
”Self-entrepreneurship” among motorcycle couriers in Brazil and its consequences for labor mobilizations

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Abstract

In recent decades, neoliberal ideology has spread the belief among workers that they are ”entrepreneurs of themselves” and solely responsible for their career, employability, survival and well-being, assuming all the risks inherent to their profession and taking full responsibility for their success and failure. Dardot and Laval (2017) speak of an ”entrepreneurial man”, an individual who manages all aspects of his life as if it were a company and keeps his subjectivity fully involved in his profession. This is the autonomous, active, competitive and responsible worker, who participates, engages and is fully involved in his professional activity, has control over his emotions, stress and relationships with clients, is committed and always available, seeking to maximize his human capital. Such individuals see themselves as a commodity that needs to be constantly renewed, continually surpassing themselves and seeking to be flexible in order to keep up with the changes imposed by the market, in an incessant search for improvement, efficiency and productivity (Sennett, 2006). Sociologists have denounced that this is not true entrepreneurship, as originally addressed by Schumpeter (1982), concerning the innovative, visionary entrepreneur, who has capital to invest and leads a radical rupture or transformation in a given sector or branch of activity. What neoliberal ideology has actually done is camouflage social vulnerability and mask the process of precariousness, helping to demobilize the working class. When dealing specifically with motorcycle couriers, Abílio (2019) states that they are not entrepreneurs at all; they are nothing more than ”subordinate self-managers”, workers entirely devoid of guarantees, rights and security associated with work. Although there is broad agreement among authors regarding the characteristics and consequences of ”self-entrepreneurship,” few took the initiative to measure and evaluate it empirically. Our main objective is to assess the presence of ”self-entrepreneurship” among motorcycle couriers in Brazil, in order to figure out what they think about it, how many of them assimilate it, and to what extent this impacts (negatively) their ability to mobilize for better working conditions. To this end, we will use data collected from approximately 400 app delivery workers in Brazil. In addition to descriptive analysis, we will use the exploratory factor analysis technique, which allows us to identify the relationships observed between several items, in a smaller number of latent variables. We will also seek to construct an index representative of a supposed ”self-entrepreneurship”.

Keywords: self entrepreneur, neoliberalism, mobilization, strikes

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