

SUPER-EXPLOITATION OF LABOUR AND DECENT WORK: AN ANALYSIS ON THE WORKING DAY IN MEXICO AND CHILE

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Abstract: Based on the debate proposed by Ruy Mauro Marini in the Marxist Theory of Dependency, this paper aims to discuss the category “super-exploitation of labour” and one of them mechanisms – the tendency of working time increasing. The paper intend is to discuss the experience of two countries –Mexico and Chile - to present how the advance in the capitalist mode of production, especially after the implementation of neoliberal agenda, impact on the working time. Therefore, and considering the impacts in the social and labour relations, we intend to show how these theory and category contribute to the debate on the decent work.

Keywords: Marxist Theory of Dependency; super-exploitation of labour; working time; decent work.

Códigos JEL: B14, B51, J21, J81, O40.

Submetido às Sessões Ordinárias

Área temática 7: Estado, trabalho e políticas públicas.

Introduction²

Over the last years, the debate on the decent work has assumed an important relevance on the social sciences. Even though over time the concept has got some different interpretations around its definition and significance³, there is no doubt of how much the discussion has been contributing to understand the social structure in the Global South, especially when we consider the social and labour

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² Most of the bibliography used on this paper were originally written in Portuguese and Spanish. Quotes presented all along the paper were translated by the author, and he is the only responsible for that.

³ Mocelin (2011) presents other different interpretation regarding the understand of the decent work concept. According Infante and Sunkel (2004:8), decent work is defined by high quality employment, which means high levels of productivity and fair wages, social protection, including access to health care and social security system; in which the social rights are respected and the workers have political power into their communities; besides, it has to provide social equity, allows the balance between work and family, achieve gender equality and promotes que acquisition of personal skills. According Uriate (2001: 15), decent work is a concept still under construction, with a profound ethical content and which tends to highlight the relevance of the worker’s rights and the quality of working conditions; decent work can only be work in sufficient, appropriate, dignified, and fair quantity and quality, which includes respect for rights, income and satisfactory working conditions, social protection, and a context of freedom of association and social dialogue. According to Espinoza (2003: 6), the main idea of decent work is an integrating proposal of different aspects transforming the quality and quantity of jobs, but also the social relationship and the type of society and development they are looking for. However, its mere enunciation and its dynamics character reveal a “political will” and a critical capacity that takes a position in the face of the serious problems that workers are experiencing, and it can serve as an instrument that orders different axes at the micro and macro levels.

relations and regulations. This is also the case in Latin-America countries, which has been historically characterized by structural unemployment and large rate of labour exploitation. From those issues, some important questions raised to think the relevance of the public policies, if not to solve completely that problems⁴, at least to propose better conditions in the labour relations, considering the working time, the labour productivity, and the wage levels.

The concept of “decent work” was proposed, for the first time, in a summary document presented by the General Director of the International Labour Organization (ILO) during the 87^o Meeting of the International Labour Conference, which took place in Geneva, in July 1999. This proposal emerged in a historical moment when the discussions on the labour quality has been neglected to a discussion based on the precarious or precariousness of work, and it was happening since the productive restructuring during the 1970’s and the establishment of the industrial job as reference to “high quality jobs”. However, at the same time, and especially in the peripheral and dependent countries, the advancement of the informality and atypical forms of work, also because of the productive restructuring, brought the necessity to discuss better conditions of work.

In that proposal, decent work was presented as one of the primary goals of the ILO. According to the document,

[currently] the primary purpose of the ILO is to promote opportunities for men and women to achieve decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity [...]. Decent work is the point of convergence of four strategic objectives: the promotion of fundamental rights at work, employment, social protection, and social dialogue. This should guide the Organization’s decisions and define its international task in the coming years”. (International Labour Organization, 1999).

Since the concept was proposed in an international conference – which means that it incorporates all of the agreements made among the participating countries -, it is based on these rights and principles: 1) respect for trade union freedom and trade union association; 2) the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; 3) the elimination of any kind of forced or compulsory labour forms; 4) the effective abolition of child labour; and 5) the elimination of discrimination in matters of employment and occupation. Eight other international labour conventions are associated to these four rights and principles, establishing that all the ILO members have to respect and follow those rights and principles, whether or not they have approved and/or ratified the corresponding conventions.

⁴ This is a very important issue in the Marxist Theory of Dependency. According to this theory, the labour exploitation is a structural characteristic of the capitalist mode of production, which means that it is impossible to consider the advancement of capitalism without the increasing in the exploitation. For this reason, the theory could be contradictory to the concept of decent work. In the next sections, we will discuss the details on the Marxist Theory of Dependency, and from that try to point out the convergences between those two interpretations.

The concept of decent work, in addition to incorporating the idea of creating quality jobs, also incorporates the notions of labour rights, social protection and the right to voice and political representation. By reaffirming there are forms of employment which are unacceptable so it must be abolished – such as child and forced labour – it proposes not only public policies aimed at creating jobs and fighting unemployment, but also overcoming forms of labour which are based in insufficient income for individual and their families, or jobs based on unhealthy, dangerous, unsafe and/or degrading activities.

Therefore, it is understood as a multidimensional concept since states that employment must be associated: with social protection and labour rights; to the need to reduce informal labour and moving towards the expansion of formalization; and defines gender equity as a central axis of the concept. (Abramo, 2010). Under the discussion on the decent work, it is considered a set of aspects or elements which should have been found in the labour contracts and labour conditions, to assure social inclusion, and in this way offering to the employees' access to social protection, public pension plan and social security, minimum wage, labour rights, credit system and unemployment insurance.

According to Rodgers (2002) the concept of decent work tries to capture the connection between social and economic objectives, through the debate not only about the employment itself, but also the work quality that each society are able to create. Just as it makes no sense to discuss labour rights without worrying about job vacancies availability, it makes no sense to discuss job creation without worrying about their quality and the access of those new occupied workers to labour rights. Also, it is not just a matter of debating employment and occupation, due the more general understanding of what work is, which includes self-employment, work carried-out at home, the set of activities in informal economy and the housekeeping. Furthermore, it emphasizes that decent work includes universal rights and principles, but also reflects the values and possibilities of each society. Therefore, it must be desired as an element of economic development, but it must also be thought and implemented according to the possibilities and particularities of each society.

Even though the concept got relevance to discuss the job quality, researchers have pointed out some problems about its understanding. According to Mocelin (2011), one of the most principal problems of the concept is the fact that it is based on the idea that there is a standard of “quality employment”, which is basically the kind of job that emerged in the industrial society. That kind of job is characterized by a contractual relationship with only one employer, in industries/companies organized to produce goods and services, full time working, contracts for indefinite periods, progressive wages, stable work paths etc. But nowadays the labour market is different from the industrial society in the beginning of the XX century. Industries and companies are demanding a more flexible and creative employee, which has relevant impacts in the contract forms, maybe leading to the expansion of the precariousness. That is, more important than the discussion on the concept, is to

understand the current structure and problems of the labour market, and how a debate on the decent work can contribute to the societies moving toward a situation in which the jobs can provide what the author so-call “the best job”:

“The best job” [is that one which] promotes the “well-being” of employees: it is a job able to provide economic security, solid social support, professional development. The best job adds economic value, which means that it is productive, but it also needs to add social value, which means that it must provide knowledge and social recognition. To fulfil these requirements, employment involves acquired knowledge and information. It must improve the standard living, adding elements that can generate economic and social satisfaction, corresponding to individual aspirations and professionals of workers. A quality employment is defined as such from the moment the worker starts working, as it would reward qualifications and competences, and not just experience or the “suffering” time devoted to work. (Mocelin, 2011, pp. 56).

Considering this theoretical discussion, this paper wants to analyse if the peripheral countries – such as the Latin American – have some elements on their labour markets that promote the increasing in the labour exploitation, and in consequence the worsening in working conditions. Even though the labour exploitation is one of the main elements of the capitalist mode of production, in the peripheral and dependent countries the economic and social structure have some specific features which make them been under the situation of super-exploitation of labour, according to the Marxist Theory of Dependency. Of course, the mere fact that they are capitalist countries would make them countries with enough conditions for the analysis of decent work. But under a structural situation of super-exploitation of labour, these conditions are even more reinforced.

Considering that one of the super-exploitation of labour’s mechanisms is the increasing in hours worked during the working day (or the extension of the working day), in the next sections will be discussed changes in the working day/time in two countries – Mexico and Chile – after the consolidation of neoliberal policies on these countries. The argument is that after neoliberal policies implementation, there was a tendency to worsening the working conditions, including among them the working day. To go into this discussion, at first it will present the theoretical debate on the Marxist Theory of Dependency and the category super-exploitation of labour, intending to explain the working day as one of its mechanisms. The following sections intend to present data on working day/time in Mexico and Chile, starting on the 2000s, when the neoliberal policies were already entrenched in the region. Finally, the last section will link both discussions – super-exploitation of labour and decent work - presenting how these two different theories can be connect for the understand of the Latin American economies and societies.

The analysis made on this paper is based on data provided by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) database, which can be found on the OECD Statistics website.

1. The category super-exploitation of labour

The proposition of this new category was strongly connected to the understand that authors of the Marxist Dependency Theory has had about the way that the capitalist mode of production had been arranged over the history in the peripheral countries. Specifically, Ruy Mauro Marini – who was the responsible for its proposition – whose interpretation was based on the idea that the advancement of capitalism in certain regions (central countries) was possible due to the establishment of dependency in other (peripheral countries). So, to understand what “super-exploitation of labour” meant, was necessary to think in the international expansion of capitalism – basically the imperialism movement -, the setting of capitalism in the peripheral regions and the establishment of the central-peripheral relationship in the international trade.

Marini (1973) argues the productive structure framework in the peripheral countries and the role they assume in the international trade, as primary goods suppliers, results in what he used to call a “debt spiral”. Basically, the peripheral countries are supplying primary goods – which have a low incorporation of technologies and value composition (or “cheap goods”) – and demanding industrial and technological goods – which have high incorporation of technologies and value composition (“expensive goods”). This type of trade leads to an imbalance in the international payments, so the peripheral countries must access foreign loans to cover the imbalance, promoting the increase in their debts. Over this trade structure there is a permanent income transfer from the peripheral to the central countries – which can be for both commercial and/or the financial perspectives; but since the income has been transferred and not invested in their own countries, this reflects in their development possibilities. From this analysis, Marini propose a definition for dependence, which is

a subordinate relationship between formally independent nations, in the framework of production relations in the subordinate nations are modified or recreated to ensure the expanded reproduction of dependence. The fruit of dependence can therefore only be more dependence, and its elimination necessarily presupposes the suppression of the relations of production involved. (Marini, 1973, p. 109)⁵.

⁵ Regarding the concept of dependence, Bamberra (1978, p. 41) says that “[dependence] is not just a phenomenon of international relations, with unfavourable commercial exchange for underdeveloped countries; but they are also local relations, which configure an economic and social structure whose character and dynamics are conditioned by subordination, exploitation and imperialist domination. The political consequences that emerge from this analysis are very clear: the dependent bourgeoisies are not in a position to face imperialism and promote autonomous development”. And Santos (1978, p. 37) says that “(...) dependence is an intrinsic feature of the socioeconomic system of underdeveloped countries which is characterized by the existence of a growing interdependence among national economies on a world scale under the hegemony of one or several dominant central countries that transform this development into the wealth accumulation and power for them to the detriment of the vast world majorities. The local structures are not just a consequence of external factors but is its own way – the dependent way – of participating in this process of the capitalist world economy development”.

Following the arguments, Marini says that the role played by Latin American countries in the international trade is a key point to explain how processes the industrial development in the central countries. The industrial revolution in the central countries required a change in their productive structure: in one hand, they had to reduce the primary good production to transfer all the resources and capacities to the industry; on the other hand, they had to find a way to access the primary goods, since they were used as raw materials to the industry. To make it possible, the advancement of the imperialism had to intensify the international division of labour, stablishing the peripheral countries as world food suppliers, and the central countries as the industrial goods suppliers. So more than contribute to the capital accumulation in the industrial countries,

Latin America's participation in the world market will help the transition of capital accumulation in industrial economies from the absolute surplus value production to the relative surplus value production, which means the accumulation will depend more on the increase in the work productive capacity than the simple exploitation of the workers. (Marini, 1973).

Into the industrial economies, this shift in the type of accumulation, now based on the relative surplus value, required a change in the relationship between the necessary labour time and the surplus labour time⁶, which must produce a decrease in the labour force value. Since the labour force value is stablished by the necessary value to consume the equivalent of their livelihood, the decreasing in the labour force value would be necessarily linked to decreasing in the value of the goods in the market basket (considering in this case the market basked consumed by the workers). Since the goods in this basked is basically foodstuffs, and the international supply of the foodstuffs is provided by the peripheral countries, we could say:

- The peripheral countries are responsible for the supply, and somehow for the price, to the primary goods/raw materials;
- Since the peripheral countries are increasing the primary goods supply, specially over the demand, it is possible their prices will reduce;
- In this case, the increasing in the primary goods supply leads to the decreasing in their prices, and so the decreasing in the labour force value.
- In turn, the decreasing in the labour force value into the industrial countries results in a raise in the productivity, so it's also expected a raise in the surplus labour and maybe – depending on the conditions – in the profit rate.

⁶ According to the Encyclopaedia of Marxism, the necessary labour time is the time (per day or per week) which workers must work (in the average conditions of the industry of their day), to produce the equivalent of their own livelihood (at the socially and historically determined standard of living of their day). As wage-workers however, they cannot get paid until they have completed a full working day, and that extra time they work, over and above the necessary labour time, is called surplus labour time (Access on www.marxists.org in February 2sd)

- Therefore, the position of the peripheral countries in the international market can be considered the responsible for the decreasing in the labour force value in the central/industrial countries.

This is the path how the peripheral countries, based on the role played by them in the international economy, contributes to the shift in the accumulation and in the productivity in the industrial economies and its establishment as the industrial goods suppliers. From now, it is possible to affirm that the economic structure in the industrial economies is completely dependent of the international division of labour – then they will use their economic, political, and military power to maintain it.

However, the change in the values and prices of the primary goods caused by the international trade dynamics – as described above - does not mean the same would happen with the values and prices of the industrial goods, since its values are less elastic to the changes in the supply and demand dynamics. Usually this happens because two reasons: 1) the industrial goods' values and prices are more stable because of its productive structure, which is more based in fixed production costs; 2) second, because this is a monopolist production, which means the producers have more control over the prices, so they will work to keep them in high and stable levels.

According to Marini, by establishing a trade among goods whose values have not only different but also opposite dynamics, the center-periphery trade would gradually be marked by what the development theories called “unequal exchange” – the exchange of goods with different value composition. In turn, this will lead to a deterioration in the terms of trade, since there is a downtrend in the primary goods' prices at the same time that there is a trend towards stability (or even an upward trend) in the prices of industrial goods.

Then the only possible result of this process is the value transfer between the different countries, so the values produced in the peripheral and dependent countries are permanently transferred and accumulated in the central/industrial countries, exactly those who already have the technology and monopoly controls. Considering in the capitalist mode of production the capital needs to be accumulated to reproduce itself, what is happening in the peripheral countries is an obstruction in the capital reproduction, since part of the capital has been transferred to other countries – so somehow the capital transferred must be replaced. But there are some problems in the peripheral countries that difficult the replace of the capital – which must be done by increasing the capital production - transferred to the central countries:

- The increase in the capital production cannot be done by increasing the productivity, since the peripheral countries don't have techniques and technologies to produce more surplus value, specially based on relative surplus value;

- Even if those countries had technologies, this would not be enough, because the increase in the productivity by itself could not ensure the increase in the surplus value – for this, would be fundamental the decrease in the workforce value, as we explain above.

Therefore, only through the increase in the degrees of workforce exploitation would be possible for peripheral countries to increase the surplus value production, and so compensate the capital permanently transferred to other countries.

Marini (1973) describes three main mechanisms, which can be implemented singly or in combination, whereby peripheral countries could increase the surplus value production and get the accumulation process completed, replacing the capital transferred.

1. The first mechanism is the *increase in the labour intensity*: based on systems to reorganize the production process, the worker starts to produce, in the same working day, a quantity of goods greater than what he/she used to produce under the previous conditions;
2. The second mechanism is the *increase in the working day*: the working day becomes longer than before; in this situation is possible to increase the surplus labour time, so the worker keeps working a longer time, producing a value which will be appropriated by the capitalist (in this case, there is no change in the workforce value, so the necessary labour time does not change); and
3. The third mechanism is what Marini so-called *appropriation of worker's fund*: this situation happens when there is a decreasing in the wages, but without any correspondence in reducing the workforce value – which means that the workers will earn less than the necessary their livelihood⁷.

These are the situations which it is taken from the peripheral countries' workers the minimum conditions to guarantee their life reproduction. In the first and second cases, because they have to work more and longer than it's consider regular⁸, and they have a higher energy spending⁹ that, consequently, intensifies their process of physical exhaustion. In the third situation, because it is taken

⁷Amaral (2006; 2012) argues that the workforce value is social and historically established, so from time to time it is expected some changes in that value, depending on the new livelihood necessities which is brought by the social changes. So, if there is a change in the livelihood necessities (which means that there is a change in the workforce value) without any change in their earnings, it is possible to say there is a new type or mechanism of superexploitation. Besides, says in the current stage of the imperialism (fictitious capital's stage), part of the workers funds its transfer to the credit system through the payment of interest - the credit system its more accessible to the population, which are going to that system exactly to get credit to ensure their livelihood. It means that the workers are going to a situation of indebtedness, since they will have to access the credit system again, this time not only to guarantee their livelihoods, but also to have resources to pay the interest debits. Somehow, this could be pointed out as the fourth mechanism of super-exploitation of labour.

⁸In this case, not just according to the labour laws of each country, but also according to what can be consider regular respecting the life conditions and the human physical limits – something close to a decent working day.

⁹According to Marx (1887), labour is a spend of human energy aimed to performing any kind of activity.

from them the minimum necessary to access all the goods and services (in the market) that they need for their livelihood.

Insofar as those mechanisms are based on the intensive and extensive use of the workforce, they are also based on the higher workforce exploitation, and not on the expansion of their productive capacities, this leads to the payment of the workforce below its real value. This is what Marini so-called *super-exploitation of labour*.

Important to highlight that this is not a general category by the capitalist mode of production, but a specific category by the dependent countries that came from the role that they play in the international trade. What Marini is proposing is not a discussion to consider situations in which there are many possibilities to increase the production through the increasing in the workforce exploitation – which is something basically possible in any capitalist society. He is proposing a situation to increase the surplus value extraction through changes in the working day (reducing the necessary labour time and increasing the surplus labour time) in a very specific context of permanent value transfer from the peripheral to central countries; this is the same to say that these mechanisms are implemented to extract more surplus value just because there is a permanent value transfer among these different regions. Since the capital produced in the peripheral countries had been transferred to the central countries, there was an interruption in the capital dynamics (capital is produced but not accumulated), so it needs to be replaced. And the replacement is made through the super-exploitation of labour mechanisms, which results in the payment of the workers below of their labour value.

Besides the structure of the international division of labour as the reason for the super-exploitation of labour, Marini says that the industrial reserve arm plays an important role to understand this category. This is because the peripheral economies are also characterized by a structural surplus labour, which reflects in the levels of the wages: the greater the surplus labour, the greater the tendency to a low level of wages. As a matter of fact, for a high level of unemployment, the working class is under a more precarious conditions, losing its bargaining power and the conditions to negotiate with the employers. Worse the conditions of the working class, better the conditions for the capital, so better the conditions to implement the super-exploitation of labour mechanisms.

Working through an imbalance increase in the workforce achieved by the immigration process, and using labour-saving technologies, these economies carried out their capital accumulation process fundamentally based on the absolute surplus value production. For this, it is important in part the lack of regulation of working conditions and the consequential irrational extension of the working day. But also, the rupture of the relationship between the working earns and its real value, in the words, between what is considered as necessary working time and the livelihood needs effectively created by the working class. (Marini, 1974, p. 115).

To finish the discussion, Marini wrote some appointments regarding the industrialization process in the peripheral countries. Even though they are structurally characterized by the underdevelopment and dependency, it does not mean that they cannot go through that process. So, he argues there is an industrial sector into the peripheral countries, but it was developed following the rules of the imperialism advancement, since it was part of the capital expansion into the international level. To understand the transition of the peripheral countries from the primary goods suppliers' economies to industrial economies, it has to be taken as part of the international expansion of capital, because it will explain, first, why this transition would be important for the imperialist accumulation, and second, why is a kind of dependent industry.

The peripheral industrial sector was organized based on the imports substitution¹⁰, which means there was a previous demand for its products, even though at that moment it was not a very large market¹¹. Depending on this very stricter market, it was necessary an unequal income distribution to allow the industrial sector development, for two basic reasons:

1. The lower the wages, higher the companies/industries profits; the lower the wages, greater the income inequality.
2. A great income inequality means the rich class was earning more, and since they were the industrial goods market, more their conditions to increase the consumption.

The combination of a monopolist industrial production and low production costs (including the wages as costs), lead to the income inequality, to the high profit levels and the organization of the industry. Of course, everything based on the super-exploitation of labour, which is also an important aspect of the capital-labour relations into the industry. No matter where the economic dynamics comes from – primary or industrial sector: in the peripheral countries, all of them is based on the dependency and the super-exploitation of labour.

But why this process must be understood as part of the imperialism expansion in the XX century? Once the periphery starts its own industrial revolution, it needs to access from the central countries' machines, equipments and technologies since they did not produce it. In the meantime, they are not just organizing a new market for industrial countries, but also absorbing technologies

¹⁰ The Latin American industrialization is usually so-called "imports substitutions process". Several events that happened in the world during the first half of the XX century (I and II World War, 1929 crisis) created some constraints to the non-industrial countries to maintain the industrial imports, especially because most of the industrial countries reduced their production during those moments. For those which have some industrial structure, it was an opportunity to increase the investment in the industrial sector to produce goods previously imported. This was the cases of Brazil and Argentina for instance. Therefore, this process is so-called "imports substitutions".

¹¹ Also, important to highlight in the first half of the XX century, the industrial goods were demanded in Latin America basically by rich people, then it could not be considered a large market. This was one of the most important limits for that new sector.

already considered obsolesces for the technological frontier, so not used in the central countries anymore. Into the peripheral countries, this turns into a situation really complex for the working class: more technologies mean replacement from workers to machines, and more unemployment; more unemployment means more pressures to a decrease in the wages; more unemployment and low levels of wage means a favourable conditions for super-exploitation of labour and precarious work.

In summary, the author's main argument is based to point out the super-exploitation of labour as an aspect to define the peripheral countries' dependent condition: as the capitalist mode of production advances over the periphery, the superexploitation mechanisms also advance and became more complex. They are mechanisms to ensure the capital replacement (considering the capital transfer from periphery to central regions), which at the same time allows the capital reproduction into the periphery and the link between the dependency situation and the international expansion of capital.

2. Working Day in Mexico and Chile

As we discussed in the previous section, the category super-exploitation of labour has three main mechanisms, and one of them is the possibility to make changes in the working day to increase the surplus value production, in this case through the increase in the surplus labour time. Also, this category was proposed based on the historical analysis of the Latin American countries, which is enough to say that is a specific theoretical framework to analyse its economic, social and political structure.

To expose how we can perceive the super-exploitation of labour into the reality, in the present section we will analyse the working day mechanism for two Latin American countries – Mexico and Chile. The idea is to prove the existence of the category in these societies (as examples of Latin American countries) and think in some proposals, based on the decent work idea, to overcome or at least reduce the impacts in the labour force precariousness. As we said in the theoretical discussion, the super-exploitation of labour mechanisms may work on their own or even in combination to each other at the same time. Here we're going to present just one of them, without considering that the others may be also working in the same period.

For the analysis, we will use data from the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) regarding not just the working day and hours worked, but also some information on the labour earnings and the type of employment (full time or part time job), which we consider essential for the kind of analysis we are intending to do. The analysis will cover the period that goes from 2000 to 2020, year of the last information provided by the OECD database. In this case, we will not cover the pandemic period, especially because we consider that the pandemic has

had effects on the labour market that do not necessarily reflect its structural problems, although it may have accentuated them.

Before going into the analysis, it is important to highlight the legal aspects which limit the working day/labour hours in Mexico and Chile, since each country follow their own definitions and laws.

2.1 Mexican Labour Laws

From its colonial history, Mexico always has a labour market distinguished by precariousness, especially the lack of labour rights and consequently a combination of low wage levels and high labour hours levels. The first Mexican labour law backs to the early 20th century, which were the *Ley Jose Vilada* in 1904 (at the Mexico State) and the *Ley Bernardo Reyes* in 1906 (at the Nuevo León State), both attributing civil liabilities to the companies regarding labour accidents in the productive process. An important advancement for the labour class will happen during the discussions of the 1917's Mexican Constitution, which include a set of laws to protect workers.

The following legal rights were included in the 123th article of the Mexican Constitution: 1) limit of the working day in 8 hours at the day, 7 hours at night and 6 hours for children under 16 years old; 2) 12 years old as the minimum age able to work; 3) prohibition of unhealthy, dangerous, night and overtime work for women and those under 16 years old; 4) protection for women before and after childbirth; 5) one rest day for every six working days (weekly rest); 6) minimum wage; 7) equal payment for the same work, and also cash payment; 8) 50% additional for overtime work; 9) obligation to offer comfortable and hygienic housing to workers; 10) corporate responsibility for accidents at work and occupational illnesses; 11) establishment of hygiene and safety measures; 12) unlimited freedom of association for workers and employers; 13) right to strike; 13) job stability; and others. The Constitution also authorized the States to have their own specific labour rules. Later in 1931 was approved the Mexican Federal Labour Law, which ended all the previous state rules, and included other labour rights, like the establishment of official bodies to inspect labour rules and committees to determine the value of the minimum wage, and others.

Other two labour reforms would be approved over the next years. In 1962, some changes in the 123rd article allow women working in unhealthy and dangerous situations, and in overtime work; the minimum work age raised from 12 to 14 years old; and the overtime work was increased from 50% to 100%. In 1970, a New Mexican Federal Labour Law was enacted, which came into force on the 1st of May in the same year. The main highlight at the time was the obligation of the employer offer comfortable and hygienic housing to workers. However, the legal command was reformed in

1972 and the obligation was replaced by a 5% payroll contribution to the National Housing Fund (Basile, 2013).

Nowadays, the legal working hours in Mexico it is similar with the 1917 Constitution: 8 hours a day and no more than 48 hours a week for day working; 7 hours a day and no more than 42 hours a week for night working; and 7,5 hours a day and no more than 45 hours a week for “mixed workers” (working day and night). Also, employers and workers can negotiate the length of the working day if it does not exceed the legal limits. Regarding the overtime working, it cannot be longer than 3 hours a day and 3 days a week (9 hours a week). The first 9 hours overtime are paid at a rate of 200% of the regular wage, but if the worker must work more than 9 hours of overtime in the week, the employer must pay 300% of the regular wage.

2.2 Chilean Labour Laws

As the case of Mexico and other Latin American countries, Chile also has a large history of precariousness in the labour relations. The first public debates in the country regarding labour regulations can be found back on the beginning of the XX century. Nevertheless, the working time regulation was legalized only in 1924, establishing 8 hours of working a day and 48 hours of working a week. However, at that time were some problems concerning its implementation, since that were doubts about how to account the working time – for instance, if the time spending going from home to the work should be counted, and the resting time. This was the reason why many industries did not adopt the new regulation.

In 1931 was approved the *Código del Trabajo*, which included in the labour laws 15 days of vacations and the so-called “English Saturday” - which allowed a half day to rest a week, in exchange to the possibility to increase the labour time in 8 hours a day. Also, in the beginning of the 1930’s, the Committee on Labour and Social Legislation of the House of Representatives started to discuss the establishment of the “continuous working day” for all the productive sectors, but disagreements among the representatives prevented its approval. After many discussions, it was finally approved by a decree on 15th May 1942. The 5th decree’s article established that the continuous working day could be interrupted for 30 minutes resting time, resulting in 8 hours of working time. However, employers and workers could agree to extend the resting time to 60 minutes, if it wouldn’t reduce the working time established by the decree (Andrade, 2015).

Besides the working time regulation, the Chilean labour legislation also included other rules. The 1931 Labour Code regulated the right to strike, which also prevented the right to individual negotiation between worker and employer. In the same code, there were other mechanisms to regulate the trade unions, which include the collective negotiation, the financial support, and its organizing

structures. In 1966, it was approved the *Ley de Inamobilidad Laboral* (Labour Imobility Law), establishing the employer could not fire the employee without a justification.

Relevant changes in the labour legislation happened after the military coup, in 1973. Following other changes in the economic policies – looking for to stablish a more liberal economy in Chile – Pinochet's government considered the Chilean labour laws were hardly strict, so it had to go through some changed. According to Correa and Ramos (2003) Chile's government considered the labour marker flexibilization one of the most important mechanisms for the new development strategy since the labour regulations were not compatible to the model of policy framework to strengthen the private sector and promote the economic efficiency. Huge changes in the labour legislations (rules to lay off workers and indemnity payments, union membership, collective negotiation and right to strike), in the wage regime (rules for minimum wage and pension system) and in the working time (establishment of the part time job) were made, facilitating the conditions for increasing in the working time.

Since the end the of military government, some changes to achieve a more democratized labour market were implemented, but in fact just few changes could be observed. The last Labour Reform, in 2016, changed some regulations regarding unionism, and seems that both workers and employers remained unsatisfied. Concerning working time, that were no other changes, only the fact that the maintaining of the part time job helped to make Chile one of the countries with the large working time in the world: Chile ranks third among OECD economies with the longest working hours (Rau, 2012).

2.3 Data analysis

After the previous discussion, now we intend to present some data regarding working day/time in Mexico and Chile, in order do understand how this super-exploitation of labour mechanisms are working through these countries.

Table 1 shows the average usual weekly hours worked in the main job. As we can see, for both Mexico and Chile there were a decrease in the average hours worked a week – less than 2 hours for Mexico and around 5 hours to Chile – which can express a tendency to adjust the working time to the union's demands of the respective countries, and to their labour laws. Nevertheless, both still have a working day longer than 40 hours a week – the maximum recommended by the International Labour Organization (ILO) – even though they are adjusted to the Labour Regulation of each country. Besides, both have an average working week longer the average of the OECD countries, which goes from 38,4 hours in 2000 to 36,6 hours in 2020. The table 2 shows the average annual hours worked per worker – in this case, considering all kinds of job, not just the main one. Following the same

tendency, both countries presented a decrease in the annual hours worked, even though the decrease in Mexico was very low, around 50 hours. For the Chilean case, the decrease was relevant (348 hours). But both are still under the data for the OECD countries, which also decreased in 138 hours a year.

Table 1: Average usual weekly hours worked in the main job (in hours)

	Mexico	Chile	OECD Countries
2000	44,3	46,1	38,4
2001	43,9	46,1	38,5
2002	43,6	46,1	38,3
2003	43,7	45,8	38,2
2004	43,6	45,6	38,1
2005	44,0	44,0	38,2
2006	43,8	44,2	38,1
2007	43,5	44,0	38,0
2008	43,5	43,8	37,9
2009	43,4	43,4	37,6
2010	43,3	42,7	37,6
2011	43,2	42,7	37,5
2012	43,1	42,7	37,5
2013	43,2	42,5	35,6
2014	43,1	42,2	35,6
2015	43,2	41,9	35,6
2016	43,4	41,6	37,4
2017	43,4	41,3	37,4
2018	43,4	41,3	37,3
2019	43,2	41,1	37,3
2020	42,9	41,3	36,6

Source: OECD Stat.

Table 2: Average annual hours actually worked per worker (in hours)

	Mexico	Chile	OECD Countries
2000	2.174	2.263	1.825
2001	2.146	2.242	1.811
2002	2.196	2.250	1.807
2003	2.143	2.235	1.798
2004	2.123	2.232	1.798
2005	2.105	2.157	1.793
2006	2.067	2.165	1.792
2007	2.045	2.128	1.789
2008	2.105	2.095	1.787
2009	1.973	2.074	1.753
2010	2.150	2.070	1.772
2011	2.121	2.050	1.771
2012	2.120	2.027	1.770
2013	2.136	2.021	1.765
2014	2.134	1.994	1.764
2015	2.140	1.994	1.764
2016	2.146	1.978	1.763
2017	2.149	1.963	1.756
2018	2.149	1.956	1.753
2019	2.139	1.930	1.743
2020	2.124	1.825	1.687

Source: OECD Stat.

Table 3: Incidence of employment by usual weekly hours worked (percentage)

		1 to 19 hours	20 to 29 hours	30 to 34 hours	35 to 39 hours	40 hours or more
Mexico	2000	6,4	7,1	3,8	7,3	75,5
	2001	6,7	7,0	4,0	7,5	74,8
	2002	6,5	7,0	3,9	8,1	74,5
	2003	6,5	7,0	4,1	8,1	74,4
	2004	7,5	7,6	4,2	7,6	73,1
	2005	8,3	8,0	5,0	7,0	71,7
	2006	8,7	8,4	5,1	6,6	71,2
	2007	9,4	8,5	5,1	6,7	70,4
	2008	9,3	8,3	4,9	6,6	70,7
	2009	9,6	8,6	5,1	6,6	70,0
	2010	9,7	8,5	5,1	6,7	70,0
	2011	9,8	8,6	5,1	6,5	70,0
	2012	10,3	8,6	5,1	6,4	69,6
	2013	10,1	8,4	5,1	6,4	70,0
	2014	9,9	8,2	5,0	6,3	70,5
	2015	10,0	8,1	5,1	6,3	70,5
	2016	9,6	8,2	5,1	6,1	71,1
	2017	9,2	8,0	5,0	6,2	71,6
	2018	9,1	7,9	5,0	6,2	71,8
	2019	9,6	8,1	5,1	6,0	71,2
2020	9,6	8,1	5,3	6,3	70,7	
Chile	2000	1,9	2,8	2,9	2,6	89,8
	2001	2,5	3,1	3,1	2,3	89,0
	2002	2,1	3,1	2,9	2,3	89,6
	2003	2,2	3,5	3,1	2,4	88,8
	2004	2,8	3,8	3,3	2,2	87,9
	2005	3,1	4,1	3,3	2,3	87,3
	2006	3,4	4,2	3,2	2,6	86,5
	2007	3,8	4,3	3,1	2,6	86,2
	2008	4,5	4,6	3,1	2,6	85,3
	2009	5,4	5,1	3,4	2,8	83,3
	2010	10,2	7,3	3,9	2,8	75,9
	2011	10,3	7,0	3,8	2,9	76,1
	2012	9,7	6,9	3,6	2,7	77,1
	2013	9,6	6,9	3,7	2,7	77,1
	2014	10,1	6,9	3,7	2,8	76,5
	2015	9,9	7,0	3,7	2,8	76,6
	2016	10,2	7,3	4,0	2,8	75,8
	2017	10,1	7,5	4,0	2,9	75,5
	2018	10,4	7,4	3,9	2,7	75,5
	2019	10,4	7,6	3,9	2,7	75,4
2020	9,0	7,1	3,8	3,0	77,1	

Source: OECD Stat.

So far, the information shows that there was a decrease in the working hours in both countries (also for the OECD countries), so that at this point we wouldn't be allowed to confirm an increase in the super-exploitation of labour in these countries over the last years. Maybe just in the case of Mexico, since we can notice over the period there were some moments of increasing in the hours worked – between 2002 and 2003 for instance. But even this situation is not enough to confirm the super-exploitation of labour, especially because for the whole period we have a downtrend in the hours

worked. Table 3 below shows interesting information to help us to understand the real situation in Mexico and Chile.

Analysing the data regarding the incidence of employment by usual weekly hours worked, it is possible to notice a decreasing in the employment for those working 40 hours or more, which means a full-time job – usually the more stable jobs. As we expected, the highest percentage of employment is in this range (which we can consider the main job), but for both countries the percentage gets lower over the last years. On another hand, the percentage of employment gets higher for those working in part time jobs – ILO and most of Latin American economies consider part time jobs those jobs which less than 30 hours. The percentage increasing is more remarkable for Chile and for those working from 1 to 19 hours, since the percentage went from 1,9% to 9,0%, but the highest point was in 2019 (10,4%). In the case of Mexico, it went from 6,4% to 9,6%, and the highest percentage was 2012 (10,3%).

From this data it is possible to suggest there is a tendency of an increasing in the part time job for both countries, which also might show a tendency for a bigger number of workers working in less stable jobs, since the flexibility is one of the most important characteristics of that kind of jobs. Another conclusion from this data is that maybe some workers are working in different part time jobs in order to raise their earnings, once is expected these kinds of jobs offer lower wages – not just because working time is lower, but also because usually this kind of jobs has a lower pay standard, especially when compared to formal and stable jobs. If worker isn't working longer hours, at least it is possible to indicate they are apparently working under more precarious situations.

The argument above can be reinforced by the data from the table 4, which shows the percentage of workers in full time and part time jobs. As we can see, there is a downtrend in the percentage of full-time workers, and an uptrend in the part time workers, which is higher to Chile. Even though they got close to the percentage of the OECD countries, it is important to highlight the tendency for the labour market with a bigger number of workers working in part time jobs. This can be explained by several reasons (and here we do not have enough information to explore all of them), but it is a fact that there is a trend in the world labour relations to have more workers working in part times jobs, since this a possible way to get more payments – which in turn is a result of a decrease in the earnings. Also, as we already said, part time jobs are characterized to be flexible, and most of the workers are not working based on a legal contract, which means that they don't access the labour regulations and might be working under more precarious conditions.

Table 4: Full-time part-time employment, based on a common definition (percentage)

	Mexico		Chile		OECD Countries	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
2000	86,5	13,5	95,3	4,7	86,1	13,9
2001	86,3	13,7	94,4	5,6	85,7	14,3
2002	86,5	13,5	94,8	5,2	85,4	14,6
2003	86,6	13,4	94,3	5,7	85,4	14,6
2004	84,9	15,1	93,4	6,6	85,0	15,0
2005	83,7	16,3	92,8	7,2	84,8	15,2
2006	82,9	17,1	92,3	7,7	84,8	15,2
2007	82,2	17,8	92,0	8,0	84,6	15,4
2008	82,3	17,7	90,9	9,1	84,4	15,6
2009	81,7	18,3	89,5	10,5	83,6	16,4
2010	81,8	18,2	82,6	17,4	83,3	16,7
2011	81,6	18,4	82,8	17,2	83,1	16,9
2012	81,1	18,9	83,3	16,7	83,1	16,9
2013	81,6	18,4	83,5	16,5	82,9	17,1
2014	81,8	18,2	83,0	17,0	83,0	17,0
2015	81,9	18,1	83,2	16,8	83,2	16,8
2016	82,3	17,7	82,6	17,4	83,3	16,7
2017	82,8	17,2	82,4	17,6	83,5	16,5
2018	83,0	17,0	82,2	17,8	83,5	16,5
2019	82,4	17,6	82,0	18,0	83,3	16,7
2020	82,3	17,7	83,9	16,1	83,3	16,7

Source: OECD Stat.

Even both countries have the same tendency for the OECD countries, the concerning is more regarding the type of tendency, that is downward in the full-time jobs and upward in the part time jobs. The case of Mexico is not that unsettling (4,2% decreasing in the full-time job), but it is for Chile. In 2000, more than 95% of the Chilean workers were working in full time jobs, and 20 years later, the percentage got down in 11,4%. This is a huge increasing in the part time jobs, which strongly emphasizes the flexibilization in the Chilean labour relations and the fact that are a greater number of workers occupied in worst jobs.

Indeed, observing the data regarding the earnings it can get close to these conclusions. From 2000 to 2020, the minimum wage increased in both countries. According to the OECD data, monthly nominal minimum wages in Mexico went from 761 to 2,670 (in Mexican Pesos), and in Chile from 96,042 to 317,250 (in Chilean Pesos). Looking at table 5, it is possible to figure out that at least for Mexico the changes were not that much. On this table, it can observe the full wages in USD (constant prices for 2020). For Chile, the average annual wages had an interesting increasing, but it was not the case of Mexico, where the wages kept around the same in USD; the tendency is the same observing the wages in 2020 current prices in National Currency Units. Comparing these data with the previous one, we can have this situation: there are a greater number of workers in part time jobs and usually, part time jobs are less stable and offer lower wages. For Mexico, there was an increasing in the nominal wages, but there were no changes in the wages in terms of 2020 USD, suggesting a worse situation along the period. At the other hand, there was some gains in the case of Chile – wages in

terms of 2020 USD basically followed the increasing in the nominal wages and considering the wages in 2020 current prices in NCU.

Table 5: Average Annual Wages

	Mexico			Chile		
	Current price in NCU (Mexican Peso)	2020 current price in NCU (Mexican Peso)	In 2020 constant prices at 2020 USD PPPs	Current price in NCU (Chilean Peso)	2020 current price in NCU (Chilean Peso)	In 2020 constant prices at 2020 USD PPPs
2000	73.727	178.654	16.111	4.411.441	8.969.992	18.686
2001	81.512	189.031	17.046	4.750.175	9.215.765	19.198
2002	85.123	188.271	16.978	4.953.106	9.295.960	19.365
2003	90.157	191.588	17.277	5.188.102	9.497.029	19.784
2004	94.393	192.541	17.363	5.144.962	9.239.576	19.247
2005	100.642	193.887	17.484	5.330.752	9.137.241	19.034
2006	105.218	193.582	17.457	5.648.888	9.384.018	19.548
2007	111.331	194.316	17.523	6.038.604	9.647.904	20.098
2008	117.277	192.632	17.371	6.706.847	9.920.342	20.665
2009	122.119	194.205	17.513	7.346.281	10.671.991	22.231
2010	120.488	181.942	16.407	8.629.843	12.118.991	25.246
2011	127.979	183.577	16.555	9.036.942	12.185.570	25.384
2012	132.294	180.289	16.258	9.605.681	12.577.653	26.201
2013	137.504	180.435	16.271	10.157.235	12.901.639	26.876
2014	143.541	180.775	16.302	10.825.883	13.008.803	27.099
2015	149.404	183.150	16.516	11.435.336	13.000.577	27.082
2016	154.641	181.002	16.322	12.333.939	13.562.271	28.252
2017	162.097	180.501	16.277	12.360.538	13.251.781	27.605
2018	172.080	184.491	16.637	13.148.634	13.716.677	28.574
2019	179.501	185.979	16.771	13.742.884	14.199.226	29.579
2020	179.976	179.976	16.230	12.831.073	12.831.073	26.729

Source: OECD Stat.

Lastly, to reassert our argument, in the table 6 it is presented the minimum relative to average wages of full-time workers. For both cases, there are an increasing in the relation, which means the minimum wage is getting bigger than the average wages over the years – so workers can be earning less than before, or they are earning wages that is getting closer and closer to the minimum wage. But this is not because wages are getting bigger, but as they have been reduced or growing at lower percentages when compared to the minimum wage growth. Unfortunately, the data is regarding only the full-time workers, so we cannot assure that the same is going through to the part time workers.

Table 6: Minimum relative to average wages of full-time workers

	Mexico		Chile	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
2000	0,33	..	0,39	0,64
2001	0,31	..	..	..
2002	0,31	..	..	..
2003	0,30	..	0,44	0,71
2004	0,30	..	..	..
2005	0,30	0,38	..	..
2006	0,29	0,38	0,41	0,65
2007	0,28	0,37	..	..
2008	0,29	0,36	..	..
2009	0,28	0,37	0,44	0,71
2010	0,27	0,35	0,44	0,71
2011	0,27	0,36	0,43	0,67
2012	0,27	0,36	0,43	0,67
2013	0,27	0,37	0,45	0,67
2014	0,29	0,37	0,45	0,68
2015	0,30	0,39	0,46	0,66
2016	0,30	0,38	0,48	0,69
2017	0,32	0,40	0,47	0,70
2018	0,34	0,42	0,47	0,71
2019	0,37	0,46	0,48	0,72
2020	0,42	0,52	0,49	0,72

Source: OECD Stat.

Anyway, if the workers are earning relatively less than before (which is specially the case of Mexico), they might have more difficulties to guarantee they livelihood – which is also one super-exploitation of labour mechanism. It is possible to assume this is a situation in which workers would be working in more than one job – to guarantee a minimum income. Working more, they might have spent more energy – another superexploitation mechanisms. Therefore, if it is not the case to say the workers are working in longer working days, or they are working in more than one job, at least we have elements to point out that they are working in more precarious conditions.

Final remarks

This paper aimed to discuss one of the super-exploitation of labour mechanisms, which is the increasing in the working day. To go through this analysis, the methodological approach proposed was to investigate the cases of Mexico and Chile, two of the most principal Latin-America economies.

From the data analysis, it is not able to confirm there was an expansion in the super-exploitation of labour through the increasing in the working day. Data actually shows that workers in Mexico and Chile are working less in terms of hours – 50 hours a year in Mexico and 438 hours a year in Chile – even though both have an average annual hours worked per worker higher than the OECD countries. But, on the other hand, this is not enough to say that workers are working in better conditions, or they are working in what can be consider an adequate working day.

In fact, it is necessary to considerate that over the last years there is a world tendency for a more flexible labour markets, which can reflect in the hours worked. At the other side, there is the trade unions and labour movements working hard and fighting to guarantee better labour conditions. In front of this opposition, is expected some gains for the workers, and one of them is the decreasing in the working hours. Besides, it also should consider that in a more technological productive structure an increasing in the surplus value will be achieved more through relative surplus value than the absolute surplus value. It means that nowadays the extension of the working day is not even necessary to increase the capital gains. But there is something else that also must be considered nowadays, based on how technological the productive system has become. Most of workers are more available to the capital, working through they smartphones and computers, during their rest time or even at home, and most of these hours has not been counted or considered as working time – and of course they are not paid for this working time. And this is a new strategy for the capital to increase the labour productivity.

In fact, if there is not an increasing in the working day, on another hand, does not mean the workers are working under better conditions. As we could check based on the data presented, there are more workers working in part times jobs – usually characterized by low access to the labour laws (informal jobs) and low wages, and therefore more precarious – and getting lower wages. In the same way there are less workers working in full time jobs, which might mean there are less workers accessing the labour regulations. In the case of Mexico, it was not observed any change in the average wages (in 2020 USD). In the case of Chile, they had gains in the earnings, but is important to consider that in this country most of the basic services – as education and healthy – are private and are getting more expensive over the last year. Therefore, it is important to check the dynamics of the livelihood in Chile either. Besides, for both countries the full-time workers wages are getting lower earnings, comparing with the minimum wage. All this information is more than necessary to consider the working conditions for both countries are not getting better.

To sum up, what could be done in terms of decent work? Since from a political point of view there is not a broad movement to fight against capitalism – at least yet – it expected that the trade unions and the labour movements can organize themselves around the word to fight for better labour conditions. And of course, this is not just regarding the working time, but must be extended to all working-class interests, including earnings, labour contracts, health care and pension systems, resting time and so on. This is the way, from our point of view, that decent work debate and proposals – and all the discussions that already has been done for all the international agencies – have too much to contribute, especially because it is also a debate that came from the political representations of workers.

Until the world gets to the moment where the workers will have political structure to fight against capitalism, it is truly necessary to advance the public policies to guarantee the labour movements demands. Workers are the base of production, but first they need to be seen as human beings, and labour laws and regulations must assure decent conditions for all of them. This is the reason the decent work debate must be inside the public spaces and must be taken for the policy makers, and why workers must be part of the public decisions. Without listening workers and their demands, it will be hardly difficult to find a solution for the labour issues.

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