necesidades del capital: la necesidad de un nuevo ciclo de acumulación sobre el incremento de la explotación de la mano de obra, la extracción de recursos naturales, ya sean combustibles o materias primas, y un nuevo impulso a la ocupación del territorio.

En este sentido, podemos vislumbrar las tareas que nos permitan poner sobre la mesa una orientación política propia encaminada a incidir sobre estos sectores desde la izquierda revolucionaria, política y sindical, hacia las trabajadoras y trabajadores insertos en el sector de autónomos a partir de:

1) Un programa concreto que atienda las necesidades inmediatas, como es la mejora de las condiciones laborales y salarios, como camino para mejorar las condiciones de lucha de los sectores asalariados en el conflicto.

Potenciar decididamente el papel del cooperativismo en manos de los propios trabajadores a partir de fondos sociales

2) Un programa a medio plazo encaminado a defender a la pequeña producción frente al gran capital o de la entrada de grandes fondos de inversión y las multinacionales de la llamada nueva *economía digital*. Medidas encaminadas a la apropiación bajo control de los trabajadores de las plataformas para servir mejor a la demanda, repartir y planificar el trabajo y mejorar las condiciones laborales, apoyar las batallas legales por el reconocimiento de los falsos autónomos, y su conversión en asalariados, hasta potenciar

decididamente el papel del cooperativismo en manos de los propios trabajadores a partir de fondos sociales. Cooperativas soportadas por capital social bajo escrupulosas condiciones que eviten la constitución de una nueva burguesía con capacidad de explotar a nuevos trabajadores; se persigue así la voluntad de caminar hacia una integración posterior en el sector público. El objetivo ahí es claro, salir de la lógica mercantil para avanzar hacia el control tanto de los medios de producción como del propio proceso de trabajo y de la finalidad social del producto.

3) Para lo anterior es imprescindible la organización independiente, buscando romper las relaciones laborales cuasi absolutistas, la *ley de familia* imperante, en palabras de Antoni Domènech, entre asalariados y pequeños propietarios en este sector. En este sentido, por ejemplo, no sería descabellada una campaña por la subida de los salarios en todo el sector de la hostelería que potenciara la afiliación en el sector servicios. En esta línea nos puede ser muy útil aprender de la nueva ola sindical en Estados Unidos en este campo.

In conclusion, we must point in the face to the new political cycle that we face that is such the insertion of the self-employed within the market and its submission to the competition laws of the same that, Like the worker, he does so as the owner of his labor power, but Not so of the exclusivity of the product created by him and of the production process. With the substantial difference that their relationship with other workers Nor does it occur in the work process as isolated subjects, but only in and through the market. As we have seen, they influence a whole A series of political and cultural factors that today place a great part of the self-employed as a potential ally of the petty bourgeoisie in Upcoming conflicts. Give up this fight in order to attract millions of workers is undoubtedly a first defeat that we can not allow.

Notes:

1/ Victor de la Fuente, "Carriers, first chapter of a wave of growing discontent", south wind, 24/03/2022 (accessible in <https://vientosur.info/transportistas-primer-capitulo-de-una-ola-de-descontento-creciente/>).

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Source: <https://vientosur.info/un-acercamiento-politico-al-papel-de-los-autonomos-desde-el-marxismo/>

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