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### ABSTRACT

The new historical phenomenon emerging in the twenty-first century, marked by population aging, should increase the physical and mental illness of the aging working class – the gerontariate – composed of a group of people over 45 years of age, highly educated. This age group should start to occupy the labor market in the coming decades, at the risk of unequal and undignified conditions. Thus, the "problem of gerontariado" is projected: the reflection on the working conditions, productivity, and health of older and elderly workers. In this context, this theoretical essay aims to reflect on the precariousness of the work of older and older people in the twenty-first century. The

group of gerontariate that represents the most complex workforce, with skills, talents, and high competencies is located before a set of risks of precariousness, a part resulting from the vulnerabilities linked to the fragility in the training of workers and, still, due to the precariousness of the wage conditions of exploitation of the labor force. This reduces the opportunities of "older" workers in the evolution of their professional careers. The increase in the average age of people in this context portrays, in part, the fact that older workers reproduce a growing group of people employed or looking for work. On the other hand, older workers are less likely to be unemployed, but if so, they take longer, on average, to return to work, being more susceptible, therefore, to the employment crisis, that is, if they become unemployed, they will have more difficulty inserting themselves into the field of work. To this end, employers are suggested greater efforts to maintain and update the skills of these workers, avoiding the obsolescence of the workforce is the responsibility of the worker himself or the lack of public policies capable of accounting for the qualification of this group.

**Keywords:** Gerontariado, aging, work, elderly.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

One of the emerging historical phenomena of the twenty-first century is the new demography characterized by population aging. In addition, the devastation of aging living labor immersed in the new wage precariousness, social scarcity, and the metabolic contradictions of capital, also make up the structural crisis of capital as a means of production and a system of control of metabolism between man and nature (ALVES, 2020).

The new demographic metabolism in the twenty-first century, marked by population aging, should increase the physical and mental illness of the aging working class – the gerontariado, exposed to the precarious conditions of the social existence of the labor force.

Also, the new demography of this population aging must lead humanity to a constant health crisis, that is, leading to the precariousness of the life and work of the gerontariate.

According to Alves (2020) in addition to the impact on the capitalist system, it will have ramifications in the world of work with the increase of gerontariado, constituted by the group of "older

and older" workers, highly educated. Due to the growth of the potential labor force in the world, capitalist economies are seeing a withering of the human labor force due to population aging. In addition, the productivity growth of the employed workforce is also decreasing (ALVES & NETO, 2020).

The aging of the workforce must have implications for the social metabolism of the working class, simultaneously with the changes in technological-organizational, cultural, increased schooling, and the growth of global migration, revealing a set of problems derived from the age and generational cut of the social class of the proletariat: the issues of older adult workers and the problem of the elderly.

The first group is related to the issue of health and productivity at work, in the group of elderly, in turn, demands related to the social security system (ALVES & NETO, 2020).

Population aging, from an economic point of view, is systematically demanded on the expenditure side.

The fact that the elderly segment increased its relative participation in the total population came to be recognized as a burden in public accounts. Since the 1980s, this narrative has occupied a place for progress in reducing the role of the State in the responsibility under social protection, taking as an example, the reforms of the social security systems to promote progressive and continuous reduction of historical rights conquered.

The economist looks at population aging has resulted in little effectiveness for the planning projects of aging societies on almost all continents, including Brazil (FELIX, 2019).

In Brazil, IBGE data show that informality is present in the elderly population in 71.1% of cases, showing the need for the labor market to adapt, especially in numbers, generating new opportunities to meet the growing demand of older and elderly people, a population that often has low education and a level of qualification below what the market has demanded (IBGE, 2012; PAOLINI, 2016).

The rates of work activities, for men, begin to decrease from the age of 50 and, for women, from the age of 45. The researchers also point out the growth, in the last two decades, in the number of men aged 50 to 69 who do not perform work activities in the formal labor market and are not yet retired (CAMARANO & FERNANDES, 2014).

Another important situation about older people in the Brazilian labor market concerns the selection process to win a job vacancy, since age is still a relevant factor, with younger people at an advantage over older people.

And when elderly person wants to return to the world of work, they also need to compete with younger competitors, usually preferred by the market due to their higher degree of qualification.

In addition, there are few chances that older and elderly individuals have to update and recycle, making it difficult to stay or even return to the labor market in a dignified way (PAOLINI, 2016).

Because of the information presented, this theoretical essay aims to reflect on the precariousness of the work of older and elderly people in the twenty-first century.

The group of gerontariate that represents the most complex workforce, with skills, talents, and high competencies is located before a set of risks of precariousness, a part resulting from the vulnerabilities linked to the fragility in the training of workers and, still, due to the precariousness of the wage conditions of exploitation of the labor force.

## **2 THE WORKFORCE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

The demographics of the workforce in the twenty-first century demonstrate the increase in the share of older workers (45-65 years of age), of the elderly retirees and bring challenges regarding the group of retirees and their impacts on the productivity of companies and pension funds. The elderly is expected to occupy the labor market considerably in the coming decades.

Then, the "problem of gerontariado" is projected: the problem of working conditions, productivity, and health of older and elderly workers that in this context presents the new social issue of capitalism of the twenty-first century (ALVES & NETO, 2020).

Given these findings, a relevant point to be debated from the perspective of capital is the challenge of the sustainability of social security systems and public pensions in the face of the increase in the number of elderly retirees.

Among so many agendas of professional aging, the fight against social inequality, precarious work, and poverty is a complex, paradoxical, and insoluble issue from the perspective of capital (ALVES & NETO, 2020).

Gerontariate in the twenty-first century is characterized by the risk of poverty. The "new poverty" of the gerontariate is a consequence of the unequal and undignified conditions in the labor market offered to older workers, or disability resulting from health problems; and the deterioration in the value of pensions. Indigence to the gerontariate means the existential condition of extreme proletarianism in the sense of the inability of the "older" or elderly workforce to have income below the reproduction value of this force (ALVES & NETO, 2020).

## **3 THE CONTINGENCY OF THE GERONTARIATE**

The authors do not consider elderly people with low (or medium) schooling to belong to what determines "gerontariado".

This demarcation by level of education is intended to expose the contradictions of the social system of capital, causing highly qualified professionals (or with a higher education degree) to be exposed to risks and vulnerabilities, as they age and become unproductive (ALVES & NETO, 2020).

(1) "older" adult workers - stable or "precarious"; and (2) "elderly" workers (65 years of age or older), retirees, or pensioners who work [...]. Therefore, to be included in the social layer of the "gerontariado" it is not enough to be "older" (45-65 years of age) or elderly (over 65 years), but one must have high education (have a higher-level diploma).

The group of gerontariate that represents the most complex workforce, with skills, talents, and high competencies is located before a set of risks of the precariousness of a part resulting from the vulnerabilities linked to weaknesses in the training of work and due to the precariousness of the wage conditions of exploitation of the labor force. For Alves (2020), still, in the abuse of the workforce, the gerontariate should consider the type of contract, the professional activity, management method, and work organization with the devaluation of skills and competencies (subjective precariousness) of older and elderly workers.

In Brazil, currently, the contingent of "older" workers and elderly with high education has a perspective of life above their parents and grandparents, in addition to having a higher education degree.

This group is characterized by risks of vulnerability, originating from the aging process, wage precariousness, new work environments, forms of productivist management, precarious contracts, and the new informational technological base, adding to this, the new social security and social assistance systems with devalued retirement and pensions (ALVES, 2020).

According to Alves and Neto (2020), the increase in the average age of people in the labor force partly portrays the fact that older workers reproduce a growing group of people employed or in search of work.

On the other hand, "older" workers are less likely to be unemployed, but if so, they take longer, on average, to return to work, being more susceptible to the employment crisis.

As for the participation of "older" workers in formal education and vocational training, it is comparatively lower among the group of younger workers, as a result of the reluctance of employers to incur training costs for workers who must stay for a short time with their companies.

This further takes away the opportunities of "older" workers in career development.

Therefore, if they become unemployed, they will have more difficulty reentering the labor market, as well as in the conditions of technological and organizational innovations (ALVES, 2021).

The increase in the average age of the labor force can result in the number of "older" workers being forced out of the labor market before completing the legal retirement age, due to the lack of



adequate job opportunities, that is, for the productive process of capital, intense and continuous, considers that the group of "older" potentially harms productivity growth (ALVES & NETO, 2020).

To this end, employers are suggested to make greater efforts to maintain and update the skills of "older" workers, aiming to ensure that they are capable of changing sectors.

Following this perspective, the issue of the obsolescence of the "older" workforce is the responsibility of the worker himself or the lack of public policies capable of accounting for a qualification that could provide new skills required by the current standard of labor market requirements (ILO, 2018, p. 48).

#### **4 GERONTARIATE SCENARIO: INEQUITY AND POVERTY**

For Alves and Neto (2020), the central issue of gerontariate focuses on the challenge of moving this contingent of workers out of poverty and avoiding precarious working conditions.

The gerontariate has experienced a real decline in labor income and weakened social safety nets contributing to income fragility in old age, diminishing the ability of workers to save for retirement and also the provision of benefits by retirement security systems.

Therefore, ensuring adequate access to social security coverage represents a major challenge in the face of the rapid aging of the population.

The precariousness of work in the twenty-first century has threatened both labor and social security rights.

The exclusion of the workforce from social security rights becomes a threat to the elderly worker of the mid-twenty-first century.

Those who are in low-quality occupations, with lower incomes and shorter or interrupted employment careers are undeniably more predisposed to disadvantage in legitimizing pension rights within a contributory system (ALVES & NETO, 2020).

From this perspective, women are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to creating pension rights, as they are subject to shortened or interrupted employment careers due to family issues, while also facing increased risk exposure from precarious and informal work.

Thus, as a consequence, these gaps in the employment market for women substantially harm both their remuneration and access to the pension system (ILO, 2018; ALVES & NETO, 2020).

The income of the elderly population is related to the inequalities present both in labor income and in access to retirement and pension plans commonly.

Disproportions in the labor market and unequal access to social security tend to exacerbate inequalities in old age, income, and access to health services and housing (ALVES & NETO, 2020).

## **5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The aging of the world's population is about to become one of the most significant phenomena of the twenty-first century, with an impact on all segments of society.

In the coming decades, rapid aging will imply for many countries challenges in the sphere of public health, social security, and social protection systems for the elderly population.

In this sense, I also challenge the group of men and women and the elderly, who are submissive to the precariousness of pensions, having compulsorily to keep themselves occupied, inserted in a situation of work and life Precarious.

The group of elderly people who live the precariousness of pensions and pensions, who's dedicated to active life to work for others, highly qualified professionals exposed to risks and vulnerabilities, the sociologist Giovanni Alves calls "Gerontariado".

Thus, the biggest challenge for elderly gerontariate workers is to keep out of the circle of unequal and undignified conditions, in the face of the threat of the loss of labor and social security rights. Therefore, the accelerated growth of elderly people in society places the issue of population aging at the top of the agenda of public policies and social protection.

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