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# The Case of ‘Breque dos Apps’: Civil Society’s Support for Digital Platform Workers

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## Abstract

This paper intends to contribute to legal research by demonstrating how platform workers organized themselves in Brazil to demand better working conditions and, based on “Breque dos Apps”, verify what lessons can be learned and replicated by future movements with similar goals. The use of social networks was fundamental to engage the category and civil society in favor of “Breque dos Apps”, making it possible to bypass mechanisms traditionally associated with collective bargaining to achieve some concessions in favor of couriers.

**Keywords:** *Breque dos Apps; Civil society; Collective mobilization; Delivery couriers; Work on digital platforms.*

## Introduction

The “Breque dos Apps” (an expression that can be freely translated as “break on the apps”) is a social movement that occurred in Brazil, and was organically organized by workers who provided services to food

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delivery apps/digital platforms (like iFood, Uber Eats and Rappi), and unfolded in two different moments: July 1st and July 25th, 2020.

At first glance, this movement may be perceived as having the nature of a strike. However, it is difficult to make this association from a legal point of view, since the legal concept of a “strike” is connected to the legal concept of “employee”. There is a great debate about the classification of delivery app couriers as employees, a theme that will be developed later on. These workers— delivery app couriers or delivery men and women— decided to organize a movement in protest against several working conditions generally associated with the most precarious forms of work and the absence of social protection measures. The scenario under which those workers already were became worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic, which represented both a health and an economic crisis for many countries. During this time, the possibility of working with food delivery apps/digital platforms became the main—if not the only—source of income for a large number of Brazilians. This situation then led to an increase in the number of couriers waiting to provide services and, consequently, increased the competition between them, resulting in a decrease in the amounts paid as delivery fees, beyond all risks associated with working in precarious conditions aggravated by the context of a pandemic.

As mentioned earlier, a fundamental issue within this analysis is the fact that there is a debate over the legal framework of digital platform/app workers in Brazil. Scholars and courts have not yet achieved a consensus over whether they should be considered employees—and thus receive all the social protection conferred by the Brazilian Consolidation of Labor Laws—or self-employed/autonomous workers, a different category not entitled to said framework of social protection.

Consequently, they are not able to collectively organize themselves through unions. Thus, they are prevented from obtaining the legal protection conferred to strike movements, since in Brazil unions are the only entities legally authorized to organize strikes.

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to analyze how the movement was organized to overcome the legal barrier arising from the fact that self-employed/ autonomous workers cannot organize themselves through unions.

To investigate what are the lessons left by the strategy adopted by the organizers of “Breque dos Apps”, the following main research question is proposed: is “Breque dos Apps” a representation of new forms of protest and solidarity-based responses oriented towards the protection of

platform workers, thus able to provide broader lessons to be learned about how they may be organized?

The referred main research question is supported by three secondary ones, notably aimed at investigating: (i) what were the workers' claims; (ii) if there was support from civil society to the workers; (iii) how the companies in the delivery platform business reacted to the organization of the workers.

Regarding the methodological approach, the study applies theoretical qualitative research conducted through documental and bibliographic review techniques, based on the analysis and interpretation of data obtained mainly from literature and documents related to the themes.

This study intends mainly – but not exclusively – to contribute to the legal literature by demonstrating how platform workers organized themselves in Brazil to demand better working conditions and, based on the movement they arranged, known as “Breque dos Apps”, verify what lessons can be extracted and reproduced in favor of future movements with similar goals.

### **1. The Issue Regarding the Legal Framework of Platform Workers in Brazil<sup>2</sup>**

As explored by these authors in previous work (Portilho & Sousa, 2023), there is a fundamental issue underlying the movement known as “Breque dos Apps”, which is whether or not digital platforms/app workers may be legally categorized as employees in Brazil.

To address this issue, it is essential to understand that the Brazilian legislation has certain requirements to consider someone as an employee, that is, one of the subjects of the so-called employment relationship. This is not a mere technical detail, as it is the characterization of the employment relationship that brings all the labor and social protection that derives from this quality.

Thereby, every employee is a worker, but not every worker is an employee. According to Article 3 of the Brazilian Consolidation of Labor Laws of 1943 (known in Portuguese by the acronym CLT), someone is considered an employee when it is an individual who provides services of

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<sup>2</sup> The ideas developed and updated in this section were previously worked on in a previous paper. Therefore, it is recommended to read: Portilho, Raphaela Magnino Rosa and Sousa, Ricardo José Leite de. (2023). Social Rights and Work on Digital Platforms in Brazil: The Case of “Breque dos Apps”. *Sociology Study*, May-June 2023, Vol. 13, No. 3, doi: 10.17265/2159-5526/2023.03.

a non-continuous nature to an employer, under his/her dependence and in return for a salary.

Thus, the essential requirements of an employee are: natural person; not eventuality; onerousness; subordination—fundamental element; business risks must be entirely borne by the employer (according to some authors). Under the terms proposed by Sérgio Pinto Martins (2023, p.103), an employee can be defined as an individual who provides services of a continuous nature to an employer, under his/her subordination, personally, and upon payment of salary.

Although all requirements are relevant, the most important one is subordination: basically, it refers to the idea that an employee works under the employer's dependence. But another question then arises: What kind of subordination? For instance, is this dependence an economic one, a technical one or a legal one?

Scholars and courts have long since concluded that the requirement is legal subordination: the employee's subordination comes from the law. The employer gives the employee the rules and guidelines regarding how to carry out the provision of services. Thus, the employee does not have autonomy to conduct these services:

Subordination is the obligation that the employee has to comply with the orders determined by the employer as a result of the employment contract. It is the legal status in which the employee regarding the employer. It is the object of the employment contract. Subordination is submission of the employee to the power of direction of the employer. (Martins, 2023, p. 100, our translation).

Absent the legal subordination, there is no employment relationship. It is important to consider that in this case there might be (self-employed/autonomous) work, but not employment. This is the background regarding the current debate on qualifying digital platform workers as employees or autonomous/self-employed workers.

For those who consider them autonomous/self-employed, allegedly there would not be any trace of subordination in the relationship between workers and digital platforms. The context would be the one represented by the idea of self-management: workers have the autonomy to conduct the provision of services, i.e., choose how, how much and what hours to work. Based on this argument, companies behind apps/digital platforms have been presenting themselves as mediators between supply and demand, denying the subordination and employment relationships in this intermediation.



Nevertheless, there is a counterpoint, known as algorithmic subordination (Fincato & Wunsch, 2020; Carelli, 2020). The idea defends that there is control over the work performed by those workers. However, this control would not be made by a person, but defined by a logical, finite and defined sequence of instructions—an algorithm. This new form of work control unfolds via technological tools, such as apps.

As mentioned before, there is no consensus in Brazil on whether to qualify digital platform workers as employees or as autonomous workers. Since they are currently not legally qualified as employees, they are constantly exposed to revolving around the idea of precarious work, such as poor working conditions; lack of social protection; and not being able to collectively organize themselves through unions (the alternative for collective organization being the so-called civil associations, which have different prerogatives).

Due to the growing use of digital platforms in the provision of services around the world, the phenomenon known as “uberization” began to be observed. It is about a new way of managing, organizing and controlling work which asserts itself as a global trend, representing a new form of control and management of work, presenting it as an organizing trend that eliminates rights and turns workers into subordinated self-managers, available for work, used as just-in-time workers (Abilio, 2019).

Although other companies are using the same approach, the pioneering and early global success of Uber caused this type of relationship to be named after the company.

The workers providing delivery services to digital platforms in the food sector are just one category of workers of digital platforms submitted to the phenomenon of “uberization”. This is an extremely precarious category and they are at the center of the “Breque dos Apps” movement. Thus, after this brief context, this paper shall focus on the “Breque dos Apps” episode, mainly addressing its background and core claims.

## 2. The “Breque dos Apps” Movement: Background and Claims<sup>3</sup>

The collective movement of workers of digital platforms (applications), mainly those related to food and goods delivery, such as iFood, Rappi and

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<sup>3</sup> The authors have developed some of the ideas addressed in this section on a previous work. For further information: Portilho, Raphaela Magnino Rosa and Sousa, Ricardo José Leite de. (2023). Social Rights and Work on Digital Platforms in Brazil: The Case of “Breque dos Apps”. *Sociology Study*, May-June 2023, Vol. 13, No. 3, doi: 10.17265/2159-5526/2023.03.

Uber Eats, known as “Breque dos Apps”, traces back to two dates in July 2020 (July 1st and July 25th).

The action is somehow comparable to a strike and aimed to give visibility to the precarious working conditions to which these workers were subjected. Even though these conditions have been inherent to the provision of this kind of work since the very beginning, the context derived from the pandemic of the new coronavirus caused a significant impact and made this issue a matter of public debate.

The Covid-19 disease was classified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. Subsequently, countries around the globe were called upon to take coordinated measures to preserve people’s health and prevent infections and, ultimately, deaths. (OPAS, 2020). For instance, at that time several countries recommended social distancing, encouraging people to stay at their homes as much as they could.

In this context, activities that were previously practiced in different places, such as work and study, were transferred to people’s homes and carried out remotely, transforming everyone’s routine into a new reality. Thus, the provision of various “in-person” services was interrupted and both public and private spaces for collective coexistence were closed. Among them, were commercial establishments, such as those belonging to the food sector, like bars, restaurants and snack bars.

In Brazil, the pandemic also signified the maintenance of a high level of informality in the labor market, which was already observing high rates in previous years. Official data provided by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística acronym IBGE—IBGE, 2018) informality rate in Brazil was around 40.8% in 2017, the year in which the Brazilian Labor Reform was approved by the Parliament. According to the results of the Continuous National Household Sample Survey, released by the same institute on August 12, 2022, the informality rate in the country was currently 40.0% (IBGE, 2022).

In addition, an increase in unemployment rates was also observed, since several activities were discontinued due to the global economic impacts and, consequently, jobs were lost. Without the possibility of immediate reabsorption by the market, there was an even greater increase in the informalization of work and other elements of precariousness, such as outsourcing, subcontracting, flexibilization, part-time work and sub-proletarianization (Costa, 2020).

Since a relevant part of the population was complying with social isolation and constricted to remote work and study regimes, the demand for the

provision of delivery services, mainly food delivery experienced growth. Notably, this kind of service then became essential for consumers as well as for businesses operating in the food sector, such as restaurants and bars. Without it, the maintenance of those economic activities would be nearly impossible (Brail, 2020). Therefore, businesses had to adapt quickly to remain operating, either by starting to provide delivery options or by increasing their once residual delivery service, making it the main activity. Thus, during this time and within the aforementioned context, the possibility of working with food delivery digital platforms/apps became the main—if not the only—source of income for a large number of Brazilian workers. This had a double effect: more couriers available to provide services and, consequently, more competition between them. This combination of factors resulted in a decrease in the amount paid from delivery fees.

Even though the couriers were perceived as fundamental to the operation of this gear, they remained in highly precarious working conditions and were paid an extremely low amount in exchange for their services. In addition, they were being exposed to various risks, including the risk of contagion by the disease and its possible consequences, for instance: lack of social protection due to the time of leave, loss of source of income, chain of contagion in the family, risk of developing comorbidities and, ultimately, risk of death. It is worth remembering that at the time vaccines were not available to the public and contagious/death rates were very high.

In the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil, companies in the app delivery business, such as iFood and Rappi, acted timidly, at maximum, to mitigate the risk of contagion for couriers. As a result, the Brazilian Public Prosecution of Labor Office filed a public civil action against the platforms with a request for provisional/urgent remedy in April 2020, aiming to ensure the adoption of minimal health, social and labor measures in favor of the couriers.

The preliminary injunction was granted by Judge Elizio Luiz Perez, who determined the adoption of a series of measures to guarantee the health and safety of couriers, whose compliance should take place within 48 hours. Otherwise, a fine would be applied as a penalty. Among these measures, the following stand out: provide sufficient information and guidance to reduce the risk of contamination as much as possible; distribute protective products and equipment, such as alcohol gel and masks, free of charge; provide and accredit spaces for cleaning vehicles, backpacks, helmets and jackets; guarantee financial assistance of at least one minimum wage for the worker eventually contaminated, and also for

workers who are part of the so-called risk group for the disease (BRASIL, 2020a).

Although it did not address the matter of any recognition of an employment relationship between couriers and platforms, the court decision under discussion recognized that: (i) business companies centralize and organize digital platforms and, therefore, make the connection between couriers and the third parties (consumers); (ii) the right to reduce work risks based on health, safety and hygiene standards is constitutionally guaranteed to workers; (iii) the nature of the activities provided by the platforms entails strict liability in the event of damage being caused to service providers (BRASIL, 2020a).

Immediately, the business company that owns the iFood platform filed a writ of mandamus, succeeding in halting the effects of the injunction, after the decision of Judge Dóris Ribeiro Torres Prina. The Judge based her decision on three central arguments: (i) there would be no employment relationship between the platforms and the couriers, who would be mere users of their services; (ii) the measures intended by the Public Prosecution of Labor Office could have the effect of preventing the full execution of the services provided by the platforms, which, due to the context of social isolation, were essential; (iii) given that the digital platforms did not cause the pandemic, these requirements would be inappropriate, as the measures would be complex and the deadline to implement them very short (BRASIL, 2020b).

iFood claimed that it was already complying with some of the measures, such as the distribution of alcohol and the creation of the Solidarity and Protection Fund to guarantee financial aid for contaminated couriers, although in amounts and scope below what the first instance decision determined.

Amauri Alves, Lorena Marques Bagno and Nicolle Gonçalves comment that the platform's reaction was more an attempt to maintain a good reputation with the public than to guarantee the health and safety of workers, also drawing attention to the possibility that this assistance was result of an attempt to conform the category and avoid greater insurgencies of these workers against their working conditions (Alves, Marques Bagno, & Gonçalves, 2020). It is observed that these attempts proved to be unsuccessful since the couriers organized themselves around the "Breque dos Apps" stoppages.

Returning to the lesson of Allyson Mascaro (2020), for whom the reaction of business companies within the capitalist system tends to be a minimal response to maximum demands, the authors infer that, in this case, even

the minimum seems excessive for those who do not want to have any liability over the provision of services received (Alves et al., 2020).

As seen, it is important to emphasize that digital platform workers in Brazil, the category in which app delivery people fall, are often supporters of discourses of overvaluation of entrepreneurship and free market exacerbation. In this context, supported by the idea of self-management at work, they tend to be resistant to the idea of regulating the activity they perform, and, consequently, to the precepts of unionism and the defense of labor laws (Delgado & Carvalho, 2020; Desgranges & Ribeiro, 2021; Abilio, 2019).

Faced with the situation resulting from the pandemic, which revealed even more clearly the levels of precariousness of this work regime, this dominant mentality in the category began to be questioned (Desgranges & Ribeiro, 2021). Many couriers began to expose the reality of their daily lives on social networks, starting a wave of reflection on existing vulnerabilities and the need to demand improvements.

This movement culminated in the stoppage/“strike” of the activities of couriers in several Brazilian cities on two occasions during the month of July 2020. This stoppage became known as the “Breque dos Apps” and had the support of trade union movements and civil society, which promoted the issue on social networks.

The “Breque dos Apps” that took place on July 1, 2020, was the first national manifestation of app delivery couriers. The couriers had the objective of paralyzing the delivery applications for one day, so that their claims could be amplified and considered, in the wake of what comments Ricardo Lourenço Filho:

The name chosen for the mobilization was “Breque dos Apps”, an expression that alludes to the digital platforms that offer delivery services to the market, such as iFood, Uber Eats and Rappi. The reality faced in carrying out delivery activities led application workers to gather and organize collectively. The difficulties, associated with the long hours, the risk of accidents, the low wages, were accentuated during the pandemic time. (Lourenço Filho, 2020, p. 80, our translation)

Among the strategies that were applied, some may be highlighted: pickets and motorcycle motorcades; incentives for couriers to stay offline in the applications; face-to-face demonstrations in the streets; and transmissions through social networks. The demands were related to aspects of that working relationship that reflected the precarious conditions to which the couriers were subjected (Lourenço Filho, 2020).

In short, the claims were: an increase in delivery fees per km traveled; raising the minimum delivery fee; the end of blocks carried out by the applications considered improper by the couriers and reactivation of the registrations of blocked couriers; granting insurance against theft and accidents; granting paid leave to workers infected during the pandemic; distribution of personal protective equipment, including those capable of helping to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, such as protective masks and alcohol gel; in addition to the end of the scoring system, which could imply an increase or decrease in remuneration for the service.

Essentially, the “Breque dos Apps” can be perceived as a movement in search of recognition and, above all, guarantees of carrying out a service in dignified conditions. From the perception that the applications were prospering in their profits at the expense of the inherent precariousness that involves the work of delivery, which was boosted by the wide availability of manpower for the performance of this activity, it is noted that the mobilization turned to the struggle to ensure minimum conditions of dignified subsistence for workers who often are hungry while delivering meals to app users (Braga & Santana, 2020).

It was in this context that an important leadership emerged, normally seen as the “face” of the movement and one of its creators, that is, the courier Paulo Lima, known as “Galo” or “Galo de Luta”, who founded the “Antifascists Couriers” in the city of São Paulo.

In an interview for the newspaper *El País*, Galo says that the collective, which today brings together couriers from several cities in the country, traces back to the night of his birthday, on March 21, 2020. He was working and the tire on his motorcycle went flat, making it impossible for him to complete a delivery in progress. The situation led to the digital platform/app to which he was providing the service blocking him, which was the trigger for the courier: “That’s when I thought ‘enough, bro, I’m going to report these guys around’. They don’t explain why they block you, they tell you to read the contract and say they don’t have to explain anything, no” (Oliveira, 2020, s/p, our translation).

In the same month, Galo wrote a petition demanding that the digital platforms/apps provide breakfast, lunch and dinner, in addition to hygiene kits for couriers. Some of his colleagues reacted with criticism, understanding his claims as part of an ideological field they did not intend to be recognized with: “When I went to talk to my colleagues, some told me to go to Cuba, saying they weren’t starving, that what they wanted was to earn more to buy their own food”, he recalls. Gradually, he gained support and strengthened his movement, which has already raised, for

example, the average earning of this risky activity: 963 reais per month for 12 hours of work per day (Oliveira, 2020, s/p, our translation).

This reaction on the part of couriers indicates a phenomenon that scholars dedicated to studying uberization of work have already argued: despite the category's heterogeneity, which already makes collective organization difficult, Brazilian digital platform/app workers often adhere to the discourse of individual entrepreneurship, which is guided by the neoliberal rationality once deeply analyzed by Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2016).

According to the anthropologist Rosana Pinheiro-Machado (2022), the scenario is worsened by the existence of a significant identification of a large part of those workers with anti-democratic extreme right-wing ideologies and the consequent rejection of agendas historically associated with the left, such as labor, unionism and social assistance. The author states that:

The biggest problem to be faced is political. A significant part of the new precarious forms of work via platforms comes with an ideological component attached—and this component is profoundly anti-democratic. It is as if the work package came with a political plug-in installed, without the worker having necessarily chosen that product. Work and politics have always gone hand in hand. Work alienates, but it is also a terrain of resistance. However, coexistence between people is increasingly scarce in the 21st century, giving way to functions performed in isolated and intermittent ways, mediated by platforms and obscure algorithms that encourage hyper-individualization, competition and what researcher Fernanda Bruno calls rationality algorithmic: the individual who blames himself for the failure, even in the face of a non-transparent pricing policy of the platforms. (Pinheiro-Machado, 2022, s/p, our translation)

In a recent participation in the Podcast “Mano a Mano” (2023), hosted by Brazilian rapper Mano Brown, from Racionais MCs, in which he was joined by Thiago Torres, better known as “Chavoso da USP” (student of Social Sciences, speaker and YouTuber), Galo rejected the framing of traditional political spectrums, emphasizing that he is neither from the right wing nor from the left wing, “but from below”. Mainly because he realized, after the success of the protests and the emergence of his leadership, that the approach with people traditionally linked to the left-wing was causing the effect of distancing him from delivery couriers and, consequently, from the real problems he faced as part of the category. Nevertheless, reflecting on Liberalism and the idea of Minimum State, he stated that it remains very difficult to deal with the resistance of his peers

regarding the social agenda, but that he is learning to step back in certain aspects and to respect the timing of things. Galo quotes as an example precisely the fact that many couriers do not want an employment card under the terms of the CLT, as they consider the employment relationship to be harmful. Asked by Mano Brown about tax discounts that are applied to employees and the possible impact of this on the income of couriers, Galo says that the discount would be lower than what currently already occurs: “what happens is a feeling of power. Delivery guy never had 5 thousand reais in his account, but now he does. But he doesn’t calculate the motorcycle’s performance, how much he spends on gasoline, food, the cost of repairs when the motorcycle breaks down... If he does this calculation, he will see that he earns less than the minimum wage and does not have paid vacations, thirteenth salary, he has no rights, he does not have any assistance [...] and if he has an accident, the partners get together, buy a piece of meat, a crate of beer and a bag of coal, they make a raffle and help the brother who is at home [...] The category does this, it is organized in WhatsApp groups and it works, that’s how it has worked. Today there are cooperatives that are WhatsApp groups, you see. Today I am already backing out of this idea of defending the CLT employment card, even if it hurts a lot, because I need to meet with them and understand what solution will come up from there, not bringing a solution from outside and such... That shouldn’t have been from outside, but it was splashed outside”. (Mano a Mano, 2023, our transcription and translation). Thiago Torres, on his part, added that the problem is the employment status because nowadays people do not want to be someone’s employee. According to him, “People want that false sensation provided by the application that you do not have a boss” (Mano a Mano, 2023, our transcription and translation).

This scenario explains, in part, two interesting characteristics commonly associated with the “Breque dos Apps”. The first is the fact that the couriers did not reach a consensus on claiming recognition of the employment relationship with the digital platforms, which, ultimately, would attract the protective legal regime of employees, moving from an (alleged) relationship of autonomy for the recognition of a relationship of legal subordination, according to the terms and parameters indicated on the first section of this paper.

The second characteristic relates to the very choice of the movement’s name: “Breque” and not “Strike”, a term that is historically, technically and legally used to refer to the phenomenon of mobilization and collective resistance of workers identified as employees. The term “breque”, in turn, alludes to the idea of blocking or stopping deliveries,



and its “choice represents the intention to achieve a new form of organization and collective action” (Lourenço Filho, 2020, p. 82, our translation).

The group led by Galo started to attend anti-fascist protests and draw the attention of the press with the agenda of the anti-fascist couriers. Some of his videos went viral, especially one in which he denounced the difficulty of carrying food on his back on an empty stomach.

It has been argued that the main achievement of the movement known as the “Breque dos Apps” in July 2020 was to put the problems faced by the category in the spotlight, exposing the reality of the precariousness of work performed under these conditions in Brazil (Portilho & Sousa, 2023).

As stated by Andreia Galvão (2020), the “Breque dos Apps” constituted a truly historic milestone for the collective organization of precarious workers and emerged as the main progressive demand movement in recent years. Hence the enthusiastic reception on the part of unions, researchers, parties and left-wing militants, who saw in the movement, despite its heterogeneity, a sense of collectivity and the emergence of a new paradigm for the struggle. This reasoning is also shared by Gabriela Neves Delgado and Bruna Carvalho:

Amidst all this context of demands of the digital age, app workers played a historic role in the fight for the rights of the category, based not only on the Brazilian Constitution, but also on international guidelines for the protection of work. Tired, but still mobilized, they sparked a national movement against the new model of labor exploitation in the 21st century, denouncing the state of vulnerability and precariousness of workers on digital platforms. Powerful, the “Breque dos Apps” spread from end to end, strengthening ties of solidarity, collective agendas and the right of resistance. (Delgado & Carvalho, 2020, s/p, our translation)

In the same sense, Ricardo Lourenço Filho (2020) commented that the “Breque dos Apps” gave visibility to the organization of couriers through the formation of collectives, such as “Antifascists Couriers”, as well as the idea of thinking about fairer ways of executing the delivery work.

For the aforementioned author, the choice of this form of collective organization, as an alternative to the unions that are traditionally used, signals the intention, conscious or not, to think about new institutional forms of representation for this type of work, different from the

traditional legal regime of employment relationship provided and regulated by the Brazilian Consolidation of Labor Laws.

### 3. The Fundamental Support from Civil Society

Movements of social revolt arise “from a crisis in living conditions that makes everyday existence unsustainable for most people” (Castels, 2013, p. 161, our translation). In that regard, it is possible to infer that the tension between couriers and delivery platforms reached its peak in Brazil with the movement known as “Breque dos Apps”.

However, the movement articulated and carried out by the couriers themselves would not have caused as much social and media impact if disregarded how it was received by civil society.

Before analyzing the reaction of civil society to the movement articulated by couriers, especially that of consumers, it is important to take into consideration the role played by two phenomena that contributed to the “Breque dos Apps” being possible: communicative capitalism and social networks.

According to Dean (2008, p. 104), communicative capitalism is a late form of capitalism, in which core values for democracy are materialized in networked communication technologies, including the collective exercise of political dimension acts.

Undertaking a critical analysis regarding the concept of communicative capitalism based on what was exposed by Dean, Sartoretto (2020, p. 63-64, our translation) notes that political participation in this context should be understood as “collective action capable of influencing short-term institutional and social changes in the long term”, through engagement with collective social actors within the scope of civil society, such as social movements or spontaneous mobilizations.

Sartoretto (2020, p. 64) goes on to clarify that an example of collective social participation within the scope of communicative capitalism was precisely the “Breque dos apps”, in which couriers mobilized on the streets and on social networks to give visibility to their demands, while trying, at the same, to initiate a collective dialogue with state institutions to guarantee rights to themselves.

Thus, the class struggle, which has been inherent to capitalism since its origins, is also disputed with the mediation of network communication technologies, which brings us to the second phenomenon that needs to be analyzed: the role played by social networks – in particular Twitter, Youtube and Instagram – in the viability of “Breque dos Apps”, as well as in the way that civil society received and perceived the movement.

Desgranges and Ribeiro (2021, p. 191) state that in contemporary society leisure, work and relationships are mediated by communication software companies, which is why digital platforms are the scene of claims, protests and narrative disputes, which also involve struggles against the precariousness of work in favor of delivery apps, as was the “Breque dos Apps”.

As seen, Paulo Galo, along with other members of the courier category, founded the group Antifascists Couriers and, as the group’s spokesperson became a recurring figure in major media newspapers, on YouTube channels and in lives promoted on digital platforms.

Based on this, the “Breque dos Apps” movement had its origin and its organization through digital media, using tools from platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook to disseminate its agendas and call workers to the act, gaining proportion throughout Brazil and giving visibility to the category and its claims. (Barbosa, 2022, p. 161).

At this point, it is possible to start verifying how this visibility impacted not only the category of workers but also civil society, which ended up raising its support in favor of the movement.

Desgranges and Ribeiro conducted research “looking for a dense analysis of the network produced by app delivery people on YouTube and Instagram, aiming to understand how the “Breque dos Apps” mobilizations were conducted” (2021, p. 191), based on the extraction and observation of 1162 publications on the Instagram app and 50 videos on the YouTube platform (2021, ditto).

According to the authors, some past experiences of popular demonstrations with a strong social nature promoted through social networks anticipated the “Breque dos Apps” event. The first event they reference is the protests that took place after the death of George Floyd, a black man, shot by a white police officer in early 2020. Although the Black Lives Matter movement in the US dates back to 2013, the death of George Floyd was the trigger for the hashtag #blacklivesmatter going viral and, thus, taking thousands of people to the streets in protest against police violence and the state’s structural racism, integrating street and digital actions at the same time, through mass publications using the aforementioned hashtag (Desgranges & Ribeiro, 2021, p. 196).

In Brazil, the integration of social networks and street protests during the COVID-19 pandemic was also present in an act organized by anti-fascist supporters of football clubs, who protested against the ineffectiveness of the Brazilian government in facing the pandemic. This demonstration took place six days before the first “Breque dos Apps”, reaching a lot of visibility in the Brazilian media (Desgranges & Ribeiro, 2021, p. 196).

The feasibility of organizing protests through social networks and the visibility they achieved, both in Brazil and in other countries, were fertile ground for “Breque dos Apps” to take place, as it was the first Brazilian manifestation of app delivery couriers.

The Instagram profile @tretanotrampo was one of the main tools for disseminating the movement’s demands, through posts also aimed at consumers, seeking their engagement:

Figure 1. Instagram de @tretanotrampo



Source: Instagram screenshot cropping @tretanotrampo (2020). Accessed on June 13, 2023.

Consumers' adherence to the movement was considered fundamental for two equally strong reasons. The first of them is related to the difficulty of calling couriers to the movement, due to the fear that many had of suffering

reprisals if they joined the “strike”. Galo had already denounced iFood for tracking couriers who mobilized to participate in protests aiming to block them from the platform later (Desgranges & Ribeiro, 2021, p. 197). The second reason, and the most obvious one, is that the success of the movement was directly linked to consumers failing to use delivery platforms on the day set for the “Breque dos Apps”.

With that in mind, the Instagram profile @tretanotrampo released booklets with instructions for customers who wanted to support the movement, requesting that, in addition to not placing orders on the day of the stoppage, they would help publicize the “Breque dos Apps” by printing flyers, pasting posters and sharing the supportive hashtags #BrequeDosApps and #ApoioBrequeDosApps. It also asked consumers to evaluate delivery apps with just one star on PlayStore and Apple Store, to damage or at least diminish the public image of delivery apps (Desgranges & Ribeiro, 2021, p. 198).

The first visible point of civil society’s support for “Breque dos Apps” was precisely the negative evaluation received by delivery apps on July 1st. According to a survey carried out by the Appbot website, the main delivery apps in Brazil received more than 50 thousand evaluations during the mobilization, with 96% of them being one star, the minimum possible evaluation score (Braga, 2020).

The analysis carried out by Desgranges and Ribeiro concluded that the observation of engagement metrics on Instagram pointed to the success of the mobilization in favor of “Breque dos Apps” on this network. From research based on the hashtag #ApoioBrequeDosApps on the day of the stoppage, more than a thousand publications were collected, which resulted in 234,092 likes and 1,162 comments. The videos of the stoppage that we released on the same network had a total number of 260,460 views (Desgranges & Ribeiro, 2021, p. 198).

Maria Mônica Holanda Oliveira, for her part, conducted research on the repercussions of “Breque dos Apps” on Twitter (2021). After analyzing the data, the author divided the collected messages into four categories (Oliveira, 2021, p. 54): i) support (messages favorable to the movement, without referring to the strategy or questions that broaden the debate); ii) organization (favorable messages, which reflect content related to the organization and strategy of the fight for app delivery couriers, referring to specific issues of working conditions and workers’ claims and echoing the strategy, such as not to make requests on the day of the stoppage, evaluate applications negatively and requests for disclosure and images and materials about the mobilization and dissemination of the mobilization agenda); iii) debate (messages favorable to the movement that go beyond the context of

the specific struggle conditions of the category of app delivery couriers, containing criticism of the narrative of entrepreneurship, autonomy and partnership, discussing the business model of digital platforms and the consequent intensification of precarious work); and iv) against the brake (messages that oppose the stoppage and the movement's demands). Thus, Oliveira claims that:

In category 2, "Organization (mobilization)", most of the messages in the two brakes that are related to the movement's mobilization and dissemination strategy were included. These messages concentrate the most shared content among users: 42% of the messages from the Breque 1 sample and about 64% from Breque 2. In this category, the messages reflected strategic contents of the mobilization, namely, the demands and the orientation for not placing an order through the applications, as well as evaluating them negatively. Also, they asked to support the movement and "upload" (disseminate) the #Brequedosapps tag.

In addition, in the aforementioned category, several messages criticized application companies, such as the lack of transparency of blockages and undue shutdowns applied to workers, and also the lack of assistance to workers who fall ill or have an accident during delivery, in addition to the low rates applied by Rappi, iFood and Uber companies. It should be noted that the Rappi company was the most cited and criticized individually, generally associated with the demand for the end of the scoring system and the increase in coupon offers during the strike. (Oliveira, 2021, p. 58, our translation)

This finding led the author to conclude that almost all users produced and reproduced thousands of contents favorable to the movement, with most of the messages concentrated in the "organization" category, which allows verifying that there was engagement of users in the dissemination of the movement's strategy. It also allowed for the verification that content expressing solidarity with workers at different levels was predominant, revealing the support of Twitter users for the app delivery couriers' movement (Oliveira, 2021, p. 64).

#### **4. The Reaction of Delivery App/Digital Platform Companies**

Castels (2013) coined the expression "networks of indignation and hope" to explain new ways of organizing social movements in the Internet age, especially in the age of social networks. What can be taken away from the studies conducted by Desgranges and Ribeiro, regarding YouTube and Instagram, and Oliveira, regarding Twitter, is that "Breque dos Apps" managed, in all these social networks, to make civil society indignant and,

at the same time, hopeful that the claims of the delivery app couriers would be met.

By seeking the support of consumers, couriers sought not only solidarity, but also to increase their power to pressure delivery apps/digital platforms, since consumers have a direct influence on the marketing practices adopted by companies, making it imperative for them to maintain a good image. By promoting a boycott through communicative strategies, aimed at tarnishing the platform's image with its customers and the general public, delivery applications are affected, both economically and politically. For no other reason, the largest delivery platform in Brazil, iFood, reacted to the "Breque dos Apps" by carrying out advertising campaigns and building a page on its website to protect its institutional image. These campaigns were used to influence public opinion and reinforce the image of a company allegedly concerned with its "delivery partners" (Soares, 2022, p. 163).

On its institutional website, iFood claimed to have allocated around 100 million Brazilian reais (about 20 million US dollars) among all the protection and support initiatives developed for couriers during the pandemic. But the company itself recognized that, of the 100 million Brazilian reais allegedly invested, less than 400,000 (about 80,000 US dollars) were allocated to delivery workers away from work due to Covid-19 (Desgranges & Ribeiro, 2021, p. 205).

Although this may be perceived as a very timid reaction, it should not be disregarded. Had it not been for civil society's support for "Breque dos Apps", there is no doubt that no concessions on the part of delivery apps in favor of couriers would have been obtained whatsoever.

From this, it is possible to draw a parallel with the very genesis of Labor Law in the context of post-Industrial Revolution. In that regard, labor legislation is the result of the reaction against the exploitation of employees by employers. According to the lesson of Sérgio Pinto Martins (2023), Labor Law arises to limit the abuses of the employer in exploiting the work and to modify precarious working conditions that took place at the time; being a form of opposition to the freedom or autonomy of the will of Civil Law, also with the objective of protecting work as the weakest part of the employment relationship.

In any case, the protective legislative state action was the result, at the same time, of the workers' struggle for better conditions, in what can be considered an achievement; but also, the fear that dissatisfaction could raise questions and riots about the capitalist system itself, in what can therefore be considered a concession.



Ultimately, the classic reflection undertaken in *The Leopard*, by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, is the idea that for things to remain the same, everything must change revealing itself to be still relevant.

## 5. Final Considerations and Research Limitations

First, it is important to point out this paper's research limitations, which are the ones regarding the difficulty in apprehending the phenomenon of work on digital platforms broadly, since it was methodologically necessary to restrict the investigation of "uberization" to the perspective of food sector digital platform couriers. In addition, it was not possible to carry out an analysis of the economic impacts experienced by delivery platforms, due to the "Breque dos Apps", considering that the companies did not disclose this information.

Furthermore, this research was conducted through a theoretical approach/analysis.

Due to what is above, this paper's main conclusion, given the proposed research question – whether the "Breque dos apps" is a representation of new forms of protest and solidarity-based responses oriented towards the protection of platform workers – our understanding is that that the answer is affirmative.

The reason for this relies on the following facts: the "Breque dos apps" was a form of insurgency against the reality of excessive exploitation of labor, aggravated in the scenario of the Covid-19 pandemic, which had an agenda with specific claims typical of a strike movement. This insurgency was only possible due to the use of social networks to engage couriers and civil society in favor of the movement, bypassing mechanisms traditionally associated with collective labor law; that, in the end, achieved concessions on the part of delivery apps in favor of couriers, although very distant from those intended by the movement.

Finally, it should be noted that this paper does not intend to exhaust the theme in analysis, which can still admit different approaches in the future.

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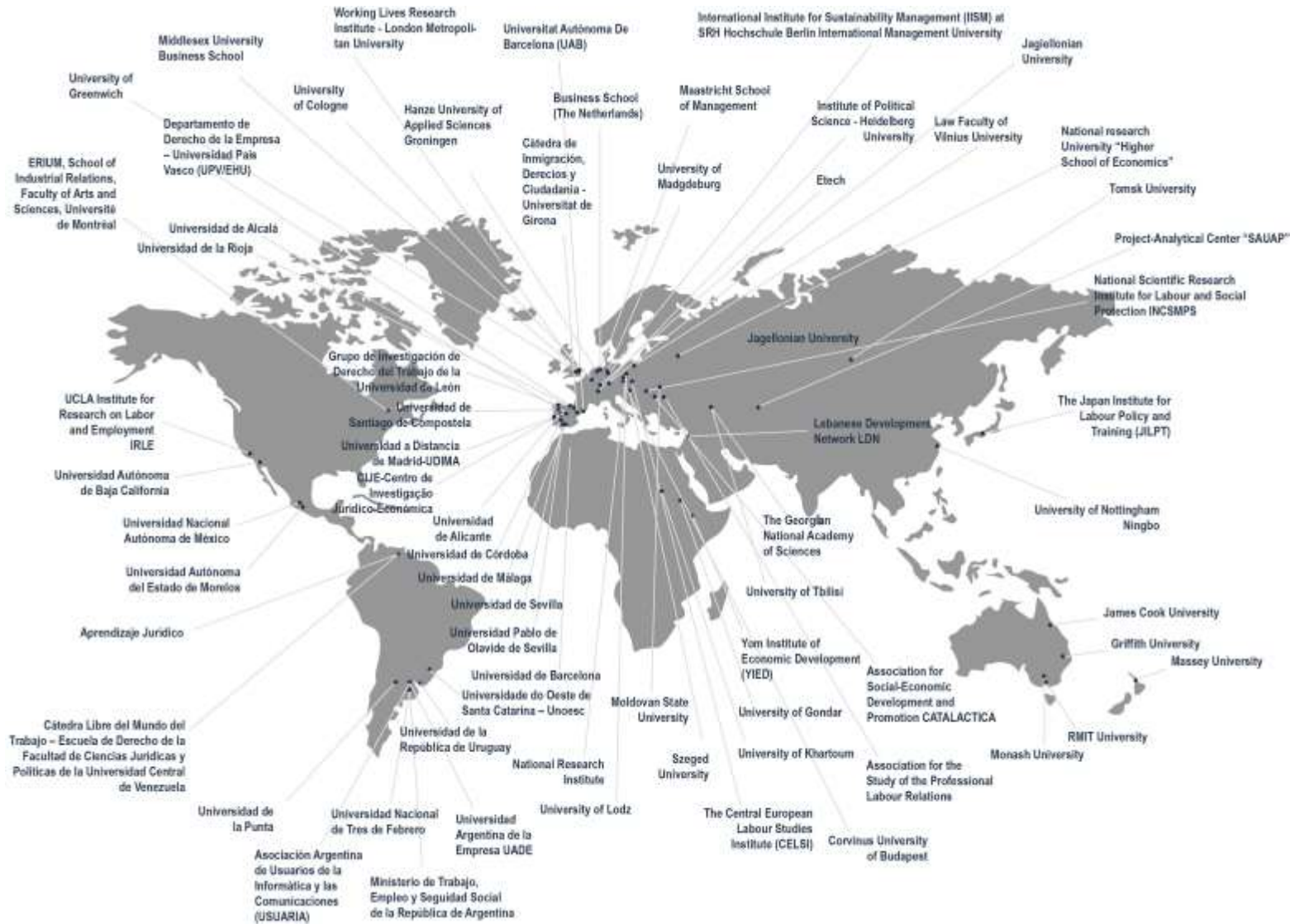
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